

FEMALE MATURITY IN MRS. GASKELL'S NOVELS

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DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated
this thesis is my own work.



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SYNOPSIS

This thesis puts forward the view that the notion of female maturity is central in Mrs. Gaskell's novels. In fact, a great deal of the interest of her fiction comes from her thinking about female maturity, about the moral and psychological qualities that make it up and about the conditions that enable women to mature, as well as those that work against maturation.

This view has not been argued coherently before. Critical opinion has tended either to ignore the notion of maturity in relation to Mrs. Gaskell's heroines or to have granted that some of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines change and develop in the novels. However, there is disagreement between these critics, and often confusion in their own minds, as to what exactly this development means in Mrs. Gaskell's novels.

In all of the novels, the heroines should be seen as maturing in more than the outward and superficial sense of developing physically and socially. Though Mrs. Gaskell does not use the word "mature" in relation to her heroines, her work implies a definite though developing conception of moral, emotional and intellectual development which can be taken as her notion of female maturity. Often, this development is demonstrated by a comparison of the heroine with characters who do not, and cannot, mature and with characters who are already seen as mature from the beginning of the novel. In Mrs. Gaskell's novels, a character can be seen to have become mature if she has gained moral integrity and has become clear-sighted about herself, her relationship with others and her place in the world.

This thesis discusses only the heroines of the major novels, so that each can be dealt with in reasonable depth. The shorter works, including Cranford, do not really tackle the question of female

maturity because it is a notion which requires the extended treatment of the novel form. Mrs. Gaskell's heroines will be looked at separately in individual chapters, in chronological order. In this way, the basic ideas about maturation and maturity set out in Mary Barton can be examined and a foundation for discussion of the later, increasingly more complex and subtle novels in this respect, can be established.

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INTRODUCTION

Critical opinion has been both divided and muddled about Mrs. Gaskell's heroines in relation to the idea of maturity. Most critics seem to assume that her initially naive heroines - Mary Barton, Ruth Hilton, Sylvia Robson and Molly Gibson - learn lessons about life from various experiences and mature only in the external sense of becoming "grown up" physically and socially. Others see that some of her heroines change and develop in their personalities, and not merely in their external behaviour, as a result of such experiences. These critics, however, are sometimes themselves confused as to what constitutes maturity in relation to Mrs. Gaskell's heroines. Most critics, for example, see Margaret Hale as mature, in whatever sense they want to use the term, from the beginning of the novel North and South. Even those critics who recognize that some of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines mature in more than the outward sense of reaching physical and social adulthood give too little thought to the idea because they are pre-occupied with their own interests. Hence, they can only imply that Mrs. Gaskell's heroines mature, without fully substantiating their assumptions and without defining exactly what they see as maturity in relation to Mrs. Gaskell's novels. In order to see more clearly how the critics respond to Mrs. Gaskell's heroines in this respect, it is necessary to look at them in relation to each individual novel (as will be done in this thesis), for all her critics believe that Mrs. Gaskell is writing about something different in each novel.

This thesis, in contrast, intends to show that in all of her novels, Mrs. Gaskell is concerned with the maturation of her heroines and that her work implies a distinct, consistent, though not rigid notion of moral, emotional and intellectual development which can be

taken as her conception of female maturity.¹ As will be seen, this notion is more profound than one in which maturity is simply a matter of growing-up, for Mrs. Gaskell portrays many immature adults. Here, this thesis is positing a view which has not been clearly articulated or coherently argued before. At the same time, the thesis intends to show that this concern with female maturity is not peripheral to Mrs. Gaskell's other themes, as so many critics believe, but that in every novel it is one of her central concerns. Because of the unprecedented nature of this thesis in this regard, it is necessary to look closely at what Mrs. Gaskell is doing in her novels in relation to the notion of female maturity: to demonstrate how important it is to an understanding of her work and how consistent it is throughout the novels, as well as how it develops from one novel to the next. This, of course, means that the work runs the risk of seeming too narrow in scope. Yet it is vital, in order for the topic to be properly discussed, that the thesis does not get deflected onto other concerns external to the topic and the novelist under discussion.

Mrs. Gaskell has a notion of female character development which goes deeper than the idea of maturation merely as learning to behave as an adult. For Mrs. Gaskell, maturity means a state wherein a character is clear-sighted about herself and the world around her and has integrity, in the sense of moral rectitude combined with courage and independence of action and an ability to balance her own needs with those of others. In order to reach this state, a character must have had an upbringing and a nature which was responsive to her environment, which have made her open to the possibility of development to maturity.

In her novels, Mrs. Gaskell shows not only how such characters are able to mature, but also how characters without this foundation are unable to mature, for they can only learn acceptable social behaviour. She also contrasts both maturing and immature characters with those who are already mature.

¹By "Mrs. Gaskell" and "notion" I mean the author and the idea implied by her works. I do not necessarily mean the conscious intention of the private person who was Mrs. Gaskell in real life.

Mrs. Gaskell's model of maturity is basically the same for both sexes, as can be seen with the maturing males in her novels, though her females must learn more self-control than her males and must strengthen their natural emotional warmth and generosity into effective succouring and peace-making attributes. Due attention will be given to male characters, and to their maturing processes, in proportion to the amount of attention which Mrs. Gaskell gives them in her novels.

Mrs. Gaskell's ideas concerning female maturity are based on certain assumptions, outlined clearly in the novels. Firstly, in order for her to be able to mature, her heroine must have had a stable, happy childhood, with some degree of moral guidance. Even if her parents or influential parent dies while she is still young, if she has lived her early years in a secure home environment, then she is capable of maturing. The presence of parents, as is seen in most of the novels, can sometimes thwart or hold back a girl's maturity, particularly if those parents are themselves immature and dependent on their child. Cynthia Kirkpatrick is the paramount example of a female character who can never really mature because of the insufficiencies of her upbringing. Secondly, her heroine must have characteristics in her own personality which can be developed, given the right conditions. These include the qualities of honesty, unselfishness, diligence, kindness and sympathy for others when the need is perceived, and a desire for thoughtfulness towards others which would allow that need to be perceived; of spontaneous warmth and generosity, and depth and steadfastness of feeling; and of degrees of self-reliance and self-possession. Generally, they also have an obvious, though in some respects incomplete or unexercised, sense of morality. Together, these qualities are encapsulated in the ideas of "sense" and "spirit", first mentioned in Mary Barton and helpful to the discussion of the topic as a whole for as Mrs. Gaskell's heroines develop, their "sense" and "spirit" come into a better state of balance than they were at the beginning.

In order to mature, all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines must lose their illusions. It is in the process of disillusionment that her characters pass the point of transition from an immature to a mature character

for, close on the heels of disenchantment and consequent clear-sightedness, comes a desire to change, to develop, as a result of this enlightenment. In all cases a character is deluded about her real feelings for a particular man and the recognition of these buried feelings is central to her development. It is only, though, with Mrs. Gaskell's first heroine, Mary Barton, that this is the sole delusion.

In addition to having clear-sightedness, Mrs. Gaskell's heroines - to varying degrees because of their backgrounds, personalities and circumstances - acquire qualities or have already-existent qualities strengthened in all facets of their personalities: moral, emotional and intellectual. Basically, they change in two ways: in respect to their sense of themselves; and in respect to their understanding of and relationship to others. Within themselves, Mrs. Gaskell's heroines become more self-aware and realistic about their personal limitations, their expectations and their standard of morality; more able to discriminate morally and to stand up for their beliefs against others' demands and expectations or the possibility of manipulation or exploitation; more able to balance demonstrativeness with self-control, when necessary; and more willing to be actively diligent, responsible, and dependable. They are now able to act independently and courageously, when necessary, despite the possibility of losing standing or popularity. At the same time, they have gained more self-respect and self-esteem and thus manifest calmness and quietness in the eyes of others, denoting a nature at peace with itself, which leads others to have confidence in these heroines as true friends and peace-makers. These latter qualities combine with those which are directed towards the comfort and aid of others. Those qualities which relate to others, in which they are more willingly, freely selfless and thoughtful of, and sensitive to, others, more humble, tolerant and compassionate, show them to be "good" women, a term used by Mrs. Gaskell throughout her works to denote feminine maturity in her heroines in their practice of their moral code.

Though Mrs. Gaskell's fundamental ideas as to what constitutes the difference between an immature character and a mature one, and hence what composes female maturity, do not change fundamentally from novel

to novel, they are both built upon and made more solid in each successive novel. At the same time, Mrs. Gaskell's narrative techniques develop as she increasingly allows her characters' consciousnesses to speak for themselves without super-imposed authorial comment. One has only to compare Mary Barton's reflections on the night of her disillusionment with Molly Gibson's soliloquies at various stages of disillusionment in Wives and Daughters, both examined in the relevant chapters of this thesis, to see how much Mrs. Gaskell's fictional techniques have changed and become more assured, polished and subtle.

In her first novel, Mrs. Gaskell's attention to her heroine was not whole-hearted. At the same time, she was formulating the basis of her fictional representations of immaturity and maturity. Hence, the development from the former to the latter state in her heroine was straightforward and clear. In her second novel, Mrs. Gaskell concentrated all her attention on her heroine's development but, because of the problems of her heroine's situation, Mrs. Gaskell maintained a simple profile of the maturation process and of the mature heroine at the end. In her third novel, however, Mrs. Gaskell had by now the technical facility and the familiarity with the notion of maturity to develop a much more complex and integrated portrayal of feminine maturation. Having lain so much groundwork in this third novel, Mrs. Gaskell was able to consolidate those ideas in her last novel so that, in that novel, the delineation of her heroine's growth to maturity seems natural and spontaneous. The fourth novel is, in comparison, only remarkable in that it brings out one new idea, which is then carried on in the last novel: that of the problem of self-control.

It is clear that Mrs. Gaskell saw maturity as a valuable attribute, for most of her novels demonstrate that life becomes richer and more a matter of choice, of personal autonomy, with maturity. For example, her mature heroines no longer leave things up to fate; taking responsibility for their own lives gives its own satisfactions in terms of self-respect, even if it does not necessarily lead to happiness. These women are a far cry from those in Mrs. Gaskell's novels who exhibit resigned dependence on man's authority, extreme self-discipline and the avoidance or surrender of any personal goals.

Not only does Mrs. Gaskell devote much of her energies in her novels to delineating a notion of female maturity, but, as can be seen in her letters, she also thought about it in her own life in relation to her daughters and when thinking about Charlotte Brontë's personality while writing The Life of Charlotte Brontë. It is clear from her letters that she wished her daughters to achieve their full potential as women morally, emotionally and intellectually. Whether or not they married, she wanted them to lead full, rich lives: with a well-defined personal moral code; caring for others and each other; valuing their own worth as individuals; and learning the skills which would give them and others the greatest satisfaction and fulfilment. She wanted them all to be capable of a "standard of high goodness"² as can be seen in her pride in her second daughter: "Meta is turning out such a noble beautiful character - Her intellect and her soul (or wherever is the part in which piety and virtue live) are keeping pace, as they should do."³ She goes on to explain that, in addition to studying hard, Meta teaches poor children and looks after poor old people - "as a friend not as a benefactor"⁴, and "is ever ready with household sympathy."⁵ She was most scathing about girls who had been brought up to be nothing more than passive lapdogs, as she makes clear in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton about Meta, whom she wants to make busy and intellectual "lest she does not fall into 'young-lady-life'."⁶ This can also be seen in her letters about female education.⁷

Perhaps the reason that Mrs. Gaskell can write about female maturity - and do it so successfully - is because she herself was a mature woman. Though she was modest, sometimes to the point of

²Elizabeth Gaskell and C.E. Norton, The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton 1855-1865, ed. Jane Whitehill (London, 1932; rpt. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1973), letter 37, p.110.

³The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton, letter 13, p.32.

⁴The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton, letter 13, p.32.

⁵The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton, letter 13, p.32.

⁶The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton, letter 21, p.64.

⁷Gaskell, The Letters, letter 86, pp.137-138.

self-deprecation about her own personality, it is clear from Norton's letter to a friend that she appeared to embody many of the characteristics about which she writes as mature attributes:

She is like the best things in her books; full of generous and tender sympathies, of thoughtful kindness, of pleasant humour, of quick appreciation, of utmost simplicity and truthfulness, and uniting with peculiar delicacy and retirement a strength of principle and purpose and straightforwardness of action, such as few women possess.⁸

Such a view of Mrs. Gaskell strengthens the reader's confidence in assuming, what he or she can sense in the novels anyway, that the narrators of Mrs. Gaskell's novels are one with the author in relation to the notion of maturity.

The novels will be dealt with chronologically, with a chapter devoted to each. Each chapter will be looking chiefly at Mrs. Gaskell's primary heroine, though, where relevant, subsidiary female characters and male characters will be discussed. In this way, an examination of the basic model of maturity which is seen in Mary Barton can be made and then built on in looking at later novels, in much the same manner that Mrs. Gaskell herself built up her depiction of maturity from the first novel to the last.

⁸The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton, p.xxiii.

CHAPTER 1

MARY BARTON - "SPIRIT AND SENSE"

Mrs. Gaskell's first novel, Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life, was intended originally as a study of John Barton, Mary's father, and of working-class conditions in industrial Manchester. Two letters written by her, one to a Miss Lamont in January, 1849, and one to Mrs. Greg, the wife of an eminent critic, some time in early 1849, attest to this intention. To Miss Lamont she wrote:

John Barton was the original name, as being the central figure to my mind; indeed I had so long felt that the bewildered life of an ignorant thoughtful man of strong power of sympathy, dwelling in a town so full of striking contrasts as this is, was a tragic poem, that in writing he was [?] my "hero"; and it was a London thought coming through the publisher that it must be called Mary Barton.¹

Her publisher apparently urged her to change her emphasis from John Barton to Mary Barton, as a character who becomes a murderer was not thought fit to be a hero.² The title of the novel first became A Manchester Love Story³ and then at his suggestion, Mary Barton: A Manchester Love Story.⁴

Many critics have seen this unwilling alteration as evidence that Mrs. Gaskell never wanted to pay much real attention to Mary Barton

¹Elizabeth Gaskell, The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, ed. J.A.V. Chapple and A.Pollard (Manchester: M.U.P., 1966), letter 39, page 70.) Hereafter, this work will be referred to as The Letters.

²Ann Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work(New York: Octagon, 1971), p.77.

³As she says in a letter to her publisher, Edward Chapman, The Letters, Letter 23, p.55.

⁴The Letters, letter 25, p.56.

because she was pre-occupied with Mary's father.⁵ They claim that the first half of the novel is largely taken up with the figure of John Barton and that the melodramatic second half is that in which Mary Barton comes to prominence. French gives as the reason for this critical judgement the fact that, apart from their interest as sociological aspects of Manchester working-class life "the affairs of Mary Barton and Jem Wilson are not of exceptional interest."⁶ In this estimation of the novel, French has completely missed the importance of the sections devoted to Mary Barton. Though she may think that they are uninteresting, they are still important to Mrs. Gaskell because in them she begins to come to grips with a concept which is to be central to all her later novels: the notion of female maturity. It is not to be denied, though, that Mrs. Gaskell was not initially much engaged with this concept. Her original intention was clear, an intention created by her awareness of the abysmal and hopeless conditions of the working-class people living around her in Manchester. This intention was inspired by her knowledge of a man who, as Hopkins notes, became the character John Barton, "the only one drawn from life."⁷ Hence, it was possible for her to make her portrayal of this character vivid and intense. His unusual circumstances and actions in the novel make him even more fascinating to the reader. Thus, it is in spite of such interests and advantages as these that Mrs. Gaskell became interested in the psychological development of her female characters, starting with that of Mary Barton.

Most critics do not see Mary Barton as maturing in the novel.⁸ Some see her as luckily escaping an unhappy fate; others do not even mention Mary Barton in relation to maturity at all. Others, such as Sawdey and Mantovani, accept that Mary grows and changes but do not

⁵Margaret Ganz, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict(New York: Twayne, 1969), pp.68-69; Yvonne French, Mrs. Gaskell(London:Home and van Thal, 1949), pp.24-25; Barbara Sawdey, Between Two Worlds: A Study of the Heroine in the Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell(Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 1975), p.213.

⁶French, p.24.

⁷Hopkins, p.77.

⁸Arthur Pollard, Mrs. Gaskell, Novelist and Biographer(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p.56; and Ganz, p.69, e.g.

look closely at the process of development as it is shown in the novel. Sawdey believes that Mary's "struggle for maturity is prompted and determined by a series of forces which are uniquely the product of the new industrial age."⁹ She sees maturity, however, as little more than a process of physical and social development. For Mantovani, maturity is more a personal, though at the same time social, matter. Though she does go into more detail than other critics and even identifies the key scene in the novel in relation to Mary's disillusionment, she does not examine Mrs. Gaskell's overall concept of maturity.¹⁰

Mrs. Gaskell, in the early parts of the novel, makes it clear to the reader that Mary Barton is an immature young girl, though with some valuable qualities which are, as yet, relatively undeveloped. Naturally, because of her age and her family circumstances, she is innocent, unsophisticated and trusting, though Mrs. Gaskell does not see these characteristics themselves as constituting immaturity. As we later see clearly in the juxtaposition of Molly and Cynthia in Wives and Daughters, Molly, like Mary, is open and trusting and is seen to become more mature than the worldly-wise Cynthia can ever become. Mary is immature, nevertheless, in her uncontrolled impulsiveness, vanity, capriciousness, and occasional self-centredness, all of which are partly engendered by her independent and somewhat solitary life-style as a motherless working-class girl. At the same time, she is kind and thoughtful of others when needed to be so, guileless and free of malice, self-reliant, spontaneously warm and loving, and energetic and diligent. Given the right influences, Mary is clearly capable of developing into a morally, intellectually and emotionally mature woman. The one thing which hinders this development is an illusion which Mary entertains about herself, her feelings for the men in her life and her hopes for the future. This illusion is, moreover, the one aspect of Mary's character which decidedly marks her as immature.

In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell centres her heroine's development on

⁹Sawdey, p.213, i.e. because of her economic freedom.

¹⁰Juanita Mantovani, The Feminine World View of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell(Los Angeles: The University of Southern California, 1974), pp.18-19.

the shedding of this one significant delusion which Mary entertains about her ideals and her hopes for the future. This simple construction allows the process of maturation to be seen clearly. With this framework, Mary's other developing qualities can be seen in perspective. One can say that apart from gradual changes apparent in Mary Barton's behaviour, there is a point at which she becomes disillusioned, gaining much more insight into her own feelings about herself, about others and about her values.

The scene in which this moment of disillusionment occurs has caused problems for many critics because of Mrs. Gaskell's technical inexperience. Her inexperience is a feature of this first novel as a whole, but it is perhaps at its worst at this stage of the novel because Mrs. Gaskell wants the scene to be regarded as an important point in the novel and so strains for her effect. Nevertheless, despite critical claims to the contrary, the passage remains convincing in its portrayal of the two characters.

The scene occurs only a third of the way through the novel. In this first novel, Mrs. Gaskell is not concerned with the slow build-up towards insight in her heroine or the steady removal of several layers of illusion until the last, allowing clear self-knowledge near the end of the novel, as she is in later novels. Here, she is simply interested in showing quickly and efficiently that Mary has been immature and then developing the means by which Mary becomes more fully mature as a result of this early insight. The passage under discussion is that in which Jem Wilson, upright working-class man, goes to propose to Mary. It has been preceded by a scene in which there is a heated exchange between Mary and her father, in which John Barton has told his daughter that she is a fool if she does not see Jem as a fitting and good marriage-partner. Mary has other ideas for herself: she wants to marry the wealthy, handsome Harry Carson, the mill-owner's son, who has been courting her. On Jem's first words, Mary, despite her belief in the rightness of her preference for Mr. Carson, finds herself discomposed at the thought of Jem's proposal "and her heart beat so suddenly and

violently she could hardly sit still."¹¹ This is in spite of her calm avowal to herself that she will never accept him. Yet she cannot face him openly, "...her eyes fell veiled before that passionate look fixed upon her."(p.132) It is possible that she veils herself in a metaphorical sense also, in relation to Jem, because of her "violent" reaction to his words. Twice Jem proposes and is twice flatly rejected. The first time he simply expresses his feelings and his wishes. The second, he foolishly mentions the pleasure such a union would give Mary's father. This is objectionable to Mary because she believes that Jem has been coerced by her father into proposing marriage to her. At the same time, though, Jem acknowledges how long-standing his love for her has been and declares that: "It has made the very groundwork of all that people call good in me."(p.132) The third time, Jem becomes more desperate and it seems that it is a result of this speech of his that Mary's deepest feelings surface:

'And is this the end of all my hopes and fears? the end of my life, I may say, for it is the end of all worth living for!' His agitation rose and carried him into passion. 'Mary! you'll hear, may be, of me as a drunkard, and may be as a thief, and may be as a murderer. Remember! when all are speaking ill of me, you will have no right to blame me, for it's your cruelty that will have made me what I feel I shall become. You won't even say you'll try and like me; will you, Mary!' said he, suddenly changing his tone from threatening despair to fond passionate entreaty, as he took her hand and held it forcibly between both of his, while he tried to catch a glimpse of her averted face. She was silent, but it was from deep and violent emotion. He could not bear to wait; he would not hope, to be dashed away again; he rather in his bitterness of heart chose the certainty of despair, and before she could resolve what to answer, he flung away her hand and rushed out of the house.

'Jem! Jem!' cried she, with faint and choking voice. It was too late; he left street after street behind him with his almost winged speed, as he sought the fields, where he might give way unobserved to all the deep despair he felt.

It was scarcely ten minutes since he had entered the house, and found Mary at comparative peace, and now she lay half across the dresser, her head hidden in her hands, and every part of her body shaking with the violence of her sobs. She could not have told at first (if you had asked her, and she could have commanded voice enough to answer) why she was in

¹¹Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton; A Tale of Manchester Life(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 131-132. All further references to this work will be to this edition and will be included in the text.

such agonised grief. It was too sudden for her to analyse, or think upon it. She only felt, that by her own doing her life would be hereafter blank and dreary. By and by her sorrow exhausted her body by its power, and she seemed to have no strength left for crying. She sat down; and now thoughts crowded on her mind. One little hour ago, and all was still unsaid, and she had her fate in her own power. And yet, how long ago had she determined to say pretty much what she did, if the occasion ever offered.

It was as if two people were arguing the matter; that mournful, desponding communion between her former self, and her present self. Herself, a day, an hour ago; and herself now. For we have every one of us felt how a very few minutes of the months and years called life will sometimes suffice to place all time past and future in an entirely new light; will make us see the vanity of the criminality of the bygone, and so change the aspect of the coming time that we look with loathing on the very thing we have most desired. A few moments may change our character for life, by giving a totally different direction to our aims and energies.

To return to Mary. Her plan had been, as we well know, to marry Mr. Carson, and the occurrence an hour ago was only a preliminary step. True; but it had unveiled her heart to her; it had convinced her that she loved Jem above all persons or things. But Jem was a poor mechanic, with a mother and aunt to keep; a mother, too, who had shown her pretty clearly that she did not desire her for a daughter-in-law: while Mr. Carson was rich, and prosperous, and gay, and (she believed) would place her in all circumstances of ease and luxury, where want could never come. What were these hollow vanities to her, now she had discovered the passionate secret of her soul? She felt as if she almost hated Mr. Carson, who had decoyed her with his baubles. She now saw how vain, how nothing to her, would be all gaities and pomps, all joys and pleasures, unless she might share them with Jem; yes, with him she had harshly rejected so short a time ago. If he were poor, she loved him all the better. If his mother did think her unworthy of him, what was it but the truth, as she now owned with bitter penitence. She had hitherto been walking in grope-light towards a precipice; but in the clear revelation of that past hour she saw her danger, and turned away, resolutely, and for ever. (pp.133-134)

Something of the desperation and depth of Jem's feelings strikes a chord in Mary's own heart for she sees him here for the first time as capable of being passionate and impulsive. Rather than finding his threats repugnant, Mary understands how akin his behaviour is to her own at times and yearns towards him as a kindred spirit. She sees, too, that, in his eager determination to have her, Jem sees her as special, as the one woman he will marry, whereas Harry Carson in his flippant way may only be flirting with her. In this speech, then, Jem has shown himself to be not simply the good, quiet, reasonable man whom she is

meant to admire and respect. Mary has simply taken the surface man, who acts in this way - quite naturally - in order to co-exist peaceably with others, as the whole man and has neglected to look under the skin to find the inner man. In this, she has not done him justice. This has been part of her immature delusion about the men in her life: she has seen the glittering surface of Harry Carson as more inviting than the comparatively dull one of Jem Wilson. A measure of her new-found clear-sightedness is the revelation that Harry Carson is only the surface man, in terms of attractive qualities to her - that in fact the inner man is someone whom she finds repulsive in his self-centred manipulativeness and psychological shallowness. Her reaction to Harry Carson as a result of this revelation will be seen later.

At first, Mary is unable to see this clearly. Indeed, she is unable to see anything clearly, for she has been taken by surprise by her own feelings as a reaction to Jem's words. Before she can analyze her feelings, she is filled simply with an irrevocable sense of loss, a loss of something precious that she has forfeited by her own foolish ignorance of her inner feelings.

This stage is followed by one in which she begins to think. For the first time, she sees things in perspective, both her future path and her past misconceptions. That past and future are so very different can be seen by the way Mrs. Gaskell presents them as two different people "arguing the matter". Her former self, vain and flippant, short-sighted and deluded, is a very different character to her later one, which is now so clear-sighted, resolved to action and at the same time maidenly. The two sides are here like good and bad angels counselling her and recall two characters in the novel who have played these parts: Margaret Jennings and Sally Leadbitter. Margaret is the gentle, patient, kind, thoughtful, good influence and Mrs. Gaskell clearly sees her as a mature character, whereas Sally is (as her name would suggest) hard-hearted, self-seeking and happy to act in complicity with Harry Carson in his evil designs on Mary. She can be seen as an immature character, with no redeemable features.

Mrs. Gaskell generally has her characters come to maturity through gradual revelations of past misconceptions. However, she also shows

that crises catalyze the process of self-revelation, as in Wives and Daughters, when Molly Gibson learns of her father's remarriage and realizes that she can no longer be dependent on him. Here, the realization of Mary's true emotions comes immediately after Jem has shown the intensity of his feelings for her. She is suddenly, jarringly, confronted with her own delusions. It is obvious that Jem's words and manner have affected her deeply. Unfortunately, due to technical inexperience, Mrs. Gaskell mars the dramatic effect of this revelation by extrapolating from the particular fictional instance to a general discussion on such revelations and how they affect people. This omniscient narration, fortunately, diminishes in the course of her writing life.

"To return to Mary." Mrs. Gaskell is at pains in this first novel to show her reader exactly what is happening to Mary, to show that she matures in learning the true nature of her feelings for Jem and, as a consequence, for Harry Carson. Now Mary admits that Jem's visit and words "unveiled her heart". Now, she will no longer have to veil her eyes before Jem. In removing the layer of delusion from her mind, Mary is able to look out openly at the world and be seen honestly by others. No longer does she have to feel guilty because of the clandestine meetings which she has had with Mr. Carson. As she has earlier in the novel (as will later be seen), Mrs. Gaskell has signposted Mary's inner feelings for Jem at the beginning of this scene by mentioning her veiled eyes, so that the reader suspects before this that Mary is deluded about these feelings. At first, Mary herself would not acknowledge her violent reactions to the thought of Jem's proposal, but has affected calmness, both in her words and actions towards Jem and in her self-delusion, believing that she felt nothing for Jem, despite such physical signs to the contrary.

In thinking about her life, Mary comes to realize that not only has she changed her mind in relation to the prospective places of Jem and Harry Carson, but that she has been deluded by the latter into caring for him. Now, as Mrs. Gaskell has shown the reader earlier, the real nature of Mary's relationship with him is seen by Mary as one of "hollow vanities" in which he "decoyed her with his baubles". The

poverty and shortcomings of life in Jem's household seem as nothing when compared with the comfortable life she had envisaged in the Carson household, because of her new-found love for Jem. She sees, in other words, that love is far more important for a happy, satisfying life than material circumstance. This more rational and mature perspective allows Mary to see that the outward, superficial circumstances of life are not all-important, that life with such a man as Harry Carson could never be as rich or fulfilling as that with a good man like Jem Wilson.

Her situation is somewhat reminiscent of that of Esther Lyons, in George Eliot's Felix Holt, who is caught between marrying a proudly working-class man and living an honest, hard-working life, and enjoying a life of luxury and ease with a wealthy man. However, Esther is actively engaged in argument with Felix about her situation and her values and he directly influences her decision, whereas Mary Barton comes to hers by herself, though influenced indirectly by Jem.

Mary has believed that her choices have both included marriage. In this, too, she has been deluded by Harry Carson and by her own desire to transcend her poverty and become a rich lady. The reader has been well aware of Mr. Carson's intentions because of the narrator's communications of the nature of these intentions. For Mary, though, it is only now when she compares her feelings for Jem with those for Harry Carson, in the light of Jem's for her, that she realizes that Harry's intentions may have been other than she has allowed herself to believe. Though she knows nothing of the circumstances of her Aunt Esther, who was similarly beguiled by a man above her station and was driven towards prostitution after she had succumbed to him and been abandoned, Mary is aware of the possibility of being ruined. Now, she sees that that possibility may have been hers if she had continued to see Mr. Carson: "...in the clear revelation of that past hour she saw her danger." At this stage in her literary career, Mrs. Gaskell seems to be saying that if this had happened to Mary there would have been no possibility of redemption, just as there was none for her aunt, although she became clear-sighted as a result of her suffering and realized her past misconceptions about her lover.

Allied to Mary's earlier misconceptions concerning Jem's nature -

that he is simply good but dull - are Mary's misconceptions about her feelings for him and about her own wishes and values. Being young, energetic and impulsive, Mary has ambitiously believed that with her beauty she could come to live a life far different and, to her mind at the time, far superior to her present one. In this, she is not being totally selfish for she wants the goods that she will enjoy to be shared with her father and friends. Nevertheless, she sees the life that those around her are leading as menial and unsatisfying and although she respects Jem for his probity and his competence and sense of responsibility as family bread-winner, she sees him as limited by these qualities. He has no sense of fun, for example, although if one looks at Harry Carson's form of humour, which is sarcastic and insolent, one does not want Jem to have one.¹² He has not the easy charm and the command of eloquent phrases of endearment that Harry Carson has, either. Mary has seen his earlier overtures as clumsy and amateurish, until this passionate self-denying avowal of love which completely conquers her.

Many critics have complained about Jem's speech, seeing it as awkwardly written by a female hand unused to creating male ideas and speech. To say this flatly, though, is, I think, to miss the point of Mrs. Gaskell's intention here. It seems clear that Mrs. Gaskell did not want Jem to speak eloquently, coolly, logically and rationally here; that she wanted Mary to see him as desperately passionate, incapable of putting his overwhelming feelings into well-turned prose. Perhaps her lack of practice at writing such scenes mars her effect somewhat, but it does not ruin it. One can still see her intention and still believe that a character like Mary could be swayed by such words, coming as they do so surprisingly from the lips of the normally quiet, self-contained Jem Wilson.

However, the thing that sustains Mary's love for Jem is not the

¹²In none of her novels does Mrs. Gaskell introduce humour as an important ingredient to character, although it is evident in her letters that her own sense of humour is healthy and prevalent. Cynthia Kirkpatrick is the first character whose sense of fun Mrs. Gaskell endorses - to a point.

passion of which she knows now he is capable. Because of this insight into his character, Mary sees his other qualities in a new light and comes to realize how much she does, and has unconsciously until now, valued them. Moreover, she comes to see that his love for her is solid and unwavering and that life with him will give her the security, in love as in all other aspects, which she misses in her present existence with her unhappy father. In other words, she sees his dependable qualities as paramount for a happy union. Not only does she now want to share her life with a man whose moral values she respects and who treats others as she would want them to be treated, but she desires to actively take on the practice of such values herself. She sees now that her imagined role as wife of Harry Carson has been one of passive indolence - a mere lap-dog existence. Hence her desire for immediate action after this long period of reflection on the newly-found "passionate secret of her soul."

Prior to this core scene of the novel, central in terms of her maturation, Mary is seen as largely immature. I say largely because, as with all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, Mary was never completely so: she has the seeds of valuable moral qualities in her personality and she has been given the basis of a moral code of behaviour by her parents when she was young. When her mother dies while Mary is just thirteen, her father becomes embittered and frustrated to the point of desperation at the lot of his fellows and himself. This suggests that it is Mary's mother who has held together the moral tone of the family, as well as having kept strong the bonds of familial affection.

Mary mourns the loss of her mother as the loss of the one guiding influence which she can trust and depend on: "...in all her troubles and perplexities, her heart called on her mother for aid, and she thought, "'If mother had but lived, she would have helped me.'"(p.37) She is still childlike, she clings to the idea of a mother for support for she cannot always cope with her responsibilities. Mrs. Gaskell is quick to point out that though this need is not one of a naïve girl for a more worldly-wise mother, it is one which never could have been satisfied even if her mother were alive for, unknown to Mary herself, "...she was far superior in sense and spirit to the mother she mourned."(p.37)

These are the things which matter to Mrs. Gaskell - not sophistication, as can be seen later in relation to Wives and Daughters. It is a balance of "sense and spirit" which, channelled in the right direction, in conjunction with a loss of delusion, will lead to maturity.

Mary's "sense" is not always well-developed in this early part of the novel. In fact, her exuberant "spirit" and the unmitigated, because secret, strength of her fantasies work against the "sense" which Mrs. Gaskell sees as ingrained in her personality and which later shows itself as one of her most pronounced characteristics. As yet, Mary is, for one thing, deluded by the illusory importance of superficial impressions. She is attracted to the external qualities of Harry Carson, his good looks and suave quasi-aristocratic charm, and to his lifestyle which, because designed for unremitting pleasure, seems to Mary to be one conducive to happiness. Her dependence on the value of the superficial is seen in other ways, too: "Mary", the reader is told, "liked making an impression, and in this it must be owned she was pretty often gratified." (p.39) Her physical beauty, her own external appearance, in turn, is that which attracts her to others, not only to those who, like Jem, also see her good inner qualities but to those, like Harry Carson, who appreciate her only for her looks and superficial behaviour. In this, Harry Carson, too, is immature in his state of delusion, whereas Jem is able to see Mary clearly for the kind of person she is, and the kind of person she could become.

In her belief in the value of illusory superficialities, Mary is akin to her Aunt Esther who fell in love with, and left home for, a man of higher rank. Mary believes that Esther has become a fine lady by this time. Mrs. Gaskell shows clearly the degradation and impoverishment, in all senses, of Esther's life after her abandonment by her seducer. Esther does come to a mature understanding of the nature of her past folly and is humbled by it, but she can never be restored to her former position in society no matter how much self-knowledge she gains. The consequences of falling for a man of a different class, who is attracted to one because of one's beauty - for Esther was as beautiful as Mary - are seen as inevitably harsh and unavoidable. Once fallen, Mrs. Gaskell is saying in this novel, one can

never be redeemed without the powerful, protective love of a friend. Even then, one can never live down the past, especially within oneself. This idea is carried through and becomes the germ of Mrs. Gaskell's next novel and of her short story, "Lizzie Leigh". Mary, in contrast to her aunt, has the good influence of Jem Wilson to save her from a fate similar to Esther's. However, without Mary's coming to love Jem, it seems unlikely that she would have heeded his advice, being headstrong and self-willed. Rather, it is the presence of such a man as Jem which allows Mary to have a contrasting figure by which to see Harry Carson in a true light. Jem's influence on Mary is indirect and, as it turns out, passive.

Mrs. Gaskell must have been aware that her middle-class readers would dissociate themselves from the moral struggles of her working-class heroine. In order to allay such aloofness, Mrs. Gaskell warns her reader: "Before my telling you so truly what folly Mary felt or thought injures her without redemption in your opinion, think what are the silly fancies of sixteen years of age in every class, and under all circumstances." (pp.35-36) Here, she is not only trying to engage the reader's sympathy with her heroine but she is also saying that all girls of that age are alike. She is trying to show her middle-aged readers that their daughters are the same and that they themselves, if they would look back in their memories to their past silly selves, were also the same. In this, she is not trying to take her readers down to the level of her heroine: she is allowing them to believe that they are now as mature as Mary will become. This, of course, is not necessarily the case at all for Mrs. Gaskell, as this thesis attempts to make clear, does not see maturity simply as an inevitable growing-up process. She writes about many immature adults in her novels and short-stories.

As a result of her mother's death and her father's increasing pre-occupation with the Chartist movement, because of his concern with the lot of the workmen, Mary is left pretty much to fend for herself, taking on the role of housekeeper and soon looking for a job as well. This independence allows her the freedom to associate with whomever she wishes - thus she comes to meet Harry Carson. On the whole, she

comports herself with dignity, coping with all her different roles, which leads others to believe her to be more mature than she is. Furthermore, she restrains her own wishes and plans when people are in need and goes eagerly to help them. Though at first not adept in giving aid, Mary is nevertheless so willing that those she is trying to help gain benefit from her presence. Her helping skills will be improved with time and practice, Mrs. Gaskell implies - at present she is merely "an inexperienced person"(p.55), as she is in giving help to her increasingly-blind friend, Margaret Jennings. Indeed, it is not long after this passage that when Mary is asked by her father to help the widowed Mrs. Davenport she, somehow, manages to do what is most apt for the widow despite the fact that she "...did not know what to say, or how to comfort."(p.78) Again, a short while later, Mary is able to help Margaret by using, as Mrs. Gaskell puts it, "...the tact which true sympathy rarely fails to supply."(p.100)

Mary's basically loving, thoughtful nature is shown not only in her acts of kindness to others but also in her groping to understand how other people feel. After she has learnt of her own feelings for Jem, later, in the scene already discussed, Mary becomes more acutely sensitive to the feelings of others. It is as if in now being in tune with herself she can be in tune with others. These heightened sensibilities are a mark of her attainment of maturity in the latter part of the novel. In the early section of the novel, Mary has to be jolted into seeing into others' wishes and feelings, as in the scene where Mary's father, in a fit of anger, beats her for her haughty temper. Mary's initial reaction is to indulge in self-pity and to blame her father for his hasty passionate act. It is only on reflection that she sees that she has provoked him, when he is in a state unfit to be crossed because of his bitterness at being hungry and unemployed and because of his opium addiction. Then she is humbled and penitent when she remembers how loving and kind he used to be before his wife's death and his subsequent misfortunes. Even though she is often afraid of him and his union associates, fierce in their desperation to achieve their ends, Mary understands better now how unfortunate her father is and pities him.

However, until the scene when Jem proposes to Mary and she sees her own mind and emotions clearly, Mary consistently misunderstands her own feelings concerning Jem. When Mary sees Jem overcome with grief at the death of his young twin brothers, she feels deep sympathy for him, as she does with all who are in grave trouble. Yet, when she goes to him to soothe and comfort him, she is repelled by the effect her words have on him. Jem here, too, misunderstands Mary's feelings. He sees her sympathy and kindness as something more personal and eagerly tries to show his feelings in response to such a demonstration. This troubles Mary greatly for she believes that she does not want these advances. Indeed, apart from her misconceptions about her feelings, Mary is justifiably, as Jem himself realizes she should be, distressed by his passionate actions when he should be pre-occupied with his brothers' recent death. It is obvious that Mrs. Gaskell has created Jem thus to show that, in this, he is as spontaneous and natural as Mary Barton herself. Jem is clearly not the wholly good, upright man whom many critics see as too perfect or too static in his portrayal. Here, Mrs. Gaskell is showing that he is just as flawed as Mary and has some touches of immaturity in his personality.

Later that night Mary ponders on the meaning of what has occurred. She believes that Jem is mistaken in his estimation of her regard for him, as he himself later believes when his proposal is rejected though, ironically, Mary's attitude to him has changed by then. Her train of thought, though, is curious: after having established that Jem misunderstands her feelings, she muses:

'I cannot think what possesses me, that I must always be wanting to comfort him when he's downcast, and that I must go meddling wi' him tonight, when sure enough it was his aunt's place to speak to him. I don't care for him, and yet, unless I'm always watching myself, I'm speaking to him in a loving voice. I think I cannot go right, for I either check myself till I'm downright cross to him, or else I speak just natural, and that's too kind and tender by half. And I'm as good as engaged to be married to another; and another far handsomer than Jem; only I think I like Jem's face best for all that; liking's liking, and there's no help for it. Well, when I'm Mrs. Harry Carson, may happen I can put some good fortune in Jem's way.' (pp.85-86)

To the reader, as Mrs. Gaskell clearly intended, it is obvious that Mary does feel more for Jem than she is aware of. The idea that

she must "watch herself" and "check herself" so that she is not "natural" to him shows this quite patently. Mary herself is not aware of the meaning of the words that she is expressing: her misunderstanding of her feelings for Jem is so great that she does not even wonder why it is that, as she says, "unless I'm always watching myself, I'm speaking to him in a loving voice." Mary is so pre-occupied with her dreams of becoming Mrs. Harry Carson that she tries to push any other amorous thoughts out of the way. Funnily enough, she sees her inability to cope in her relations with Jem as a sign of her immaturity and believes that marriage with Harry Carson will bolster her up so that she shall be seen as mature. Yet, it is precisely her delusions of this sort which mark her as immature at this stage. This point will be returned to shortly.

There is one further occasion on which Mary betrays her real feelings for Jem. Not many weeks before Jem goes to propose to her, Mary pays a visit to his mother. Mary has been prompted by her father to visit this old family friend - indeed, she is chided for her selfishness in not having done so for a long time. She has not visited the Wilson's because she has not wanted to see Jem again after the above incident. The conversation with Jem's mother turns to talk of Jem and of his marriage prospects, because he has worked well and has been made the factory foreman. Mary's reaction is significant: "Mary went very red, and looked annoyed, although there was a secret spring of joy deep down in her heart, at having Jem so spoken of."(p.124) However, when a possible rival to her in his affections is mentioned by Mrs. Wilson, Mary becomes "vexed" and "irritated" by her words(p.125). When she leaves the house, she continues to think about this possibility and, in the end, declares that she does not care if he loves another. Spurred on to think this by Mrs. Wilson's words that she, Mary, is not good enough for Jem, Mary reinforces her belief in the rightness of her own choice. There is a touch of bitter self-justification in her thoughts:

People seemed all to think he was much too good for her(Mary's own self). Perhaps some one else, far more handsome, and far more grand, would show him one day that she was good enough to be Mrs. Harry Carson. So temper, or what Mary called "spirit", led her to encourage Mr. Carson more than ever she had done before.(p.126)

Mary's childish, almost stubborn, defiance of what people think almost leads her to her ruin. One lesson that she later learns when undeluded is that she must control and channel her "spirit" so that it is a force for good, not for self-centred ends. Mrs. Gaskell is not saying simply that Mary must curb her "spirit" in order to be a quiet, obedient wife. She shows in her novels that a certain amount of true independence and strength of spirit are vital to a well-balanced character.

Mary's delusion about her feelings for Jem is aided by, if not engendered by, a parallel delusion concerning her feelings for Mr. Carson. Mrs. Gaskell, in order to mitigate Mary's behaviour and ideals, tries to lead the reader to believe that Mary's rational mind is overcome by her feelings for this latter lover and that, therefore, she cannot be blamed for her conduct. However, Mrs. Gaskell ruins her case by showing the reader that these feelings are, in reality, non-existent. Perhaps this confusion, which is brought out in Mary's own mind, makes it the more believable that Mary is deluded in thinking that she would be happiest with Harry Carson. This delusion Mrs. Gaskell calls Mary's "one cherished weakness", which:

concerned a lover, not beloved, but favoured by fancy. A gallant, handsome young man; but - not beloved. Yet Mary hoped to meet him every day in her walks, blushed when she heard his name, and tried to think of him as her future husband, and above all, tried to think of herself as his future wife. Alas! poor Mary! Bitter woe did thy weakness work thee.(p.51)

Mrs. Gaskell's literary inelegance here, with this moralizing omniscient narrator - incidentally, a characteristic of much lesser fiction of the time - makes the point portentously obvious that Mary is deluded and in danger of following out her delusions. In later novels, Mrs. Gaskell is more at ease with her literary abilities and allows characters to speak and act for themselves, with their problems and foibles subtly and charmingly portrayed. This, of course, suggests that her meaning sometimes has to be teased out where here, in Mary Barton, it is fully exposed and pre-digested. Nevertheless, her portrayals here show a deep understanding of the complexities of her characters' psychologies. Thus, it can be said that her understanding of human nature does not change in her works, but her exposition of it develops from one novel to the next.

As can be seen from the quotation above, Mary deludes herself into believing that she loves Harry Carson and wants to marry him. This point is made even more strongly a little later in the novel when Mrs. Gaskell states, of Mary's feelings for Mr. Carson, "Her love for him was a bubble, blown out of vanity; but it looked very real and very bright."(p.119) Thus, Mary's self-deception, stripped after her confrontation with Jem, is threefold: she is deluded in believing herself to be in love with Harry Carson; she is deluded in believing that what she wants in marriage is wealth and luxury; and she is deluded in her under-estimation of her feelings for Jem. The removal of these delusions changes completely Mary's ideas about her place in the world, her ideals and her own self-esteem.

Even before her disillusionment after Jem's proposal, Mary is momentarily aware that her relationship with Mr. Carson is not all that she would wish it to be. It is as if she herself is partly aware that her dreams of marriage with Mr. Carson are just that - dreams, "castles in air", "Alnaschar-visions"(p.87), as Mrs. Gaskell phrases it. When Mary's father leaves for London with the Chartist delegation, she decides not to see Harry Carson in his absence: "There was something crooked in her conscience after all; for this very resolution seemed an acknowledgement that it was wrong to meet him at any time; and yet she had brought herself to think her conduct quite innocent and proper." (p.95)

Mrs. Gaskell, however, ameliorates the harshness of this judgement somewhat and concludes that it is simply because of Mary's father's disapproval of such a union that Mary decides not to meet him at this time. Nevertheless, the seeds of doubt as to propriety have been sown both in Mary's mind and in that of the reader. Yet Mary, right up until the moment when Jem enters the house to propose to her, clings to the idea of her relationship with Harry Carson as that most fitting and most able to give her happiness, simply on the basis of its little day-to-day gratifications to her vanity. This delusion of Mary's is an understandable dream for one in her class with its severely limited material conditions of life. It represents her way of improving her conditions: an escapist way, it must be admitted, when compared with

her father's efforts through trade unionism to better the condition of all working-class people. It would seem that there could be nothing that Jem could do to sway her from this position. Yet, as has been seen, Mary is saved from her giddiness by her own acceptance of reality when she is confronted with it. In this, she is far more mature than Harry Carson when Mary tells him that she no longer wants to see him. His reaction is to believe that Mary's earnestness is a show of vanity far beyond any of which Mary Barton could be capable. Rather than face the truth, Mr. Carson taunts Mary with the labels "witch", "coquette"(p.138) and "provoking romancer"(p.141), and clings to the idea that Mary will change her mind, because "Women always do."(p.141)

The first sign to the reader that Mary is changing because of her disenchantment is seen in her treatment of Harry Carson after this event. She resolves to face his disapprobation, despite her reluctance to see him again, and tell him that she wants to stop their meetings. She is, until she tells him this, unaware still that his intentions are definitely other than honourable. Her "naïve and candid avowal"(p.139) is answered by a desperate proposal of marriage which changes Mary's feelings of guilt to anger. She can now reject Mr. Carson with dignity and scorn. She sees him now only as a cruel plotter of her ruin and realizes that she has deceived herself into believing that he would marry her.

The second sign of Mary's development is the way in which she copes with her new-found feelings for Jem. Her handling of Mr. Carson is evidence of an externally-directed strength, a strength in action; this problem is one of inner strength, shown by external calmness and patience and restraint from showing her feelings, even though she obviously wishes to show them to him. This behaviour is endorsed by Mrs. Gaskell, in all her novels, as mature for women. Men, in contrast, are allowed to, and indeed must, show the strength of their feelings for their beloved, as is seen here with Jem.¹³ Mrs. Gaskell calls this secretion of one's feelings "maidenly modesty"(pp.134-135). It is a

¹³They are also allowed to be impatient - see p.338, e.g. - where women are not.

notion which she uses repeatedly. When the normally impulsive, unthinking Mary decides to show "womanly patience"(p.135), Mrs. Gaskell calls it a resolution of "unusual wisdom"(p.135), betokening both her approval of it and her belief that it is a mature quality. That Mary is seen to persist in her resolution underlines this idea of responsible, selfless maturity, as compared with "the changeableness of girlhood"(p.135) of which Sally Leadbitter and Mr. Carson think her guilty.

Mary is aided in her efforts at being patient and humble by two female characters who figure in the novel as mature. Old Alice Wilson, eternally patient and acceptant of her lot, despite its paucity and narrowness, is seen as an exemplar of female probity and decency. Margaret Jennings, as mentioned previously, is an example in Mary's own age-group of such qualities - and an extreme one, as she copes with her increasing blindness in patience and resignation. Even her behaviour changes, though it moves even closer to a feminine ideal, when she finds that she loves someone: "She did not speak so decidedly as before; there was a hesitation in her manner, that seemed to make her very attractive; as if something softer, more lovable than excellent sense, were coming in as a motive for speech."(p.175) She does not, though, have the healthy sense of self that Mary has and hence it is easier for her to be submissive and quiescent.

Mary has to struggle against her feelings of impatience and fear of loss in order to follow the example of these two women. Her efforts are not under-valued for Mrs. Gaskell does understand how the inequality of the sexes makes woman's lot more difficult than that of man and sympathizes with Mary:

Were a few hasty words, spoken in a moment of irritation, to stamp her lot through life? At times she thought she could bear this meekly, happy in her own constant power of loving. For of change or forgetfulness she did not dream. Then at other times her state of impatience was such that it required all her self-restraint to prevent her from going and seeking him out, and (as man would do to man, or woman to woman) begging him to forgive her hasty words, and allow her to retract them, and bidding him accept of the love that was filling her whole heart.(p.175)

Mrs. Gaskell sees that, as things are, there are certain ways of

behaving that are acceptable and that there is no use railing against hide-bound social injustices, if indeed she even saw them as injustices. Her message is that one must learn to accept graciously one's lot. At the same time, though, she clearly is aware of how things could be if only one could change society. Her "spirited" heroines who come to mature mostly share this understanding with her but, like her, realize that if there is nothing that can be done by one individual, then it is better to give in, at the same time keeping one's "spirit" alive but under control and used productively. This will be seen in the later novels.

Mary, in her eagerness to show her newly-adopted attitude of responsibility and rectitude, is afraid that her past will be known. She believes that, because it is finished with in her mind, she should not have to deal with it any more. In this, she is naïve and deluded. She has to face her past and she ends up having to do it publicly, because of the notoriety of Harry Carson's murder. However, resolutely, she quietly faces those at work who accuse her of jilting Mr. Carson; she humbly withstands Mrs. Wilson's accusations of profligacy, as a "whited sepulchre"(p.224), a "Delilah"(p.225) and "a vile, flirting quean"(p.225); and she endures Margaret's cold censure of her behaviour; and her self-reproach is deepened. Margaret, indeed, cannot even understand how one could go the way Mary has in the past:

Gentle, reserved, and prudent herself,...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. Then, she had no idea of the strength of the conflict between will and principle in some who were differently constituted from herself.(p.246)

Her maturity is so much a part of her nature that she cannot see how Mary could act immaturely, and have questionable motives. Now Mary has to prove herself as capable of maturing to people like Margaret and Mrs. Wilson.

Mary still entertains one illusion in her mind. In fact, it is a relatively new one begun, ironically, on the evening of her relinquishment of all her earlier illusions. She believes, because of Jem's impassioned declaration at that time - that he may be heard of as

a murderer - that he is guilty of Harry Carson's murder. Even though she has learnt from Harry Carson's example that people often say things that they do not mean, she believes Jem, because of his honesty and goodness, to be always literally truthful in what he says: "And she did not blame him,... she felt how madly she might act if once jealous of him, and how much cause had she not given him for jealousy, miserable guilty wretch that she was!"(p.225) Mrs. Gaskell seems to have left Mary in a quandary here: she never explains how Mary comes to grips with the nature of Jem's hyperbolic declaration. It takes concrete evidence about the identity of the real murderer to sway Mary from this mistaken belief and for her to see Jem as he really is, no longer romanticizing him into a passion-blinded figure.

Before she can become Jem's wife, Mary must undergo a kind of trial-by-faith which tests both the degree of her development and the strength of her feelings for Jem. This is a motif used by Mrs. Gaskell, in one form or another, in most of her novels: the testing of the heroine's maturity when in a difficult position, often one of confrontation. Dickens uses this motif, too, in Our Mutual Friend, when Bella Wilfer is tested by John Harmon after their marriage when he is accused of murder. Again, it is as much a test of Bella's maturity as of her love for her husband. Not only is Mary to behave with "maidenly modesty", as already discussed in relation to her feelings for Jem Wilson, but also she must act to vindicate his innocence of the murder, thereby showing both her belief in his innocence and her loyalty to him when he is seen by others as a suspected criminal. Ironically, Mary's "maidenly modesty" prevents her from saving Jem from being suspected of the crime for, if she could have told him of her feelings it would not have been necessary for him to confront Harry Carson in the street.

From the midpoint of the novel on, from after the time when Mary talked to Margaret about her feelings for Jem, little is shown of Mary's thoughts and feelings. From this point on, after the murder has been committed, there is only time for action on Mary's part. It must be seen from her actions whether or not she has developed. Mrs. Gaskell would have the reader believe that Mary almost immediately has the necessary ability to act independently and courageously, though later

she shows this ability to be mixed still with the characteristics of a young hitherto-dependent girl taxed beyond her strength. She clearly engineers her story so that, by having Mary take the active role of finding the necessary witness for Jem's acquittal, she can show Mary, in her new-found clear-sightedness and self-understanding, to have more strength than the conventional heroine-figure of her time, who can perhaps be exemplified in the figure of the upright, sensible, but passive Margaret Jennings.

When Mary discovers that the onus of getting Jem acquitted falls on herself, she does not shirk from the task: "It would require much thought, and much prudence. But with the call upon her exertions, and her various qualities of judgement and discretion, came the answering consciousness of innate power to meet the emergency."(p.242) Mrs. Gaskell loads on the effect by reminding the reader: "And you must remember, too, that never was so young a girl so friendless, or so penniless, as Mary was at this time."(p.242) Now Mary is, to a degree, free of her "maidenly modesty", for the saving of Jem's life is seen as far more important than the maintenance of Mary's virtuous position. Mary can openly work for this cause now and does so with eagerness: "She longed to do all herself; to be his liberator, his deliverer; to win his life, though she might never regain his lost love by her own exertions."(p.251) It is obvious that she has been uncomfortable with the yoke of "maidenly modesty". Now, she will never have to put it on again - and her maturity is still credible.

Mrs. Gaskell is at great pains to show that, throughout this last half of the novel, despite Mary's self-reliance and independence, she is still a feminine being. As with all of her heroines, though, it is an effort for Mary to be so when there are things needed to be done: "But think of Mary and what she was enduring! Picture to yourself (for I cannot tell you) the armies of thoughts that met and clashed in her brain; and then imagine the effort it cost her to be calm, and quiet, and, even in a faint way, cheerful and smiling at times."(p.265) The image of heroine as battler against herself, her circumstances and, often, her female role, is used repeatedly in Mrs. Gaskell's novels. It seems to show that Mrs. Gaskell realizes that for her heroines with

"spirit" and self-reliance it would be hard to learn to comport oneself, in a feminine sense, in a socially-acceptable manner.¹⁴ This is not to say, though, that Mrs. Gaskell wants her heroines to become self-effacing, passive and dependent for it is clear in her novels that she does not want this. Rather, she has her heroines accept the circumscriptions of their role graciously and without losing self-respect and vitality. In this, her heroines differ markedly from those of Victorian popular fiction, as recorded by Dalziel, for example, in Popular Fiction One Hundred Years Ago.¹⁵ In Mrs. Gaskell's terms, such heroines as are outlined by Dalziel could never reach maturity.

Mrs. Gaskell is so insistent on showing that Mary is not of this sort that she rather overdoes her authorial commentary on how unusual Mary is in this respect. Again, not long after the above comment in the novel, she reminds the reader of the cost to such a formerly wilful, independent character as Mary, in developing to a mature woman:

indeed, she had so struggled and triumphed (though a sadly-bleeding victor at heart) over herself these two last days, had so concealed agony, and hidden her inward woe and bewilderment, that she began to take confidence, and to have faith in her own powers of meeting any one with a passably fair show, whatever might be rending her life beneath the cloak of her deception.(p.266)

Mrs. Gaskell is blunter and less sophisticated here than she later is in spelling out her message about the need for external appearance for the sake of others while maintaining inner integrity for oneself. Yet it is a notion which is carried through in later novels dealing with strong-willed girls such as Margaret Hale and Molly Gibson.

Mary's testimony in court is also a public avowal of her love for Jem. Because of her unusual circumstances she can now tell him, albeit indirectly, of her feelings, unfettered by "feminine shame"(p.316). At the same time, her testimony is a mature admission of past immaturity,

¹⁴Mrs. Gaskell copes better with this problem in her later novels, particularly in Wives and Daughters.

¹⁵Margaret Dalziel, Popular Fiction One Hundred Years Ago(London: Cohen and West, 1957).

humbly put. She is not the romantic "heroine"(p.270) that Sally Leadbitter calls her, just a well-integrated female who is intended to be realistic. Mrs. Gaskell points to the contrast between her heroines, whom, it seems clear, she would want to claim as girls of everyday life, and the idea of "heroine"-figures in nearly all her later novels, often with ironic amusement in her use of such a contrast. Mary herself does not want her efforts to be seen as heroic. Indeed, Mrs. Gaskell clearly did not intend them to be seen thus and allows Mary to slip into delirious illness after her testimony is given at the trial. In fact, Mary has been seen before this to have weak moments. After returning from the seemingly fruitless chase of her witness, Will Wilson, Mary, alone and penniless, sits on the waterside docks contemplating the thought of suicide: "Once or twice a spectral thought loomed among the shadows of her brain; a wonder whether beneath that cold dismal surface there would not be rest from the troubles of earth."(p.292) She is not Mrs. Gaskell's only heroine to contemplate such an act: Ruth Hilton and Sylvia Robson also imagine self-destruction by drowning. Even when gruffly befriended by the boatman, Sturgis, and invited to his home, Mary cannot rouse herself: "She came on meekly after him, scarcely thinking in her stupor where she was going, and glad (in a dead, heavy way) that some one was deciding things for her."(p.303)

Yet, after her illness, Mary rallies back to a sense of her responsibilities and duties, in deciding to return to her father. It is the last act necessary to restore her self-esteem, ruptured by her disillusion and the publicity of her past follies. John Barton is now a figure of horror in Mary's mind because of the murder which he has committed and his savage humour due to ill health and depression. Mary sees caring for him in his destitution as the responsible and right thing to do, despite Jem's protests. It seems, at this late stage in the novel, that the tables have turned and the once dependable Jem is seen as contrastingly dependent when compared with Mary. However, as Mary herself has realized, Jem is not a model of perfect rectitude. Like her, he is capable of selfishness and other characteristics of immaturity. Mrs. Gaskell is too conscious of both the impossibility and the inappropriateness of a perfectly mature character in her

fiction, if he or she is to be seen as realistic, a quality which Mrs. Gaskell clearly aims for in her novels.

Jem Wilson, from early in the novel, has been seen as honourable and conscientious in his ready acceptance of the financial and paternal responsibility of his family. He has always been seen as good, kind, honest, brave, humble, resourceful, self-reliant and active. Yet there are times when his good qualities must give way to lesser ones, when his selfishness in all other things is forgotten, when his one desire for self-fulfilment - to have Mary - is threatened. Thus, when Esther tells him of Mary's relationship with Harry Carson he neglects to help the poor prostitute though "...afterwards he bitterly regretted his omission of duty; his weariness of well-doing."(p.166) He is too pre-occupied with the idea of Mary loving another, and his feelings on this subject are not nice: "Then uprose the guilty longing for blood! - The frenzy of jealousy! - Some one should die. He would rather Mary were dead, cold in her grave, than that she were another's."(p.167) However, he eventually listens to the good voice in his mind which has been working in opposition to this bad voice and decides to become Mary's guardian influence. The effects of that influence have been discussed earlier.

Jem's symbolic vision of Mary as a "wild rose"(p.167) here is apt. It suggests, as does his entire understanding of her nature that Jem is not deluded in his love for Mary in seeing her as other than she is. In fact, it is Mary as herself that attracts her to him, not merely the appearance of physical beauty and whimsical charm that attracted Harry Carson - he loves her, thorns and all. To the suggestion of Mary being a flirt, Jem thinks: "Even if she were, the more reason for there being someone to protect her; poor, faulty darling."(p.178) After the trial and his acquittal, Jem still sees Mary as in need of a protector, though he knows that she no longer possesses the faults for which she has seemed in need of his protection. In her illness and her convalescence she is indeed weak and dependent. However, once Mary's physical strength has been regained and she wants to take an active part in life again, she shakes off her dependency. What has been learnt by others from Mary's recent past behaviour comes as a jolt to Jem -

that she is no longer the immature girl who needs someone strong to be dependent upon and to act for her, for her own good. Mary has shown herself to be capable of managing on her own: she cannot give up her independence and self-reliance in an instant, to suit Jem's whim, "his fond exaggeration of her helplessness."(p.351) It seems clear that the marriage between Jem and Mary would be more of one between equals than was usual in the fiction of the time.

Other characters in the novel to whom Mary has been close have seen the unmistakable change in Mary after her flirting has been found out and she has been able to show in actions how much she has changed. This stage, though, has come some time after the actual point of change when Mary was disillusioned as to her past ideas about her life. The first person to be influenced thus is Mrs. Wilson to whom Mary goes after Jem's arrest. Her soothing, kind words and manner suggest the idea to Mrs. Wilson that Mary is like "a sunbeam"(p.249) in her house. Job and Margaret come to admire and respect her for her "firmness of determination"(p.255) in desiring to take the necessary steps to prove Jem innocent. Indeed, Margaret, who was formerly most distressed at the revelations of Mary's flighty character, is able to see Mary now clearly, "...to see in her the same, sweet, faulty, impulsive, lovable creature she had known in the former Mary Barton, but with more of dignity, self-reliance, and purpose."(pp.255-256) Mrs. Gaskell has not miraculously transformed Mary so that her former lively "spirit" has been crushed in order for her to be seen as a perfect model of maturity. Instead, more realistically, she has given Mary a balance of characteristics - of "spirit" and "sense", in fact - which she sees as mature. Because Mary has been tempted and come to resist temptation, Margaret now loves her more than when she was untried and innocent, for Margaret acknowledges the strengths which have come into being in Mary's awakened senses. Mary's endeavours to find Will accord her the label of "brave wench"(p.299) by Job Legh, who has come to trust her actions because he sees that she has "spirit and sense".(p.297)

Mrs. Gaskell clearly is concerned with the dual ideas of "spirit" and "sense" in this novel. In later novels they are not spelled out but assumed as basic characteristics of her developing heroines. Here, in

Mary Barton, she is working out her ideas about maturity for the first time, fictionally, and is taken with these two qualities as the essential framework of maturity - once a character has been stripped of, or has stripped herself of, her romantic illusions about life and herself. As has been seen in this chapter, the two words have been used at several stages in the novel in relation to Mary Barton. Mrs. Gaskell uses them elsewhere, too - most revealingly, in Esther's thoughts about Mary and the danger to which she is exposed in flirting with Mr. Carson. Esther wants to find someone who can talk to Mary of her danger, but he or she must have "sense or spirit, or interest enough to undertake her mission." (p.160) In the end, she chooses Jem as the person most suitable for this task, presumably because she sees that he has all three of these attributes. Indeed, it can be seen in the novel that he has all three. Mary, however, initially only sees him as a man of "sense": he is sensible, upright, decent, responsible, earnest and hard-working. It is only when he proposes to her that Mary sees the "spirit" in him, in his impassioned plea for her to marry him and his threats of possible impulsive, destructive consequences if he is refused. Now, she sees the sensible qualities in him balanced by the spirited, the vital, the active ones.

At the end of the novel, Mary and Jem can be seen as complementary figures: no longer is Mary the character with only "spirit" and Jem the character with only "sense". They have both taken on, unconsciously, the attributes of each other which balance their former one-sided characters. For Jem, this has come about because of the urgency and desperation of his love for Mary; for Mary it has come about because of her disillusionment about her feelings catalyzed by Jem's proposal. He can be seen as a character who is mature from the beginning of the novel because he has no such illusions whereas Mary has had to learn to see things clearly. As previously stated, neither is a model of perfection in terms of maturity. Mrs. Gaskell is careful to give them understandable and harmless faults and failings in her efforts to portray them as realistic characters, a matter central to her moral concerns in her novels.

Mary Barton at the end of the novel is a logical development from

the Mary Barton seen at the beginning, though once somewhat immature and now unequivocally mature: once vain, flippant, largely self-concerned, flighty, impressible and deluded; now responsible, sensible, courageous, self-respectful, resourceful, independent when necessary, unselfish, thoughtful and clear-sighted. She has, however, always had the qualities of kindness, generosity, warmth, openness and honesty, and the desire to do good for others, yet the development of these qualities and the taking on of other valuable qualities have been hindered by her one great delusion concerning her feelings for the two men in her life and concerning her plans for her future. Once she has seen through this delusion, Mary is able to grow quickly to Mrs. Gaskell's ideal state of maturity.

CHAPTER 2

RUTH HILTON - "A PURE WOMAN"

In Ruth, Mrs. Gaskell has become more directly concerned with the concept of maturity in relation to her heroine. Ruth and Mary Barton differ in that Ruth is far more truly the single focus of the novel named after her than Mary Barton was of hers. She has less vitality than Mary, less sparkle, but perhaps a calmer and more pastoral charm. In other words, she has less "spirit" than Mary Barton, though she later gains more "spirit" in the sense of becoming determined, independent and strong in her decisions to nurse both the sick populace and later Mr. Bellingham. Like Mary, though, she has "sense" which develops through the novel with her increasing maturity. It is more important for Ruth to seem "good" from the beginning of the novel, and Mrs. Gaskell's problem is to make her goodness appealing and convincing throughout the novel. At the same time, Mrs. Gaskell has to be able to show Ruth as originally both innocent and deludedly immature. Where Mary's first mistaken choice was a prelude to her later more independent course of action, Ruth's error finished her as a being with any but the grimmest social choices. Where Mary's first mistake led directly to self-knowledge and self-reliance, Ruth's led to a much slower growth towards self-reliance. Initially, she is generally more submissive, naïve and dependent than Mary, though she rises to sterner heights in her later rejection of her first love and in her later determined independent course of action in taking up the unenviable position of matron of a fever-stricken hospital.

Many critics seem to overlook such manifestations of Ruth's development to maturity. Indeed, they generally argue that Ruth does not mature at all. Coral Lansbury, for example, sees Ruth as passive and dependent throughout the novel and states, of the end of the novel:

In death, Ruth is what she had always been, a faithful, obedient and loving child whom society had insisted on treating as an adult. She is not a tragic heroine capable of shaping events and making decisions for herself and others. Even when she goes to the Infirmary she says that it is because the Bensons have taught her to serve others, that the idea was not hers since she had seen how the minister had gone out and tended the sick.¹

There seems to be no evidence in the novel for this latter claim: Ruth has learnt, unconsciously, the precepts and practices of the Bensons but she does not consciously, slavishly, copy their behaviour. To claim that she does shows a complete misunderstanding on Lansbury's part of Mrs. Gaskell's intentions with Ruth, namely, that Ruth is inherently good, caring and well-intentioned but that she has been misled in her youthful innocence and deludedness, and in her state of orphaned friendlessness. Mrs. Gaskell, to make this point even clearer than her narrative in itself demonstrates, has Mr. Benson, clearly a mature character in the novel, say of Ruth: "she seemed, and was, a young and gentle girl, who had been led astray before she fairly knew what life was."² There is, in this, the suggestion that, given the right conditions, Ruth will be able to develop into a good, responsible, mature woman.

Lansbury's misconception concerning Mrs. Gaskell's intention is based on her knowledge of the Unitarian movement and its beliefs. She concludes that:

As a Unitarian, Elizabeth Gaskell firmly believed that every human being could be developed by education to the full capacity of his intelligence....Thus Ruth, vapid, on the verge of illiteracy, deprived of the sense of family and friendship in her life, is transformed into a capable and courageous young woman. These qualities were not innate; they are the result of her life with the Bensons.³

There are two objections to this line of reasoning. The first objection is that Lansbury has extrapolated from a general

¹Coral Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis(London: Paul Elek, 1975), p.80.

²Gaskell, Elizabeth, Ruth(London: Dent, 1967), p.346. All further references to the novel will be to this edition and will be placed in the text.

³Lansbury, pp.64-65.

understanding of Unitarian ideas to Mrs. Gaskell's own thoughts and thus to her novels. There is nothing in Mrs. Gaskell's letters to substantiate such a sweeping and vague claim. The second objection is that such a belief on Mrs. Gaskell's part as the one posited above would imply that there could be no characters in her novels who could be capable of becoming mature people - only ones better-developed, in terms of education, than they were formerly. However, in her novels, it is clear that Mrs. Gaskell wants her readers to see that there are characters who, given the right conditions and with the right dispositions, are capable of developing in terms of their whole personalities and their value-systems. It is also clear that there are others who, no matter what external conditions prevail, are incapable of developing thus, even if they learn by precept - as Richard Bradshaw does in Ruth - to comport themselves better and learn acceptable behaviour.⁴ Ruth, as I hope to show in this chapter, is a character who is capable of truly maturing.

Most critics prefer to ignore the issue of whether or not Ruth matures because they are primarily concerned with Mrs. Gaskell's fictional treatment of the fallen woman theme and the strategems that she has to use to make the point that the fallen woman is often an innocent victim, not only of her seducer but also of society's later attitude towards her. Indeed, Mrs. Gaskell's problem was to accuse the middle-class of a ruthless hypocrisy towards sinners, while showing them that a merciful approach would, in fact, rehabilitate the "sinner" and provide an environment where an original potentiality for good could still develop. Thus it was essential that, at the beginning of the novel, Ruth is seen to be both innocent and intrinsically pure and good. This requirement, however, is often overlooked by critics. Lansbury, in her complaints that Ruth has not enough vitality, that she is too passive and docile, is not alone. Axe, too, fails to understand Mrs. Gaskell's purpose and the nature of the contemporary critical climate in stating that:

⁴thus, being better-developed in having gained the knowledge necessary to appear capable and to be more worldly-wise than they were formerly.

Ruth has none of the flashes of temper and humor which her other heroines show. As the center of a moral struggle, Ruth's bland, featureless purity becomes a liability to the successful blending of art and purpose.⁵

At the same time, Axe seems to ignore the very real development which goes on in Ruth during the course of the novel which changes the nature of her purity with increasing knowledge and self-awareness.

Mrs. Gaskell's letters of the time show that she was aware that she was depicting "an unfit subject for fiction"⁶ in Ruth, and that she was pained by the largely censorious critical reception of the book - "though", she wrote, "I would do every jot of it over again to-morrow."⁷ Because of this awareness she trod carefully in her depiction of her heroine and in her overall handling of her theme:

I could have put out much more power, but that I wanted to keep it quiet in tone, lest by the slightest exaggeration, or over-strained sentiment I might weaken the force of what I had to say.⁸

Indeed, Margaret Ganz criticizes Mrs. Gaskell for having been too cautious in her handling of her theme, because that "weaken(ed) the force of what (she) had to say":

...the many reactions of disapproval to her treatment of the "fallen woman" provide one dramatic clue to her ambivalence in criticizing the assumptions of the time. For even if such a tentative challenge to social attitudes as Ruth provoked shock and outrage, one can guess the enormous difficulties the author would have faced had she been more totally committed to tolerance.⁹

In other words, Mrs. Gaskell could not possibly have written the book without such an innocent, pure heroine. Yet, at the same time, Mrs. Gaskell wants to show Ruth as initially immature and self-deluded, and therefore capable of maturing. Because Mrs. Gaskell wanted to

⁵Kathryn Axe, Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell: A Critical Evaluation of Her Novels(Uni. of Kansas, 1973), p.42.

⁶The Letters, letter 148, to Anne Robson, p.220.

⁷The Letters, letter 148, p.220.

⁸The Letters, letter 148, p.221.

⁹Ganz, p.105.

demonstrate that Ruth is both innocent and immature, she is caught between two inapposite intentions. Throughout the novel, her authorial problems in this respect are evident and, as a result, the novel is not successful. For the reader, like the critics, cannot help but ask questions about how Ruth can maintain her innocence and ignorance after her seduction for, at least from this point on, she must have realized the sinful nature of what she had been doing and what she was still doing: and why should Ruth have to learn to take responsibility for her past sin if she was blameless rather than irresponsible at the time? Mrs. Gaskell cannot answer these questions because of her circumscription as a didactic novelist in wanting to present to her reader an acceptable picture of a fallen woman who must be seen as innocent and therefore able to be rehabilitated, as Mr. Benson sees Ruth. This works in opposition to her fictional intention in showing Ruth, as she does all her primary heroines, as misguided and deluded and, throughout the novel, in the process of becoming clear-sighted and self-aware. Faith Benson, in this novel, though too ready to condemn Ruth as an evil sinner, is more realistic than her brother in seeing that Ruth is more than simply an innocent, pure victim; that she is self-deluded and must learn to battle with her own nature. Mr. Benson, in this, can be seen as rather too other-worldly though his influence is necessary to give Faith the faith to help him in his task of giving Ruth the right conditions to learn to cope with the consequences of her seduction, for he knows enough of the ways of the world to see that, if left to herself, Ruth would have no other alternative but to turn to a life of sin.

Craik is one critic who realizes what Mrs. Gaskell is trying to do in this novel, though he underestimates the difficulty of her task and her inability to do it successfully:

To create and delineate Ruth, rendering her sympathetic without sentimentality, faulty without being criminal, ignorant without being unintelligent, so that she can develop into maturity and awareness, and even to modest heroism, such is Elizabeth Gaskell's primary undertaking.¹⁰

¹⁰W. Craik, Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel (London: Methuen, 1975), p.80.

One of many delusions which the young Ruth entertains about Mr. Bellingham, which are steadily stripped from her on later occasions, is that her lover's intentions towards her have her welfare in mind. As was the case with Mary Barton, these delusions of Ruth's, coupled with her innocence and ignorance, make her an easy prey for an idle aristocrat and potential seducer. Again, as with Mary Barton, it is Ruth's beauty and her trusting, gullible youthfulness, which make her attractive to Mr. Bellingham. Like Mary Barton, Ruth has no mother to give her moral guidance and her environment at the dressmaker's establishment where she works is not conducive to personal development for Ruth has no friend or advisor from whom to learn about life and from whom to gain the encouragement and support which would strengthen her intrinsic "good" qualities. Furthermore, she is obedient and docile, warm, sweet-natured and childlike and in her loneliness she is desperate for affection from others. Mr. Bellingham's attentions are both flattering and comforting to her and she wants to be able to trust him. Circumstances - her sacking by her employer for having been seen alone with Mr. Bellingham - put her into a position where she thinks that she can do little else but trust him.

Ruth's first delusion about her relationship with Mr. Bellingham to be broken is that of her continuing rectitude in the eyes of the world after her seduction. Prior to this moment of disenchantment, in the Welsh village where Mr. Bellingham has taken her, Ruth has seen her growing attachment to Mr. Bellingham as morally acceptable, judging it in the light of remembered words and ideas of her dead mother - because it seems to give her innocent pleasure - and because Mr. Bellingham seemed "so kind and good"(p.39). Indeed, her mis-estimation of Mr. Bellingham's character is ironically portrayed by Mrs. Gaskell to show her reader just how innocent Ruth is. When Mr. Bellingham shuts the window of his carriage quickly, and with a grimace, to block out the cold, Ruth sees it as a sympathetic gesture to the poor who are left outside: "Ruth fancied that Mr. Bellingham looked as if he could understand the feelings of those removed from him by circumstance and station."(p.17) Yet there is a hint that Ruth knows something of the ways of the world, that she is aware that having Mr. Bellingham as companion may be different from her friendship with her workmate,

Jenny, even though she does not know why, and she feels momentarily guilty on occasions. Mrs. Gaskell explains away any responsibility on Ruth's part by reminding her reader that: "She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting the subject of a woman's life."(p.43) This slight self-mistrust of Ruth's fades, though, as she becomes better acquainted with Mr. Bellingham and her childlike nature allows her to trust him, even when he takes her away from her town: "She was little accustomed to oppose the wishes of any one; obedient and docile by nature, and unsuspecting and innocent of any harmful consequences. She entered the carriage, and drove towards London."(p.60)¹¹ Yet, though she thinks that she can do nothing else but obey Mr. Bellingham, the awareness that she could have taken an alternative recourse - to return to her parents' old farm and be looked after by old Thomas and his wife - does momentarily come upon her. Thus, she freely chooses, though she does not know this, to accept passive dependence and deludedness when she could have tried to assert herself. In this, she is clearly immature, rather than simply innocent.

In Wales, Ruth's ignorance of her new social status is rudely shattered when a small boy calls her a "naughty woman"(p.71), among other things. Suddenly, she is made aware of the uncertainty of her position though she has not the personality to blame Mr. Bellingham for what has happened to her:

She could not put into words the sense she was just beginning to entertain of the estimation in which she was henceforth to be held. She thought he would be as much grieved as she was at what had taken place that morning; she fancied she should sink in his opinion if she told him how others regarded her; besides, it seemed ungenerous to dilate upon the suffering of which he was the cause. "I will not," thought she, "embitter his life; I will try and be cheerful. I must not think of myself so much. If I can but make him happy, what need I care for chance speeches?"(p.72)

¹¹McDaniel points out that at this stage Ruth is both innocent and ignorant but that her innocence is lost more quickly than her ignorance: "With her seduction, Ruth has lost her innocence. The rest of the novel is devoted to the more positive process of the loss of her ignorance; that is, to her education in life and life experiences which results in the formation of her mature character."(p.165) Judith Mc.Daniel, Fettered Wings Half Loose: Female Development in the Victorian Novel(Tufts University, 1975).

It is clear from this soliloquy that Ruth here is already capable of thinking of others before herself, that she is in this way good and thoughtful. These are not qualities which she adopts later under the influence of the Bensons. In fact, they are qualities which the Bensons themselves see as part of Ruth's personality when they first make her acquaintance, especially after her kindness in helping Mr. Benson recover from a fall, despite her pre-occupation with her own plight of sudden desertion by her lover. At the time of the above speech, though, Ruth, in fact, comes to think so much about Mr. Bellingham's welfare and to depend on his good graces that she forgets, when he leaves her, the shame of her position in her lonely despair(p.93), though she later somehow intuitively realizes that she is "an outcast."(p.99)

As with many of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, Ruth has not been trained to think rationally and logically; her childhood education has been principally one of the affections and she has learnt well from her mother to be kind, loving, generous and responsive to others. This way of being, naturally, predisposes a female character to adopt a position of dependent trust on others, particularly those who seem to be otherwise constituted. Ruth's ignorance of society's moral standards has to be forcefully shaken by external forces in such encounters as this one with the little boy. Another encounter later is with the Bensons' servant, Sally, who, in her almost-brutally pragmatic way, shows Ruth the most sensible methods of coping practically and independently with her situation. More importantly, though, Ruth comes to love the idea of learning, of overcoming her intellectual and moral ignorance, of exercising her mental faculties in readiness for teaching her child when it is old enough. Thus, she is able to come to look at her past misconceptions and illusions more clearly.

Ruth's first great moment of disillusionment about her lover comes - not after her lover has abandoned her, not after she finds herself pregnant and husbandless - but soon after she has given birth to her son. She has, just after her abandonment several months previously, been adopted by the Bensons as a member of their household in Eccleston and is, for the first time since she was orphaned, in a secure, stable and loving environment. The influence of these good people, the

Dissenting minister, his sister and their outspoken servant, has already affected Ruth to the extent that she can now look more objectively at the character of Mr. Bellingham.¹² Ruth's first thoughts are only of her new motherhood.

But soon remembrance and anticipation came. There was the natural want of the person, who alone could take an interest similar in kind, though not in amount, to the mother's. And sadness grew like a giant in the still watches of the night, when she remembered that there would be no father to guide and strengthen the child, and place him in a favourable position for fighting the hard "Battle of Life." She hoped and believed that no one would know the sin of his parents; and that that struggle might be spared to him. But a father's powerful care and mighty guidance would never be his; and then, in those hours of spiritual purification, came the wonder and the doubt of how far the real father would be the one to whom, with her desire of heaven for her child, whatever might become of herself, she would wish to intrust him. Slight speeches, telling of a selfish, worldly nature, unnoticed at the time, came back upon her ear, having a new significance. They told of a low standard, of impatient self-indulgence, of no acknowledgement of things spiritual and heavenly. Even while this examination was forced upon her, by the new spirit of maternity that had entered into her and made her child's welfare supreme, she hated and reproached herself for the necessity there seemed upon her of examining and judging the absent father of her child. And so the compelling presence that had taken possession of her wearied her into a kind of feverish slumber...(pp.161-162)

Like Mary Barton, at her moment of disillusionment, Ruth begins to think objectively and thus comes to see things more clearly. Ruth's disillusionment is called her "spiritual purification" because Mrs. Gaskell wants to show the reader that it is God-given, a gift to one who is ready to receive it. In this, it is like the gift of the child and the two ideas are inextricably mixed so that the birth of the child is the force which opens Ruth's eyes to the realities of past, present and future. By binding the idea of "spiritual purification" with the

¹²Incidentally, Mantovani sees Ruth's lessons at the hands of the Bensons as the activating agent in her maturation rather than the resulting dispelling of immature illusions: "Ruth learns a lot in a hurry,...and in her impending motherhood, the [sic] character undergoes a transformation, a deepening and strengthening into womanly maturity."(p.62) Juanita Mantovani, The Feminine World View of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell(Los Angeles: The University of Southern California, 1974) In fact, they are only partially responsible. Without attaining a state of disillusionment, Ruth could never fully mature.

means, through disillusionment, of Ruth's gaining maturity, Mrs. Gaskell is saying that mature people are godly, pure and unworldly, in the sense of being untainted by the world, though aware of it, as the Bensons are. These are elements of maturity which are seen most prominently in this book, because elsewhere, where the whole religious tone is more subdued, Mrs. Gaskell does not have to convince her readers so much that her heroine is capable of maturing to a high standard of moral goodness and thus does not have to stress those qualities most highly valued by devout Christians as an integral part of her heroines' characters. In this passage, Mrs. Gaskell brings out those mature qualities nicely, in using the contrast of Mr. Bellingham's character in Ruth's mind to show that she, Ruth, sees these qualities as paramount. Ruth's moral sensitivity has been heightened by exposure to the Bensons' influence so that she can now judge Mr. Bellingham as a man of "low standards": "selfish", "worldly", with "impatient self-indulgence". In making these judgements, Ruth is listening to an inner voice, a "compelling presence that had taken possession of her." This voice, this "presence", is reminiscent of Mary Barton's good self which argues with her bad self at her time of disillusion concerning her past feelings. Again, here, "it was as if two people were arguing the matter; that mournful, desponding communion between her former self, and her present self." (Mary Barton, p.133) The former Ruth, which stubbornly refused to see any fault in Mr. Bellingham, which can be seen as the deluded self, influenced by Mr. Bellingham himself, has been confronted by the present Ruth, influenced by the God-given "presence" for good and, at the same time, for clear-sightedness which have now become part of her. Yet, this present self does not completely overcome Ruth's past self for some time.

This is the first time since Ruth joined the Benson household that she has thought of Mr. Bellingham. By now, she is used to the thought of her own guilt and has accepted the Benson's decision to practice duplicity in calling her a widow, a distant relative of theirs. She has also accepted that, despite her past and the need to keep it from the notice of others, the Bensons do not judge her harshly for her past sins, that they see her simply as one who has fallen and who can be

redeemed. Of her former lover, there have been no enquiries made or judgements pronounced. Thus it can be seen that, right from the beginning, Ruth's independence and self-reliance are valued by the Bensons though it is partly as the effect of the Bensons' own upright behaviour, which has brought back to Ruth the atmosphere of her early years, that Ruth is able to judge Mr. Bellingham - in comparison. She is still naïve enough to hope and believe that her past actions may never come to public light because she is incapable, at this stage, of standing up and accepting the inevitably harsh censure of the public voice. In this inability to cope with the town's judgement, Ruth is still immature - understandably so, though, because both she and the Bensons know that their judgement would be severe. Ruth needs to gain some years of building up inner strength and external composure before she can face such a trial.

One force which acts in Ruth's consciousness to help her cope with her situation and to aid her moral development is her religion. She sees the birth of her child as a God-given gift, as does Thurston Benson, which stirs her into thoughts of being good and redeeming herself. Thus, the baby, to her, is an almost holy being, pure and dependent. It is in seeing Mr. Bellingham in contrast to her son, who seems to be so much part of the Benson household, that Ruth starts to form an idea of what Mr. Bellingham is really like. He is now no longer the one whom she has looked up to as superior in every way, one whom she had thought in the past had acted in her own best interests. Now she sees him as selfish, worldly and self-indulgent and is afraid of the taint of his personality on her child. At the same time, she is unwilling to see him thus - she wants to keep her memory of him intact, but realizes that she can do so no longer.

It is not until years later, when she meets Mr. Bellingham again, that Ruth becomes more fully disillusioned about her past ideas concerning Mr. Bellingham. Until this second occasion, Ruth still harbours feelings of love based on her illusions about Mr. Bellingham alongside her awareness that he is not the man whom she thought he

was.¹³ Not long after Ruth's baby, Leonard, has been born the narrator comments on Ruth's development since she has been in the Benson household:

But the strange change was in Ruth herself. She was conscious of it, though she could not define it, and did not dwell upon it. Life had become significant and full of duty to her. She delighted in the exercise of her intellectual powers, and liked the idea of the infinite amount of which she was ignorant; for it was a grand pleasure to learn, - to crave, and be satisfied. She strove to forget what had gone before this last twelve months. She shuddered up from contemplating it; it was like a bad, unholy dream. And yet, there was 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 begone as sinful, it was so pure and natural, even when thinking of it as in the sight of God. (pp.189-190)¹⁴

At this stage, Ruth seems in many ways to be more mature than she was before the birth of her child, indeed before her awareness of her pregnancy. That moment seemed to mark the very beginning of her development. However, in holding on to her cherished illusion about the nature of Mr. Bellingham's character, Ruth is still basically immature: she is not confronting herself with reality and the truth about her past because it is painful to do so. Yet she is aware that her past is "like a bad, unholy dream" which can be separated from her present. The presence of her child makes it hard for her to separate her past life from her present one, as it does her past self from her present self, for the child was both begotten by worldly man and given to her by God as "spiritual purification" from that past life and that man of the past. The quandary into which Mrs. Gaskell inadvertently puts Ruth is one which can never be fully resolved, as can be seen in Ruth's later explanation as to why she must nurse Mr. Bellingham - and possibly why Mrs. Gaskell had to have Ruth die in the end.

Ruth, however, has developed from a character who had passively

¹³Craik states that, because of Ruth's lingering feelings of love for Mr. Bellingham: "There must...be the second meeting eight years later to reassess that love against her mature self-knowledge, her conscious moral standards, and her other great love for her child." (p.53)

¹⁴See also p.154, in which Ruth thinks that a gift for her may be from him and acknowledges that her "new-born resolutions would have had a hard struggle for existence."

accepted her lot - as long as it was a fair one. She had questioned her employer's choice of herself to attend the town's annual ball because of her "diligence" knowing full well that she had not been as diligent as others, though never suspecting the real reason for the choice, which was because of her beauty. Here can be seen an early instance of Ruth's "spirit" and pluck in speaking up for others when she feels that she has been given an unfair advantage. She has never been wholly passive and weak. Now, as a result of her overwhelming interest in the bringing up of her child, Ruth actively strives to learn both how to be good, to redeem her past, and, as previously mentioned, how to be useful to her child. The minister, too, sees the child as the necessary catalyst to hasten Ruth's growth to clear-sightedness and self-dependence. He sees it as a purpose outside of herself which can lead Ruth away from a state of morbid introspection, for he was highly aware that when she was first taken into his care she was contemplating putting an end to herself(p.99). This possibility could be very real, Mrs. Gaskell seems to be saying, to one who has nothing or no-one for whom to live. At the same time, Mrs. Gaskell, through Mr. Benson, sees the child as an example for Ruth of how to live above (or apart from) the need for social approval. In teaching him, she will learn herself:" She must strengthen her child to look to God, rather than to man's opinion. It will be the discipline, the penance, she has incurred. She must teach it to be (humanly speaking) self-dependent."(p.120)¹⁵

Ruth has an ideal household on which to model her own behaviour - though her changing behaviour is not consciously imitative. Mrs. Gaskell tells the reader that:

In the Bensons' house there was the same unconsciousness of individual merit, the same absence of introspection and analysis of motive, as there had been in her mother; but it seemed that their lives were pure and good, not merely from a lovely and beautiful nature, but from some law, the obedience to which was, of itself, harmonious peace, and which governed

¹⁵McDaniel comments that: "Any object, at this point in Ruth's life, that will bring her in contact with reality and allow some scope for the natural disposition she has toward loving and feeling and thinking, will help in her moral and spiritual development. A child, Benson sees, will do both of these things."(p.166)

them almost implicitly, and with as little questioning on their part, as the glorious stars which haste not, rest not, in their eternal obedience.(p.141)

Ruth is seen to have changed from pathetic submission to "soft, yet dignified submission"(p.144) when Sally cuts off Ruth's beautiful hair in her early pregnancy; to quiet but evidently strong "dignity" after her child has been born, in which "Sally was quelled into silence by the gentle composure, the self-command over her passionate sorrow, which gave to Ruth an unconscious grandeur of demeanour as she came up to the old servant."(p.172) At this stage, Ruth thinks that she is ready for an independent existence from the Bensons, though they know that she is not. She is not mature enough yet to cope on her own, though her desire to be self-sufficient does show her to be developing self-reliance and self-respect. Though Ruth is aware of her externally-apparent changes because of her changed mode of living, she is unaware of any inner changes. Yet, as Mrs. Gaskell suggests, the inner changes have created the external. "Her eyes", which Mrs. Gaskell sees as the mirror of Ruth's soul, as she does with all of her heroines, "even if you could have guessed that they had shed bitter tears in their day, had a thoughtful, spiritual look about them, that made you wonder at their depth, and look - and look again. The increase of dignity in her face had been imparted to her form."(p.207) That Ruth allows others to see into the depths of her eyes is an indication that she is not afraid, as Mary Barton was in veiling her eyes before Jem Wilson, of others looking at her directly because she can look out openly and honestly at them. This is because the shame that she has felt in the past has been subdued during her time with the Bensons', in which she has tried to live irreproachably and has succeeded in doing so. Later, when her past is publicly disclosed, her look becomes guarded and fearful, like that of a hunted animal(see p.415), when in the presence of strangers.

Others, who have not known her before, see Ruth as eternally calm, composed, mature in her judgements and her treatment of her son and of her pupils, the younger Bradshaw children. Mr. Farquhar, Mr. Bradshaw's partner and Jemima Bradshaw's undemonstrative suitor, sees her as "heavenly calm as the angels"(p.231). In fact, due to Jemima's

capricious treatment of him, believing him to be interested in her only because her father has decreed the union, Mr. Farquhar is about to transfer his affections from Jemima to Ruth, known in Eccleston as Mrs. Denbigh. The latter is seen as better wife-material because she seems more mature:" Mrs. Denbigh, if not many months older in years, had known sorrow and cares so early that she was much older in character."(p.239) Jemima herself sees Ruth thus but, because of her jealousy of Mr. Farquhar's new feelings for Ruth, resents her for her "excellences": "Ruth was beautiful, gentle, good, and conscientious...Her goodness, undoubted as it was, was more distasteful than many faults which had more savour of human struggle in them."(p.242) In her bitter feelings of rivalry, Jemima is unable to see under the superficial appearance of Ruth the signs of past unhappiness that Mr. Farquhar can detect, though even he could never guess the source of Ruth's "sorrow and cares".

Jemima, at this stage of the novel, is displaying her own immaturity. Like Ruth, she too develops in the course of the novel, as will later be seen. Even at this stage, though, she is aware of what qualities are considered valuable in the eyes of other characters in the novel, as in her own. These reflect those which Mrs. Gaskell sees as necessary in all her novels so it is worthwhile to look again at Jemima's view of Ruth: "sweet, lovely, composed, and dignified Ruth - one who always thought before she spoke (as Mr. Farquhar used to bid Jemima do) - who never was tempted by sudden impulse, but walked the world calm and self-governed."(p.239) Mrs. Gaskell uses Jemima at this stage as a foil for Ruth to show the reader how mature Ruth has become compared with this well-brought up, sheltered, educated girl. At the same time as showing how a poor, motherless seduced girl can become an acceptable citizen, she is again, as in Mary Barton, reminding her comfortable middle-class readers that their daughters may not be as responsible and self-controlled as her character Ruth is, in order to gain compassion for her heroine.

The second, and final, occasion on which Ruth loses her remaining illusions about Mr. Bellingham's character and past treatment of her occurs when she takes her two charges, the young Bradshaw girls, to

stay by the sea at Abermouth. She is suddenly confronted with the presence of Mr. Bellingham, accompanied by Mr. Bradshaw on the beach at dusk. Mr. Bellingham is in the guise of a Mr. Donne, the political candidate for Eccleston whom Mr. Bradshaw is supporting. Because it is dusk, Ruth cannot see or be seen by Mr. Bellingham and can cover her violent reaction to his presence with silence. That night, however, when Ruth is on her own in her room, she can give way to her overwhelming emotions:

But the tension did not give way immediately. She fastened her door, and threw open the window, cold and threatening as was 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 stupefied brain. Till all at once, like a flash of lightning, her life, past and present, was revealed to her in 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.

'If I might see him! If I might see him! If I might just ask him why he left me; if I had vexed him in any way; it was so strange - so cruel! It was not him; it was his mother,' said she, almost fiercely, as if answering herself. O God! but he might have found me out before this,' she continued sadly. 'He did not care for me, as I did for him. He did not care for me at all,' she went on wildly and sharply. 'He did me cruel harm. I can never again lift up my face in innocence. They think I have forgotten all, because I do not speak. Oh, darling love! am I talking against you?' asked she tenderly. 'I am so torn and perplexed! You, who are the father of my child!'

But that very circumstance, full of such tender meaning in many cases, threw a new light into her mind. It changed her from the woman into the mother - the stern guardian of her child. She was still for a time, thinking.(p.270)

Ruth's initial reaction to her plight is to seek the cold, fresh air, as she has done right from the beginning of the novel, when she was a dressmaker's apprentice, confined in a stuffy room. In this refreshing climate Ruth, like Molly Gibson later in Wives and Daughters, is able eventually to clear her head and see things in perspective. The violent storm outside is an element in which she is, surprisingly, most at peace. As is pointed out a little later: "A still, calm night would not have soothed her as this did."(p.271) Here, because of her great emotion, it takes a long time for the cold, bracing air to take its effect. At first, Ruth is so stunned by the

encounter with Mr. Bellingham that she forgets her newly-augmented capacity to think rationally and clear-sightedly. In this, she is like Mary Barton, whose first reaction after her encounter with Jem Wilson is purely emotional and it is some time before she can think about the revelation which has been made to her of Jem's real nature - then she sees clearly for the first time. In fact, she even momentarily loses her emotional capacities. Yet, once the floodgates of her mind are opened she is confronted by the deception which she has been practising, unconsciously, on herself and on those around her in maintaining the belief that she feels nothing for Mr. Bellingham. Obviously, she feels much at the remembrance of Mr. Bellingham's voice(p.266) and has been perturbed by the lack of information concerning his behaviour in the past. Yet she knows without asking him that Mr. Bellingham left her not merely because his mother engineered his removal from Wales but also because he had tired of her. Thus, though she can recall tenderly the love she felt for Mr. Bellingham in the past, she can see that he was wicked for seducing her in her helpless dependence on him. More importantly, she realizes what a bad influence he would be on her son, the creature for whom she can feel the most pure, untainted love.

Again, as with Mary Barton, this process of reasoning is one of an interchange of two opposing ways of seeing things, an interplay between two voices arguing out the matter: Ruth's present way, her present mind (which in her first moment of delusion was seen as a voice possessing her mind), is initially repressed by the strong remembrance of her past world, her past mind, which was numbed by circumstance and the overwhelming power of Mr. Bellingham's influence. As in that earlier passage of first disillusionment, Ruth is torn between the two forces: "her very present 'Now'" has been such a strong presence in her that it is painful for her to be reminded of the past. It is only when she becomes "quite dead" that the old forces of temptation intrude upon her like "the sound of galloping armies". This former voice, part of Ruth's former self, has its say but it is continually taken issue with by the rational voice of the present. Eventually, Ruth, in thinking of her child, banishes the past delusions and sees her position clearly. Naturally, there are vestiges of old memories of her past love which

will linger in her mind and continue to cause her confusion, but they are, until the end of the novel, held in check by the strength of both her "spirit" and her "sense" which tell her not to have any further dealings with this "bad man."(p.271)

The feeling of remembered love lingers until Ruth sees Mr. Bellingham/Donne again. This time, she has leisure to study his looks, his behaviour and his mannerisms. In the meantime, she courageously determines to cope with this encounter and not try to avoid it, for she "collected her thoughts with a stern calmness"(p.273). Again, a while later, "she felt weak and trembling in body, but strong in power over herself(p.277). As in other novels, here Mrs. Gaskell shows Ruth to be more mature in one important way in her resolution to face up to her past in the person of Mr. Bellingham and not run away, as she would have if she were less responsible.¹⁶ She realizes that "there was no escape, except through subterfuges and contrivances that were both false and cowardly."(p.273) Ruth's time with the Bensons has had a powerful effect on her for, although it has not taught her to be analytical or worldly-wise, it has shown her what good, kind, caring, thoughtful - that is, mature - people are like. For the Bensons, though they may seem a little peculiar to the pragmatic Mr. Bradshaw and others of his ilk, are to be seen as mature people because of the strength of their, albeit independent, views, precepts and practices and because of their personalities and manner of co-existence. Ruth becomes suddenly aware of this when she watches Mr. Bellingham/Donne while she is forced by protocol to remain in the room with him:

That half-hour seemed to separate the present Mr. Donne very effectively from her imagination of what Mr. Bellingham had been. She was no analyser; she hardly even had learnt to notice character; but she felt there was some strange difference between the people she had lived with lately and the man who now leant back in his chair, listening in a careless manner to the conversation, but never joining in, or expressing any interest in it, unless it somewhere, or somehow, touched himself.(p.274)

Now, the vital thing which has happened to Ruth at the Bensons is that she has become part of a close family-like relationship, a little

¹⁶As Cynthia is in Wives and Daughters concerning Mr. Preston.

community of people who share their thoughts, their sorrows and their joys, thus maintaining a strong bond of stable and secure fellowship. Mr. Donne, it can be seen, could never be part of such a company, he is both too self-seeking and too self-concerned. Early in the novel, Mrs. Gaskell has given a lame, transparent reason for Mr. Bellingham's personality being as it is: "The fact of his being an only child had given him, as it does to many, a sort of inequality in those parts of the character which are usually formed by the number of years that a person has lived."(p.31) In other words, Mrs. Gaskell is saying that Mr. Bellingham is not only the conceited selfish only child of a rich widowed mother but he is also immature. In fact, as Ruth sees him at this later stage, he is still immature - in the very sense that he is still self-centred and thoughtless of others.

In contrast, Mr. Bellingham/Donne can hardly believe that the innocent, trusting young creature whom he had discarded to a certain downfall is the same person as this Mrs. Denbigh, who is "far handsomer"; indeed "positively Greek", with "such a proud, superb turn of her head; quite queenly!"(p.275) In fact, right from the beginning, Mr. Bellingham has been unable to see Ruth's inner qualities - those qualities which have allowed her to develop into the woman whom he sees now as far superior to his memory of "poor Ruth". It is instructive to compare their differing but similar situations and roles at this point: both have now new guises and both have now adopted disguises of their past selves. Ruth's disguise as Mrs. Denbigh has been taken out of necessity, in order to shield her from public disapproval and to give her time to strengthen her character; Mr. Bellingham's disguise as Mr. Donne has been taken out of boredom, escapism or amusement - a motive as shallow as his personality has shown itself to be. Ruth's new guise is mature and stately, as indeed is her underlying character, and contrasts with her past appearance which was girlish and impulsive; Mr. Bellingham's new guise is of a gross and self-indulgent man, characteristics which were not so easily apparent - to Ruth at least - in his former appearance. Ruth, however, has been seen, in her moments of disillusionment to be passionate and violent emotionally and quite irrational: that she manages to overcome these feelings is greater proof of her maturity than her mature appearance to other characters in

the novel who do not know the tortures that she must endure in order to become re-purified.

Mr. Bellingham believes that he only has to conjure up thoughts of the past in Ruth to win her over again. He does not realize that she has developed to the point where she can reject him for being the man he really is, for unlike Mr. Bellingham, Ruth can now recognize the illusory nature of her past picture of him, as Mrs. Gaskell makes perfectly clear :

He spoke in a tone of soft complaint. But he himself had done much to destroy the illusion which had hung about his memory for years, whenever Ruth had allowed herself to think of it. Besides which, during the time of her residence in the Benson family, her feeling of what people ought to be had been unconsciously raised and refined; and Mr. Donne, even while she had to struggle against the force of past recollections, repelled her so much by what he was at present, that every speech of his, every minute they were together, served to make her path more and more easy to follow.(p.281)

The proof of Ruth's maturity in her dealings with Mr. Bellingham is in her rejection of his marriage-offer, which he sees as an admirable advantage for her. She can see, in recognizing her own past and present selves, that her past illusions about Mr. Bellingham's personality are very different from his present self, his real self, which has changed only in that his worst characteristics have been strengthened. Thus, when she meets him on the beach to discuss their position, she is strong in her resolution to follow the dictates of her "sense". Ruth knows that, despite her society's sanction of marriage at all costs to legitimize children, the greatest wrong would be to take such a step for, illegitimate, Leonard is under the influence of those who work for his good whereas, legitimate, he would only be harmed by Mr. Bellingham's influence. This opinion is later reinforced by Mr. Benson after Ruth's death(p.450). Ruth defies Mr. Bellingham with the words: "If there were no other reason to prevent our marriage but the one fact that it would bring Leonard into contact with you, that would be enough."(p.300) In this, Mrs. Gaskell shows herself to be unusually tough-minded for her time and for her own generally conservative nature. She has gone a step further than she had in Mary Barton but is obviously afraid of the consequences, for when it comes to the point where Ruth could exercise this resolution - to live with Leonard's illegitimacy - Mrs. Gaskell backs down and lets Ruth die.

It is not long after this episode at Abermouth that the truth about Ruth's past becomes known to all. Jemima Bradshaw is the first person to discover the secret of Ruth's unmentionable past. Until this moment, she has been jealous of Ruth. Now her feelings about Ruth change dramatically: not only does she come to think that Ruth is no longer, to her, the pure and virtuous woman that she thought she was but also that, because of this, she no longer feels jealous of her in relation to Mr. Farquhar for she knows that Mr. Farquhar would never want to marry a "fallen woman".¹⁷ Though initially her primary feeling about Ruth is still one of hatred it has changed character and leads to a more objective assessment of Ruth and, ultimately, to her defence before Mr. Bradshaw when he denounces Ruth for her past. Even when she is feeling most bitter towards Ruth she acknowledges: "It might be...that Ruth had worked her way through the deep purgatory of repentance up to something like purity again; God only knew!...Whatever Ruth had been, she was good, and to be respected as such, now." (p.323) In this, as Mrs. Gaskell has made the reader aware, Jemima's instincts are rightly-placed and mark her as a more mature woman than she has been to this point.

Jemima is first seen in the novel as a complete contrast to the young Ruth. Where Ruth was passive, dependent and trusting, Jemima yearned for independence, was rebellious and wilful, and full of "warm passionate impulses." (p.209) Yet both were innocent, because of their sheltered childhoods. Ruth, however, lost her protective family influence and was thus easy prey for a seducer, something which Jemima later comes to recognize. Jemima is pre-occupied with thoughts of Mr. Farquhar which she cannot understand for she sees him as too much like her own inflexible, order-conscious father. Mr. Farquhar, in turn, feels that it is possible that he may be in love with Jemima, despite the fact that she does not fit his image of what good wife-material should be. Jemima is aware of Mr. Farquhar's ideas concerning an ideal woman, yet she cannot stop herself from coming to love him and, seeing

¹⁷Mrs. Gaskell was brave enough to make Ruth a character worthy to be a friend to those such as Jemima and Mr. Farquhar, but she draws the line at the possibility of any closer relationship being feasible.

her own feelings for him realistically for the first time, is alternately desirous of becoming that ideal and repulsed by the fact that she must be other than herself:

For an instant she planned to become and to be all he could wish her; to change her very nature for him. And then a great gush of pride came over her, and she set her teeth tight together, and determined that he should either love her as she was or not at all. Unless he could take her with all her faults, she would not care for his regard; "love" was too noble a word to call such cold, calculating feeling as his must be, who went around with a pattern idea in his mind, trying to find a wife to match. Besides, there was something degrading, Jemima thought, in trying to alter herself to gain the love of any human creature. (p.217)

However, the person whom Jemima sees as "herself" is made up partly of the ignorant, childish Jemima who is confused by her own emotions at the same time as she is aware of her female position in the world as property of a man, whether it be father or husband. This position, however, is not spelt out by Mrs. Gaskell. In fact, in the terms of the novel, Jemima is later made to see that her status is not just a matter of property. Mrs. Gaskell does not want to see Jemima's marriage as anything but good, when it does happen. Instead, she must make Jemima develop to a stage where she can see Mr. Farquhar's nature and intentions as everything she would want in a man, so that her marriage is one for love. Jemima does not consciously "alter herself" to gain Mr. Farquhar's love. She simply looks more closely at the man and comes to see that he is not materialistic in relation to women - for if he were he would not be interested in someone as poor as Ruth. At the same time, she comes to respect him for his judgement - his choice of Ruth is admirable, because Ruth has so many good qualities although this makes her, as previously stated, distasteful to Jemima. Mr. Farquhar changes, too, in coming to love Jemima for what she is, particularly now that those characteristics are now mixed with, and controlled by, new qualities of self-restraint, thoughtfulness of others, and tolerance and compassion engendered by a new awareness of the world around her.

The revelation of Ruth's past sin makes Jemima, for the first time, grateful for her upbringing for it has guarded her from even the knowledge of a fate such as Ruth's:

Two hours ago...she had never imagined that she should ever come into contact with any one who had committed open sin; she had never shaped her conviction into words and sentences, but still it was there, that all the respectable, all the family and religious circumstances of her life, would hedge her in, and guard her from ever encountering the great shock of coming face to face with Vice.(p.320)

Now Jemima can see the virtues of a strict, confining upbringing - the complementary side to its chafing, seemingly unfair, restrictiveness. This revelation shows how Jemima is already maturing in terms of learning tolerance, forgiveness and unselfishness. Now she can be gracious about Ruth and admit that: "It might be...that Ruth had worked her way through the deep purgatory of repentance up to something like purity again; God only knew!"(p.323) and that: "Whatever Ruth had been, she was good, and to be respected as such, now."(p.323)

Further, Jemima compares her own past behaviour with that of Ruth's and sees that it is only because of her circumstances that she has been saved from sin and that her personality is more likely to have gotten her into trouble if she were in a situation like that of Ruth's, and she says to Mr. Benson:

'With a father and mother, and home and careful friends, I am not likely to be tempted like Ruth...if you knew all I have been thinking and feeling this last year, you would see how I have yielded to every temptation that was able to come to me; and, seeing how I have no goodness or strength in me, and how I might just have been like Ruth, or rather worse than she ever was, because I am more headstrong and passionate by nature, I do so thank you and love you for what you did for her!'(pp.361-362)

Again, it is a reminder on Mrs. Gaskell's part that the readers' own daughters, if put in the wrong circumstances, could similarly err. It is possible that it is as a result of her knowledge of Ruth's past that Jemima matures so quickly, indeed that she matures at all for she learns that one can adapt to circumstance without losing one's integrity, if one has inbuilt qualities of goodness and warmth. Jemima herself immediately warms to Ruth when she sees her no longer as a threat for it is impossible for her to imagine Mr. Farquhar desiring a fallen woman, even if she is as good as Ruth. In fact, he feels the same way once he learns of Ruth's past - Mrs. Gaskell can only go so far in preaching tolerance and forgiveness. Thus, Jemima is able to

testify on Ruth's behalf to her father as to Ruth's purity and goodness, though Mr. Bradshaw pays her words no heed, deeming them the consequence of Ruth's corrupting influence on his family.

In her relations with Mr. Farquhar, Jemima's behaviour has changed. No longer is she quick to attack Mr. Farquhar for his differing views for:

Jemima had learnt more humility from the discovery which had been to her so great a shock; standing, she had learnt to take heed lest she fell; and, when she had once been aroused to a perception of the violence of the hatred which she indulged against Ruth, she was more reticent and measured in the expression of all her opinions.(p.366)

As Mrs. Gaskell expresses it, Jemima's character has been "purified from pride".(p.366) Now, like Ruth, she possesses the qualities seen as mature by Mrs. Gaskell of humility, patience, reticence and generosity towards others, both in thought and action. Now, she is able to joke with Mr. Farquhar, once they have promised themselves to each other, about Jemima's past wilfulness when Jemima claims that if Mr. Farquhar, as her husband, refuses to allow her to visit Ruth - as her father has done - she will disobey him. To which Mr. Farquhar replies:" Tell me, how much of your goodness to me, this last happy hour, has been owing to the desire of having more freedom as a wife than as a daughter?"(p.371) One can see here something of the happy balance of submission and independence which Mrs. Gaskell sees as necessary, in all her novels, for a good marriage. Jemima will never become like her mother, "thoroughly broken into submission"(p.152), because Mr. Farquhar is meant to be seen as too good a man to exercise such ruthless authority over her.

During this time of Jemima's development and the consequent maturation of her relationship with Mr. Farquhar, Ruth has had to come to terms both with the townspeople's knowledge of her past and with her son's knowledge and the attending shame and indignation on his part. Despite her repugnance at being seen in the town, Ruth resolves, due to her loss of income as governess, to go out into the town and nurse the sick. This is not only an act of determined independence on her part but also an act of redemption, as seen by Ruth herself, for her past.

Yet she never seems to acknowledge how much she has grown in character, though those around her, particularly the Bensons, see the change:

She herself did not feel changed. She felt just as faulty - as far from being what she wanted to be, as ever. She best knew how many of her good actions were incomplete, and marred with evil. She did not feel much changed from the earliest Ruth she could remember.(p.388)

Her effect on her patients is one mark of her maturity: she has an aura of religious peacefulness about her, and she gives out a feeling of calm self-command and thoughtfulness towards her patients which has an unforgettable effect on them. It is the same with her son: her gentle, loving, patient, watchful treatment of him goes a long way towards making his position more bearable as does her teaching to him of her faith.

However, before Ruth resolves to take up nursing, she goes through a stage in which she finds her position unbearable, because of the public revelation of her past, and in which she wishes that she could just run away from it all. However, with Mr. Benson's help, Ruth is strengthened to the point where she can stand her ground, despite the inner pain which it causes her to be seen and commented upon by others. Now, because of her ability to cope with this burden, she is more self-assured than she was in the past when she could not bear the thought of her history being known. Her newfound strength has its effect on her son. Mr. Benson comments that "her noble humble, pious endurance of the consequences of what was wrong in her early life seems expressly fitted to act upon him, whose position is (unjustly, for he has done no harm) so similar to hers."(p.415)

Ruth's desire to act independently and to be useful, coupled with her desire to seek atonement for her past sins in taking on unpleasant tasks, leads her to accept the position of matron of a fever-ridden hospital, when all its staff have fled with fear. This action redeems Ruth in large part in the eyes of the townsfolk, for it is only after she has bravely taken on this position that her intrinsic goodness and kindness are observed. The public testimony of the people's feelings goes a long way to helping Leonard cope with his mother's past and his own birth for he sees that others forgive and forget her past immature

actions because of her responsible, caring, hard-working, present mature behaviour. Thus, he finds that he can be proud of his mother and wants to grow like her.

Even Mr. Bradshaw, who denounced Ruth vehemently when he learnt of her past, for her past profligacy and her continuing deception of him for so many years, finally repents of his harsh judgement of Ruth. For Mr. Bradshaw's conception of morality has been given another shock at this time when he finds that his own son is guilty of fraud and theft. Richard Bradshaw, unlike his self-willed, impetuous, passionate sister, Jemima, has, as a child, appeared to be pliant and easily-trained by his father. However, underneath this surface appearance, he has been much more determined than his sister to have his own way and so has learned to be devious and manipulative, though at the same time seemingly manageable. When his deceit of his father and his father's client, Mr. Benson, is found out Mr. Bradshaw learns, too late, that his harsh rule of his children can sometimes, with the wrong child, cause devastating consequences. Richard, in his delusions about the nature of the world and about his own cleverness, is seen as immature. However, unlike Ruth, he will never be able to mature because his personality and his moral values have none of those qualities necessary as foundation for development. The best that could be hoped for with Richard is that he learns what is considered suitable behaviour and acts accordingly. This is, in fact, what happens in the novel. Mrs. Gaskell makes it patently clear that Richard can develop no further than this. The other characters in the novel, including Mr. Bradshaw, also realize this.

Mr. Bradshaw has to learn the bitter lesson, for the proud authoritarian man that he is, of Christian tolerance for both offenders. However, it seems to take Ruth's death to finally convince him of the wrongness of his past treatment of her and for him to admit that "if all had entertained his opinions, [Ruth] would have been driven into hopeless sin."(p.453) The Bensons, too, learn something from Ruth's exposure: they learn that they were right in shielding Ruth from such exposure years earlier when Ruth was far more vulnerable and far less responsible. Despite their remorse at having had to lie to

protect Ruth from the town's censure, the Bensons realize that their earlier decision was a right and mature one, for Mrs. Gaskell wants the reader to see that the Bensons' own personal standards are more mature than those of the townsfolk.

Ruth's desire, at the end of the novel, to nurse the ailing Mr. Bellingham, after her stint at the hospital, could be seen as a regression from her hard-won maturity. There seems to be no reason why she should nurse him, if she has come to terms with her past. Many critics see Ruth's action as evidence that she has not matured at all. This is because Mrs. Gaskell has put herself and her heroine in a quandary here: she wants to show both that Ruth is mature at the end of the novel and that she is human, warm, womanly - and pure. For Ruth's purity and feminine nature to go hand-in-hand, she must have her love Mr. Bellingham at the beginning of the novel. She could not have been seen as cold and calculating, aspiring to be his mistress, or perhaps even his wife. Thus, like all good loving women, Ruth must find it hard to forget her past love to the point of banishing it completely from her present heart, despite her own rational condemnation of such feelings. Hence Ruth's desire to nurse Mr. Bellingham when he is weak and alone would seem, to Mrs. Gaskell, a humane, womanly thing to do. In a paradoxical way, Mrs. Gaskell seems to be saying that this episode shows Ruth to be a mature woman, rather than the contrary, even though Ruth's adamant determination works against commonsense and reason. It is possibly because of the problematical nature of this episode that Mrs. Gaskell thought fit to see Ruth die, even though she now is intended to be seen as accepted by those among whom she lives. At the same time, though, it must be acknowledged that the critics have a point in stating that the whole nursing-of-Mr. Bellingham episode was designed by Mrs. Gaskell as the appropriate ironic way of having Ruth die. Yet, the irony of such a plot does not fit well with the rest of the book. It seems far more feasible that Mrs. Gaskell wanted to have Ruth take the final step in her atonement by nursing the very man who caused her so much pain and humiliation over the years.

Be that as it may, whatever Mrs. Gaskell's intentions were concerning the manner of Ruth's death, it is obvious that she felt the

death necessary because of the reactionary nature of many of her readers which she did not, as it turned out, over-estimate.¹⁸ Despite this melodramatic ending, the novel's point is made clearly: that Ruth is, and always was, a pure, good, woman, one who was led astray in her immature youth but who has been, given the right nurturing conditions, able to develop morally, intellectually and emotionally into a quiet, but determined, mature woman. Once impressionable, dependent, unthinking and irresponsible because of the insecurity and loneliness of her youth, Ruth is now modestly self-assured, diligent, dependable, clear-sighted, independent, morally courageous and at peace with herself. She has always been honest, unselfish, simple and sincere, and caring of others but it has taken the Bensons' influence and the birth of her child - the catalyst of disillusion and self-awareness - for these qualities to be consolidated and strengthened.

One cannot help but compare Ruth with Thomas Hardy's Tess, in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Hetty Sorrel, in George Eliot's Adam Bede, two other Victorian heroines whose seduction by aristocratic idlers and consequent pregnancies parallel Ruth's. The major difference between Ruth's situation and that of these two heroines is that Ruth's past is redeemed through the actions of friends and her own consequent moral development, and she is able to live a normal life for many years. Tess Durbeyfield ends up falling back into sin with her seducer and Hetty Sorrel goes to prison for the murder of her baby. Mrs. Gaskell is akin to Anthony Trollope who with Carry Brattle in The Vicar of Bulhampton demonstrated that a good, obedient, loving child can, although diverted for a time into a disreputable life, be restored to the status of a good woman with the caring guidance of friends or family. Hardy and Eliot show what happens when a misguided girl has not got such good influences in her life. Hardy's "pure woman" is a much harder notion to accept than Mrs. Gaskell's precisely because of this difference of environment which makes their later lives so dissimilar: Ruth has the chance to prove that she is still inherently pure.

In this novel Mrs. Gaskell has reiterated her ideas first

¹⁸See The Letters, letters 148-154, pp.220-230.

expressed in Mary Barton about the necessary pre-conditions for her heroine's maturity and about the importance of the removal of delusions from the heroine's mind about her way of seeing herself and the world around her. In Mary Barton, her most straightforward novel in respect to the concept of maturity, Mrs. Gaskell dealt with only one central delusion which concerned Mary's feelings about her two lovers and her ambitions. With Ruth, a far less vital and "spirited" heroine, Mrs. Gaskell wanted to add to her heroine's initial delusions about her lover and her relationship with him another delusion which is to be tackled by Ruth - that of her position in the world as a helpless, passive creature, dependent on others in all things. Naturally, because she is young and untrained to fend for herself, Ruth does not try gain total independence, yet Mrs. Gaskell insists here that she come to a stage where she can, and will want to, take on a life of active, self-determined independent industry. Ruth, as has been seen, does so even though her position is enormously constrained by her lack of education and financial support and by the secret of her past which makes her afraid of public notice. In her life with the Bensons, it could have been very easy for a weaker female to have maintained a dependent role, submissive and obedient, because the Bensons never would have demanded anything of her. It is hard to see how critics can maintain that Ruth is this kind of figure to the end of the novel. Mrs. Gaskell goes to great pains to show that Ruth is able, often against what is considered socially acceptable, to make a stance on her moral beliefs and to act independently in trying to give something of herself to others, rather than sitting back and accepting to receive all from others.

In trying to, throughout, portray Ruth as a pure woman, Mrs. Gaskell has given herself difficulties in demonstrating that her heroine matures for she sometimes tends to make her seem more perfect than would realistically be thought possible. On the other hand, in describing the stages in Ruth's disenchantment and allowing Ruth to retain a vestige of her former love for Mr. Bellingham, Mrs. Gaskell is taking an extraordinary risk of alienating her more circumspect readers. She is not as timid as many critics would have the reader believe. One can see, in this, that Mrs. Gaskell is more assured of her

medium in this novel. This assurance is manifested in another important way, also: Mrs. Gaskell has forfeited much of her earlier authorial heavy-handedness, especially in her much-reduced omniscient commentary on her characters' feelings. Thus, the novel works better as a psychological assessment of her heroine, although this novel does not display the same degree of internal psychological complexity as the later novels do. Much of what is happening in *Ruth* is still shown from outside, through the eyes of other characters. Nevertheless, it is an important step in the development of Mrs. Gaskell's fictional techniques.

Unfortunately, this novel is still Mrs. Gaskell's most ponderous because of the difficulty in carrying out her intention of portraying a fallen woman as pure. Thus, her concept of maturity has to be somewhat more hedged in than elsewhere. Despite such difficulties, the novel succeeds in making the point that its heroine develops into an example of Mrs. Gaskell's notion of female maturity. With her next novel, with the solid groundwork built up in Mary Barton and Ruth, Mrs. Gaskell can now delineate a more complex psychological portrayal and a more subtle form of maturation.

CHAPTER 3

MARGARET HALE: INDEPENDENCE AND MUTUAL DEPENDENCE

Margaret Hale seems at the beginning of the novel North and South to be a mature woman in terms of Mrs. Gaskell's ideal set up in her previous two novels. She has qualities right from the start which both Mary Barton and Ruth had acquired after much time and effort, as a result of disillusionment. She is responsible, self-assured, dignified in demeanour, strong, capable, sensible and selfless. Additionally, she is self-confident and intelligently well-spoken when in educated social circles as well as at ease and amiable when she comes among the villagers of Helstone. In this, she differs from both Mary Barton and Ruth in her social background for she oscillates from an upper middle-class to a middle-class lifestyle, whereas Mary was a member of the working-class and Ruth becomes middle-class after a working-class girlhood. Margaret is conscious that she comes from old aristocratic stock which makes her more sure of herself. She has had the stability of a serene home life with her aunt, from her late childhood on, and the future prospect of a return to her own home. In this, she is markedly unlike both Mary Barton and Ruth, who were left to their own devices in their early- and mid-teens respectively. This adolescent period of life seems to be very important to Mrs. Gaskell in terms of development of character and moral strength. Yet despite, or indeed because of, her background and her own apparently mature qualities, Margaret Hale is not at the beginning a mature woman in Mrs. Gaskell's extended terms in this novel. There are parts of her character which hinder development in Margaret and allow her to go through her life deluded by certain misconceptions. These misconceptions are destroyed, one by one, by Margaret's response to the suffering which they, in combination with her circumstances, cause her.

Mrs. Gaskell wanted Margaret to be seen as the focus of the novel:

"She wished to call the work Margaret Hale, and in her letters she referred to it as "Margaret"."¹ It was Dickens, the editor of "Household Words", who wanted the book, to be serialized in this periodical, to be called North and South. That Margaret is the focus of the novel is not disputed by her critics for the novel is so constructed that all of the other characters can mostly only be seen as they relate to Margaret and it is through her eyes that much of the action of the novel is seen and interpreted. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, very few Gaskell critics see Margaret as maturing in the novel. Mostly, they see her as a well-developed character who has some lessons to learn about life, as do most of the characters in the novel. Lansbury, for example, states that "...it is [Margaret's] changing vision of herself and society that is dominant."² Pollard claims that: "the history of Margaret and Thornton is centred on their re-education."³ He sees Margaret's changes as those of ultimate adaptation to each new environment that she becomes a part of though, at the end, he sees her as more separate from the London scene than she was at the beginning. Thus, in a sense, he sees her as already mature in her flexibility and ability to cope with change.

These critics see that Margaret needs to learn new things about life because she has hitherto had a comfortable, sheltered upbringing. However, what Mrs. Gaskell expresses in the novel is much more complex than this: she is putting forward the idea that it is not just Margaret's environment which makes her awareness of life deficient but, more importantly, her own seemingly-mature nature. In this, she posits the thesis that Margaret, like the heroines who have preceded her, is not mature at the beginning and that she, again like her predecessors, must mature through the disillusionment of her formerly-cherished notions about herself, her values and the world around her. Lansbury believes that the learning process in the novel is brought about by suffering, though it is not clear whether or not she sees this as a

¹Pollard, p.109.

²Lansbury, p.125. She continues: "She is deliberately made imperfect both in character and opinion so that the reader may not be prejudiced in favour of one witness."

³Pollard, p.132.

maturation process. In writing about Mr. Thornton, she is obviously thinking also of Margaret: "Suffering, in Elizabeth Gaskell's psychology, brought people to the source of their being. It was a means whereby a person could either hide from himself or find himself and make a fresh beginning."⁴ I would like to suggest that it is the maturing-process which is brought about by suffering.

Mantovani is the only critic to have an inkling of this maturation in Margaret. She suggests that Margaret must lose her parents in order to develop and have mature relationships - though this basis for Margaret's development is debatable. At one point she states: "As in other Gaskell tales, such as Cranford and "A Dark Night's Work," the heroine's close relationship with her father is at once a source of emotional strength and a hindrance to womanly maturation."⁵ Later, she suggests that: "Because Margaret is so firmly committed to her parents' service, Mrs. Gaskell has to remove them physically from the scene before the daughter is free to form emotional relationships on a mature level."⁶ If this estimation of Mrs. Gaskell's intention is correct, then it would seem that Mrs. Gaskell's attitude to the family has changed from that shown in the earlier novels. Indeed, I think it has, but not quite to this extent. Mrs. Gaskell is not suggesting suddenly that young women are better off without parents - that would be quite out of character for her - but merely that immature parents can hinder a girl's development particularly when, as in this novel, those parents are so dependent on their daughter. Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of her themes in this novel is much subtler than Mantovani allows.

Mrs. Gaskell is subtler in this novel than in the preceding ones in her portrayal of her heroine's developing maturity and her initial relative maturity. This is why most critics simply do not see what Mrs. Gaskell is doing in this novel: showing Margaret Hale to be not fully mature at first so that she can portray the complex and fascinating stages of her development. There are no great moments of insight

⁴Lansbury, p.113.

⁵Mantovani, p.90.

⁶Mantovani, p.92.

occurring at a stage early enough in the novel for the reader to see the consequent growth in the heroine emotionally, intellectually and morally. Instead, Mrs. Gaskell has deliberately drawn Margaret at the beginning of the novel as seemingly mature and then slowly removed the foundations of Margaret's beliefs, which then turn out to have been delusions, by changing her external circumstances and thus creating conditions for her intelligence and perceptiveness to come into play in working through these delusions. These delusions form several strands which interweave throughout the novel and are often inter-connected. Thus Mrs. Gaskell can deftly, quietly, bring them out during the course of the novel leaving the key scenes, in terms of the heroine's great moments of revelation, until the end of the novel when Margaret can look back clearly to the past as a whole and look forward to her future life. This is a far more ambitious structure, based on a more ambitious plan, than Mrs. Gaskell had ever used before and is also more so than her later novels, as will be seen. Margaret Hale is Mrs. Gaskell's only primary heroine who seems mature at the beginning of the novel - though Cynthia Kirkpatrick also seems mature, at least in Molly Gibson's eyes, when she first appears in Wives and Daughters but she is a subsidiary character to Molly. Thus, in this novel, Mrs. Gaskell can express her ideas in terms of her views about the roles of women and how they affect or are affected by a character's maturity. Because of her increased technical competency by this stage, Mrs. Gaskell is able to make her ambitious plan work in this elaborate, complex structure.

On her return home to Helstone, near the beginning of the novel, Margaret Hale is faced with responsibilities far greater than those with which Mary Barton and Ruth had to cope so early in their lives. Of course, she is older than both of these characters when she is put in such a position: Mary Barton had to take over the running of her father's house at the age of thirteen - though, being a working-class girl, this was not too difficult a role for her because of her early familiarity with housekeeping - at the same time as taking employment; Ruth Hilton had only to cope with her situation as apprentice, but she was left orphaned and alone at the age of fifteen. Margaret accepts these responsibilities willingly because she sees looking after her parents as part of her life's duties. Yet, in doing so, she takes on

more than she bargained for and eventually comes to see her own personality more clearly as a result of her struggles, as does the reader. For it can be seen that, while Margaret can cope with the burden of family responsibility, she can do so only when her situation is stable, for she is afraid of, and resistant to, change. In this, she is less mature than both Mary Barton and Ruth who, though obviously deeply distressed by the causes of change in their young lives, simply try to make the best of their situations thereby showing perhaps more practical, as well as more mature, natures in this respect. They are, however, less accustomed to analyzing their situations and their feelings because they are less perceptive and possibly less intelligent than Margaret.⁷ For her, then, maturity will be a more highly-developed state than for these two heroines.

Margaret's resistance to change is the product of one of the delusions which she harbours at the beginning of the novel, the illusion of permanence and stability in her life. In this, she can be seen as somewhat naive and still childlike, with her fear of external change denoting an insecure inner nature. This is one of the six major delusions which Margaret entertains early on with which she has to do battle in order to become mature. The other five, to be dealt with separately, are: Margaret's delusions about class; her delusions about her personal superiority to others; her delusions about the superiority of the South to the North, once she has moved to the North; her delusions about her real feelings for Mr. Thornton, whom she meets in the North; and, near the end of the novel, her delusions about her role, her task in life and of her identity as "heroine". It is only at the end of the novel that these delusions are finally fully disintegrated and Margaret's integrity is assured.

The first hint the reader is given that Margaret is resistant to change is seen in her thoughts as she leaves London for her home:

The farewells so hurriedly taken, amongst all the other good-byes, of those she had lived with so long, oppressed her

⁷Margaret's "keenness of sight"(p.49) is mentioned by Mrs. Gaskell concerning the discord she notices between her parents when she first moves home.

now with a sad regret for the times that were no more; it did not signify what those times had been, they were gone never to return. Margaret's heart felt more heavy than she could ever have thought it possible in going to her own dear home; the place and the life she had longed for for years - at that time of all times for yearning and longing, just before the sharp senses lose their outlines in sleep. She took her mind away with a wrench from the recollection of the past to the bright serene contemplation of the hopeful future.⁸

Despite her joy at going home, she initially mourns the stability of the past until she realizes that her future life will be just as stable - if not more so, because she will have more control over her own life. Nevertheless, to shake herself out of her reverie, Margaret uses her well-developed self-discipline, a force which, in her future, both helps her to cope with events and hinders her personal development. Mrs. Gaskell has earlier hinted at this aspect of Margaret's nature - manifested in this desire for stability - in calling her regret at leaving the London house "cat-like"(p.39) for, though she came to that house as a young girl "untamed from the forest"(p.38), she has become domesticated to the degree that she is unable to welcome change in her life as beneficial or enriching. Again, there is something in Mrs. Gaskell's early descriptions of Margaret which warns the reader that Margaret is not as self-assured and competent as she appears on the surface, for though Margaret displays a mixture of "honest, open brightness"(p.40) and "stately simplicity"(p.42) , "the look on her face was, in general, too dignified and reserved for one so young."(p.48)

These latter qualities tie in with Margaret's resistance to change, as can be seen in the scene in the Helstone garden in which the London barrister, Henry Lennox, proposes to Margaret. The moment that Margaret realizes what Mr. Lennox is saying she panics and is afraid of the implications. She combats this reaction, however, with the "strong pride that was in her"(p.60) and "her high maidenly dignity"(p.61) and is cold in her refusal of him. Her paramount desire to do the right thing, which she sees her refusal as, allows her then to act once more

⁸Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.47. All further references to this novel are to this edition and will be included in the text.

as her old self with Lennox: "her eyes...met his with their open, straight look, expressive of the utmost good faith and reluctance to give pain."(p.61) The "pure serenity"(p.61) of Margaret's eyes disconcerts Mr. Lennox, as it does the reader, for there is something in Margaret's manner of refusal which is more puzzling and complex than her simple desire not to accept this man. "The truth as it was in her own heart"(p.61) is not simply that she does not love this man or that, in her "maidenly modesty", she has never thought of the prospects of love and marriage, but something less easily gauged. It is suggested by Mrs. Gaskell's words concerning Margaret that: "Her beautiful lip curled in a slight disdain"(p.62) as "she felt a tinge of contempt mingle itself with her pain at having refused him."(p.62) The truth is that, as she herself later admits, "Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage."(p.65) She is afraid of her own physical change to womanliness and has not thought about the consequences of such a change. Although Mrs. Gaskell says that it is Margaret's "instinct"(p.64) which made her refuse Mr. Lennox, it is not her instinct which supplied the reasons for her refusal, for Margaret, like Molly Gibson in Wives and Daughters, is at this stage unaware of her feminine instincts, which are repressed deep down in her nature by her desire to retain the simplicity and security of her childhood state. In this, she is very different from both Mary Barton and Ruth, whose healthy adolescent femininity allows them to feel attractions to certain men and to be aware of reciprocal feelings of attraction. She is not unlike George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, in Middlemarch, in her fear of her own sexuality. It is the fear of womanly maturation, as part of her fear of change, which makes Margaret appear "dignified and reserved" and show "contempt" for one who has transgressed the boundaries of her imagined sanctity, her delusion of safety. This dignity and reservedness signify that there is something stiff and unyielding in her nature, like a brittle reed liable to be broken, possibly an outer protective covering of an inner over-sensitivity. Those moments when her self-control and reserve break down violently, in private, support this notion - as happens shortly after Margaret tells her mother of her father's plans when she tries "...to stifle the hysteric sobs that would force their way at last, after the rigid

self-control of the whole day."(p.82) In this again, she is different from Mary Barton and Ruth whose warm, loving natures allow them to grow womanly and who must learn to balance this disposition of lovingness with the rational and thoughtful sides of their natures. Margaret must learn to become more open, self-accepting, pliant and womanly to balance her more prominently rational, defensive side.

Margaret, however, like all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, is a battler and tries to come to terms with the negative sides of her nature. She also struggles to act in a way which she considers mature, as when her father asks her to tell her mother of his decision to leave the Church and Helstone. Despite her reluctance to do the job, "she conquered herself...with a bright strong look on her face."(p.70) She never questions her parents' increasing reliance on her but accepts this position as her duty. In this, as in her struggles, Margaret is striving to develop into a strong, resourceful and reliable woman. Yet, underneath, she is shocked: "The one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking."(p.67) Margaret's habitual dislike of examining motives - as is the case with all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines - is overcome by the strength of her feelings about the move and she sees that her father, like herself, is not one to seek change but must take it as an escape from his present life and its associations with his past. The changes, to her, coupled with her proposal earlier in the day, leads Margaret to feel that all her "youth and buoyancy [have been pressed] out of her heart, never to return."(p.76)

The illusory freedom of the poachers who frequent the neighbourhood, which Margaret has admired when settled in the secure environment of her home, now, on her imminent departure for Milton-Northern, is threatening to her. Ironically, her own freedom of movement in the village, which she sees as to a degree akin to the poachers' freedom, is an illusion in itself. It is not really a freedom to act as she wishes, for her life-style is still curtailed by convention - it is simply that that convention is not as visible or as demanding as that with which she has had to live in London. McDaniel claims that "Margaret Hale's [romantic vision of her environment]

consists of imagining that she has a certain kind of freedom - the freedom to act independently - and, as a result of that, a certain superiority."⁹ Now that she is about to leave the known, safe village-life, Margaret is as much afraid of real freedom as she is of change for she sees that the two are related. As will later be seen, by the end of the novel this fear has given way to acceptance of, and even willingness to partake in, change for she is now more secure in herself and clear-sighted about the realities of her own personality and of life.

In the meantime, though, Margaret has also to accept the changes created by her parents' deaths. Even the awareness of her mother's imminent death causes Margaret to reflect sorrowfully on the transience of life:

The dull gray days of the preceding winter and spring, so eventless and monotonous, seemed more associated with what she cared for now above all price. She would fain have caught at the skirts of that departing time, and prayed it to return, and give her back what she too little valued while it was yet in her possession. What a vain show Life seemed! How unsubstantial, and flickering, and flitting! It was as if from some aerial belfry, high up above the stir and jar of the earth, there was a bell continually tolling, 'All are shadows!-all are passing!-all is past!' And when the morning dawned, cool and gray, like many a happier morning before - when Margaret looked one by one at the sleepers, it seemed as if the terrible night were unreal as a dream; it, too, was a shadow. It, too, was past. (pp.224-225)

This is one of the many occasions in the novel in which Margaret sees reality as a dream, something too painful to dwell on and therefore something to be cast out of her mind. It is not until near the end of the novel that she can wake in the morning and confront her night fears and illusions and accept them for what they are. As in the earlier-quoted passage when she leaves London for Helstone, Margaret regrets change in itself even if it may be change for the better, because it makes her see her own life as less solid and productive than she would like it to be. In coming to value herself more realistically later in the novel, her sense of self-importance is put into perspective with the nature of life as a force for change, for decay

⁹McDaniel, pp.109-110.

and renewal, and she gains a more optimistic view of life than this present negative one engendered by her stiff resistance to the external forces which control her life, to a certain degree, whether she likes them to or not.

Margaret's second delusion about herself and the nature of her world is one concerned with class. Because of her upbringing in her aunt's upper middle-class environment in London and because of her own ancestry, Margaret is, at the beginning of the novel, snobbish about class. She accepts the village people as worthy of her time and notice though she does not realize that her attitude towards them is patronizingly benevolent. Mrs. Gaskell shows Margaret's patronizing though kind attitude to her inferiors in her final words to her servant in Helstone: "You must try and write to me, if I can ever give you any little help or good advice."(p.91) She sees them, perhaps because they allow her to patronize them, as "people without pretence" (p.50), whom she contrasts with "shoppy people"(p.50), those whose occupations have to do with trade rather than the land. In this, she is early showing her prejudice for country people and rural ways against city people and manufacturing towns such as the one she will come to live in in the not-too-distant future. She believes that she and her family are superior to people who are wealthier than them, if their wealth has been earned through commercial means, because they are of a lower class, the nouveau riche.

When her mother's maid, Dixon, derides Mr. Hale for having put her mistress into her unfortunate circumstances, Margaret's attitude to servants is brought to light. With "flashing eye and dilating nostril" (p.83) she addresses the maid: "'Dixon,' she said in the low tone she always used when much excited, which had a sound in it as of some distant turmoil, or threatening storm breaking far away. "Dixon! you forget to whom you are speaking.'"(p.83) Because Margaret is "haughty and determined in manner"(p.83), Dixon admires her for her stance where otherwise she would have been annoyed or upset. As Mrs. Gaskell puts it: "...the truth was, that Dixon, as do many others, liked to feel herself ruled by a powerful and decided nature."(p.83) This "powerful and decided nature" of Margaret's shows that, in the terms used in Mary

Barton, Margaret has perhaps an excess of "spirit" though, to give her credit, it is usually balanced by her "sense", which is relatively well-developed except in relation to her immature delusions. Later, Dixon comments to Margaret that "I like to see you showing a bit of a spirit. It's the good old Beresford blood"(p.178) and goes on to relate how one of Margaret's ancestors shot his steward for disobedience and cruelty! With this overweening "spirit", Margaret Hale contrasts strongly with Ruth Hilton, whose "spirit" was initially deficient and had to be built up with a secure environment and loving friends; Margaret's "spirit" has to be toned down by her developing "sense" and clear-sightedness. This process is accelerated by her meeting with a prime example of the self-made man of trade, Mr. Thornton, who comes eventually to make her think again about class.

Mr. Thornton is confused and uncomfortable in this first meeting with the young Miss Hale. Hitherto, the only women he has known have deferred to him as superior, because male. Margaret seems to be a very different kind of woman "...with the straight, fearless, dignified presence habitual to her. She felt no awkwardness; she had too much the habits of society for that."(p.990) In fact, her attitude towards him, because it is not based on sex, leads him to reflect further that, with members of either sex, he "...was in habits of authority himself, but she seemed to assume some kind of rule over him at once."(p.99) He too is used to thinking of himself and his class as superior to others because hard-working and able to make fortunes, the yardstick by which rank is measured in the industrial North, and by Mr. Thornton himself who sees poverty simply as the consequence of idleness. His consciousness of superiority is jolted in this encounter - Mary's takes longer to be disturbed. In the meagre surroundings of her hotel room in Milton, Margaret looks anomalous:

Margaret could not help her looks; but the short curled upper lip, the round, massive up-turned chin, the manner of carrying her head, her movements, full of a soft feminine defiance, always gave strangers the impression of haughtiness. She was tired now, and would rather have remained silent, and taken the rest her father had planned for her; but, of course, she owed to herself to be a gentlewoman, and to speak courteously from time to time to this stranger; not over-brushed, nor over-polished, it must be confessed, after his rough encounter with Milton streets and crowds.(p.100)

The very way in which Mrs. Gaskell makes Mr. Thornton appear tainted by his contact with the world of Milton shows that Margaret's air of "haughtiness" is not just an unfortunate matter of looks but also a conscious posture of aloofness. Part of this "cold serene look"(p.100) of aloofness stems from what Mrs. Gaskell calls her "quiet maiden freedom"(p.100). This freedom is the one which Margaret expressed at the beginning of the novel when in the presence of Mr. Lennox in London and it is the armour which she dons when she tries to show him how insulting his proposition at Helstone seems to her to be. It is a self-defensive reaction against accepting her change into womanhood and the ramifications of that change.

Naturally, Mrs. Gaskell is saying, it is important for Margaret to feel that she is part of her own class, that she is a "born and bred lady"(p.116) - for one thing, it helps her to cope with having to take on menial domestic chores in her family's increased poverty in Milton. It is her feeling that her class is superior to others - hence her inability to cope with the rough manners of the Milton work-people from which she shrank with "fastidious pride" (p.109) - which is seen in the novel as a delusion. Margaret's attitude softens, though, partly through finding "human interest"(p.113) in the person of Bessy Higgins, a working-girl, who is dying and this brings out Margaret's philanthropic urges and her real sympathy. Her attitude also alters partly through her increased contact with Mr. Thornton. For a long time, Margaret does not realize that her feelings for Mr. Thornton are slowly changing until, suddenly, she is enlightened about them. The process of that change will be dealt with later in the chapter, at length.

The first inkling of change in her misguided feelings about class occurs when Margaret feels impelled to defend Mr. Thornton against her mother's complaints that he is a mere tradesman. Margaret knows that Mr. Thornton has become a valued friend to her father and so sees him now in a more genial light.¹⁰ To her father's statement: "'I don't

¹⁰Again, later, she is annoyed by her brother, Fred's, impression that Mr. Thornton is just a shopman, "someone of a different class, not a gentleman."(p.324)

know that you would ever like him, or think him agreeable, Margaret. He is not a lady's man.'" (p.115), Margaret "wreathed her throat in a scornful curve" and answered "'I don't particularly admire ladies' men, papa.'"(p.115) She is now starting to admire Mr. Thornton for certain qualities in him which bespeak a life of activity and industry, contrasting with her father's passive, quiet life and the languid easy-going lifestyle of London society for she says: "'He looks like a person who would enjoy battling with every adverse thing he could meet with - enemies, winds, or circumstances.'"(p.114) Her defensive attitude about class is starting to give way to the knowledge that an overbearing belief in one's class-superiority could stand in the way of a life of activity and self-direction - and, it must be admitted, freedom. For freedom is something which she is starting to enjoy now that she has new interests in Milton and needs freedom to come and go as she pleases.

Much later in the novel, Margaret is prepared to identify herself with women of the working-class in begging to go with her father to her mother's funeral, something upper-class women are not allowed by etiquette to do. Margaret prefers to see it that "Women of our class don't go, because they have no power over their emotions, and yet are ashamed of showing them. Poor women go, and don't care if they are seen overwhelmed with grief. But I promise you, papa, that if you will let me go, I will be no trouble."(p.336) In other words, she will not let her class down, although she sees herself as made of sterner stuff than other "ladies". Her ability to control her emotions is one of the qualities which she herself sees as mature. At this stage, Margaret tries to exercise such rigid self-control at all times and hence breaks down, privately, often in the early parts of the novel. She confuses this type of self-repression with the self-control which a well-balanced character uses when necessary in order to make others' lives easier or more pleasant - but which she can also do away with at other times because she is self-aware and self-acceptant and, therefore, able to be at ease with herself and accept her limitations and not try to hide them. In this novel, Margaret has no such mature figure to emulate and so has to learn for herself the difference between a person using self-discipline to hide from their own nature

and using self-control for the sake of others. Mr. Thornton, too, for a long time seen as a rigidly self-disciplined character, has to learn, through examining his own motivations and character, to recognize this difference and he too matures in the process.

It is through her relationship with Mr. Thornton that Margaret later in the novel suffers humiliation when she realizes that Mr. Thornton has learnt of her great lie and is magnanimously covering up for her. Now, she is beholden to him for his generosity and this, among other things, does much to reduce her imagined class-superiority. She realizes now that, despite her earlier well-defined ideas of class, denoting the difference between "gentlemen" and ordinary men, Mr. Thornton is not merely one of the latter type because he is a man of commerce. In treating her, in respect to her lie, with such delicacy, he is showing himself to be a true "gentleman". Her definition of "gentleman", expressed in her discussion with Mr. Thornton halfway through the novel, can now be seen to be too narrow and limited in comparison with Mr. Thornton's ideal of the "true man"(p.217). His ideal, in the course of the novel, also is undermined for his belief that a man should be noble within himself and not merely in relation to others is seen to be too unrealistic, for Mrs. Gaskell shows by the end of the novel that not only must one be worthy of one's own respect but also of others'. Margaret, conversely, has to come to see that one must be able to stand up to one's own scrutiny primarily for only then can one be truly worthy of others'. From their initial polarized positions, both come to see the value of the other's beliefs and both modify, unconsciously, their own beliefs accordingly. This point will be seen more clearly later in the chapter.

Allied to Margaret's misconception about her class-superiority is her delusion about her personal superiority. This is instanced in her interchange with Mr. Lennox, already discussed, in which he proposes to her at Helstone. It is not simply a matter of fear of maturation which impels Margaret's indignant but controlled reaction. It is also a manifestation of her personal inordinate pride, possibly what Mrs. Gaskell calls her "high maidenly dignity"(p.61), which makes her feel that she is superior to such a suitor - or perhaps indeed to any

suitor. Again, earlier, in the opening pages of the novel, Margaret sees herself as superior to all the frivolous fineries arranged for her cousin's wedding and stands parading her aunt's shawls to the assembled guests, as requested, "looking at Mr. Lennox with a bright, amused face, as if sure of his sympathy in her sense of the ludicrousness at being thus surprised."(p.40) In her pride, Margaret feels that she could do without such luxuries, though Mr. Lennox has not the same disregard for the conventionalities of wedding-breakfast, bridesmaids and so on. In her ironic way of admiring and at the same time disapproving of these shawls, Margaret is very much like George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke in Middlemarch who, in the opening chapter of that novel, is both attracted by her inherited jewels and repulsed by them in a misguided feeling of ascetic pride.¹¹ Both authors obviously want the reader to see immediately how different their heroines are from the more conventional fictional heroines of their time, such as Mrs. Gaskell's Edith Shaw in this novel and George Eliot's Celia Brooke in Middlemarch. Their similarities go much deeper than this, though, although there is no scope here for extended comparisons. Nevertheless, it is relevant to note that in their proud feelings of superiority to the rest of womankind, and even humanity in general, though coupled with a genuine desire to do good and help others, they are similarly initially deluded and immature.

In the passage constantly alluded to and shortly to be fully discussed, when Margaret follows out the idea that Mr. Thornton knows of her lie to save her brother, Mrs. Gaskell brings out clearly Margaret's deluded feelings of superiority to Mr. Thornton. This, now, is not just her class-superiority but also her personal feelings of superiority, coming out in her indignation and shame which make her exclaim: "Mr. Thornton, above all people, on whom she had looked down from her imaginary heights till now! She suddenly found herself at his feet, and was strangely distressed at her fall."(p.356) It is also her personal feelings of superiority, combined with those of her class superiority, which cause Margaret to feel offended and insulted by Mr. Thornton's proposition earlier, shortly after the riot at the mill.

¹¹George Eliot, Middlemarch(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp.34-36.

Both of these feelings are, however, only part of Margaret's justification in refusing Mr. Thornton so sternly: she is also extremely hurt by the imputation, made by members of his household, that in her defence of Mr. Thornton she was showing her personal feelings towards him. This passage, too, will be looked at at greater length later in the chapter.

Once Margaret has accepted the idea that Mr. Thornton knows of her moral transgression, her pride is badly deflated. In her humbled state and in her realization that her life cannot be devoted just to her parents, now that her mother is dead, she reverts to the old occupation of helping others as she had done in Helstone. Her attitude now, though, is changed for she "worked hard at goodness"(p.423) and tried to carry out her father's wishes in a "meek spirit of obedience."(p.424) Now Margaret is restless for change to break up the "dreary peacefulness of the present time" in which "her mind had lost its elasticity."(p.423) This is partly engendered by her newly-discovered feelings for Mr. Thornton which she must keep hidden because she believes him to be no longer in the same mind towards her, especially now that she has been guilty of a great sin which, she feels, he could never forgive. Again, the stages of Margaret's disenchantment about her real feelings for Mr. Thornton will be discussed later in the most important section of the chapter concerning her immature delusions about her feelings and their dissolution.

A further delusion which Margaret entertains in the early stages of the novel is that the South of England is superior to the North. This notion is bound up with feelings of class-superiority for, as is explained in the book, the South is seen as more "aristocratic"(p.122) than the industrial North and with her feelings of personal superiority, that her way of life and upbringing have made her into a singular person. Thus, Margaret reacts emotionally to what she sees as Mr. Thornton's aspersions on her old homeland, with "...a fond vehemence of defence, that brought the colour into her cheeks and the angry tears into her eyes."(p.122) Her thoughts about the relative merits of North and South have become more balanced by exposure to the lives of Milton people and - more importantly - by her newly-born

feelings, which as yet she cannot acknowledge to herself, for Mr. Thornton. Thus it is that her rejoinder to her father, who tries to show that there are some advantages to life in the North, namely active habits of mind, is a fair assessment of both the good and the bad in each way of life. This is the turning-point in relation to the question of the superiority of North or South. Hereafter her defence is solidly of the North, particularly after her return to Helstone later in the novel. Most importantly, she realizes that constant change, as a product of activity, is necessary and indeed unavoidable. The "stagnant habits of mind"(p.377) and cruel superstitions of the villagers shocks Margaret into this realization. As she explains to Mr. Bell, who is her companion on this trip, not long after her views had started to swing in favour of the North: "I'm standing up for the progress of commerce."(p.409)

Margaret's initial reaction to Mr. Thornton, as already discussed, leads her to be condescending towards him. It is only when she stops thinking of him as a representative of the North but rather as an individual man that she begins to appreciate some aspects of his character. His powerfully masculine nature contrasts with that of the men she has known, principally her effeminate indecisive father, against whom she herself has played something of a more dominant, decisive role. She sees Mr. Thornton at his best when he is on his own ground, when surrounded by others who pay homage to him in just the way she naïvely expects him to pay homage to her. Despite such attentions by others, his manner strikes Margaret as "so straightforward, yet simple and modest, as to be thoroughly dignified"(p.216), mature qualities which she clearly admires. His lifestyle, too, vigorous and powerful, creating constant change and defying "the old limits of possibility"(p.217) is exciting to Margaret. Yet she finds his attitudes to his workers somewhat despotic, despite his belief in the need for individual independence. This causes antagonism between the two of them which makes both question their beliefs and views and their own personalities. Mr. Thornton, it seems, has as much to learn about himself as Margaret has and though he may be considered to be mature by most of the characters in the novel, he is not so to his creator until he has changed under Margaret's influence. This is partly because, like

Margaret, he sees himself and his opinions about life as superior to others and their views.

Margaret's belief that she is right in urging Mr. Thornton to go out and speak to the rioting workmen puts her in the position where she must follow him and defend him from the wrath of the crowd. As a result of her actions, Mr. Thornton admits to himself for the first time that he loves her, believing that she, too, must feel something similar for him in order to take such an action. Yet it is not her bravery which has stirred these feelings in him but rather her feminine softness as she clings to him protectingly. Thus, when he goes to propose to her, he sees images in his mind of her holding him again, but this time as in need of protection, like a little bird: "She might droop, and flush, and flutter to his arms, as to her natural home and resting-place."(p.251) He does not yet know her real nature, even though he has constantly seen evidence of her pride, independence and straightforwardness. His romantic vision of what might happen comes into collision with her delusion of superiority over him and the meeting causes painful words to be exchanged as to motives and expectations.

As was the case with Mary Barton, when Jem Wilson went to propose to her, Margaret stands with "...eyelids dropped half over her eyes."(p.251) Like Mary Barton, her stance is one of defiance, though far more aggressively so as: "Her head, for all its drooping eyes, was thrown a little back, in the old proud attitude."(pp.251-252) Her reasons for her defiance, too, are very similar: both believe themselves to be misunderstood by their suitors in relation to their feelings for them - and they are. The difference between the two situations is that Mary is won over by Jem's words whereas Margaret feels antagonistic to Mr. Thornton until the last, despite his desire to triumph over her. Nevertheless, Margaret now knows how Mr. Thornton feels about her, though she is not sure whether or not his feelings have been prompted by his belief in her love for him, as recounted to him by his family after Margaret's defence of him during the riot. In relation to Margaret's earlier conversation with Mr. Thornton about the difference between a "gentleman" and a "true man", Margaret feels

offended by what she sees as Mr. Thornton's boorish ungentlemanliness in proposing to her because she does not understand his motives and she uses this as an argument against him. He, in turn, defends himself by stating: "I am a man. I claim the right of expressing my feelings." (p.253) It is not until later, after Mr. Thornton has learnt of her lie, that Margaret sees the limitations of her own definition and the fact that Mr. Thornton is a true "gentleman" - in a much broader conception of the word - as much as a "true man".

Margaret's own reaction, after hearing one of the servants say that she was chasing Mr. Thornton, is to feel that her "maiden pride" (p.247) has been insulted and to exclaim: "'Oh how low I am fallen that they should say that of me!'" (p.247) She even derides herself for her temporary delusion at the time in acting "like a romantic fool" (p.247), in trying to save Mr. Thornton from the mob. Nevertheless she upholds the rightness of her actions because she believes that she has averted dangerous harm to both Mr. Thornton and to the workmen. That same night finds her at her lowest: she is barely able to keep up the effort of giving comfort to her unhappy father who now knows that his wife is dying. She resembles Jem Wilson in Mary Barton in this, a similarly conscientious, loving, responsible relative who tired of doing good and missed the chance to help Esther because pre-occupied with his own situation: "She let her colour go - the false smile fade away - the eyes grow dull with heavy pain. She released her strong will from its laborious task. Till morning she might feel ill and weary." (p.248) Her pride, which has formerly been an important component of her self-image, has begun to be eroded and she is left weakened and dispirited by the realization of her new position in the eyes of others.

After his rebuff by her, Mr. Thornton affects not to notice Margaret when he is in the same room with her. This rather churlish, immature behaviour works in Mr. Thornton's favour, though not designed to: "It was wilful at the time; repented of afterwards. But no deep plan, no careful cunning could have stood him in such good stead. Margaret thought about him more than she had ever done before" though, as Mrs. Gaskell hastens to add, "not with any tinge of what is called

love, but with regret that she had wounded him so deeply."(p.303) In return, Margaret shows "pretty humility in her behaviour to him"(p.303), thereby showing that she accepts that she has fallen from the high position of his friendly regard. However, at this stage, she only wants to renew friendship with Mr. Thornton, on the old familiar footing.

Just before Margaret's mother dies, her son, Frederick, returns briefly from his enforced exile abroad to see her. He has been seen close together with his sister at the railway-station, on his leaving Milton, by Mr. Thornton who believes him to be Margaret's lover. Frederick's visit has had to be kept a secret because he is on the run from the naval authorities - thus Mr. Thornton has grounds for suspicion concerning Margaret's behaviour. In coming to terms with this possibility, Mr. Thornton's delusions about Margaret's nature have to be questioned as does his faith, at least temporarily, in her continuing rectitude. Mr. Thornton's delusions about Margaret are one with his delusions about the necessary love relationship between man and woman for he believes that in such a relationship the man is meant to be the strong protector of the frail, helpless woman. After Margaret's mother's death, he nurses

...the idea that his great love might come in to comfort and console her; much the same kind of strange passionate pleasure which comes stinging through a mother's heart, when her drooping infant nestles close to her, and is dependant upon her for everything.(p.339)

Mrs. Gaskell is quick to add that this is a "delicious vision"(p.339) on Mr. Thornton's part. Yet, at the same time as he feels these misguided, inappropriate feelings, Mr. Thornton does see something of the real Margaret in believing that

he knew how she would love. He had not loved her without gaining that instinctive knowledge of what capabilities were in her. Her soul would walk in glorious sunlight if any man was worthy, by his power of loving, to win back her love.(p.339)

Frederick's visit causes more trouble than this though and through him Mrs. Gaskell advances her fictional aims a step further, for it causes Margaret to tell a lie, a sin considered by both her and later Mr. Thornton to be heinous in view of her much-vaunted "maiden purity".

To protect her brother from being found out to be in the country, Margaret tells a police inspector that she was not at the railway-station on the night when she farewelled Frederick. She is being sought as a witness to an accident on the station - an accident, in fact, involving her brother. Mr. Thornton turns out to be the magistrate involved in the case and dismisses the case, thereby preventing Margaret from being found out. However, he has seen Margaret at the station and knows that she has lied. When the inspector tells Margaret that she is no longer needed, she learns of this. It is this idea which finally disenchants Margaret about her past imagined position of superiority over Mr. Thornton and though she struggles against the idea of his knowledge and her new position, she cannot help but see the consequences:

She shrank from following out the premises to their conclusion, and so acknowledging to herself how much she valued his respect and good opinion. Whenever this idea presented itself to her at the end of a long avenue of thought, she turned away from following that path - she would not believe in it. (p.356)

At the same time as acknowledging how much she feels for Mr. Thornton, Margaret holds back from the idea that this feeling is more than the mere friendly regard she had hitherto sought to regain. It appears that Margaret's new humbled position has put her in a very vulnerable state in relation to her feelings and her moral status, as Mrs. Gaskell obviously intended that it should. This new state of Margaret's will make her more desirous of wanting Mr. Thornton's good opinion and wanting to become more mature in her behaviour so that she may be worthy to be his friend.

The following morning, Margaret discovers that Frederick was safely out of the country before she was approached by the inspector and that, therefore, she did not have to lie. Her awareness of the irony of her situation only makes her feel more debased and more indebted to Mr. Thornton. Her moral weakness, though excusable because she was protecting her brother, horrifies her for she sees herself now in a new light as other than she had formerly, proudly, done:

If she had but dared to bravely tell the truth as regarded herself, defying them to find out what she refused to tell

concerning another, how light of heart she would now have felt! Not humbled before God, as having failed in trust towards Him; not degraded and abased in Mr. Thornton's sight. She caught herself up at this with a miserable tremor; here was she classing his low opinion of her alongside with the displeasure of God. How was it that he haunted her imagination so persistently? What could it be? Why did she care for what he thought, in spite of all her pride; in spite of herself? She believed that she could have borne the sense of Almighty displeasure, because He knew all, and could read her penitence, and hear her cries for help in time to come. But Mr. Thornton - why did she tremble, and hide her face in the pillow? What strong feeling had overtaken her at last?

She sprang out of bed and prayed long and earnestly. It soothed and comforted her so to open her heart. But as soon as she reviewed her position she found the sting was still there; that she was not good enough, nor pure enough to be indifferent to the lowered opinion of a fellow creature: that the thought of how he must be looking upon her with contempt, stood between her and her sense of wrong-doing.(p.358)

Her association of cowardice with humility at the beginning of this passage, shows just how proud Margaret has been and now how self-condemning. Hence, for Mrs. Gaskell, it was fictionally necessary that Margaret should have been found to be imperfect for her maturation to occur. She is such a stiff, resistant person that she must be broken by circumstances or, more appropriately, as happens, by her own hand. The sting of being held in lower esteem by Mr. Thornton is exacerbated by the remembrance that he whom she believes now holds her in contempt was once the man towards whom she displayed contempt. Now, he is up on a pedestal, almost as high as God - but not quite. She has no delusions of love, as has Phillip Hepburn, in Sylvia's Lovers, most noticeably among others, of a mortal transcending that of her God. Indeed, Margaret completely misses, or perhaps tries to miss, the implications of Mr. Thornton's new position in her estimation. Mrs. Gaskell's meaning here is ambiguous: it is as if she herself is not sure whether or not to make Margaret aware of her new real feelings at this stage and so makes the subject a matter of irony, for the reader is in no doubt as to what these new feelings constitute. In either case, nevertheless, Margaret is shown to be immature in respect to this possible discovery, either out of true ignorance of herself or out of feigned ignorance, as a result of her fear of the truth concerning her feelings.

Shortly after Margaret's realization of her fall from her past superior stance, she expresses the desire to go to Mr. Thornton and have the opportunity of showing him her new-found humility and her intention of future honesty. Yet, like many of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, as was discussed at length in the case of Mary Barton, she feels circumscribed by her maidenly female role in not being able to act thus openly and honestly, as a man would be able to do. This chafing restrictiveness acts as a further mortifying force in Margaret's consciousness for, as she says: "It seems hard to lose him as a friend just when I had begun to feel his value."(p.385) Yet, again, it is necessary to ensure Margaret's new awareness and consequent change that she be thus humbled and penitent, and thus desirous of creating change in her self and her attitudes. She is learning a parallel lesson to the one which Mr. Thornton is learning in having been rejected by Margaret. He, too, has been a proud, unbending man who, on the surface has seemed mature but who, like Margaret, must have his eyes opened by suffering to his real nature and to his motives in his relationships with others. That he is suffering and is being humbled can be seen in his poor ability to cope at this stage of the novel when, on the surface, he appears to be more arrogant and inflexible than ever to hide his inner feelings of thwarted love and consequent shame:

Mr. Thornton was conscious that he had never been so irritable as he was now, in all his life long; he felt inclined to give a short abrupt answer, more like a bark than a speech, to every one that asked him a question; and this consciousness hurt his pride: he had always piqued himself on his self-control, and control himself he would. So the manner was subdued to a quiet deliberation, but the matter was even harder and sterner than common.(p.387)

Margaret has one further humiliation to endure: the visit by Mrs. Thornton, in which she proposes to speak to Margaret about her conduct at the station. She knows nothing of Margaret's lie but believes, as does her son, that she has a lover whom she was meeting near the out-of-the-way station. Mrs. Thornton is somewhat put off by Margaret's initial behaviour - she is too "gentle and ladylike"(p.391), in fact rather like her mother, for she sees this role as the mature and necessary one for the woman of the house to play with guests - but steels herself up to do what she sees to be her duty. Margaret at first

seems to be "...too much humbled not to bear any blame on this subject patiently and meekly."(p.392) Yet when Mrs. Thornton suggests that she has "lost her character", "Margarets' eyes flashed fire. This was a new idea - this was too insulting."(p.392) She reverts to her old habit of "throwing her head back with proud disdain, till her throat curved outwards like a swan's"(p.394), "and she swept out of [the room] with the noiseless grace of an offended princess."(p.394) Mrs. Thornton admires her for these renewed characteristics for they are evidence, to her, of strength of character. She does not see that they must be balanced by other qualities, such as thoughtfulness of others, tolerance and patience. Yet she sees that the "pride and spirit"(p.395) which Margaret displays makes her more than a match for her son in temper: "If John and you had come together," she thinks to herself "he would have had to keep a tight hand over you, to make you know your place."(p.395) Margaret's "spirit" has still to be modified in order for her "sense" to be able to come into balance with it.

After Mrs. Thornton has left the house, Margaret comes to the third new idea of enlightenment to her previously unconscious mind - that Mr. Thornton believes that she has a lover. At the same time, she admires him for his rectitude and thoughtfulness in not telling his mother all that he knows about the affair. This makes Margaret more proud of herself: that another - and that other being Mr. Thornton - should think her honour worth preserving: "She lifted up her head, as if she took pride in any delicacy of feeling which Mr. Thornton had shown."(p.400) Yet she does not feel herself to be worthy of his regard and feels that her life has become unendurable, with no future prospects. In this, she is being somewhat melodramatic but at the same time her train of thought forces her to face her inner mind, as never before, though she is loathe to do so:

'It is not merely that he knows of my falsehood, but he believes that some one else cares for me; and that I - Oh dear! oh dear! What shall I do? What do I mean? Why do I care what he thinks, beyond the mere loss of his good opinion as regards my telling the truth or not? I cannot tell. But I am very miserable! Oh, how unhappy this last year has been! I have passed out of childhood into old age. I have had no youth - no womanhood; the hopes of womanhood have closed for me - for I shall never marry; and I anticipate cares and sorrows just as if I were an old woman, and with the same fearful spirit. I am weary of this continual call upon me for strength. I could bear

up for papa; because that is a natural, pious duty. And I think I could bear up against - at any rate, I could have the energy to resent, Mrs. Thornton's unjust, impertinent suspicions. But it is hard to feel how completely he must misunderstand me. What has happened to make me so morbid to-day? I do not know. I only know I cannot help it. I must give way sometimes. No, I will not though,' said she, springing to her feet. 'I will not - I will not think of myself and my own position. I won't examine into my own feelings. It would be of no use now. Some time, if I live to be an old woman, I may sit over the fire, and, looking into the embers, see the life that might have been.'

All this time she was hastily putting on her things to go out. only stopping from time to time, to wipe her eyes, with an impatience of gesture at the tears that would come, in spite of all her bravery.

'I dare say, there's many a woman makes as sad a mistake as I have done, and only finds it out too late. And how proudly and impertinently I spoke to him that day! But I did not know then. It has come upon me little by little, and I don't know where it began. Now I won't give way. I shall find it difficult to behave in the same way to him, with this miserable consciousness upon me; but I will be very calm and very quiet, and say very little. But, to be sure, I may not see him; he keeps out of our way evidently. That would be worse than all. And yet no wonder that he avoids me, believing what he must about me.' (pp.400-401)

Margaret's first thoughts here are not unlike those of Mary Barton a short while before Jem proposes to her, in which she cannot understand, and tries to shrug off, recurring reflections about Jem, his personality and his ways, though she feels sure that she does not love him. Margaret's thoughts go from wonder at her own possible feelings to remembrance of the unhappiness of her past year in which not only have her home and family been almost destroyed by change but her self-confidence has been dislocated to the extent that she can see no clear future path, in her new-found self-understanding. This new clear-sightedness, part of her new maturity, because of the responsibilities which it entails, makes Margaret think that she has lost her youth, that time of joyous unthinkingness and independence. Yet, because of her feelings hidden hitherto, for Mr. Thornton, she feels that she can have no womanly future as wife and mother. This is because she now, for the first time, comes to realize that it is in relation to Mr. Thornton that she has seen herself in these roles. Thus, she says that now she will never marry. Her mature "strength" is not an easy quality to maintain for it entails self-denying devotion to

others which Margaret would be happy to embrace if it fell within the normal realms of married life. Like her creator, Margaret Hale has until now seen marriage as the desirable condition for women, though she does not believe that it is a state to rush into too early, as she feels her cousin, Edith, has. Now she herself, unlike her earlier self at the beginning of the novel, feels that she is old enough for marriage - and mature enough for the kind of marriage which she obviously envisages, as one between "mutually dependent"(p.169) partners, as she believes all relationships should be.

Margaret's repressed feelings for Mr. Thornton finally come close enough to the surface for her to recognize them, though she tries to avoid this confrontation for it is painful for her to realize that now that she loves Mr. Thornton she believes that he does not love her, and rightly so, in her moral code. She realizes, though, that it is not just the lie which has alienated her from Mr. Thornton's affections but also her earlier proud refusal of his proposal. Like Mr. Thornton himself, Margaret vows to pretend that her feelings for him do not exist when she is in his company, instead feigning calmness and quietness. Naturally, Margaret cannot always keep up this air of indifference - and neither can Mr. Thornton - and thus, in the end, they come to recognize kindred feelings in each other. However, this does not occur until both characters endure further trials and become more humbled and more mature as a result.

The next time that Margaret and Mr. Thornton meet, in the street, Mr. Thornton acts in an ungracious, childish way bespeaking his inner pain and confusion. Firstly he tells Margaret that he speaks to her only as a friend and, then, as she affects indifference in return, he becomes angry and declares that, in spite of his past proposal, all his former feelings for her are at an end. He is so blinded by his own mixed passions that he does not hear or see Margaret's sad, quiet reply but goes on to declare that there is no need for them to continue walking together now that Margaret is convinced that his past feelings have evaporated. As a result of this curious one-sided progression of thought of Mr. Thornton's, Margaret is left nonplussed and more resigned than ever to a lonely unfulfilled life:

'But I won't care for him. I surely am mistress enough of myself to control this wild, strange, miserable feeling, which tempted me even to betray my own dear Frederick, so that I might but regain his good opinion - the good opinion of a man who takes such pains to tell me that I am nothing to him. Come! poor little heart! be cheery and brave. We'll be a great deal to each other, if we are thrown off and left desolate.' (p.407)

Not long after this episode, Margaret has leisure to examine her thoughts, as her father has gone to Oxford to stay with his old tutor, Mr. Bell. Margaret has needed this time alone to think about her life and her future. In believing that there can now be no possibility of marriage with Mr. Thornton, she looks for alternative fulfilling duties. Because she cannot cope with the thought that they are not her first desire, she deludes herself into thinking that it is her chosen lot to do work for others and sees this thought as an enlightening revelation:

She almost blamed herself for having felt her solitude (and consequently his absence) as a relief; but these two days had set her up afresh, with new strength and brighter hope. Plans which had lately appeared to her in the guise of tasks, now appeared like pleasures. The morbid scales had fallen from her eyes, and she saw her position and her work more truly. If only Mr. Thornton would restore her the lost friendship, - nay, if he would only come from time to time to cheer her father as in former days, - though she should never see him, she felt as if the course of her future life, though not brilliant in prospect, might lie clear and even before her. She sighed as she rose up to go [to] bed. In spite of the 'One step's enough for me,' - in spite of the one plain duty of devotion to her father, - there lay at her heart an anxiety and a pang of sorrow. (p.429)

This is Margaret's newest delusion, her sixth and final one: that her life's work should be one of devotion to her father. Instead of disillusioning herself, as she believes she is, she is placing "the morbid scales" in front of her eyes so that she will not have to think of what might have been. Even the immature Mary Barton and Ruth Hilton never let themselves be so deceived as to misunderstand what their natural duties are, which are - to Mrs. Gaskell - their future maternal duties, even though they do not see that their rich lovers are philanderers who have no intention of marrying them. Possibly this is simply because they are not perceptive and reflective enough to put themselves in a position where they question themselves about their

roles. Both are given the gift of children: Mary Barton as part of the reward of marriage with Jem Wilson for her development to maturity; and Ruth as an incentive and a purpose for maturing. Mrs. Gaskell here is combining Margaret's seemingly hopeless circumstances (to Margaret) with her negative feelings about her future to show the reader that Margaret is by no means mature yet, and that she will not be fully so until she is re-united with Mr. Thornton. Margaret's "anxiety" and "pang of sorrow" are not merely the result of regret that she cannot be friends again with Mr. Thornton. It is clear from the tone of the whole passage that these feelings of Margaret's are due to her repressed understanding of her rightful place - by the side of Mr. Thornton as wife and mother. Men, for Mrs. Gaskell, have different aims and needs. Mr. Thornton matures through Margaret's influence and the good works he sets in motion for the workpeople are an example of this yet he, too, feels that he will never marry again because he cannot have Margaret. His life is not as hampered as Margaret's is by her sex; he can still be active and gain fulfillment. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gaskell tries to suggest, by showing Mr. Thornton to be in poor spirits, that he too needs to be complemented by Margaret in order to be perfectly fulfilled. Yet he has the edge on her in that he is allowed to be seen as mature in his behaviour before this event occurs. Despite all her efforts to be mature - for she does consciously strive to be so - Margaret is still self-deceived as to her womanly purpose.

Mr. Bell's comments to Margaret's father on the same night, just before Mr. Hale's death, are noteworthy in this regard. Of Margaret, he states: "she looks as grand and serene as one who has struggled, and may be struggling, and yet has the victory secure in sight. Yes, in spite of all her present anxieties, that was the look on her face."(p.431) Of course, he may be saying this simply to reassure Margaret's anxious father that his daughter is capable of looking after herself. Yet it does seem that Mrs. Gaskell is trying to say something more important about Margaret at this stage, without intruding authorially into the text. On the one hand, this statement can be seen as a wise insight into Margaret's present struggle to overcome her natural desires and be content with the role she sees as carved out for herself. On the other, Mr. Bell's words may be a prophetic vision of

her future life, in which she has become mature and has thrown over these illusions of filial duty as being her life-long function, thus enabling her to be open to the possibility of marriage with Mr. Thornton. To be consistent with what Mrs. Gaskell is saying in the novel, the latter interpretation is the one that rings true. In fact, this is consistent with the view which Mrs. Gaskell expresses in all her novels: that marriage for her heroines is the desired state, as long as it is entered into by two mature characters, with a mutual degree of affection. Sylvia Robson's marriage, in Sylvia's Lovers, fails because both Sylvia and Phillip are too immature to cope with their unequal degree of affection and questionable motives on both sides for the marriage. Ruth Hilton forfeited the right to marriage but is consoled with the birth of a child to fulfil her natural function. For Mrs. Gaskell, though relatively clear-sighted about the natures and prospects of her own daughters - though she hoped that they all would marry - is idealistic about her fictional characters' personalities and needs. She does not show single life for a woman to be a realistically-fulfilling alternative to marriage. Though in life she admired Florence Nightingale for her achievements, she thought that her love for humanity transcended her love of individuals and that, though that is praiseworthy in a pioneer of public welfare, it is not the true pursuit for a woman. Mrs. Gaskell actually points out the contrast between the modes, showing her own preference, a little later in the novel when Margaret looks at herself more closely in relation to the idea of change.

After her father's death, Margaret has to alter her ideas as to what she considers to be her duty. To make up for the "strange unsatisfied vacuum in [her] heart and mode of life"(p.458), Margaret decides to take on philanthropic duties. Before she comes to this decision, she is taken by Mr. Bell to visit Helstone for the first time since she left the village. In looking back at her past, Margaret comes to see her present and her future more clearly, as she does her own changed views. At first she is disheartened and depressed by what she sees: the combination of continuing barbaric superstitious customs, which she never seemed to have noticed before, and the changes brought about in the village by the new Vicar, in the name of

"improvements".(p.480) She is, finally, forced to come to grips with change and her own delusion of the need for permanence:

A sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment, overpowered Margaret. Nothing had been the same; and this slight, all-pervading instability, had given her greater pain than if all had been too entirely changed for her to recognise it.

'I begin to understand now what heaven must be - and, oh! the grandeur and repose of the words - "The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Everlasting! "From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." That sky above me looks as though it could not change, and yet it will. I am so tired - so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place; it is like the circle in which the victims of earthly passion eddy continually. I am in the mood in which women of another religion take the veil. I seek heavenly steadfastness in earthly monotony. If I were a Roman Catholic and could deaden my heart, stun it with some great blow, I might become a nun. But I should pine after my kind; no, not my kind, for love for my species could never fill my heart to the utter exclusion of love for individuals. Perhaps it ought to be so, perhaps not; I cannot decide to-night.'

Wearily she went to bed, wearily she arose in four or five hours' time. But with the morning came hope, and a brighter view of things.

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

At first, Margaret gives in to her old desire for the continuity of sameness because she wants to believe that it would give her inner peace and stability and, possibly, fulfillment. The vision of such change as she has witnessed makes her feel uncertain in herself and vulnerable, particularly as it reminds her of all the past changes and uncertainties - and present uncertainties - in her own life. Like the old woman she earlier imagined herself to be, who had passed through childhood and had missed out on her womanhood, she is tired of all the vagaries and uncertainties of her life. Her brittle, proud spirit has taken a battering and she feels as though she cannot cope with any

more. This is her last vestige of resistance to her own warm nature and its hidden desires breaking down for though she feels that she wants to be able to transcend her human condition, she knows that she cannot. She also realizes that she cannot be generally philanthropic for, unlike Florence Nightingale, as earlier mentioned, Margaret's love for individuals is greater than for her "species" as a whole. This is in direct contradiction to her intention, earlier put, as well as later, that she will devote her life to philanthropic pursuits. This statement seems to show that Margaret is at such a low point at this time that she can, for once, be honest with herself about her real nature and her real desires. It is obvious here that her love for individuals, like Mrs. Gaskell's own, is centred on the one thought of husband and family as nucleus of a circle of loving friends and an outer ring of recipients of comforts and advice. This realization only makes her uncertain as to whether or not it is right to feel this way. Of this stage in her thinking, David says: "That night she is overwhelmed by a loss of identity, which I think is a necessary prelude to her final discovery of herself as a woman."¹² Then she states:

In the morning, the anxiety is replaced by a recognition that she must look outside herself...and her awareness of her altered mood, of the capacity of the human psyche to adapt itself, to remain flexible, reconciles her to the notion of change itself. She gives up her moral absolutism, accepts the loss of a grassy wayside as a condition of enlightenment, and sees that the "reality" of Helstone, change and all, "is far more beautiful" than she had imagined it. All that remains is her reconciliation with Thornton.¹³

Not quite all. Margaret still has to come to terms with her past feelings of superiority and the effect of the lie that she felt impelled to tell on her own personality and moral values - not just in the eyes of Mr. Thornton. Until she has done this, she has not really taken a mature ethical stance on her own past behaviour in the light of her early beliefs. That is the moment when "she gives up her moral absolutism" and becomes emotionally "flexible". She also has to come to terms with her self-chastizing attitude, in which she sees herself as

¹²Deirdre David, Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.48.

¹³David, p.48.

more imperfect and more immature than she really is. She has been seen right from the beginning of the novel to be unselfish and thoughtful of others. She is being too self-denigrating in saying that she has hitherto thought too much of how circumstances affect her, for that has only been in relation to her deluded beliefs, outlined in this chapter. Again, a little later, she deprecates herself in saying: "And I too change perpetually - now this, now that - now disappointed and peevish because all is not exactly as I had pictured it."(p.489) Margaret Hale is never seen in the novel as petty or peevish - this false humility is probably the predictable reaction of a once-proud person to that past self. As Mrs. Gaskell puts it, concerning Margaret's feelings about change - "a few days afterwards she had found her level"(p.489) - the same can be said of this over-reaction which then melts as her perception of her faults falls back into balance with the positive aspects of that past pride and self-confidence. Her "right judgement", her "sense" is now more fully developed than she realizes or gives herself credit for.

Not long after this episode, Margaret learns of the death of her god-father and guardian, Mr. Bell. Her first reaction to this death of the third person to whom Margaret was close is to fall into a "heavy trance of almost superstitious hopelessness"(p.502). In her old nursery at her aunt Shaw's house, on her return to London, Margaret muses, prompted by this additional change in her life, on her life:

On some such night as this she remembered promising to herself to live as brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read or heard of in romance, a life sans peur and sans reproche; it had seemed to her then that she had only to will, and such a life would be accomplished. And now she had learnt that not only to will, but also to pray, was a necessary condition in the truly heroic. Trusting to herself, she had fallen. It was a just consequence of her sin, that all excuses for it, all temptation to it, should remain for ever unknown to the person in whose opinion it had sunk her lowest. She stood face to face at last with her sin. She knew it for what it was; Mr. Bell's kindly sophistry that nearly all men were guilty of equivocal actions, and that the motive ennobled the evil, had never had much real weight with her. Her own first thought of how, if she had known all, she might have fearlessly told the truth, seemed low and poor. Nay, even now, her anxiety to have her character for truth partially excused in Mr. Thornton's eyes, as Mr. Bell had promised to do, was a very small and petty consideration, now that she was afresh taught by death what life should be. If all the world spoke, acted, or kept

silence with intent to deceive, - if dearest interests were at stake, and dearest lives in peril, - if no one should ever know of her truth or her falsehood to measure out their honour or contempt for her by, straight alone where she stood, in the presence of God, she prayed that she might have strength to speak and act the truth for evermore.(pp.502-503)

Like George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke again, Margaret Hale has had adolescent longings to be a "brave and noble" heroine though Dorothea's was a more ascetic spiritual vision in which she pictured herself as a latter-day St. Theresa. Mrs. Gaskell's views about romantic "heroines" has already been discussed in the chapter on Mary Barton as often a matter of some irony. Here, in this novel, it is clear that Margaret's views are to be seen simply as the fantasies of an immature young girl who has yet to learn about the realities of life. These views, though, make it understandable in retrospect why Margaret had so much pride and so many feelings of superiority: because she felt that she was going to do great things in her life and be a morally whole and unimpeachable person. She has had to learn that having pride in oneself can be counter-productive, that it can make a person believe falsely that she is morally superior when, if she were more humble and open to experience, she could see her faults more clearly and consequently mature more easily. Hence, for Margaret, maturity has come at the great cost of loss of previously unquestioned self-esteem and self-confidence. Now she is finally, for her own sake and not for Mr. Thornton's, coming to terms with her lie. At the same time, she is coming to terms with the practical application of her earlier-formed theories of morality. Her belief early in the novel, as stated to her mother in relation to Frederick's mutiny that "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"(p.154) has been rescinded. Now she is saying that no matter what the consequences were to her vulnerable brother, she should not have lied to the authorities but stood upon truth and have been seen to be pure and untainted. No longer will she accept that the purity of her motives - as Mr. Bell saw it, that "you forgot yourself in thought for another"(p.484) - justifies her actions. Mrs. Gaskell's defence of Margaret's position concerning lies and deceit shows that her thinking has become more conventional and

conservative than it was in Ruth where, to the end, she defended the Bensons' need to lie in order to protect Ruth. One would think that Margaret's earlier statement showed an independent-thinking and therefore mature character, but Mrs. Gaskell is more interested in showing how mature characters must be in relation to each other than in isolation. The Benson case, in other words, was a special exception. In order to co-exist equitably with others, she is saying, a character must be able to be completely honest; she can stand up against injustice by all means, but without using lies and deceit to uphold her stance. In other words, she is saying that one should not use amoral means to gain morally-acceptable ends.

It is a bitter pill for Margaret to swallow to accept that she has sinned and is thereafter tainted by her sin. The memory of it will ensure that she will never again feel herself to be superior to others, either personally or as a representative of her class. However, although Margaret has fallen the furthest she can in her own estimation in coming to accept her wrong-doing, she is curiously relieved and strengthened by the admission. It takes time for reflection, though, for her self-confidence to be restored - though never to the level it was at the beginning, but to a more well-balanced level, where she sees herself as the equal of others and is hence more tolerant and open-minded. She has the opportunity for this necessary period of reflection when she goes with the Lennoxs' to the seaside. While others busy themselves with various occupations, Margaret sits on the beach and simply thinks. "But all this time for thought enabled Margaret to put events in their right places, as to origin and significance, both as regarded her past life and her future."(p.506) This time contrasts strongly with her earlier sea sojourn before she moved to Milton, in which she was afraid of looking too closely at her life and her self, when "it seemed as if she could dream her life away in such luxury of pensiveness, in which she made her present all in all, from not daring to think of the past, or wishing to contemplate the future."(p.96) That this marshalling of her thoughts has an effect on Margaret's self-esteem can be seen from the visible changes which occur in her. Of "the look that Margaret's face was gradually acquiring" (p.506), Mr. Henry Lennox says that now "her face [is] altogether so full of peace

and light."(p.507) The qualities which he admired in her years ago in Helstone have returned to the fore, but are intensified because of her development, including "the latent sweep of her mind"(p.507) which he desires to nurture on his favourite topics in his renewed efforts to woo her. He is, however, less to Margaret's liking than he has ever been but now for different reasons: she sees him as self-centred, materialistic, small-minded and as resistant to change and as superior in his attitudes to others as she once was.

As a result of her period of reflection, Margaret decides to make a life for herself independent of her aunt's lifestyle and strictures. She does this in the understandably mistaken belief that her future lot is to be a single woman forever. At the same time, though, she grapples with ideas that all women must, says Mrs. Gaskell, who have ambitions to do something worthwhile with their lives. This Mrs. Gaskell calls "...that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working."(p.508) Here, Mrs. Gaskell is writing of a situation which she herself has had to solve, as can be seen, for example, in her letters to Eliza Fox.¹⁴ Again, in her Life of Charlotte Brontë, she makes clear the dual nature of woman's role:

But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife. or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place: a woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents.¹⁵

As for Charlotte Brontë, so for herself, so for her fictional heroines: "There were separate duties belonging to each character - not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled."¹⁶ For Margaret, it appears that her two lives are as member of her aunt's household and as an individual woman seeking satisfaction from

¹⁴The Letters, letters 68 and 69, pp.106-109.

¹⁵Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë(London: Dent, 1946), p.238.

¹⁶Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.238.

philanthropic work. This duality of life-style, the reader is led to imagine, suits Margaret's independent, questing, ambitious nature and would, if possible, be carried on if she married. Only with the freedom to have part of her life as her own can she accept circumscription in other areas and maintain maturity. Unlike Mary Barton and Ruth, whose ideals and ambitions are so simple and thus in keeping with their limited chances in life, Margaret has a great deal of intelligence, perceptiveness and a long-standing desire to feel that she is achieving something with her life. Now, though, she has a more realistic idea of what she can achieve in comparison with her girlish fantasies of heroism.

She is also a more humble woman now. Both her pride and her strong will have been curbed to the extent necessary for her to co-exist with others without feeling alien or superior, and without wanting to dominate over or contradict others. She is now ready for Mr. Thornton to re-enter her life. He, too, has been humbled in the meantime by the loss of his mill because he was unwilling to speculate in risky ventures during a time of recession. While his fellow mill-owners are trying to make a fortune, "he waited, and stood on one side with profound humility."(p.518) When he comes to Margaret at the end, it is not as the aggressive, commanding mill-owner but as a dispossessed but not crushed man, who is now more proud of the fact that he is learning how to relate to his work-men than he is disheartened at having lost his mill. He is quite ready to admit his failure and his loss of self-esteem for, in truth, his heart now is not so much wrapped-up in power as in developing amicable relations with those without whom, he now sees, commercial success can be but a selfish satisfaction. He has come to this position only because he has listened to Margaret's earlier arguments about his "hands" being people on whom he is just as dependent as they are on him. In being able to control his pride and see another different point of view, Mr. Thornton has matured. He has also now, it must be owned, been made a more suitable candidate for marriage with Margaret, with her ideals of "mutual dependence."

Mr. Thornton is eager to show Margaret how humbled he has become, to show her that he is made of finer stuff - in that he is more

sensitive to others - than he imagines that she had previously thought him to be. He does not know that she, too, is also humbled now but from a different cause. He somehow instinctively knows that she will be pleased that his former men want to work with him again, proof of his new-found wisdom and sensibilities. Her "speaking eyes"(p.526) when he informs her of this tell him that she understands what he has gone through and what he has become, as much as what she feels for him. At the same time, she recognizes a kindred feeling for her in his "eloquent glance"(p.526) and her eyes drop at the realization that she may be showing too much of how she feels, an unmaidenly act. Unlike the earlier dropping of her eyes when Mr. Thornton proposed to her shortly after the riot, in which this was done to disguise her feelings of repugnance at his action and shame at her own ignominious position, Margaret has now to cover up her honest feelings of love. Unwittingly, too, she is showing that she cannot openly look at him simply as a sympathetic friend as she could with Mr. Lennox shortly after his proposal to her at the beginning of the novel when she dismissed the possibility of marriage with him from her mind. At the end, when she tries to treat Mr. Thornton as a friend whom she wants to help back onto his feet, Margaret has to "veil her luminous eyes"(p.529) from him when he imploringly calls her name. One suspects this is partly for the conventional reason, in Victorian fiction, of feminine coyness - out of character for Margaret - as well as because of her humble feelings of unworthiness, as she sees herself as "not good enough"(p.529) for Mr. Thornton. Here, Mrs. Gaskell is clearly trying to show that a balance of "mutual dependence" has been reached between the two characters. Margaret is in a position of supremacy over Mr. Thornton in being able to offer him restoration to his former position, but at the same time she sees herself as personally unworthy of him. However, as Mr. Thornton himself feels unworthy of her, it can be seen that Margaret has the edge on her lover with her financial power of giving him back his commercial status.

The reader is left at the end with the belief that Margaret is finally in the position where she can exercise her own maturely-decided authority over her life at the same time as fulfilling the role that she has so clearly longed for, as wife to a strong but just man.

Margaret is also in the position now where the reader can see her as a mature character and this can partly be inferred from the fact that she no longer sees herself as a unique and special person. Her necessary time of introspection and self-analysis, after her periods of suffering, has rendered her tolerant and acceptant of the world as it is and not as she would have it be. In allowing her delusions to be stripped away one by one, and often simultaneously, Margaret's character has been laid bare for her to examine herself and her motives. Now she is in a position in which she can see and act with more insight and "sense" to countermand her once proud, wilful behaviour and attitudes. Unlike the case for her predecessors in the earlier novels, maturation for Margaret is seen as a process in which her self-confidence and lofty standards of morality have had, in some measure, to be broken down, rather than built up, to a more acceptable level for her to fit into Mrs. Gaskell's category of mature females. However, Mrs. Gaskell has also tried to show how a female character with more scope for activity and self-determination than her former heroines had can demonstrate a more complex notion of female maturity than she has hitherto attempted. Indeed, of all her novels, North and South is the one in which Mrs. Gaskell is most ambitious both in her representation of the possibilities for a female character and in her delineation of a more finely-honed notion of maturity. After this, she turns her attention to a far less significant work in terms of female maturity in Sylvia's Lovers, before she returns to some of the ideas dealt with in this novel in her other great work concerning female maturation, Wives and Daughters.

In her developing complexity of the notion of female maturity in North and South, Mrs. Gaskell has given the reader greater insight into the notion of character itself. However, at the same time, she has not made it easy for the reader to see the point or points at which Margaret changes from an immature to a mature character. This does not lessen her achievement. Indeed, this treatment - in showing that maturation is not simply a matter of pressing an "on" button but a matter of a slow shedding of multiple illusions until a point is finally reached at which the author is satisfied that her character has matured - may be a more realistic representation of maturity and

therefore more interesting and relevant to the reader than a fictional technique which shows characters to be at one stage immature and then suddenly mature. This is not to suggest that Mrs. Gaskell's technique in her earlier novels is as stark as this for it is not. Even in her first novel, Mary Barton, the process, though catalyzed by a moment of enlightenment, is gradual and incremental. In North and South, Mrs. Gaskell's concept is at its zenith: the slow subtle revelation of Margaret's immaturity blends in with the equally measured delineation of her increasing maturity throughout the novel. For Margaret is not easily seen as immature at the beginning of the novel: it takes time and careful reading for the reader to see that she has been immature in the past, though generally the reader is allowed this insight before the moments when Margaret herself realizes this. There is, too, an overlap of discovered immaturity in one respect and developing maturity in others which makes the novel both enlightening and difficult to discuss. It is not, however, difficult to see, as I hope has been demonstrated in this chapter, that Margaret Hale does indeed develop in the novel from a fairly mature girl at first, in relation to Mrs. Gaskell's former heroines, to a disillusioned and subsequently clear-sighted and more completely mature woman in the end.

CHAPTER 4

SYLVIA ROBSON AND THE PROBLEM OF SELF-CONTROL

Sylvia Robson, in Sylvia's Lovers, is a simpler, more straightforward depiction of Mrs. Gaskell's conception of maturity than her complex portrayal of Margaret Hale in North and South. The rigours of writing such a difficult novel, followed by the onerous and painful task of putting together The Life of Charlotte Brontë, probably led her to turn to a pastoral, homely tale of the past for her next work. In this novel she is as much interested in showing the tragic repercussions of immaturity as in delineating the process of maturation. Both Sylvia Robson and Philip Hepburn mature as a result of their enlightenment concerning their past immature delusions but their maturity comes too late for them to be able to have their lost self-esteem and integrity restored for Philip dies not long after his revelation and Sylvia has been too embittered by her past immature behaviour ever to overcome her grief, though she comes to terms with her youthful delusions and her consequent bitterness. Philip, like Mr. Thornton in North and South, is a character who seems at first to be mature but who, in the course of the novel, is shown to have immature delusions. His, though, are only about one subject: Sylvia. In all other ways, his behaviour can be seen as mature. Because of his obsession with the idea of Sylvia, though, Philip's faultless morality collapses as a result of his deception of Sylvia. Sylvia, in contrast, is seen at the beginning of the novel to be, like Mary Barton and Ruth, a simple, artless, vain, loving, thoughtless, innocent girl. Unlike these two heroines, though, Sylvia Robson is happy in the security of a home and family, in which she is the petted only child.¹ Despite her seventeen years, Sylvia is childish still because she has few

¹ just as Mary Barton and Ruth once were before their parents' deaths.

responsibilities or anxieties to trouble her or make her take stock of her life. During the course of the novel, her passive dependence on others, combined with her lack of judgement and fore-thought, gives way to a desire to mature and become self-reliant, responsible and sensitive to others.

Most of Mrs. Gaskell's critics are in agreement that Sylvia learns and changes, through suffering. Pollard sees that this is a maturing process, one which starts fairly early in the novel:

Sylvia grows from a carefree young girl to a mature disillusioned, deeply wounded woman in all too short a time. At first she is shown as just a happy farm lass, but then at the funeral of Darley we hear about her first serious thoughts, of her arriving at the church thinking about her new cloak and of her leaving 'with life and death suddenly become real to her mind.' (p.79)²

Pollard maintains that Sylvia is already mature before she discovers Philip's duplicity, despite her impulsive, vindictive reaction to it, that she has previously been made mature "by extra-ordinary experience and suffering."³ As will be seen in this chapter, it is clear that Mrs. Gaskell did not intend Sylvia to be seen as mature until the end of the novel precisely because she is not until this point finally "disillusioned" about her feelings for the two men in her life and acceptant of more realistic and workable moral values. As Lansbury points out, of the young Sylvia, "Untroubled by any sense of moral alternatives, she lives in a world of elemental contrasts, resisting any kind of change, whether it comes in the form of education or ethics."⁴ It takes a series of disastrous events, culminating in Philip's fatal accident, to precipitate Sylvia into enlightenment and consciousness of her limitations. In her resistance to change, she is unreasoning and superstitious where Margaret Hale, in North and South, was simply insecure.

Franko sees the scene in which Sylvia discovers Philip's duplicity

²Pollard, p.216.

³Pollard, p.219.

⁴Lansbury, p.173.

as "the structural and thematic climax of the novel."⁵ After this "confrontation scene", she says: "the heroine experiences three kinds of spiritual deprivation, each of which helps prepare her for the ultimate tragic knowledge she acquires at the end of the novel. The loss of emotional security, the loss of moral certainty, and the loss of romantic illusion induce Sylvia's search for wisdom."⁶ Franko's idea of "wisdom" here, although she herself does not discuss the concept, can be tied in with the notion of "maturity" which Mrs. Gaskell expounds in this, as in all her other novels. In her "search for wisdom", Sylvia gains maturity though "maturity" stands for more than the word "wisdom" conventionally means, for it encompasses not only intellectual and moral qualities but also the emotional attributes that are part of the personality of a character. Inadvertently, I suspect, Franko is using the word "wisdom" here to mean something akin to the word "maturity" - at least the "sense" part of it, to use the terminology which is found in Mary Barton - as it is seen in this thesis in discussing Mrs. Gaskell's notion of female character development.

In Sylvia's Lovers, Mrs. Gaskell has drawn a character who, right from the beginning, clearly embodies many of the qualities which Mrs. Gaskell considers to be mature qualities. Hester Rose, an expanded development of the type of character which Margaret Jennings exemplified in Mary Barton, is seen in this novel as a paradigm of maturity. Sylvia herself sees her thus and, ultimately, comes to want to emulate her. She has enough of her own lively, impulsive qualities of "spirit", though, to develop in her own way, despite her desire to be like Hester. One suspects that, as in the case of Mary Barton and Margaret Jennings, Mrs. Gaskell prefers the less initially subdued and passive character - the one with more "spirit", even if her "sense" has to be developed - for, in every novel except Ruth, she is pre-occupied with this type of female character. In order to see how much Sylvia develops in the novel, it is appropriate to look first at Hester's

⁵Patricia Franko, The Emergence of Harmony: Development in the Novels of Mrs. Gaskell (Temple University, 1973), p.208.

⁶Franko, p.208.

character so that Sylvia's changes can be seen in contrast to the stable, dependable Hester. Then, too, Sylvia's transformation can be examined through the eyes of this exemplary character.

Hester is first seen as a quiet, reserved, neat character, "of a grave aspect, which made her look older than she really was."⁷ In this, she is very like Philip Hepburn. Her inner nature shows in her appearance: "Her grey eyes were very pleasant, because they looked at you so honestly and kindly; her mouth was slightly compressed, as most have it who are in the habit of restraining their feelings."(p.21) Though this self-restraint is intended to be seen as an admirable quality, the reader can see the limitations of a character who must exercise such great self-control as Hester does, as much to repress her own feelings as not to incommode others. Mrs. Gaskell does not fully endorse self-discipline to this extent, as can be seen in her treatment of her maturing characters though, at the same time, she clearly wants to be able to. Like Dickens, she is in two minds about female characters who are models of perfection but is cautious about speaking out her reservations about such ideal figures. Instead, she draws them and leaves them while she focusses her attention on the more flawed and interesting female characters who have to struggle to develop to a more realistic notion of maturity. In relation to Hester, Sylvia "was a great contrast; 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 the hour called out."(p.21.) Her childishness bespeaks a want of perceptiveness, tolerance or understanding of others, qualities which it takes much suffering and effort for her to adopt.

Hester is seen to be in love with Philip, with whom she works in the Fosters' shop, though none of the characters in the novel, except her mother, realize this. Hester has to resort to watching him with "quiet, modest, yet observant eyes"(p.103), so that her feelings will not be discovered. Indeed, she tries to tell herself that she does not

⁷Elizabeth Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers(London: Dent, 1964), p.21. All further references to the novel will be made to this edition and will be included in the text.

have such feelings because she sees them as wrong. In this, she shows herself to be a touch deluded yet Mrs. Gaskell does not want to spell this out for her argument in the novel is that one is deluding oneself if one thinks that love for a mortal should be greater than love for God. Hester definitely does not feel this way, as Philip Hepburn does about Sylvia. So, unperceived, Hester displays in Philip's presence "the little flush on the pale cheek, and the brightness in the half-veiled eyes whenever he was talking. She had not thought of love on either side. Love was a vanity, a worldliness not to be spoken about, or even thought about."(p.103) This self-discipline, even in her own mind to herself, causes Hester to suffer, too, just as Sylvia suffers from a lack of self-discipline later in impulsively sending Philip away from his home. It is at its most vulnerable when Hester has to cope with Philip's announcement of his imminent marriage to Sylvia and he asks her to help him in his preparations:

Never was such a quiet little bit of unconscious and unrecognised heroism. She really ended by such a conquest of self that she could absolutely sympathise with the proud expectant lover, and had quenched all envy of the beloved, in sympathy with the delight which she imagined Sylvia must experience when she discovered all these proofs of Philip's fond consideration and care. But it was a great strain on the heart, that source of life; and when Hester returned into the parlour after her deliberate survey of the house, she felt as weary and depressed in bodily strength as if she had gone through an illness of many days.(p.290)

But Hester learns to live with the marriage because she is "so truly good and pious"(p.297) and tries to come to love Sylvia, for whom at first she has felt little affection because she has seen her as flighty and self-centred. Indeed, at the end, she tries to do all in her power to reconcile Sylvia to her banished husband and to re-unite the estranged couple. She is seen throughout as a character whose qualities of selflessness, responsibility, loyalty, kindness and thoughtfulness, though more suited to her naturally quiet, thoughtful disposition than to a character like Sylvia, are ones which do not always come easily to her. Though she spends her life in serving others, she must struggle with herself in order to overcome her one self-directed desire: to gain happiness in giving Philip her love. This struggle is made more difficult for her throughout much of the novel because she believes that the woman whom Philip has chosen over herself is unworthy of him

and causes him great suffering. To the end, Hester never knows the part Philip's duplicity has played in his own downfall - Sylvia is noble enough never to tell her.

Sylvia, at the beginning of the novel, is surely Mrs. Gaskell's most immature heroine. Her spoilt wilfulness and self-centredness is partly the product of her upbringing as the only child of doting parents. As in the case of Margaret Hale, as pointed out by Mantovani, Mrs. Gaskell is perhaps showing that Sylvia will not mature until her parents are removed from the scene because they inhibit her maturation while she is dependent on them. However, there seems to be less of a case here for that argument. Sylvia's father is immature:

In fact, Daniel was very like a child in all the parts of his character. He was strongly affected by whatever was present, and apt to forget the absent. He acted on impulse, and too often had reason to be sorry for it; but he hated his sorrow too much to let it teach him wisdom for the future(p.213),

Her mother, though, her chief influence, is not so childish. She is, in fact, sensible, undemonstrative and straightforward, with an elementary but consistent moral code which she tries to impart to her daughter despite her husband's opposing negligent, indulgent influence.

The first quality which Sylvia admires in Hester, and in which she sees that she herself is deficient, is that of kindness towards others. After she leaves the Darley funeral - the point at which Pollard sees her take her first step towards maturity - and learns of Hester's kind conduct to Darley's sister. Sylvia wonders whether she, too, could be good if she were a Quaker. Shortly after this, she "ungraciously" tells Philip that she would "rayther be whipped"(p.67) than be taught by him to read and write. But: "A moment afterwards, she repented of her little spirt of unkindness, and thought that she should not like to die that night without making friends. Sudden death was very present in her thoughts since the funeral."(p.67) Sylvia's half-formed resolution to be good is because she is afraid of death, an attitude which Mrs. Gaskell shows, as in Ruth, to be immature. This incident is as important as the funeral scene preceding it in the development of Sylvia's character for it can be seen here that not only does she

recognize mature behaviour in others but that she herself wants to adopt such behaviour. She has, however, to contend with her own impulsive, thoughtless, self-seeking nature and so the struggle to mature will be protracted and difficult.

Sylvia's obvious immaturity at the beginning of the novel is combined with her innocence and her youthful delusions about the gallant specksioneer, Charley Kinraid, with whom she is infatuated - all a result of her protected life-style. It is contrasted with Philip Hepburn's immaturity which is solely a matter of his own delusions about Sylvia for, in all other ways, he is seen to be mature in the sober, responsible, self-repressed sense that Hester is: "He could not be merry and light-hearted like other young men; his nature was not cast in that mould; and the early sorrows that had left him a lonely orphan might have matured, but had not enlivened his character."(p.138) This is one of the rare occasions on which Mrs. Gaskell uses the word "maturity" and it is as a matter of character formation, not just of age. For some years Philip has entertained the hope that this very different sort of character will come to love him as he loves her and he has tried everything possible to achieve this end. As Mrs. Gaskell puts it, not long after Sylvia has started to feel flutterings of interest in Kinraid and is therefore gentle and friendly in her manner towards Philip:

He was not often carried away by delusions of his own creating; to-night he thought he had good ground for believing that by patient self-restraint he might win Sylvia's love. A year ago he had nearly earned her dislike by obtruding upon her looks and words betokening his passionate love. He alarmed her girlish coyness, as well as wearied her with the wish he had then felt that she should take an interest in his pursuits. But, with unusual wisdom, he had perceived his mistakes; it was many months now since he had betrayed, by word or look, that she was anything more to him than a little cousin to be cared for and protected when need was. The consequence was that she had become tamed, just as a wild animal is tamed; he had remained tranquil and impassive, almost as if he did not perceive her shy advances towards friendliness.(p.110)

Sylvia's behaviour towards Philip continues in this quiet, gentle vein as she becomes more deeply involved with Kinraid. Philip, not understanding the reason for this changed behaviour, sees it as a sign that Sylvia is maturing and approves of the change. With Kinraid,

Sylvia is not "tame" as she is with Philip: he sees her as "shy and wild in her look and manner"(p.158) and he, too, wants to tame and subdue her. His feelings for her, though, are seen as shallow in comparison to Philip's for he loves her for her beauty and her femininity - her "pretty modest ways"(p.122) - and does not mind her lack of attainments, or want her to learn any. With him, Sylvia's "girlish coyness" is not "alarmed" but rather pleasantly disturbed. He seems to her to be more suitable and to accord much better to her "ideal" of a husband than Philip does for "her ideal husband was different from Philip in every point, the two images never for an instant merged into one."(p.110) When she thinks of him, "her eyes looked trance-like, into a dim glorious future of life."(p.179) Thus it can be seen that both Sylvia and Philip are deluded in their ideals of their fitting mates: Sylvia thinks that she wants an exciting, handsome "hero" and Philip that the vivacious Sylvia is his perfect complement.

Sylvia's wilful childishness is intermixed with innocent childlikeness at times. In this, she resembles Ruth who was both to be pitied in her innocent vulnerability and to be censured for her passivity and lack of self-determination. Mrs. Gaskell wants her to be seen both as immature and therefore capable of maturing and unfortunate because of her limited moral training and therefore in need of learning and experience. With Sylvia, however, the combination works better because Mrs. Gaskell has not the difficult task of trying to exonerate her heroine completely from blame for her conduct as she has tried to do with Ruth in showing her to be always "pure". Despite the fact that she has a mother to cling to or, as I have suggested earlier, perhaps because of it, Sylvia is still dependent and openly childlike in her manifestation of that dependence. When Kinraid proposes to her, she hides her tearful face on his chest and so "he lulled and soothed her in his arms, as if she had been a weeping child and he her mother."(p.168) Philip makes excuses for her behaviour - even her attachment to Kinraid - in stating: "She's but a young lassie"(p.182), even though she is seventeen, older than both Mary Barton and Ruth were when they had to take their lives into their own hands and a little younger than Margaret Hale when she had to take on the responsibilities of her family without prior training. Hence, when Kinraid is impressed

by the naval authorities, Philip decides to withhold Kinraid's message to Sylvia that he will come back to marry her because Philip believes that Kinraid will be false to her and rationalizes that: "He felt like a mother withholding something injurious from the foolish wish of her plaining child."(p.202) With this patronizing attitude, complicated by his own love for Sylvia, Philip can be seen as partially self-deceiving in believing that his motives for deceit are noble.

Sylvia invites such patronage in her passive state, especially after Kinraid's disappearance when the light seems to go out of her life, leaving her depressed and "listless":

She now was rather glad to see [Philip] than otherwise. He brought some change into the heavy monotony of her life...Insensibly to herself she was becoming dependent on his timid devotion, his constant attention; and he, lover-like, once so attracted, in spite of his judgement, by her liveliness and piquancy, now doated on her languor, and thought her silence more sweet than words.(pp.232-233)

At this stage, Philip sees this new quietness and subdued "spirit" as evidence that Sylvia is maturing, that she is becoming aware of her past girlish foibles and trying to change. It is not until a little later that he sees these qualities for what they are: evidence that Sylvia has turned in on herself, that she is trying to hide from reality, that, in fact, she has become actively immature where she was once immature largely through ignorance of any other way of being. Sylvia breaks down even further when she learns that her father will hang for his part in the riot against the impressment-gang and Mrs. Gaskell says that "In that hour she lost all her early youth."(p.259) It is never clearer in Mrs. Gaskell's works than here that her concept of maturity does not simply mean growing-up for here she is saying that Sylvia has to grow up suddenly but it is a long and painful time before she can become mature. Despite the new responsibilities which she must take on in looking after her bereft mother, Sylvia resorts to passionate, childish threats that she will never forgive those who helped procure her father's sentence, even though she is told by others that it is noble to be merciful to others even if they have done wrong.

Not long after Sylvia and Philip become engaged, Philip starts to realize that something is wrong in Sylvia's behaviour and that he has misjudged the changes in her:

In general she obeyed his expressed wishes with gentle indifference, as if she had no preferences of her own; once or twice he found that she was doing what he desired out of the spirit of obedience, which, as her mother's daughter, she believed to be her duty towards her affianced husband. And this last motive for action depressed her lover more than anything. He wanted the old Sylvia back again; captious, capricious, wilful, haughty, merry, charming. Alas! that Sylvia was gone for ever.(p.283)

It pains Philip to see that Sylvia's strongest feeling towards him is one of gratitude for having taken care of her and her debilitated mother. Mrs. Gaskell is here showing what can happen when a female character gives in to the expectations of others concerning her role - as good, dutiful wife - without herself believing that it is what she wants, because she does not love her husband. Sylvia is only deluding herself in trying to take on this role and subduing her own nature, because of her lack of strong affection for Philip, in order not to have to face her own feelings.

There are changes in Sylvia, though, which bespeak a more mature character. One noticeable example is her altered attitude to dress and other such physical luxuries.⁸ At the opening of the novel, Sylvia is pre-occupied with the acquisition of a new cloak and chooses a bright red one over a sober grey one, even though it is a less practical colour, because she wants to look her best. Now, Philip cannot "win her by material advantages" for:

the old vanities had been burnt out of her by the hot iron of acute suffering. A great deal of passionate feeling still existed, concealed and latent; but at this period it appeared as though she were indifferent to most things, and had lost the power of either hoping or fearing much.(p.294)

No longer is she the happy, carefree, impulsive Sylvia who once irked Philip with her thoughtlessness and self-centredness. Now all her time is spent in devotion to her mother, for whom she cares with such gentle devotion that even Hester, who has hitherto, unwillingly, resented her for her place in Philip's affections, comes to love her: "Hester could

⁸This is not like the deluded Margaret Hale who thinks that she can forgo luxuries in her early pride and who, at the end, accepts that she will still dress well even if she takes her life into her own hands.

not but be touched with the young girl's manner to her mother - as tender and protecting as if their relation to each other had been reversed and she was lulling and tenderly soothing a wayward, frightened child."(p.292) In this manifestation of maturity, Sylvia has become more like Hester herself. Yet she cannot, and never will, be like Hester because, as Mrs. Gaskell makes clear, her personality is so very different that though she may take on many of the attributes of a character like Hester, there will always be basic differences between the two. For Sylvia, the struggle to be "truly good and pious"(p.297) will always be a much more difficult one than for Hester who has had, since her infancy, the influence of her unwordly, virtuous, principled mother, Alice Rose. Hester's mother, we are told, has had to learn the same lesson that Sylvia will later: that it is better to choose a life with an honest, upright man, even if he seems dull, than one with an extroverted ladies-man, who is likely to be revealed ultimately as fickle, shallow and egotistical. Hester, always prepared to accept the surface for the inner person in her non-analytical way, sees the changes in Sylvia in a different light to Philip: "Now the very change in Sylvia's whole manner and ways, which grieved and vexed Philip, made his wife the more attractive to Hester."(p.311) Even she, however, has inklings that the quiet, obedient, staid person that Sylvia has become is not like herself, that there is something wrong, though:

she could not understand how the very qualities she so admired in Sylvia were just what were so foreign to her nature that the husband, who had known her from a child, felt what an unnatural restraint she was putting upon herself, and would have hailed petulant words or wilful actions with an unspeakable thankfulness for relief.(p.311)

Sylvia finds it hard to cope with her new life as Philip's wife, confined to town-life and the habits of respectability which it brings with it. After the freedom of her childhood open-air farm-life, Sylvia feels a rebellious need for freedom from her restrictive circumstances and often steals out to the cliffs overlooking the sea, even after she has had her baby. It is not simply a need to escape from the oppressiveness of her house, however, that drives Sylvia to the sea-shore but also a need to escape from her relationship with Philip, about which she does not want to think too deeply and discover her own dubious motives for marriage and her lingering affection for Charley

Kinraid. In this running away to the safety of the "mother-like sea"(p.300), Sylvia is showing an immaturity akin to that of Mrs. Gaskell's other heroines who try to evade the knowledge of their own feelings and take avenues of escape from the possibility of confrontation with this knowledge. Mrs. Gaskell shows clearly in this novel that Sylvia's seeming maturity is really a transition from a state of innocence to one of willed immaturity, in which she is unable to take the responsibility for her own actions. Later, after Philip's disappearance, Sylvia plans to return to a "free country life once more"(p.357) and in this way escape from confining town-life and its associations with Philip, but her fancy, "her green, breezy vision"(p.357), gives way to the practical considerations dictated to her by Jeremiah Foster. But, near the end, Sylvia has become reconciled to her new life-style and no longer dreams of the freedom of the open air. This is partly because she is afraid of being seen in public as "a deserted wife"(p.409). Nevertheless, it is also an indication that she has accepted the responsibilities of her life as the woman of Philip's house, whether he is there or not, as she has accepted the reasons why, in the past, she had sought the freedom of the cliffs.

Sylvia's evasion of personal responsibility can no longer be ignored when she is confronted with the re-appearance of Kinraid. Her own dubious morality is forgotten, though, for a long time in her confused passions of love for Kinraid and anger with Philip. Again, she swears an oath to never forgive the one who has caused her the misery that she feels has been brought upon her by another's deceitful actions. This effectively banishes Philip from his home for, combined with his own feelings of guilt, he feels that Sylvia is justified in wanting to be rid of him, particularly as he compares himself unfavourably with the hero-figure, Kinraid, and "the comparison drove Philip from passive hopelessness to active despair."(p.331) Right from the beginning, Sylvia realizes that her reaction is ruthless and implacable and that she should be capable of some degree of forgiveness for Philip. Yet it is only when Jeremiah Foster, to whom she applies for help, agrees with her that Philip's concealment of the truth was "baseness"(p.354) that Sylvia's thoughts are ameliorated somewhat:

This acquiescence, which was perfectly honest on Jeremiah's

part, almost took Sylvia by surprise. Why might she not hate one who had been both cruel and base in his treatment of her? And yet she recoiled from the application of such hard terms by another to Philip, by a cool-judging and indifferent person, as she esteemed Jeremiah to be. From some inscrutable turn in her thoughts, she began to defend him, or at least to palliate the harsh judgement which she herself had been the first to pronounce.

'He were so tender to mother; she were dearly fond on him; he niver spared ought he could do for her, else I would niver ha' married him.' (p.354)

Like Margaret Hale in North and South who, when her mother and her brother speak ill of Mr. Thornton, finds herself coming round from disapproval of him to a more balanced appraisal of him, Sylvia's mind is opened to the possibility of a different way of looking at Philip. Like Margaret Hale, again, one of the strong causative factors in this change of heart is the man's gentle treatment of her ailing mother, something which betokens a well-meaning and thoughtful nature.

Sylvia advances a step further in her development when she realizes, 'as a consequence of her actions, that she is alone and incapable of properly looking after herself: "She was too much a child, too entirely unaccustomed to any independence of action, to do anything but leave herself in (Jeremiah Foster's) hands. Her very confession, made to him the day before, when she sought his counsel, seemed to place her at his disposal." (p.357) Jeremiah Foster's influence extends further than this in that he puts into her mind the complex ideas (to her) of good and evil and she decides both to learn to read and thereby to gain knowledge so that she can learn the difference and adopt a standard of Christian morality which she now realizes that she is sadly missing. Now she is recognizing her past state of ignorance, as one of her limitations, though only theoretically. At the same time, she is learning humility, patience and self-reliance.

Practically, Sylvia's ignorance of the world and its ways and of her own inner nature, is brought home when she learns of Kinraid's marriage, only a few months after she has seen him. This occurrence has a profound effect on her for it makes her compare him with Philip in other aspects than of his physical appearance and her romantic vision of him:

The idea was irresistably forced upon her that Philip would not have acted so; it would have taken long years before he could have been induced to put another on the throne she had once occupied. For the first time in her life she seemed to recognise the real nature of Philip's love.(p.374)

Now Sylvia is at the point of disillusionment concerning her past understanding of the two men. The passion, the "spirit", of which Sylvia was once capable and which Philip, when married to her, longed to see return because part of "her nature - vehement, demonstrative"(p.306), now is able to come to the fore when Sylvia defends her actions against her old friend, Molly Corney, now Mrs. Brunton, and Alice Rose who both blame her for Philip's disappearance, not knowing of his part in the cause for estrangement. Molly only remembers Sylvia as a placid young girl and tells her that she has "grown into a regular little vixen"(p.379). Sylvia's look of defiance, with "fire in her eyes"(p.379), however, is a good sign that she has now become more alive and aware than she was in her past benumbed state since her father's death and Kinraid's disappearance.

Alice Rose is aware now that Sylvia is trying to redeem herself for her past wilful cruelty towards Philip and that, in the process, she is maturing. She sees her as more humble, serious and patient where before she was "light-minded and full of vanity"(p.378). For, now that Sylvia has broken out of her state of passive indifference and mindless dependence, she really is starting to mature, not simply appearing to do so as she has previously, which has led Hester to believe that she was developing in "sense". Alice is more aware, it seems, of the difficulties of Sylvia's transformation than Hester, in her naïveté about natures different from her own, is capable of perceiving. Alice is right for, even before Sylvia's consciousness is shaken into action by the news of Kinraid's re-marriage, she has been endeavouring to act responsibly and thoughtfully for others, particularly since her mother's death which occurred on the day of Philip's disappearance. In this, she is unconsciously imitating Hester's ways:

...for her dear mother's sake Sylvia had a stock of patient love ready in her heart for all the aged and infirm that fell in her way. She never thought of seeking them out, as she knew that Hester did; but then she looked up to Hester as some one very remarkable for her goodness.(p.362)

That she is unconscious of her development can be seen in Mrs. Gaskell's words, reminiscent of those used of Ruth in her maturation, "No one knew much of what was passing in Sylvia; she did not know herself."(p.359) She is not only trying to carry out Hester's practices but also to learn the precepts which Hester follows unerringly, in going to Hester's mother to learn to read and understand the Bible.

Hester, however, is constantly battling with herself to act fairly towards Sylvia: "Hester, too, had her own private rebellion - hushed into submission by her gentle piety. If Sylvia had been able to make Philip happy, Hester could have felt lovingly and almost gratefully towards her; but Sylvia had failed in this."(p.357) Sylvia has detected coldness in Hester's manner towards her, though she is always patient and quiet, but Sylvia does not understand the cause for this changed behaviour since Philip's flight and sees it simply as the misapprehension of someone who does not understand what has preceded this flight. It is not until Alice has enlightened Sylvia about Hester's feelings for Philip that Sylvia comes to comprehend rightly what kind of a person Hester is, for she imagines herself in Hester's shoes and sees how very different her own behaviour would have been. As a result of this, Sylvia tries hard to regain Hester's former increasing fondness for her, believing that if she can achieve Hester's renewed approval of her she will have become acceptably mature. It is not, however, until Sylvia speaks to Hester that she realizes how very far she has to go to be like Hester. At the same time, though, she believes that Hester would think differently about Philip if she knew all, which the reader knows that she would not for Mrs. Gaskell has created Hester to be capable of forgiveness of others' wrongs, however great they may be, if they are penitent. Hester, selflessly, wants Sylvia to change and she tries to convince her that her own feelings for Philip are past for, as seen above, she would be content to know that Philip is loved properly by Sylvia as a "kind, good wife"(p.381), just the sort of wife which she believes that she, herself, would have been to him. Earlier, just after Philip has, unseen, left his home, Hester ponders on how easily she would have given Philip happiness in subjecting her own will to his. She does not realize, though the reader is intended to, that Philip, having known a girl like Sylvia, could

never be contented with this - conventional Victorian - male role, that he would want a woman with some "spirit", though naturally also with a lot of "sense" (to re-use the terms first proffered by Mrs. Gaskell in Mary Barton) to make for a more equal relationship.

In other words, this partnership would have to be one in which the woman would be mature, in terms of balance of "spirit" and "sense". But Mrs. Gaskell is saying more than this in this novel for Philip Hepburn is seen initially as a man of "sense" but devoid of "spirit" though he envies "spirit" in others. He, too, by the end of the novel gains maturity and clear-sightedness and, in the process, a degree of "spirit" in his genuinely heroic act in saving Kinraid's life in Palestine. Mrs. Gaskell clearly sees the ideal partnership as being that between two characters of "spirit" and "sense", as well as of clear-sightedness. Hester has "sense" but no "spirit" and so, despite her absence of illusions, she is seen as too selfless and giving to accord with Mrs. Gaskell's working ideal of maturity. As stated previously, she is a development of the type of character which Margaret Jennings first exemplified, in Mary Barton, and she is the ideal of the type of pure woman which Ruth, in the novel of that name, developed into after her disillusionment, though Mrs. Gaskell, at cross purposes with herself, tried to demonstrate also that Ruth had a degree of "spirit" in her personality which developed alongside her "sense". Mrs. Gaskell sees these characters as limited, even though they accord with a conventional Victorian ideal of maturity as seen in the work of lesser Victorian novelists.

When Sylvia is first told of Philip's heroism, by Kinraid's pretty little wife, she disbelieves that he is capable of such an act, but slowly the knowledge that he is capable of more than she has expected of him sinks in. Her changing feelings about Philip from the point when Kinraid's marriage is first made known to her onwards demonstrate the stages in her development towards maturity. As was the case with Mary Barton and Ruth, this development is not seen from within - as it was with Margaret Hale and will later be seen so with Molly Gibson - but from small actions and words perceived by others. Her development has already been examined in terms of her changing behaviour towards

others. Finally, though, it is seen in her altered attitude towards her husband as a result of her disillusionment about his nature and about that of her former lover. Near the end of the novel, in conversation with Kester, once her father's farm-hand and friend to Sylvia from her infancy, Sylvia shows both how much her feelings have changed and how open she is to change. Kester, who once favoured Kinraid over Philip because of the latter's grave nature and unmanly build - which he saw as unsuited to the spritely, passionate Sylvia - comes around to approving of Philip when told of Kinraid's marriage and of Philip's rescue of him. He cannot believe the latter at first, as Sylvia herself could not when she was first told. Sylvia has to assure him that Philip would not rather have helped Kinraid to be killed, as Kester suggests, but that it would be in character for him to save his enemy, for: "Philip had a deal o' good in him. And I dunnot think as he would have gone and married another woman so soon, if he'd been i' Kinraid's place."(p.406) At this stage, Sylvia still thinks that she cannot forgive Philip but she would like to believe that he is "doing well"(p.406). Yet, the news of Kinraid's marriage has had a - suppressed - effect on her feelings for Philip for, as she says now to Kester, "it gave me a shake in my heart, and I began for to wish I hadn't said all them words i' my passion."(p.406) Both Kester and Sylvia believe Philip to be dead and, in their superstitious way, to have had a spirit which saved Kinraid. When Kester points out that, unlike Kinraid, Philip's life would have been wasted after he had left Sylvia, she demonstrates her new-gained humility and tolerance in wishing that she had treated him kindly. Indeed, Mrs. Gaskell says that "her heart was softening, day by day"(p.412) towards him.

Hester, from Sylvia's words and manner about the subject, thinks that Sylvia's heart was "altogether hardened on this one point."(p.420) Yet it is not: "Poor little Sylvia! She was unforgiving, but not obdurate to the full extent of what Hester believed. Many a time since Philip went away had she unconsciously missed his protecting love."(p.419) In fact, as Mrs. Gaskell puts it, Sylvia is unforgiving not because she does not want to forgive Philip but because she believes that she cannot because she has made a vow against him which, "with all the weakness and superstition of her nature"(p.420), she

thinks that she cannot break. Yet this "weakness and superstition" are being undermined by new strong forces in Sylvia's nature which, with her new clear-sightedness, allow her to see others more realistically, as can be seen near the end of the novel:

After she had learnt that Kinraid was married, her heart had still more strongly turned to Philip; she thought that he had judged rightly in what he had given as the excuse for his double dealing; she was even more indignant at Kinraid's feebleness than she had any reason to be; and she began to learn the value of such enduring love as Philip's had been - lasting ever since the days when she first began to fancy what a man's love for a woman should be, when she had first shrunk from the tone of tenderness he put into his especial term for her, a girl of twelve, "Little lassie," as he was wont to call her. (p.419)

She sees that her former vision of Kinraid as strong and Philip as weak is illusory and that it is Kinraid who is "feeble" in his moral uncertainty and emotional fickleness. She even accepts that, in her former childish state, it was right for Philip to take control over her and patronizingly withhold information from her which he believed to be injurious to her. She knows now of her past immaturity in both these respects. Furthermore, she accepts that her early vision of her ideal man was illusory in comparison with the reality of Philip's abiding love, despite her own petulant behaviour towards him. She sees that the values which she now appreciates and tries to adopt are those which Philip could have taught her if she were prepared to learn and so would have saved both of them the pain which they are now suffering. Like Mary Barton, when she first realizes that underneath Jem Wilson's dull surface lies a passionate heart, Sylvia comes to value Philip's steadfast love for her which in its own way is as passionate, because long-burning and obsessive, as any sudden passion of which a man like Kinraid may be capable.

It is almost a relief to Sylvia for events to force her to be re-united with Philip, even though it is only to be for a short time, for she cries out, when she hears of his rescue of their daughter: "Oh Philip! Philip! is it yo' at last?" (p.421) It takes three attempts on Philip's part to ask her for her forgiveness before she can ask him for his. The last vestiges of stubborn pride and superstitious fear finally fall away as Sylvia comes to accept her past unjustness and selfishness

and pours out all her past wrong-doings before Philip. He is comforted, as he lies dying, by the fact that: "She knows me now." (p.427) Yet he cannot forgive himself for his past behaviour for he sees that, in treating Sylvia as an idol, he too has been deluded and immature. But Sylvia sees herself as far less virtuous than Philip and resolves to try harder to be good so that she can eventually join him in Heaven. In this, she sees him as much more mature than herself.

The reader knows, though, that Sylvia has, by the end of the novel, matured into a woman who, through becoming disillusioned, has endeavoured to develop towards maturity. Her initial adoption of mature-seeming behaviour in some respects, despite impressing a character like Hester Rose, is not seen as mature, rather as an immature shying away from self-awareness and reality. It is, though, the first step towards development in that it bespeaks a character affected by suffering and taken out of a state of innocence to the possibility of awareness. It only needs a moment of disillusionment for that awareness to surface, particularly once Sylvia is left alone to learn to cope for herself and her dependent daughter for, like Ruth Hilton before her, Sylvia's devotion to her child gives her a reason to strive to develop maturity. Again like Ruth, Sylvia has gained maturity too late to find happiness but it does help her to redeem herself for her past follies both in the eyes of others and, more importantly, in her own eyes. It is debateable, though, whether Sylvia's self-esteem and "spirit" are ever fully restored because her humble acceptance of her former immaturity is so great. One could not expect them to, given the circumstances. It would not be mature in her, to Mrs. Gaskell, if she regained her lost liveliness, remembering her great wrong and its consequences. Thus, of all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, Sylvia is the one who becomes most self-effacing, the most Hester-like, the most conventionally Victorian, in her womanly maturity.

CHAPTER 5

MOLLY GIBSON: THE FULLEST EMBODIMENT OF THE IDEA

By the end of Wives and Daughters Molly Gibson is the fullest embodiment of the idea of maturity that Mrs. Gaskell has been developing throughout her novels. She is first seen with the youthful freshness, vitality and innocence of heroines like Mary Barton, Ruth Hilton and Sylvia Robson. Yet, because of her social standing and her consequent greater expectations in life, she has some of the early attributes of Margaret Hale, for she is not circumscribed by her class as Mary Barton is, or by her rural environment as Sylvia Robson is, or by her early grave mistake as Ruth Hilton is, in the possibilities and influences open to her. However, Molly is not as complex a heroine or as intense as Margaret Hale. Unlike Margaret, Molly's adolescent fantasies are not grand and noble though, like Margaret, she is resistant to change and it is this desire for her life with her father to continue for ever which constitutes her girlish visions of the future.

Mrs. Gaskell has deliberately created Molly to be a less ambitious and difficult character than Margaret Hale because in this novel she has wanted to introduce a new type of heroine, in Cynthia Kirkpatrick, who does not fit into the formulation built up since Mary Barton of immature heroines who develop in the course of the novel to a mature state at the end. With Cynthia, Mrs. Gaskell is clearly questioning some of her own values invested in these other heroines, though her questioning is open-ended, as well as showing how important upbringing and moral foundation are to the possibility of personality development. Hitherto, all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines have had some degree of moral guidance in their early years, at the very least until their teens. Cynthia has had none. Mrs. Gaskell wants to demonstrate that Cynthia cannot mature because of this lack of fundamental training, though she

does develop to a degree. Cynthia does, however, in some respects, seem to be already mature from the beginning: in her awareness of her own nature and her limitations; and in her apparent clear-sightedness about the nature of the world, in comparison with other heroines' illusions, although it almost amounts to cynicism, an equally false but opposite view of the world to the romantic one. She is, nevertheless, capable of learning to cope better with, and take more control of, her own life and so, like Mrs. Gaskell's mature heroines, gains some degree of autonomy by the end of the novel. She can not be considered to mature in the way that Mrs. Gaskell's other heroines do, though, because she cannot develop moral virtues and achieve moral integrity. Her learning process is simply intellectual and, to a degree, because of her contact with Molly, emotional.

Mrs. Gaskell's notion of maturity in relation to Cynthia is not discussed by the critics. Sharps sees that Cynthia's negligent upbringing has made her miss out on "...the opportunity to establish those strong and intimate bonds necessary for emotional development"¹ which can be seen from an analysis of the novel to be a reasonable, though rather obvious, statement. Pollard believes that, in her "cynical" but "ruthless candour",² Cynthia is "so much more mature"³ than Molly who takes everything so seriously. His basis for this judgement is that Cynthia's actions "...in our less morally firm and more psychologically candid age provide glimpses of what may seem to us the greater humanity of Cynthia."⁴ Whether or not our age or hers can be so easily defined, Pollard's statement still seems dubious for, even now, maturity cannot simply be equated with apparent spontaneity and candid self-expression. Moreover, it is highly debateable whether this gives Cynthia "greater humanity" than Molly for, in any age, "humanity" surely has at least as much to do with how one relates to and cares for others as it does with how clearly one sees oneself and how much one shows - and, anyway, how much does Cynthia really show? - others of

¹John Sharps, *Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention*(London: Linden Press, 1970) ,p.507.

²Pollard, p.241.

³Pollard, p.240.

⁴Pollard, p.240.

one's inner nature. In any case, Pollard is abstracting Cynthia from the work and looking at her in isolation. This thesis discusses the characters as they appear in the novel in relation to each other and in the eyes of others - as Mrs. Gaskell's own vision and her notion of development intended them to be seen.

Molly Gibson often suffers a similar kind of truncation in being cut off from the novel and looked at purely in relation to a so-called modern perspective. This inevitably damns her as a Victorian curiosity about whom little else can be said than that she has many good qualities, that she is too perfect, to be realistic or to be acceptable to the modern reader. Partly because of this seemingly omniscient perspective, many critics do not see Molly as maturing. As Wright glibly puts it, she is like Sylvia Robson: "Molly Gibson is yet another study in the temperament and emotions of a young girl growing up and falling in love, although" he concedes "the character is no stereotype."⁵ Others, like Sawdey, see her as typically Victorian and compare her with Thackeray's Amelia Sedley, Trollope's Mary Thorne and Dickens' Esther Summerson. van Dullemen, for one, does not believe that any of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines develop in the novels. Others, like Lansbury, who does not believe that some of Mrs. Gaskell's earlier heroines mature, clearly see Molly as maturing. Initially, she points out: "Molly is the lumpish agglomeration of confused emotions that compose most immature girls."⁶ But then: "Molly grows and changes in the novel."⁷ Gerin sees Molly as Mrs. Gaskell's only heroine who matures:

what distinguishes her from her author's previous heroines is not only her class - she is a "lady" - but the gradualness and naturalness of her growth. Her childish ignorance is delightfully conveyed by her surprise at every new discovery about life. Margaret Hale in North and South was unmistakably a lady too, but she was already mature and the freshness of her reactions to events, which is so much a part of Molly's charm, is missing. Mary Barton, Ruth, Sylvia Robson, were care-worn and early caught up in the struggle of life; starved of

⁵Edgar Wright, Mrs Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.221.

⁶Lansbury, p.203.

⁷Lansbury, p.203.

happiness they had no time in which to develop, and remained confined within the limitations of their circumstances. They could not be expected to respond to life in the same way as Molly.⁸

She does not, like many other critics mentioned in the chapter on North and South, see that Margaret Hale's early maturity is partly an illusion, one which the reader must accept - as Margaret accepts her illusions - during the course of the novel. The other three heroines, as has been shown, clearly do mature despite "the limitations of their circumstances". One of the things which Mrs. Gaskell is saying - emphatically - in her works is that her heroines, of all classes and in all circumstances, given the needed moral support and background, can mature, generally by suffering. Hers is not the élitist view which Gérin superimposes upon her and of which many of her fellow Victorian novelists were guilty.

Axe states that: "Molly is a lovely and intelligent girl, but she is unformed. The series of trials which she must undergo serves to transform her into a woman of strength and character."⁹ I take it that her idea of "strength and character" is not dissimilar to the notion of maturity posited in this thesis. Sawdey's perspective is not quite so clear: she appears to confuse the process of growing-up with the ideas of maturation which Mrs. Gaskell suggests in her novels and which are under discussion here. On the one hand, she states bluntly that: "...in her last novel, Mrs. Gaskell offers a more subtle exploration of the human capacity for self-improvement and social progression than was possible in the early novels in which cataclysmic problems demanded melodramatic answers".¹⁰ This progression, "from adolescence to maturity"¹¹ is more akin to Richard Bradshaw's development, in Ruth, in

⁸Winifred Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) ,p.288.

⁹Axe, p.77. Then she mars her argument with the dubious and unbased idea that: "As is true of the heroines of all the novels, Molly must first discover herself before she can successfully create a world of her own. The creation of her world, in turn, serves to unify the entire society."(p.77.)

¹⁰Sawdey, p.175 - the latter idea is not true, by the way, as has been seen in previous chapters.

¹¹Sawdey, p.205.

which he learned to behave like an adult but was not considered to be mature; in other words, he learnt "self-improvement". On the other hand, Sawdey sees maturity as "the integrity of adulthood".¹² Mrs. Gaskell clearly sees integrity as a part of maturity, yet she does not equate the idea of integrity with that of adulthood for, as has been pointed out previously, Mrs. Gaskell does not see adulthood as constituting maturity; she has portrayed too many immature adults for Sawdey's equation to be at all plausible. Sawdey's idea of maturation is further divorced from that which is seen to be Mrs. Gaskell's in that she sees it simply as a matter of finding "...a sensible compromise between rebellion and submission in dealing with problems which sometimes have widespread implications."¹³ This is maturation in a very narrow sense of the word, involving only the development of "moral and intellectual judgement"¹⁴ in a girl who is supposedly always to have "sweetness...tempered by [a] healthy sense of selfhood and...altruism by [a] sturdy common sense."¹⁵ Sawdey completely neglects the emotional component which is very important in Molly's maturation, as it is with all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, for it is usually the emotional state or reaction to events which triggers off the intellectual and moral questioning and the ultimate development in all three aspects of her personality. Without this, maturation is seen merely as a matter of gaining worldly wisdom and acceptable behaviour. As Lansbury points out:

Molly feels strongly, and she apprehends the world first through her emotions. Later, a native commonsense and the trained rationality of men like Roger and her father teach her to balance her emotions with reasons. But neither of these teachers possesses her innate ability to estimate people by means of affective sympathy.¹⁶

In other words, the emotional, to Mrs. Gaskell, is an important part of character, one without which the other minor characters seem vapid and hollow, as Mrs. Gibson does in this novel and, it could be argued, one

¹²Sawdey, p.175.

¹³Sawdey, p.176.

¹⁴Sawdey, p.175.

¹⁵Sawdey, p.182.

¹⁶Lansbury, p.198.

without which a character cannot mature, for the emotional warmth and lovingness in a character is the factor which makes her want to learn to think of others. Unlike the self-centred Mrs. Gibson, Molly always sees herself in relation to others, except when she is undergoing stages of crisis in which her immature delusions are being exposed and confronted. Furthermore, in evidence against her argument, it can be seen that Sawdey denies the existence of the real subtleties of Mrs. Gaskell's portrayal which show that the young secure, though deluded, girl with a "healthy sense of selfhood" must lose that sense in the confusions of maturation until the mature state has been reached and her self-esteem and self-respect are restored, though now accompanied by a genuine self-understanding.

Margaret Ganz sees Molly as another example of the type of character earlier seen in Ruth, Margaret Hale and Margaret Legh(Jennings): "...basically serious, intelligent, patient, and sensitive, and, like these predecessors, is capable of empathy, forbearance, loyalty, and self-sacrifice."¹⁷ Cynthia, in contrast, is "...partly an inspired reworking of another type of heroine in Mrs. Gaskell's works: the rather frivolous, coquettish, thoughtless, and immature young girl of which Mary Barton is the first sketch and Sylvia the most complex example up to this point."¹⁸ Moreover, she states:"...the contrast between Mary Barton and Margaret Legh, between Sylvia and Hester Rose anticipates that presented by the two young girls in the Gibson household."¹⁹ There are two points of contention here. The first is that the former group are seen to be characters who are mature, or largely mature, and the latter immature. This is not the case, as has been demonstrated in the earlier chapters of this thesis, and will be further demonstrated in this chapter. In making this division, Ganz is denying the possibility of the latter characters, Mary Barton and Sylvia, to mature, which I hope I have shown that they can and do. In fact, contrary to Ganz's points of distinction, there are more qualities in common between Mary Barton and Sylvia and the

¹⁷Ganz, p.163.

¹⁸Ganz, 163.

¹⁹Ganz, p.163.

former heroines, as they develop through their novels, than there are between them and Cynthia Kirkpatrick. This point will be made more obvious when discussing Cynthia's character in this chapter.

The second point of contention is that Molly is like Margaret Jennings and Hester Rose in comparison with Cynthia Kirkpatrick, who is like Mary Barton and Sylvia Robson. Molly never becomes, nor is she intended to be, like Margaret Jennings and Hester Rose, any more than Mary Barton and Sylvia Robson are. The latter two see these worthy characters as exemplars of ideals to which they would like to aspire but, because of their other qualities, can never fully do so. Molly, in a similar vein, is too warm and vivacious ever to become the totally serious, self-effacing, virtuous heroine that Margaret Jennings and Hester Rose are from the beginning. Mrs. Gaskell has made it clear in both Mary Barton and Sylvia's Lovers that it is easier for these two characters to be thus because of their upbringings and certain innate qualities - one might even say limitations - of their personalities. Molly, despite some differences, is clearly the follower of all the primary heroines who have already been discussed in this thesis. In fact, she even has the qualities of one of the earlier, lesser, characters, Jemima Bradshaw, in her initial hot-headedness in defence of justice against the conventions and in her intellectual questioning of her female role. These are qualities which Margaret Hale also shares and which, like Jemima Bradshaw and Molly Gibson, she has to learn to curb in order to co-exist equably with others. In this alone, Molly Gibson can be seen to be very different from Margaret Jennings and Hester Rose, for whom self-control to the point of rigid self-repression has always been a willingly-accepted role.

Like the early Margaret Hale, Molly Gibson at the beginning of the novel is seen to be proud, stubborn, curious, wary of change, self-confident, and eager to serve her father. She, too, is deluded in several respects. Like Mary Barton, Ruth and Sylvia Robson, in the beginning, Molly is spontaneous, impulsive, responsive, warm and loving, but often unthinking and unthoughtful, unconstrained by training in etiquette, and dependent. In the earlier novels, the two types of character may have seemed to be very different but in Molly

they are combined naturally and realistically. This is because Mrs. Gaskell has developed the two different types to the furthest extent possible without adding new elements and because she is now such a master of characterization that she can amalgamate successfully seemingly contradictory characteristics. This developed talent also makes Cynthia the complex, unfathomable character that many critics are completely taken with.

Molly is seen initially as childish for at the beginning of the novel she is only twelve years old. Though she has lost her mother when very young, she has been sheltered and kept child-like by her father's careful upbringing and the attentions of her faithful nurse. In this, she is unlike Mary Barton, who is first seen at the age of thirteen with family responsibilities placed on her shoulders even before her mother's death. The openness of Molly's personality and the carefree nature of her early life is seen when she is confronted, for the first time, with a different kind of life-style at Lord Cumnor's family-seat, when she is left there after a village excursion in which she has taken part has returned home without her. Her immature personality and attitudes are seen clearly in her reaction to her detention there, when she is collected by her father:

Once out into the park Molly struck her pony, and urged him on as hard as he would go. Mr. Gibson called out at last:

'Molly! we're coming to the rabbit-holes; it's not safe to go at such a pace. Stop.' And as she drew rein he rode up alongside of her.

'We're getting into the shadow of the trees, and it's not safe riding fast here.'

'Oh! papa, I never was so glad in all life. I felt like a lighted candle when they're putting the extinguisher on it!'

'Did you? How d'ye know what the candle feels?'

'Oh, I don't know, but I did.' And again, after a pause she said: 'Oh, I am so glad to be here! It is so pleasant riding here in the open, free, fresh air, crushing out such a good smell from the dewy grass. Papa! are you there? I can't see you.'

He rode close up alongside of her: he was not sure but what she might be afraid of riding in the dark shadows, so he laid his hand upon hers.

'Oh! I am so glad to feel you,' squeezing his hand hard. 'Papa, I should like to get a chain like Ponto's, just as long as your longest round, and then I could fasten us two to each end of it, and when I wanted you I could pull, and if you didn't want to come, you could pull back again; but I should know you knew I wanted you, and we could never lose each other.'

'I'm rather lost in that plan of yours; the details, as you state them, are a little puzzling; but if I make them out rightly, I am to go about the country, like the donkeys on the common, with a clog fastened to my hind leg.'

'I don't mind your calling me a clog, if only we were fastened together.'

'But I do mind you calling me a donkey,' he replied.

'I never did. At least I didn't mean to. But it is such a comfort to know that I may be as rude as I like.'

'Is that what you've learnt from the grand company you've been keeping today? I expected to find you so polite and ceremonious that I read a few chapters of Sir Charles Grandison, in order to bring myself up to concert pitch.'

'Oh, I do hope I shall never be a lord or a lady.'²⁰

Although Molly has spent the evening writhing with shame, vexation and embarrassment at her treatment by the household, particularly by the ex-governess, Clare, she has been well-behaved and polite, contrary to what might be expected from her reactions here. Indeed, because she is an instinctively sensitive girl, aware that she might be considered a "careless intruder"(p.53.), she realizes that "the less trouble she gave, the more she kept herself out of observation, the better."(p.54.) Already she is capable of suppressing her usual passionate behaviour when she feels that it is necessary for others' convenience or comfort. However, here, she is obviously not comfortable in these surroundings and is therefore suppressing herself unwillingly. Her unconscious insight into the false manner of Mrs. Kirkpatrick, once Clare the governess, coupled with Molly's fear of the daunting formality of the nobility and the vast, elegant rooms of the Hall, leads her to express great relief at her freedom once she is out in the open air and with

²⁰Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp.58-59. All further references to the novel will be to this edition and will be included in the text.

her father again. The fresh air contrasts with the stifling constriction of the Hall; and is an element more suited to Molly's own nature and to her unrestricted home-life, as well as to her relationship with her father which transcends conventional father-daughter bonds. Beyond this, the idea of fresh air as an escape from troubling, stifling inner thoughts is used constantly in the novel. Later, Molly either goes out into the open air or throws open a window to let in fresh air whenever she cannot cope - not so much with events which disturb her but more with her own reactions to these events, unpleasant as the revelations they produce must be. In this, she is like the early Ruth Hilton and Sylvia Robson who sought the illusory freedom of the fresh air from oppressive thoughts and realizations.

Here, though, Molly is too young to examine and articulate her feelings in the way in which she later has to: she simply and effectively likens herself to a snuffed candle, stifled by people who have the power to extinguish the flame of her hitherto unquestioned sense of self. The image of the snuffed candle which Molly uses here is pertinent to her feelings throughout most of the novel though it is never overtly used again. Franko notes the importance of this image: "This statement, though humorous, provides a clue to the novel's central theme: for in Wives and Daughters, Molly Gibson strives to keep the flame of her individuality alive in spite of that enormous candle snuffer - social convention."²¹ This, however, is to over-simplify and, indeed, to distort what Mrs. Gaskell is doing in this novel for, though Molly feels at the time as though social convention will extinguish her light, feeling the first instance of her young vulnerability, she comes to learn that she can both be herself and accept social convention for what it is - in fact, that she can come to be a "lady", though not in the rigid sense she means above.²² However, the process of that discovery is a long and painful one, tied up as it is with her cherished illusions about her life.

²¹Franko, p.227.

²²As can be seen in her father's words following her outburst: "'I'm sure you'll never be a lord; and I think the chances are a thousand to one against you ever being the other, in the sense in which you mean.'" (p.59)

This image is also more complex than Franko assumes in that, bound up with Molly's sense of self - a more encompassing idea than that of her "individuality", which suggests a sense of isolation - is her sense of her union with her father being part of her existence. She does not, at this stage, see herself as separate from her father in the way that later, as she matures, she learns to accept herself to be. This feeling of a reciprocal bond is not in itself an illusion: it is the very real basis of her secure childhood existence. The thought which Molly later has that this bond can be shattered by her father's making of other bonds, is an illusion on Molly's part, as will be seen. Molly, however, is the first one to let go when once she realizes this for it is not until the end of the novel that her father accepts the break in the dependent-child and protective-father bond. This bond of mutual dependence is suggested in Molly's use of the "clog" and "donkey" images: her father teases her about them but it is in keeping with his treatment of her that he feels more for his daughter than he ever tells her for he does not, as a rule, show his feelings. Mrs. Gaskell explains that he "had rather a contempt for demonstrative people, arising from his medical insight into the consequences to health of uncontrolled feeling" (p.63), but adds that he "deceived himself into believing that still his reason was lord of all, because he had never fallen into the habit of expression on any other than purely intellectual subjects."(p.63)

Molly and Mr. Gibson's mutual possessiveness - the "clog" and "donkey" dependency - thus is generally a silent one, expressed in physical gestures rather than words. Molly's physicality, partly inherited from her mother and partly, one suspects, a means of showing her verbally reticent father her feelings in an acceptable way, is shown in this passage. It is part of her warm, demonstrative nature - of the type that Mr. Gibson does not disapprove, it seems - that her hands are so expressive. Her father, in this scene, appreciates how Molly feels and is flattered by the evident relief she shows at being again with him, even though he pretends that he does and is not, for he can tell how strongly she is feeling by the hard squeeze which she gives his hand. Not only is her fondling and clutching with her hands expressive of her feelings but also the holding, or not holding, of

someone's hands is seen to signify Molly's approval or disapproval of the person concerned or that person's words or actions. Even with increasing maturity, with the loosening of her immature, childhood bond with her father, Molly never comes to curb her instinct to show her feelings in her hands and this demonstrativeness is seen to be a valuable female attribute for it enables her to soothe and comfort those in distress.

At this early stage in Molly's life, she is comfortable in the narrow confines of her life for they suit her childhood state. She cannot envisage a time when her life will change. Generally, she is very happy with her life yet one thing which chafes Molly is the fact that her father is reluctant to give her a real education. He believes that it is enough for her, as a female, that she learn the womanly arts. Molly wants more than this and strives to be allowed to learn more "by fighting and struggling hard"(p.65). Mrs. Gaskell endorses this stance, it seems, for she says of Molly that "being daunted by her father in every intellectual attempt, she read every book that came in her way, almost with as much delight as if it had been forbidden."(p.65) Her avidity for knowledge is even stronger than that of Margaret Hale in North and South and is seen as a sign of a character desirous of more than a passive female role in life. Because she accepts that her father thinks that he knows best, Molly does not feel rancour at his prohibition. Yet this struggle is a predecessor to Molly's later battles, against circumstances and her own reactions to them, which force her to mature and become disillusioned.

One of Molly's early battles, this time against injustice being done to her governess, occurs when her nurse, Betty, continually attacks her governess, Miss Eyre: "Molly steadily resisted"(p.66) her influence but finally "...the girl flew out in...a violent passion of words in defence of her silent trembling governess"(p.67). Betty's reaction to Molly's actions is to call her a "little vixen"(p.67), a term used of Sylvia Robson in Sylvia's Lovers when her passionate "spirit" comes to the fore. Here, with Molly, it is the same sort of "spirit" which impels her to speak out her mind. Miss Eyre's reaction is to reprove Molly for giving vent to her temper, showing her for the

first time that it is not always admirable to give way to one's feelings if it results in hurting others - the same lesson which Betty should have learnt in the first place. This is what Sawdey sees as an example of social convention thwarting Molly's instincts but Mrs. Gaskell clearly does not want Miss Eyre's words to be seen thus. What Molly has to learn is to control her temper in thoughtfulness of others and, though Molly feels herself to be put out by Miss Eyre's reprimand, she nevertheless learns, from example, what mature behaviour in such instances means for she "began to respect Miss Eyre for her silent endurance of what evidently gave her far more pain than Betty imagined."(p.66) Though Miss Eyre's period of guardianship over Molly is brief, it is one of the influences which helps Molly to mature though never to the self-effacing Hester-like model which Miss Eyre represents for, like Sylvia, she has too much "spirit" ever to be able to take on such a degree of meekness and humility.

This episode in the novel serves to show the reader that Molly is endowed with "spirit" from childhood, as well as a sense of morality which perceives injustices and tries to right them.²³ Indeed, at this early stage, Molly's standards of morality, like Margaret Hale's before her, are too inflexible and intolerant to be workable. Molly's developing "sense", combined with later disillusionment, will show her that this is the case. In portraying Molly thus, Mrs. Gaskell is also making it clear from the outset that Molly is not a conventional passive Victorian heroine. Her manner and even her physical appearance annul any such assumption. In the above scene, Molly's desire to protect Miss Eyre from attack, which reminds Betty of a "hen-sparrow" fighting off a "hungry pussy-cat"(p.67) from her young, shows her to have the courage to stand up to others more powerful than herself, in the cause of justice. This is a much more accurate image of Molly than that of a "vixen". Throughout the novel, the idea of Molly as a small, protective native creature is seen and her brownish colouring, thick curly black hair and grey eyes all suggest naturalness rather than

²³Indeed, even at seventeen, Molly still shows impetuous "spirit" for "Molly had been once or twice called saucy and impertinent, and certainly a little sauciness came out now."(p.184), in speaking out her mind to the Miss Brownings.

"lady"-like control and artifice, in comparison with the Kirkpatrick women who are pink and white, with blue eyes and blonde hair: pastel, cultivated colours. As Molly matures, however, her colouring is tamed as is her wild nature by her desire for self-control, though she does not lose her individuality and naturalness.

At the next stage of the novel, when she is seventeen, Molly feels, in addition to her childlike adoration of her father, something of hero-worship for the unseen Osborne Hamley. Osborne's mother, whose one great passion in her otherwise restrictive, monotonous life is her talented son, quickly engages Molly in her interest in the young handsome heir who is, furthermore, a poet. To Molly, Osborne is the stuff of romantic imaginings in her "maiden fancy"(p.114). Thus, when she comes to meet his brother, Roger, Molly is pre-disposed to think less well of him than of Osborne. Indeed, her first feelings concerning Roger are those of dislike mixed with a spirit of "mute opposition"(p.121) because he has divulged his once-brilliant brother's failures at Cambridge to his parents. At this stage, Roger seems, to Molly, to be ugly, unfeeling, awkward and loud - the antithesis of the handsome Osborne whom she has imagined, from Mrs. Hamley's words, to be superlative to all men in all things. It takes time and suffering for Molly to come to see Roger's worth and the reality of Osborne's nature, for her ideas about the two men to change and for her romantic illusions to dissipate.

On this night, Molly is incapable, in her state of "unconscious fealty"(p.118) to Osborne, of seeing Roger as he is for she is "...indignant - with or without reason - against Roger, who seemed to have brought the reality of bad news as an offering of first-fruits on his return home."(p.118) Molly's spontaneous physicality, which brings relief to the heart-broken Mrs. Hamley, is contrasted with Roger's coolness and politeness of manner when she offers to shake hands with him and he simply bows in return. Her hands, ready to show affection, are rejected and this wounds Molly.²⁴ It takes the lesson learnt from

²⁴Her hands show her opposition to Roger's manner when she "testified with quiet vehemence" (p.120) against accepting Osborne's favourite wine, opened by his father out of anger with his elder son, for she placed "her small brown hand over the top of the glass"(p.120).

later coming to know Roger, among other things, for Molly to be more chary in her first meetings when her judgements may be prejudiced. That her first judgement of Roger is biased and delusory can be seen from Mrs. Gaskell's description of him, which assesses him fairly, pointing out both his good and bad points, followed by Molly's opinion for "To Molly, who was not finely discriminate in her glances at the stranger this first night, he simply appeared 'heavy-looking, clumsy', and 'a person she was sure she should never get on with'."(p.119) Molly's unrealistic assessment of Roger, contingent as it is upon her equally partial idea of Osborne's character, is matched by Roger's own misguided view of Molly. Though he is seen to be a capable, honest, loving, decent, responsible and diligent man - all mature qualities - he is immature in respect to women because of inexperience and a perverse belief in a fixed, unrealistic ideal type of woman. As Mrs. Gaskell puts it: "He was at that age when young men admire a formed beauty more than a face with any amount of future capability of loveliness"(p.119). Roger's inability to see beneath the surface of women, however, cannot be condemned simply as a propensity of youth for, as is seen in the novel, Mrs. Kirkpatrick's chief source of attraction to Mr. Gibson is in her superficial qualities, which lead him to believe that she is the embodiment of the wife-mother figure which he thinks that he and his daughter need.

It is while Molly is staying with the Hamleys that her father tells her of his imminent second marriage, designed principally for the sake of his unprotected, marriageable daughter. As he fumbles about trying to express himself - for he knows that she is not going to like what he has to tell her - Molly feels an instinctive dread and draws her hand out of his, signifying her present distrust of him for, to her, it seems as though her father has gotten her out of the way so that he could woo Mrs. Kirkpatrick, the Clare whom she felt so uncomfortable with at the Towers when she was younger, and now his affianced bride. On the contrary, her father's part in the whole business has been so slight, despite his motives working in that direction, that he himself seems surprised when he actually proposes to Mrs. Kirkpatrick and "...the question as to its wisdom came into his mind the instant that the words were said past recall."(p.140) The

realization that this one relatively unpremeditated action in an otherwise carefully reflective man, one which he sees that he may possibly regret, makes it more difficult for him to face his daughter. Molly uses the kind of straightforward "quiet dry voice"(p.145) that he normally does, when guessing what he has to say.²⁵ Yet, once the effect of the idea hits her, Molly can no longer be so composed and cool. Her "unnatural"(p.145) silence is a mask covering her inner confusion:

She did not answer. She could not tell what words to use. She was afraid of saying anything, lest the passion of anger, dislike, indignation - whatever it was that was boiling up in her breast - should find vent in cries and screams, or worse, in raging words that could never be forgotten. It was as if the piece of solid ground on which she stood had broken from the shore, and she was drifting out to the infinite sea alone.(p.145)

Like the heroines discussed in earlier chapters, Molly is incapable at first of thinking clearly. However, because her life until now has been so sheltered and secure, Molly is totally unprepared for such a revelation and cannot come to see clearly at this stage, unlike these earlier heroines. Molly feels suddenly awfully alienated and alone and deludes herself into thinking that her past close relationship with her father is now broken asunder. At the same time, her delusion of permanence is broken: no longer can her life go on in the same comfortable way. It will take time and counsel from others before Molly can come to accept this. At present, she is too passionately, unreasoningly, hurt to do more than try to contain her feelings behind jealous, resentful words: "Out of the bitterness of her heart she spoke, but she was roused out of her assumed impassiveness by the effect produced."(p.146) As her father jumps up to leave, Molly can no longer contain her inner feelings and in trying to excuse her behaviour only makes matters worse as she calls out: "'Oh, papa, papa - I'm not myself - I don't know what to say about this hateful - detestable -'"(p.146) No longer can she command the dry sarcastic tone so reminiscent of her father's. Now, he reverts to his old cool tone in

²⁵Mrs. Gaskell notes near the end of the novel a more general similarity between the two in : "...the quiet sensible manner which she inherited from her father."(p.686)

telling her, as he leaves: "'I think it's better for both of us, for me to go away now. We may say things difficult to forget. We are both much agitated. By tomorrow we shall be more composed.'"(p.146)

Mr. Gibson's words are an attempt to halt Molly's emotional reaction and make her think. However, he over-estimates her power of self-control concerning this great upheaval of her life, thereby showing himself to be both a little callous and unaware of the degree of effect of such an announcement. He also under-estimates her in that he is unaware of her real nature, an awareness which could have made his marriage of convenience unnecessary, for she is seen to have an already acquired sense of honour, justice and rectitude - in other words a well-developed "sense". Like Margaret Hale, her "sense" is prevalent from an early age, as is her "spirit". Her chief source of immaturity lies in her illusions about her life: her belief in the stability and permanence of her present life-style and her consequent fear of change, again like Margaret Hale; her belief in the hero-figure as a paragon of manhood, like Sylvia Robson and Ruth Hilton; and her delusions in the bulk of the novel, after this last delusion has been dispelled, about her feelings for Roger. In this she is like Mary Barton, Margaret Hale and Sylvia Robson, though Mary Barton comes to a state of disillusionment fairly early in the novel. Thus, because of her "sense", there was no need for Molly to have a moral guardian to protect her from the wrong kind of men. In fact, some of the most revealing and important scenes of the novel centre on the very fact that Molly's sense of decency and probity come into conflict with her step-mother's dubious and convenient morality, called up for the sake of propriety. Indeed, with any other young girl, Mrs. Gibson's amorality, her scheming and manipulation of others, could have had disastrous consequences. Her effect on her own daughter, despite Cynthia's strong, stubborn will, is evidence enough of this. Nevertheless, Molly Gibson remains untainted by Mrs. Gibson throughout the novel and her initial feelings of repugnance and jealousy give way to an attitude of tolerant acceptance of her step-mother's selfishness, snobbishness and hypocrisy as characteristics which cannot be done away with - as Mr. Gibson must also come to realize and accept and to live with the knowledge that he has made an irredeemable mistake. In both

cases, though, this does not happen until near the end of the novel. Molly's adjustment to this way of viewing Mrs. Gibson is seen as part of her maturation process, and the stages of this adjustment coincide with stages of her development in other respects, principally in relation to her feelings for Roger.

At this stage in the novel, Roger becomes more to Molly than the insensitive, uncouth brother of her hero, for it is Roger who comforts Molly after she has been shattered by her father's news. Molly's over-reaction, as she seeks private shelter, is to believe that "no one would know what became of her - and, with the ingratitude of misery, she added to herself, no one would care."(p.147) This shows her to be childish and dependent still. When Roger finds her and hears of the news, she appears childlike and passive, unable to help herself, for "her poor wistful eyes were filling with tears as they met his, with a dumb appeal for sympathy. Her look was much more eloquent than her words."(p.150) This idea is continued a little later when Roger leads Molly back to the house. In her weakened state, she stumbles and he takes her hand: "He still held her hand when the occasion was past; this little physical failure impressed on his heart how young and helpless she was."(p.152) Roger responds initially to Molly's emotions in searching out her underlying feelings. However, when this does not bring out much response and does not appear to have helped her, Roger changes tactics and tells Molly the story of a girl in a similar situation to her own, who ends up living happily with her step-mother because, as Roger puts it, "with something of severe brevity", "'Harriet thought of her father's happiness before she thought of her own.'"(p.151) Though Roger does not know the future Mrs. Gibson and Molly does - enough to suspect that their relationship will not be as happy as Harriet's was with her step-mother - his "philosophizing"(p.152) does help Molly to see life in a new light. Hitherto, she has only seen others as in relation to herself and has been resistant to, and mistrustful of, the idea of new people in her life. Roger's other dictum, that "'It is right to hope for the best about everybody, and not to expect the worst'"(p.152) is fine in theory, but very difficult for Molly to apply to her new step-mother though she does try to see the best in Mrs. Gibson and to make the best

of her co-existence with her, and increasingly succeeds in doing both in the course of the novel.

Molly unconsciously carries out Roger's words immediately - to think more of others than herself - by coming to lunch with Mrs. Hamley and Roger so as not to incommode the invalid Mrs. Hamley, when she would much rather be by herself: "To their surprise, Molly came in, trying hard to look as usual. She had bathed her eyes, and arranged her hair; and was making a great struggle to keep from crying, and to bring her voice into order."(p.153) In this struggle, unlike her earlier struggle against her father for a better education, Molly is fighting against her own feelings of weakness and helplessness. In coming to control these feelings, Molly is learning to become independent and self-assured. This effort at self-control is short-lived, though, for Mrs. Hamley allows Molly to divulge her feelings when Roger leaves them alone together so that she can give her the womanly kind of comfort which Roger, with his "lecture"(p.154), was unable to give. Yet it makes the next attempt easier - that she has tried and partially succeeded - when she is faced with Mrs. Kirkpatrick for the first time since that early incident when she was twelve. In the meantime, Molly has regained some strength in feeling penitence for her behaviour towards her father and in being silently forgiven by him. In this, she is again showing how she is practising thinking of others before herself, for she is happily prepared to forget his part in her unhappiness in her desire to be restored to her former place in his esteem.

Molly's meeting with Mrs. Kirkpatrick is a real test of her self-control for, this time, her self-control is at loggerheads with her pride and her sense of decency. Mrs. Kirkpatrick's overtures that she and Molly will love each other gains the response: "'I'll try,' said Molly bravely; and then she could not finish her sentence."(p.160) Mrs. Kirkpatrick's gushing sentimentality, which she uses here to charm Molly and because the joy of her catch - of Mr. Gibson - is still fresh, clashes with Molly's simplicity, straightforwardness and

honesty.²⁶ When Mrs. Kirkpatrick presumes to know Molly's father's feelings for her, "Molly's colour flashed into her face. She did not want an assurance of her own father's love from this strange woman. She could not help being angry; all she could do was to keep silent."(p.161) The image of the "vixen" (p.67) comes to mind again, but this time Molly is better controlled and stops herself from breaking out in passionate words - it helps her that here she is only trying to protect herself, not another, as she was with Miss Eyre. Mrs. Kirkpatrick's insistence on the first place in Mr. Gibson's affections, implied in her words concerning Molly: "'You don't know how he speaks of you; 'his little treasure', as he calls you. I'm almost jealous sometimes'"(p.161) really angers Molly: "Molly took her hand away, and her heart began to harden; these speeches were so discordant to her. But she set her teeth together, and 'tried to be good'."(p.161)²⁷ Fortunately for the normally obtuse Mrs. Kirkpatrick, when it comes to realizing other people's feelings, she sees "...the cloud in Molly's eyes"(p.161) of anger and distrust and turns to asking her about her father's likes and dislikes. This has the required effect of mollifying Molly²⁸ :

Molly's face cleared a little; of course she did know. She had not watched and loved him so long without believing that she understood him better than any one else: though how he had come to like Mrs. Kirkpatrick enough to wish to marry her, was an unsolved problem that she unconsciously put aside as inexplicable.(p.161)

This problem is to recur continually throughout the novel and it often causes her much unhappiness. As has been pointed out earlier, even Mr. Gibson himself does not really know why he chose to marry her, except that she is circumstantially "suitable"(p.145). In this, Mr. Gibson can be seen as somewhat immature in his delusions about a fitting mate

²⁶Here, Mrs. Kirkpatrick goes into raptures over Molly's and Mr. Gibson's dark, curly hair and grey eyes. Later, when she finds out how different their natures are from her expectations, she complains that Molly's appearance is not lady-like enough, tries to straighten her hair, and so on. She complains then too, that Mr. Gibson is not the romantic man she once thought him to be, unlike her first husband.

²⁷Note the hand again as indicator of Molly's feelings.

²⁸One wonders if that is why she is called Molly for she later becomes the appeaser, the peacemaker, the mollifier.

for he has chosen Mrs. Gibson out of a combination of practical and aesthetic reasons, without knowing the essential woman, and that, as Mrs. Gaskell clearly shows in this and other novels, is not a sufficient basis for a happy marriage. In this novel, she compares implicitly the Gibson marriage with that of the Hamleys, which was a love-match though the two were unsuited to each other in many ways, and with that of the Cumnors which, though obviously never passionate, is based on mutual affection and complementarity.

Mrs. Gaskell contrasts Molly's self-control, which is a matter of unselfishly thinking of others, with Mrs. Kirkpatrick's, which is a matter of getting what she wants without appearing to do so, at the same time as making herself appear more sophisticated and lady-like in others' eyes, as in the scene immediately following this exchange, in Lady Cumnor's morning-room. When Molly's control breaks, as she bursts out at Lady Cumnor's suggestion that she stay with Mrs. Kirkpatrick until the latter's wedding, she tries to make up for the hurt she thinks she has caused Mrs. Kirkpatrick: "she put her hand into her future stepmother's with the prettiest and most trustful action"(p.165) and tells her that she will try to love her. Ironically, Mrs. Kirkpatrick has not wanted this plan adopted either but she has not spoken out because she has not found a suitably genteel excuse for her opposition to the plan. Molly need not have worried about hurting her feelings. Mrs. Kirkpatrick's self-control is rather a matter of inner weakness and vacuity, wherein she is afraid of being accused of not behaving with propriety, where Molly's is of the self-negating variety epitomised in Hester Rose, in Sylvia's Lovers. Her outburst, though, and her later "touchy"(p.166) behaviour when catechized by Lady Cumnor, show that she has something of the spirited pride and defensiveness of a Margaret Hale. The two are irreconcilable. Molly, like Margaret Hale, will learn humility and patience but, like Margaret Hale, she will never become a Hester Rose - and Mrs. Gaskell does not want her to. The contrast between Molly's and Mrs. Kirkpatrick's kinds of self-repression is further brought out in this exchange after Lady Cumnor has accused Molly's father of having been extravagant with Molly's education in giving her a governess:

Molly did not speak, but it was by a strong effort that she

kept silence. Mrs. Kirkpatrick fondled her hand more perseveringly than ever, hoping thus to express a sufficient amount of sympathy to prevent her from saying anything injudicious. But her caress had become wearisome to Molly, and only irritated her nerves. She took her hand out of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's, with a slight manifestation of impatience.(p.167)

It can clearly be seen that Molly is trying to control herself from causing hurt to her interlocutor, although she herself feels hurt, whereas Mrs. Gibson is simply trying to make sure that Molly behaves with propriety and does not offend the dignity of the great Lady, for that would reflect on herself as Molly's future relative. Molly senses Mrs. Kirkpatrick's motives in her caresses and will not accept being coerced: she wants to show herself that she is controlled by her own free will. This is not just a matter of stubborn pride, but of a desire to be good, as Roger Hamley exhorted her to be, and to give herself some self-esteem at the same time in being thoughtful and not selfishly impulsive and rude.

Molly finds it hard to accept her new step-mother on that lady's artificial terms. Where, when Mrs. Hamley made affectionate approaches to her, Molly responded spontaneously and easily, she now finds it hard to be natural with this woman whom she does not instinctively feel likes her and whom she does not particularly like in return. It is for form's sake alone, and to ease her transition into Molly's life and Molly's home, that Mrs. Kirkpatrick insists on walking round the grounds with Molly:

...with their arms round each other's waists, or hand in hand, like two babes in the wood; Mrs. Kirkpatrick active in such endearments, Molly passive, and feeling within herself very shy and strange; for she had that particular kind of shy modesty which makes any one uncomfortable at receiving caresses from a person towards whom the heart does not go forth with an impulsive welcome.(p.167)

This does not lull Molly into a false sense of security with her new step-mother; indeed, it makes her more wary. The exchange between Mrs. Kirkpatrick and her father a little later makes her feel justified in her wariness for she finds that they share a secret which she herself knows nothing about. Suddenly she feels alienated and alone again, just as she did when her father told her of his marriage-proposal:

A bitter pang of jealousy made her heartsick. She might as well go to Ashcombe, or anywhere else, now. Thinking more of others' happiness than of her own was very fine; but did it not mean giving up her very individuality, quenching all the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself? Yet in this deadness lay her only comfort; or so it seemed.(p.169)

As was the case when Molly was a little girl, held captive in the Towers, when she felt stifled like a quenched candle, Molly now feels that the flame of her individuality has to be stamped out in order for her to live peaceably with others, if she is to be unselfish and thoughtful. Though this is what "it seemed" to Molly, Mrs. Gaskell is here showing that such thoughts on Molly's part, though a stage further advanced than her purely emotional reaction to her father's news earlier, are still muddled and fraught with the emotions of insecurity, dependence, fear and deep distrust of her father's actions and motives, and sheer, profound unhappiness. Molly can only see, at this stage, that she can either live for herself, as she thinks that her father and his fiancée do, or give up any feelings of her own worth or importance and be as one dead: good, obedient, but dead, numbed into a complete forgetfulness of self. This last train of thought is simply too much for Molly. As soon as she is safely out of view in the carriage, "she burst into a passion of tears, and cried her fill till she reached the village of Hamley."(p.169) Mrs. Gaskell wants the reader to see that, in this, Molly is not showing herself to be weak and childish for she "...had held up all the day bravely"(p.169) and when she nears the Hamley house, "...she tried in vain to smooth her face into smiles, and do away with the other signs of her grief."(p.169)

As she feels further and further estranged from her father, Molly comes to rely more and more on Roger for comfort and support. However, he offers her more than this: he gives her the chance to take an interest in things outside of herself and her world in stirring up her curiosity in natural history. Her old desire for knowledge comes to the fore again as she comes to take an active interest in the subject, and he becomes her mentor. Roger is aware, too, of Molly's "brave" struggles "...to be cheerful, in spite of her own private grief, for his mother's sake."(p.172) Molly, in turn, knows that he feels for her and values his practical help and his advice. In this, too, he becomes something of a Mentor-figure to Molly for: "She felt that he did her

good, she did not know why or how; but after a talk with him, she always fancied that she had got the clue to goodness and peace, whatever befell." (p.172) Mrs. Gaskell makes it quite clear, though, that Roger is no more to Molly at this stage than a brotherly teacher, that her idea of the person who would be "the future owner of [her] whole heart"(p.182) is someone like her conception of Osborne: "now a troubadour, and now a knight, such as he wrote about in one of his own poems."(p.182) Indeed, when the Miss Brownings suggest that something romantic is happening between Roger and Molly, Molly thinks: "'I would rather never be married at all...than marry an ugly man - and dear good Mr. Roger is really ugly; I don't think one could even call him plain.'"(p.200) Thus, when Molly is confronted with the reality of Osborne for the first time, she is somewhat disappointed. In "trying to reconcile the ideal with the real"(p.203), Molly finds Osborne to be more "effeminate", "cold" and "dainty"(p.203) than she had imagined. Yet Molly continues to misjudge Osborne in believing that he is "good"(p.229), which even Mrs. Hamley calls "the girl's impetuous romance"(p.229) and Mrs. Gaskell calls "...Molly's strong partisanship, unreasonable and ignorant though it was".(p.229) It is not until she finds out about his secret, romantic marriage that Molly sees Osborne as he really is: self-centred, weak, passive, dependent and deluded. This dual realization puts an end to her own romantic fantasies about love and marriage and reminds her of the need for realistic compatibility. Like Roger, her sense of morality makes it impossible for her to condone Osborne's actions for, like Roger, she sees that Osborne has put himself "in a false position."(p.310)

In coming to learn self-control and "goodness", Molly does not, as she herself initially believes she will, lose her personal identity. In fact, what she does learn is the appropriate degree of self-control for the circumstances she is in and the people she is with.²⁹ Her "spirit" is not crushed by increasing "sense" as she thinks that it will be, but it is a long time before she herself comes to realize

²⁹This kind of flexibility is not to be confused with Cynthia's fluctuations of manner to appear acceptable to everyone, as can be seen in this chapter.

this. One person in the novel who accepts and appreciates Molly for what she is is Lady Harriet, who calls Molly "a little wild creature"(p.195) which she says that she wants to tame. In actual fact, she wants Molly to be simply herself for she finds her naturalness, honesty and simplicity refreshing after the constricting propriety of aristocratic life. In Lady Harriet's exchanges with Molly, the reader learns, long before Molly does, the difference between what Molly called the "deadness" of "goodness" and the self-directed desire to think of others. When Lady Harriet describes Mrs. Kirkpatrick as a manipulator, Molly's reaction is very revealing: "'I should hate to be managed,' said Molly indignantly. 'I'll try and do what she wishes for papa's sake, if she'll only tell me outright; but I should dislike to be trapped into anything.'"(p.195) In this, Molly is showing, not that she resists being thoughtful of others and obedient to others, but that she wants to be autonomous, to be able to choose for herself to do as others would like or would appreciate. In this, she is showing her desire for maturity, for this kind of free choosing is part of being independent and responsible for oneself and one's actions. That Molly accepts such a stance is very important to her later decisions which, on the surface, appear to be socially unacceptable, though until that stage she is not aware of her autonomy. It also shows one fundamental way in which Molly can then be seen as mature where Cynthia is not.

As in her earlier novels, though to a much greater extent here, Mrs. Gaskell binds season to mood in her susceptible characters: to simplify, cold weather is equated with lonely, unhappy heroines; warm, sunny weather with happy, calm ones; and spring, of course, represents the budding of hope in her heroines' breasts. In Wives and Daughters, these metaphors are used constantly in this sense but another element is added. As stated early in this chapter, Molly is a creature of the fresh air: when she is miserable, she must burst out from indoors to breathe, to find solace and the days in which she can relax in warm breezes are her happiest. The contrast of Mrs. Hamley's death with the daily petty pre-occupations of the Gibson household once Mrs. Kirkpatrick and her daughter have come to it is just one example of this: "She loathed the small vanities with which she was surrounded, and would wander out into the frosty garden, and pace the walk, which

was both sheltered and concealed by evergreens."(p.256) Her earlier seeking of sanctuary in a similarly isolated and protected spot in the Hamley garden on hearing of her father's re-marriage is another obvious instance. Throughout most of the novel, until Molly can come to terms with her real feelings for Roger, Mrs. Gaskell blends Molly's inner consciousness with the environment around her - though the whole is done in the third person - to show how sensitive and physically responsive Molly is at this stage. A most revealing passage in this respect occurs just before Mrs. Hamley's death:

Molly went into the garden, thinking over the last summer, when Mrs. Hamley's sofa used to be placed under the old cedar-tree on the lawn, and when the warm air seemed to be scented with roses and sweetbriar. Now, the trees leafless, there was no sweet odour in the keen frosty air; and looking up at the house, there were the white sheets of blinds, shutting out the pale winter sky from the invalid's room. Then she thought of the day her father had brought her the news of his second marriage: the thicket was tangled with dead weeds and rime and hoar-frost; and the beautiful fine articulations of branches and boughs and delicate twigs were all intertwined in leafless distinctness against the sky. Could she ever be so passionately unhappy again? Was it goodness, or was it numbness, that made her feel as though life was too short to be troubled much about anything? Death seemed the only reality. She had neither energy nor heart to walk far or briskly; and turned back towards the house.(p.245)

In this passage, one can see that Molly has grown a step more defeatist and self-pitying than when she earlier equated "goodness" with "deadness" and felt that "her very individuality", "the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself"(p.169) was being quashed by her efforts at caring for others more than herself. The third sentence is a masterly juxtaposition of Molly's reflection of events which caused her much misery with the description of bare winter vegetation, almost as if the "thickets" and "twigs" were parts of Molly's own mind, tangled with bitter and unhappy thoughts. She feels that she is as passive and dependent and powerless as the trees in the inevitable might of the seasons. She cannot accept yet that, unlike the inanimate things of nature, she can have some degree of control over her own life, primarily in gaining control over her feelings and learning to accept the inevitability of change as part of reality. Thus, at this stage of the novel, when she is unhappy, Molly appears to be morose, dull, quiescent and submissive. Generally, though, she makes the effort to be

more lively and vivacious, loving and warm, and spontaneous, especially when not in the presence of her step-mother. This obstruction to her freedom - Mrs. Gibson's querulous domestic authority - causes Molly to have other reasons for enjoying the out-of-doors life for Mrs. Gibson rarely leaves the house. Mr. Gibson, in contrast, has always spent a great deal of his time out-of-doors because of his far-reaching practice. Molly is like him, in this as in other things, in her preference for such an environment.

From her first appearance in the novel, Cynthia contrasts strongly with Molly. Something of her nature has already been imparted to the reader in Lady Harriet's words to Molly: "'She's the prettiest creature that you ever saw; and with eyes that mean mischief, if I'm not mistaken. But Clare kept her spirit under pretty well when she was staying with us - afraid of her being troublesome, I fancy.'"(p.194) She has "spirit", though it has been bruised by her up-bringing but, as will be seen, little "sense". "Cynthia's unconscious power of fascination"(p.254) works immediately on Molly, who wants "to devote herself to the new-comer's service."(p.254) Mrs. Gaskell explains Cynthia's power as being one of "adaptation to varying people and still more various moods." (pp.254-255) In this, she is like her mother, for this adaptation bespeaks a character who wants to impress others. Her changes of behaviour, unlike Molly's, are not for others' benefit but for the reflected commendation of others. Again, she is like her mother and unlike Molly in her standards of morality, as would be expected of a character who is prepared to behave in certain ways just to make an impression on others, for: "Cynthia was not remarkable for unflinching morality."(p.255) Partly because of this and partly because of her early independence and self-acceptance, Cynthia appears to Molly to have "...the free stately step of some wild animal of the forest."(p.255) However, this appearance is delusory, as the ensuing events of the novel show, whereas Molly's strengthening sense of self, combined with her high standard of morality, really does free her from both the constraints of mere social convention and those of a shallow, insecure personality, which Cynthia has, and which she can never escape. Molly finds it very hard to accept Cynthia's lack of standards and her emotional deficiencies, though Cynthia explains them both as a

consequence of her mother's neglect of her as a child, something which denied her the necessary love and security for a happy and stable upbringing. Mrs. Gaskell endorses this idea - that this is not merely a matter of vanity in Cynthia but of a deep-seated need to compensate for her lonely, unguided childhood - at several stages in the novel.

Cynthia is aware of her own moral failings and has learnt to mask her deficiencies in two ways: firstly, by being totally honest about some of them; and secondly by making sure that other people do not get close enough to her to notice her real flaws. Cynthia is only prepared to use the first method with those whom she comes to love and trust, as much as she can love or trust anybody, namely Molly and Mr. Gibson. The second she uses to keep all others at bay. The reason why she breaks off her engagement with Roger later is because her continued relationship with him would have to put him in the first category, which Cynthia resists because she wants her future husband to think her perfect. Cynthia is almost proud to declare to Molly that: "...steady, every-day goodness is beyond me. I must be a moral kangaroo!"(p.258), despite her protestations that she wishes she were good and could love people as Molly does. Her humility can be seen as rather false, with a touch of self-mockery, as is supported by her own words: "'Perhaps I might be a heroine still, but I shall never be a good woman, I know.'"(p.258) There is an element of the boastful in this statement. As well, it constitutes a plea for clemency from others in any future morally dubious actions. This idea is discordant to Molly, to whom "...'goodness' just then seemed to her to be the only enduring thing in the world."(p.258) Molly tries to enjoin Cynthia to follow the same sort of injunctions which she herself has learned from Roger, but to no avail. Cynthia believes that it is too difficult for her to change and, furthermore, that Molly is too serious and too truthful. For one of Cynthia's self-defences is to seem wilful, childish and flippant, thereby covering up the bitterness engendered by her mother's past treatment of her.

In contrast to the description earlier mentioned of Molly as a "wild creature"(Lady Harriet's comment) and the very early physical description of her as a little brown, native animal, Cynthia appears

kittenish, with her "playfulness" and her "softness"(p.259). She is, despite her apparent freedom in Molly's eyes, a tamed, domestic creature who is in her element in civilized surroundings. This is particularly the case when she is in the company of men for, unlike Molly who is at this stage of her life unaware of sexual attraction, Cynthia is very aware of the sex of those around her and treats the sexes differentially: from a playful, wilful creature, Cynthia changes to a winsome, gentle pet in her passivity with men. When Osborne Hamley arrives for the first time at the Gibson house, Cynthia "...was extremely quiet; she was always much quieter with men than with women; it was part of the charm of her soft allurements that she was so passive."(p.269) For Roger, she goes even further:

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

This "armour", which is both protection from having her inner self seen and attraction to the naïve Roger, deludes Roger into seeing Cynthia as something akin to his earlier-imagined feminine ideal. Earlier, when Molly tried to imagine her ideal husband, Roger fantasized about his future wife: "Roger looked to find a grand woman, his equal, and his empress; beautiful in person, serene in wisdom, ready for counsel, as was Egeria."(p.182)³⁰ Unlike the earlier-deluded Molly, Roger's fantasy does not dissipate when he is faced with a real woman - he is deluded anew that this woman whom he hardly knows fits into his ideal and "...of all the victims to Cynthia's charms he fell most prone and abject."(p.277) A little later, it is seen that though Roger is "A strong man in everything else, about her he was as a child", "an

³⁰The "armour" image is also reminiscent of the difference between the Miss Brownings' ideas of a suitable husband for Molly and her own: "Yet Miss Brownings, who did not look upon young men as if their natural costume was a helmet and a suit of armour, thought Mr. Roger Hamley a very personable young fellow."(p.200)

unreasoning child."(p.391)³¹Mrs. Gaskell, in showing Roger thus deluded, is telling her reader that though Roger has a great deal of "sense" - though not much "spirit" in comparison to her "spirited" women - he is not mature at this stage of the novel.³² It is not until nearly the end of the novel that Roger is disillusioned both about Cynthia and about his interpretation of his ideal woman; that he becomes clear-sighted and realizes that it is Molly Gibson who epitomizes that ideal and who has the "sweet goodness"(p.419) which he once, mistakenly, thought that Cynthia possessed.

Molly, though not suspicious by nature, is observant and is the first person to discover the nature of Roger's attachment to Cynthia. Her first presage as to what his feelings may be brings out a touch of the reaction she had to her first presage of her father's re-marriage. Because of that precedent, Molly is quick to criticize herself for her over-reaction "and she exaggerated its wrongness to herself: "mean", and "envious of Cynthia", and "ill-natured", and "selfish", were the terms she kept applying to herself; but it did no good, she was just as naughty at the last as at the first."(p.311) In her efforts to be good, she is overly self-critical. However, she is hurt when Roger calls Cynthia her sister, implying the same degree of closeness in the two to Roger, and is unusually curt to Roger. The reflection that Roger may think her "unfeeling" for her curtness "brings on her a strange contraction of the heart"(p.356), though she does not understand why she should react thus, and sees her ill-feeling as simply a matter of rivalry for Roger's brotherly attentions. Yet she is, at the same time, protective of Roger when Mrs. Gibson attacks him in petty ways for his frequent visits to the house - for he is not the eligible Hamley son and heir. The slight upon Roger makes her "blood boil" and she believes that she "really had a violent temper."(p.356) She is even prepared to

³¹Indeed, he is very clear-sighted about his abilities and his prospects: "He knew what were his talents and his tastes; and did not wish the former to lie buried, nor the latter, which he regarded as gifts, fitting him for some peculiar work, to be disregarded or thwarted."(p.391)

³²He has enough "spirit", though, for Mrs. Gaskell's ideas of maturity in men, as can be seen in all her novels with her maturing men.

champion his cause in making Cynthia love him, though she cannot understand how Cynthia can resist him because she herself sees the value of such love as Roger is capable of - though that is not the infatuated, deluded kind of love which Roger feels for Cynthia - "She would have been willing to cut off her right hand, if need were, to forward his attachment to Cynthia; and the self-sacrifice would have added a strange zest to a happy crisis."(p.390) This is a Hester-like little act of self-denying, unnoticed heroism, though a touch too romantic to be considered mature behaviour. Again, she feels resentment on behalf of both Cynthia and Roger when Mrs. Gibson changes tactics, on learning of Osborne's fatal condition, and patently plots to bring the two together. For Molly, in learning to think of others and hence to think of herself in relation to others, has learned to look at others with critical eyes.³³ This is a characteristic which she tries to overcome and does so later, when she is more at ease because more in tune with herself and is happier about her circumstances. At this stage, though, she is critical of Cynthia, as well as her mother, for allowing her mother to use her as "the conscious if passive bait" set to "entrap" Roger(p.390). Molly knows that she herself "would have resisted"(p.391) such scheming, even if the object of it accords with her own hopes. To make her cup more bitter, Molly realizes that Cynthia does not even love Roger because, from her childhood, she is really incapable of loving anyone - her feelings for Molly are the closest to those of love of which she is capable.³⁴ The fact that Cynthia does not, even though Molly knows that she cannot, love Roger infuriates Molly:

"Molly grew angry with her many and many a time as the conviction of this fact was forced upon her. Molly did not know her own feelings; Roger had no overwhelming interest in what they might be; while his very life-breath seemed to depend on what Cynthia felt and thought."(p.398)

³³Molly's awareness of Mrs. Gibson's machinations to get rid of Roger, alluded to above, cause her to be "...always on the watch for indications of this desire."(p.356)

³⁴As Mrs. Gaskell puts it, about Cynthia's feelings for Roger : "Cynthia was not capable of returning such feelings; she had had too little true love in her life, and perhaps too much admiration to do so; but she appreciated this honest ardour, this loyal worship that was new to her experience."(p.375)

This confusion in Molly's mind of her thoughts about Cynthia, about Roger, and about Roger's for her shows how little she is aware of her true feelings for Roger, even though the fact that she connects the three thoughts makes the reader apprehend what those feelings are.

Molly's troubles build up to a second crisis when she learns of Roger's "engagement" to Cynthia. Just prior to this incident, Molly is out walking - having been sent away by Mrs. Gibson because Lady Harriet is visiting and Mrs. Gibson is jealous of her attentions towards Molly - and ponders the problems of her new home-life under her step-mother's rule:

At first she made herself uncomfortable with questioning herself as to how far it was right to leave unnoticed the small domestic failings - the webs, the distortions of truth which had prevailed in their household ever since her father's second marriage. She knew that very often she longed to protest, but did not do it, from the desire of sparing her father any discord; and she saw by his face that he, too, was occasionally aware of certain things that gave him pain, as showing that his wife's standard of conduct was not as high as he would have liked. It was a wonder to Molly whether this silence was right or wrong. With a girl's want of toleration, and want of experience to teach her the force of circumstances, and of temptation, she had often been on the point of telling her step-mother some forcible home truths. (p.407)

Her own standards of morality, based on those of her father, have never been compromised before and Molly worries that they are now in tacitly accepting Mrs. Gibson's - and her step-sister's - lesser "standard of conduct". Perhaps more than all of Mrs. Gaskell's earlier heroines, Molly has the firmest grasp of moral principles, because of the continuing influence of her father's largely unspoken but understood practice of such principles. This, combined with Roger's much more overt and tangible precepts, gives Molly the solid ethical foundation which Mrs. Gaskell sees as a learned attribute, acquired from guardian influences. That Molly is the character with the most solid moral sensibilities makes the contrast between herself and Cynthia much greater and more evident than it may otherwise have been seen to have been. Yet, as Mrs. Gaskell shows, because Molly is not fully mature yet she is incapable of deciding as to what is the right way to act. Her "girl's want of toleration, and want of experience" are signs of a degree of immaturity though, in recognizing the problem, she is more

developed than Cynthia could ever be. Molly goes a step further in her efforts to come to some decision concerning this ethical problem on her next walk. It seems as if the freedom of the open air encourages Molly to think and to try to see things clearly, whereas at home she is constantly under the influence of the very person who tries to distort reality to suit herself:

Molly chose a walk that had been her favourite with her ever since she was a child. Something or other had happened just before she left home that made her begin wondering how far it was right, for the sake of domestic peace, to pass over without comment the little deviations from right that people perceive in those whom they live with. Or whether, as they are placed in families for distinct purposes, not by chance merely, there are not duties involved in this aspect of their lot in life - whether by continually passing over failings, their own standard is not lowered - the practical application of these thoughts being a dismal sort of perplexity on Molly's part as to whether her father was quite aware of her step-mother's perpetual lapses from truth; and whether his blindness was wilful or not. Then she felt bitterly enough that, though she was as sure as could be that there was no real estrangement between her and her father, yet there were perpetual obstacles thrown in the way of their intercourse; and she thought with a sigh that if he would but come in with authority, he might cut his way clear to the old intimacy with his daughter, and that they might have all the former walks and talks, and quips and cranks, and glimpses of real confidence once again; things that her step-mother did not value, yet which she, like the dog in the manger, prevented Molly's enjoying. But after all Molly was a girl, not so far removed from childhood; and in the middle of her grave regrets and perplexities, her eye was caught by the sight of some fine ripe blackberries flourishing away high up on the hedgebank among scarlet hips and green and russet leaves. (p.416)

Molly is here clearly grappling with the idea of what is the mature and right way to behave in such a situation. She sees now that things are not as black-and-white as she had thought in her previous soliloquy. At the same time, she is, for the first time, questioning her father's attitude to his wife's weaknesses for she cannot help but believe that he is aware of them and turning a blind eye to them. She is also questioning his role as husband and head of the house, in demanding that he should "come in with authority" and "cut his way clear". Part of Molly's desire is childish and selfish - she would still like to have her life changed back into what it was before her step-mother came onto the scene - and part of it seems to be a reasonable request that her father make their lives more bearable by trying to lessen the

increasingly dominating influence of his wife.³⁵ That Mr. Gibson does not do this, that he prefers to pretend that all is well, seems to Molly to show that her father is weaker and less perfect to her than she formerly thought him to be. The reader, too, wonders as to why Mr. Gibson accepts such a passive role in the household of which he was once master. The answer, one suspects, lies in the fact that he is aware of the dreadful mistake he has made in choosing this wife and, aware of this great failing in his judgement, is loathe to criticize her for her failings. In addition, he is aware that her ingrained nature cannot be changed and that the only sensible way of coping with her is by trying continually to practice patience and tolerance. It is not until the end of the novel that Molly, too, learns to adopt this mode of behaviour with her step-mother, though throughout she has been careful, in practicing her thoughtfulness towards others, not to say or do anything which implies criticism of Mrs. Gibson.

On her return home, Molly is confronted with the news of Roger's revelations of his feelings to Cynthia. Her immediate reaction is to seek solace in solitude, as she always has, and she rushes up to her room where she can think freely:

She felt as if she could not understand it all; but as for that matter, what could she understand? Nothing. For a few minutes her brain seemed in too great a whirl to comprehend anything but that she was being carried on in earth's diurnal course, with rocks, and stones, and trees, with as little volition on her part as if she were dead. Then the room grew stifling, and instinctively she went to the open casement window, and leant out, gasping for breath. Gradually the consciousness of the soft peaceful landscape stole into her mind, and stilled the buzzing confusion. There, bathed in the almost level rays of the autumn sunlight, lay the landscape she had known and loved from childhood; as quiet, as full of low humming life as it had been at this hour for many generations. (pp.417-418)

Molly's confusion stems from the fact that she does not understand her

³⁵Mrs. Gaskell herself obviously admired the authoritarian kind of man, viz. her letter concerning Charlotte Brontë's marriage to the Rev. Nicholls: "Mr. Shaen accuses me always of being 'too much of a woman' in always wanting to obey somebody - but I am sure that Miss Brontë could never have borne not to be well-ruled and ordered." (The Letters, letter 191, pp.280-281)

own feelings for Roger, believing that she is unhappy because Roger loves Cynthia and yet is not loved in return and, as his sister, she cannot help him. Yet it is clear in this passage that she is battling against understanding her own emotions because she thinks it inappropriate to discover her feelings for one who is in love with another woman. She is confused, too, because this is the first time in her life that she has encountered romantic love in the flesh, in her hitherto sheltered life, and she is afraid of this new element in all of their lives. Hitherto, when Molly was first aware of the different sort of feeling which Roger had for Cynthia than that which he has had for herself, Molly is surprised at her own resentment of this difference and tries to rationalize to herself that it is not jealousy but the unjust intrusion of her need for Roger in a sisterly way upon his freedom to love another woman as a woman. In fact, it seems that she resents Roger loving anyone in this sexual way at all because, in her fear of change, she wants to keep everyone as platonic friends with each other. In this, she is showing her emotional immaturity in matters of relationships, as well as her fear of losing Roger as she feels, unjustly, that she has already lost her father.

Initially, Molly feels passive in the face of this second great event which, she feels, rends her life. As in the earlier-quoted scene in which Molly saw herself as akin to the things of nature when depressed by events, Molly now sees herself as even more inanimate - as one with rocks and stones - and there is no comfort in such a comparison. However, Molly can and does break out of this self-pitying way of looking at things because she finds such an attitude stifling and, though she does not herself quite recognize this, demeaning to her sense of self. Like Ruth, in the novel of that name, who hangs out of the window gasping for breath after meeting Mr. Donne, Molly seeks the fresh air when she is unable to face unpalatable facts and unable to control her feelings about events. This act, though generally initiated by a desire for escape, for avoidance - usually - as here, leads ultimately to a state of calm acceptance and inner peace. Here, Molly comes to see how trivial and momentary her inner hurt and confusion are when compared with the unchanging peacefulness and stability of the world of nature outside, albeit tamed by man's industry. The

realization leads her to put her trust in the inevitability of things and to accept the limitations of her influence without feeling powerless and alone as she has done in the past when changes have upset her life and shattered her illusions. This realization also leads her to control her emotions better so that when she is in Roger's presence, a short while later, as he leaves for Africa, Molly can stand "numb to the heart; neither glad nor sorry, nor anything but stunned." (p.421) This rigid, Hester-like, self-control over her feelings for Roger, which thus become somewhat obsessive³⁶, leads Molly, though, to suffer further bouts of depression and even physical illness before she is given the freedom to hope again for the acknowledgement and the return of her love for which still, at this stage, Molly refuses to take responsibility. This repression of her real feelings for Roger may be seen as immaturity in Molly but it seems that Mrs. Gaskell sees it as another example of "maidenly modesty" for Molly cannot accept her feelings for Roger while he is "engaged" to her step-sister. Thus, it can be seen as a mature act of self-denial, as Hester Rose's was, in the interests of the beloved woman, Cynthia and Sylvia respectively. For like Molly's realization that she cannot stem the inevitability of the seasons or of the rhythms of nature, she must accept that she has no right - as she does - to put her interests before those of others and try to change the course of events.³⁷ Molly has to accept being "numbed" and saddened for, as a good woman, which is what she is trying to be, she has no choice but to accept.

Thus, Molly is angered and shamed by Cynthia's guessing at the truth concerning her feelings for she does not want them to be known and feels that she has sufficient control over herself for them never to show. Cynthia's reaction is merely to see what Molly's face shows of these feelings, when they are in her own mind: Molly compares her

³⁶When Roger is in Africa, for example, Molly thinks of him constantly: "Molly was not in strong health, and perhaps this made her a little fanciful; but certain it is that her thoughts by day and her dreams by night were haunted by the idea of Roger lying ill and untended in those savage lands." (p.460)

³⁷For example, here, on Roger's departure: "for she had no right to put herself forward as the one to watch and yearn for farewell signs" (p.421)

appearance with that of Cynthia in a mirror and sees herself as dowdy and grubby contrasted with "Cynthia's brightness and bloom"(p.422) and thinks that "it is no wonder"(p.422) that Roger chose the latter. Impulsively, she tries to make Cynthia tell her that she really loves Roger. To Cynthia's flippant answer that she cannot love him, that she is incapable of loving, more than she does Molly, Molly puts her ever-eloquent hand in front of Cynthia's mouth to stop her words - as if her hand could stop the thoughts behind the words - "in almost a passion of impatience."(p.422) Cynthia's reaction is to question Molly, in turn, a new thought entering her mind:

'Why, Molly!' said Cynthia, in her turn seeking to read Molly's face, 'what's the matter with you? One might think you cared for him yourself.'

'I?' said Molly, all the blood rushing to her heart suddenly; then it returned, and she had courage to speak, and she spoke the truth as she believed it, though not the real actual truth.

'I do care for him: I think you have won the love of a prince amongst men. Why, I am proud to remember that he has been to me as a brother, and I love him as a sister, and I love you doubly because he has honoured you with his love.'(p.422)

Though Molly realizes that she has exposed herself in thus addressing Cynthia, she feels that she cannot help it because of her belief that Roger's worth may be under-estimated by Cynthia. A while later, she again attacks Cynthia for her luke-warm attitude to Roger: "'...I don't think you value Roger as you ought, Cynthia!' said Molly stoutly, for it required a good deal of courage to force herself to say this, although she could not tell why she shrank so from speaking."(p.454) Despite her fears of her own feelings being made known, Molly is here seen to be courageous in her efforts to make Cynthia appreciate Roger. Again, this is meant to be seen as a sign of maturity in Molly: that she accepts the inevitable and tries to ensure that Roger and Cynthia will be as happy as possible together. Yet, at the same time, Molly cannot help but feel rejected - that would be too much to ask of her, for she is a spirited and sensitive girl. A few moments after the interchange with Cynthia in which Cynthia - almost - discovers Molly's feelings, Molly likens herself to the blackberry leaf in which she earlier brought home Cynthia's blackberries, before she heard of the

"engagement". Molly saw "the broad, green leaf so fresh and crisp" before and now "soft and flabby, and dying" and she "felt a strange kind of sympathetic pity for the poor inanimate leaf."(p.423) This reflection, however, is not as morbid as her early comparisons of herself to rocks and stones for, though she thinks that she knows how the leaf feels, she herself is a little stronger now and more able to cope.

That she has been over-reacting somewhat, at least in relation to her father's supposedly changed feelings for her, can be seen in a passage a short while after this when Mr. Gibson asks Molly if there is any romantic affair in the air between herself and Osborne Hamley, because the Squire is worried about the possibility of his heir making an unfortunate marriage. Though Molly blushes for the secret which she knows about Osborne's marriage to a French servant, she is able to be as honest with her father as she always has, something which unites the two of them in this household of duplicity. Yet even this knowledge - that to be with her father and be herself is a cherished but not often attained state - causes Molly pain. This fact, combined with the awful secret of her own feelings for Roger, causes Molly "to sob bitterly"(p.445) on her father's shoulder. However, Mrs. Gaskell states: "She did not know why the tears came; perhaps it was because she was not so strong as formerly."(p.445) Mr. Gibson tries to comfort her by telling her to go out for a walk for he understands the true cause of at least part of Molly's feelings of pain and rejection: his own unfortunate marriage:

His commonplace words acted like an astringent on Molly's relaxed feelings. He intended that they should do so; it was the truest kindness to her; but he walked away from her with a sharp pang at his heart, which he turned into numbness as soon as he could by throwing himself violently into the affairs and cares of others.(p.446)

It is clear from this passage that Mrs. Gaskell sees Mr. Gibson as mature, except in his one delusion about a suitable wife - and he realized that that was a delusion quickly enough - for, though he is honest and open when he can be, he is also capable of controlling his feelings when he thinks it is for the benefit of others, even if it means having to turn strong feelings into "numbness". This is what

Molly has learned to do, as has been discussed. Mrs. Gaskell sees it as the only mature and sensible solution when a problem of relationships is insoluble or irreversible. Those times when Mr. Gibson cannot control his irritation at his wife only serve to show Molly - and the reader - how important this self-control is to co-existence with others. Molly wishes then, when "he became hard and occasionally bitter in his speeches and ways"(p.457), that he could return to a state of "blindness"(p.457) as to his wife's foibles. Yet, she comes to accept that this is no longer possible and that her father has his sorrows to bear, which he does largely in silence.

Much of the middle section of the novel is taken up with Molly's consciousness of the two sources of her misery: her father's re-marriage and Cynthia's and Roger's relationship for these two things occupy her mind incessantly and are interwoven into her feelings of misery and frustration at her helplessness to do anything about them. Again, they are tied up with Molly's identification with the seasons:

[Molly] had a great weight on her heart, into the cause of which she shrank from examining. That whole winter long she had felt as if her sun was all shrouded over with grey mist, and could no longer shine brightly for her. She wakened up in the morning with a dull sense of something being wrong; the world was out of joint, and, if she were born to set it right, she did not know how to do it. Blind herself as she would, she could not help perceiving that her father was not satisfied with the wife he had chosen.(p.456)

Perhaps because she is still afraid of acknowledging her feelings for Roger to herself, Molly still keeps trying to believe that she is unhappy simply because of the unsuitability of these two relationships. Yet Mrs. Gaskell clearly wants the reader to see that Molly is shirking such a realization, that she is not unaware that something else is wrong for, as she later points out:

So that poor Molly had not passed a cheerful winter, independently of any private sorrows that she might have in her own heart. She did not look well, either: she was gradually falling into low health, rather than bad health. Her heart beat more feebly and slower; the vivifying stimulant of hope - even unacknowledged hope - was gone out of her life.(p.458)³⁸

³⁸Mrs. Gaskell wants this "hope" to be seen for what it is: later, when Roger is free from his entanglement with Cynthia, Molly is seen to have a "new and unacknowledged hope"(p.677) in a chapter entitled "Reviving Hopes and Brightening Prospects".

However, she immediately follows this passage with the return to the "dumb discordancy"(p.458) between Mr. and Mrs. Gibson. In so often thinking about these two problems, however, Molly does come to some decision as to how to behave, how to cope, unlike Mrs. Gibson who, when occasionally attacked by her husband, "felt it unpleasant to think about it" and "forgot it as soon as possible."(p.457)

Cynthia is like her mother in this, as in many things: she would prefer to forget about things which are unpleasant or which cause discordancy or - more importantly - which might make her have to take a stance. This characteristic, combined with her never-failing desire to please and impress others - both a legacy of her mother and a result of her mother's indifference to her since early childhood - causes Cynthia to fall into bonds with men when she really does not want to but cannot help herself. The only man who affects her more strongly than this is Mr. Gibson with whom "she was more careful in speaking" and before whom she "showed more deference to her mother"(p.267); "Her evident respect for him, and desire to win his good opinion made her curb herself before him; and in this manner she earned his favour as a lively, sensible girl"(p.267). This is yet again another manifestation of Cynthia changing her behaviour to suit her audience for the reader, like Mr. Gibson himself, comes to see that Cynthia may be "lively", have "spirit", but she is not "sensible", she has no "sense", yet she recognizes and appreciates the latter quality in others, principally Molly and Mr. Gibson. To Molly's expressed hope that Cynthia can change her nature, the more realistic Cynthia says: "'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!'"(p.373)

Molly, however, because of the simplicity and straightforwardness of her manner and her youthful naïvete and idealism, has not believed Cynthia to be simply "a heartless baggage", as she has only seen the surface Cynthia and, like an honest, uncritical, unsuspecting girl, has taken the surface Cynthia to be the essential Cynthia. Once Cynthia becomes involved with Roger Hamley and Mr. Preston starts appearing in Hollingford, her nature, as Molly sees it, changes: she becomes restless and excitable and causes Molly much perplexity for:

If Molly had not been so entirely loyal to her friend, she might have thought this constant brilliancy a little tiresome when brought into everyday life; it was not the sunshiny rest of a placid lake, it was rather the glitter of the pieces of a broken mirror, which confuses and bewilders. (p.389)

Molly now is starting to realise that she does not really know Cynthia, though, as Mrs. Gaskell is at pains to point out, she does not want to see this for:

...if she had been of a nature prone to analyse the character of one whom she loved dearly, she might have perceived that, with all Cynthia's apparent frankness, there were certain limits beyond which her confidence did not go; where her reserve began, and her real self was shrouded in mystery. (p.461)

Molly has never been one to be over-critical of others or to seek out motives in others and Mrs. Gaskell makes it clear that it is admirable that she is like this, for it accords with her naturalness and her own frankness and honesty. Cynthia, on the other hand, like her mother, is suspicious and wary of others because she herself is critical and cynical and believes everyone else to be so. This kind of attitude is part of Cynthia's worldly sophistication, which contrasts with Molly's homely state of innocence and which Mrs. Gaskell clearly does not see as a mature attribute. It is rather the reverse: that worldly-wisdom can often inhibit maturation because it makes characters affected, superior and insincere - as was Henry Lennox in North and South and Mr. Preston is seen to be in this novel. Cynthia is aware, though, that there are other standards than her own superficial ones and she complains to Molly about the difficulty of living up to Molly and Mr. Gibson's "high standard of conduct" (p.456), which she has never encountered before. Molly cannot see that her advice that Roger's standards are just as high and that Cynthia must learn to cope with them can only make Cynthia afraid and want to escape from the effort. For escaping from an unpleasant situation, when it is no longer avoidable, is something which Cynthia always contemplates as a first recourse, generally in the romanticized form of running away as a governess to Russia. Cynthia knows that in this she is "cowardly", that she lacks moral courage, but feels that she cannot help herself. This, as is shown later in the novel, is only partly true: she can and does learn to stop running and take control over her life and make the

appropriate decisions for her future happiness, in deciding to marry Mr. Henderson, a man similarly shallow and worldly as herself, who accepts Cynthia for what she shows herself to be and makes no great demands on her.

One thing Cynthia has always taken control of is her emotions for, unlike Molly, part of the superficiality of her character lies in the fact that she is afraid of the emotions which she has and has, from an early age, learned to hide them. The other part lies in the fact that her development in all things has been stunted by the lack of moral and emotional nutriment in her youth and she has been left with only a reduced capacity for real feelings. The two people about whom she feels strongest are those from whom she has had the most positive support and friendship, Molly and Mr. Gibson. With them, though "her emotions were generally under the control of her will"(p.483), she is drawn out of this kind of self-preserving repression, almost against her own wishes. This type of self-control, not so very different from her mother's but less consciously self-seeking than her mother's, is not the type of self-control which Molly has learned to exercise for it embodies a fear of others knowing about her nature which Molly's does not. Molly wants to be seen and accepted as herself, and hates having to share in others' secrets because she fears that they may taint her moral self-image. Thus, her avoidance of the fact of her love for Roger is a necessity to her, though the reader can see it as a sign of immaturity - the last vestige, as it happens.

The greatest secret in the novel is that of Cynthia's engagement to Mr. Preston, contracted when she was a helpless, lonely girl of sixteen.³⁹ Molly discovers this secret, which has been wearing on Cynthia's nerves for some time - hence her sparkling "glittery" behaviour, accidentally on one of her long walks when she meets Cynthia and Mr. Preston in a wood, arguing over the matter. What Molly is told stuns her, she is "miserably shaken" (p.513) that Cynthia could have had this affair going on while she was accepting Roger's attentions

³⁹There is, of course, also the secret about Osborne's marriage, of which Molly is an unwilling partner.

(and those of Mr. Coxe, at one stage) and another "engagement" to him. Molly knows that her reaction is of the same sort that Roger's will be and he is the first person about whom Molly thinks in her "room in soft darkness" (p.513), while he is "far away in mysterious darkness of distance"(p.513) in darkest Africa, for he is always the first one in her thoughts, despite her consciousness that he should not be - hence his relegation to the dark parts of her mind. Molly decides to help Cynthia by taking active steps, for she believes that it is her duty to help others, particularly those as passive and thoughtless as Cynthia: "What lay before Molly was, to try and extricate Cynthia if she could help her by thought, or advice, or action; not to weaken herself by letting her fancy run into pictures of possible, probable suffering."(p.513) One can see here not only a manifestation of Molly's moral courage but also an indication of how much she has matured emotionally since that time, not so long ago, when she heard of her father's re-marriage and dwelt upon her sufferings in her imagination. The lesson which Roger taught her then has combined with her own moral sensibilities to make her a more rational, responsible, sensible woman. Now she, in turn, can try and do the same for Cynthia. Yet, because of her female nature, she can do more than this for Cynthia: she can, as Mrs. Hamley did for her in her own early grief, comfort Cynthia in a motherly, warm, gentle way as well as take on the responsibility of undoing Cynthia's past actions by taking her part against Mr. Preston. For, in order for Cynthia to be free of Mr. Preston, she must have him return to her some old implicating letters which she once wrote to him and have him accept some money which she has borrowed from him and wishes to return. Molly worries about what she has learned of Cynthia's nature and the effect that her part in Cynthia's duplicity will have on her for though she trusts her own judgement and believes in her own courage, she fears that she runs the risk that her strengths may be undermined by Cynthia's weaknesses:

Unwillingly, Molly was compelled to perceive that there must have been a good deal of underhand work going on beneath Cynthia's apparent openness of behaviour; and still more unwillingly she began to be afraid that she herself might be led into the practice. But she would try and walk in a straight path; and if she did wander out of it, it should only be to save pain to those whom she loved.(p.525)

This resolve is reminiscent of Margaret Hale's belief, in North and South, that it is right to help others even if it does mean compromising oneself, a belief which she later rescinds, after the repercussions of her lie are made apparent to her. Molly, surprisingly, has more courage than Margaret Hale had for even though she does become implicated and scandal is spread about her she knows that she would do the same again for someone she loves, even though she knows now that she would suffer considerable pain. Of course, Molly does not have to lie, as Margaret had, in order to protect Cynthia for, even when she is confronted by her father she knows that he will accept her truths and not demand a full explanation from her - and therefore the possibility of having to lie.

The difference between Molly and Cynthia, in terms of maturity, is brought out well in this section of the novel. Though Cynthia calls her engagement with Mr. Preston "youthful folly"(p.528), it is obvious from Molly's words and thoughts on the matter that even in her own initial degree of immaturity she could never have done such a thing, though she does realize that this is because she has a firm moral foundation which Cynthia has not. The contrast, though, is highlighted in their present behaviour: Molly cannot understand how Cynthia could let herself become engaged to two men at once, because she would be incapable of doing such a thing herself. Furthermore, she is shocked, though she tries not to be, by what she has found out to be part of Cynthia's personality. Thus, her feelings on being the go-between for Cynthia and Mr. Preston are mixed:

hating the errand, not satisfied with Cynthia's manner of speaking about her relations to Roger, oppressed with shame and complicity in conduct which appeared to her deceitful, yet willing to bear all and brave all, if she should once set Cynthia in a straight path(p.528).

Mr. Preston, more truly immoral than Cynthia who is, rather, amoral in her lack of understanding of the implications of her actions, is as disconcerted by Molly's character as he is by her presence for he believed, from Cynthia's communication with him, that he was to meet Cynthia. This, in itself, says something of the difference between the two girls: Molly has "simplicity"(p.529) and is open in her dealings where Cynthia is "worldly-wise"(p.529) and knows that she must lure Mr.

Preston to the meeting-place by leading him to believe that she herself would be present. Again, Mr. Gaskell makes it clear that in this comparison it is not Molly who is immature because she is naïve, but Cynthia who has not the moral courage to tell Mr. Preston the truth and run the risk of her project failing, because Molly's ignorance of motives is part of her "courageous innocence."(p.529) Mr. Preston sees that not only is Molly "very simple"(p.523), "frightened, yet brave"(p.533), but that she does not treat him as other women do: for "he perceived that Molly was as unconscious that he was a young man, and she a young woman, as if she had been a pure angel of heaven."(p.533) In this, she resembles Dickens' Sissy Jupe, in Hard Times, who speaks to Mr Harthouse on Louisa Gradgrind/Bounderby's behalf to leave her alone, for Sissy, too, seems to be unaware of the fact that she is talking to a handsome young man. This confuses him inwardly so much that, combined with the fact that Molly threatens to expose him to his superiors, Mr. Preston decides to return the letters.

As a result of this interview, Molly feels that "She had been tried beyond her strength"(p.535). Yet she still has much to bear. It is fortunate that she has learnt to battle against weakness for she soon becomes the subject of scandal to the townspeople - she, "who had never thought or said an unkind thing of them"(p.571) - though she holds up because she knows that "she had chosen to bear the burden of her own free will"(p.573) and that she must accept the consequences of her actions for that is part of autonomous maturity. One is reminded of Stephen Blackpool's acceptance of his personal decisions when he is disowned by his work-mates, in Hard Times. One could also compare her with Maggie Tulliver, in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, when she is shunned by the townspeople of St. Oggs after the episode on the river with Stephen Guest. Her "bravery"(p.572) is partly rewarded by her father's unspoken approval of her standards though he is angry that she has had to be dragged down into Cynthia's world of duplicity and intrigue. As she herself says: "'Perhaps I've been foolish; but what I did, I did of my own self. It was not suggested to me. And I'm sure it was not wrong in morals, whatever it might be in judgement.'"(p.570) Cynthia, in contrast, is unable to cope with the situation for, though she is free of the scandal, she cannot bear to have Molly know her real

nature. This makes her more reserved towards Molly and though she "...struggled with the feeling and tried to fight against it by calling herself "ungrateful"...she believed that she no longer held her former high place in Molly's estimation, and she could not help turning away from one who knew things to her discredit."(p.555) Cynthia can never learn the type of self-control which has now become part of Molly because she still sees herself in relation to others as a matter of appearances, rather than as a person who is unafraid of showing others her real character which is flawed, as Molly accepts that hers is, but learning to overcome those flaws. Again, when she is confronted by Mr. Gibson in relation to her secret engagement to Mr. Preston, made known to him by his wife, Cynthia cannot cope with his knowledge of her failings. It brings out the worst in her and, despite all that Molly has done for her, Cynthia is bitter and "ungenerous"(p.596) to Molly for having said anything to him about the affair at all, even though Molly had been put in an unavoidable position where she had to explain her situation to her father.

As a result of her exposure, Cynthia once again determines to run away to work as a governess. At the same time, she appears to be running away from Roger Hamley, because she decides to break off her "engagement" with him. Yet, in making this decision, Cynthia is also facing up to the fact of her own moral and emotional limitations for, even if she wanted to, she would find it difficult "straining up to his goodness"(p.600) for she still wants to see herself as perfect in a future husband's eyes. What Mr. Gibson believes may have been "mere girlish faults"(p.602) in Cynthia, she herself recognizes as personality defects.⁴⁰ Her moral and emotional shallowness are shown immediately after Cynthia has made her announcement of renunciation to Mr. Gibson, when, while Molly is nursing her "with gentle power" like a "mother"(p.602), Cynthia jumps out of her "passive" position and announces:

'Molly, Roger will marry you! See if it isn't so! You two good -'

⁴⁰Though there is a touch of lazy unwillingness to try, as can be seen in her words: "'I'm glad to be free. I dreaded Roger's goodness, and learning, and all that.'"(pp.618-619)

But Molly pushed her away with a sudden violence of repulsion. 'Don't!' she said. She was crimson with shame and indignation. 'Your husband this morning! Mine tonight! What do you take him for?'

'A man!' smiled Cynthia. 'And therefore, if you won't let me call him changeable, I'll coin a word and call him consolable!' (pp.602-603)

Molly, naturally, is revolted at Cynthia's limited respect for others' feelings and her callousness. She is shocked, too, that Cynthia's thoughts echo her own secret belief that she and Roger are suited to each other in their efforts at "goodness". Her knowledge of Cynthia's idea combined later with those put forward by the Squire and the nasty Mrs. Goodenough, make it difficult for her to accept Roger any more as a brother. Hence, until his growing regard for her is made known to her, Molly must act unnaturally, must continue to exercise rigid self-control, but for a different reason, when in Roger's presence.

The first time that Molly sees Roger again, after Cynthia has terminated her "engagement" to him, Molly cannot help but show her feelings for him in her face. She is still weak from a long illness, but, now that it is summer, she is much stronger than she was in the long, dark, depressing months of winter. Roger is struck by her appearance for the first time for, mixed with her old open honesty is a new feminine coyness:

'I was sorry to hear how ill you had been! You are looking but delicate!' letting his eyes rest upon her face with affectionate examination. Molly felt herself colour all over with the consciousness of his regard. To do something to put an end to it, she looked up, and showed him her beautiful soft grey eyes, which he never remembered to have noticed before. (p.647)

As he leaves her, he remembers an old conversation with his brother about the relative beauty of Cynthia and Molly, in which Osborne saw Molly as a developing beauty and Cynthia as someone whose beauty would coarsen with age, whereas Roger, in his infatuated state, saw Cynthia as having attributes of "perfection", eyes of a "heavenly colour" and of fascinating changefulness, and so on (p.363). In this, he was as romantic as in his letters from Africa in which he described Cynthia as "a nymph, a witch, an angel, or a mermaid" (p.415), among other things.

Now he admits that "'poor Osborne was right!...She has grown into delicate fragrant beauty, just as he said she would: or is it the character which has formed her face?'"(p.648) He is still, however, at this stage pre-occupied with trying to win Cynthia back, but this revelation to him of Molly's beauty sets the seeds in his mind of a different way of looking at her than he has hitherto done. When he next sees her, at the Towers, he has accepted - perhaps rather too easily - that he cannot have Cynthia for he has seen her flirting in the Hamley garden with Mr. Henderson. Now, Roger sees Molly as someone very different from the immature little girl whom he taught to cope with her troubles, "her movements and manners bespeaking quiet ease"(p.672) as she blends in with the nobility of the Towers, that place which long ago made her afraid and determined her never to become a "lady". Here, she is clearly seen as a "lady", though not of the artificial sort that Mrs. Gibson epitomizes.

Roger's change of heart about Cynthia, and consequently about Molly, is treated very superficially and possibly a bit glibly, perhaps because of Mrs. Gaskell's overwhelming interest in the process of her heroine's feelings. Though the reader has been aware, through most of the novel, that Roger and Molly are better suited to each other than Roger and Cynthia are, it would have been more satisfying to see the changes in Roger's feelings, his maturation process, in a little more detail than is given. Again, the moment of his change of heart, the single insight involving a whole reversal of feeling, when he sees Cynthia with Mr. Henderson and runs away, obviates a gradual learning process which even Mr. Gibson is allowed. It is only later, when talking to Molly's father, that Roger reveals that he had slowly been becoming disenchanted with Cynthia while in Africa because of her curt, hurried letters, showing often that she had not even properly read his to her. Roger realizes that his old affection for Cynthia was a "boyish love"(p.699) and that he was "a blind fool" (p.699). For this reason - that he has loved foolishly and deludedly - Roger sees himself now as "inferior"(p.700) to Molly. Roger is very careful to make sure that he is love will be worthy of Molly for "...he was very jealous on her behalf."(p.692) Thus, maturely, this time he determines to wait until he returns from his second trip to Africa before he tells Molly of his

feelings for her for: "He was no longer a boy to rush at the coveted object; he was a man capable of judging and abiding."(p.693) He knows, though, deep down that he has matured and that he will be worthy of Molly and that she is the one who is right for him:

But once safe home again, no weak fancies as to what might or might not be her answer should prevent his running all chances to gain the woman who was to him the one who excelled all. His was not the poor vanity that thinks more of the possible mortification of a refusal than of the precious jewel of a bride that may be won.(p.693)

Unlike Cynthia, he is prepared to live with his past mistake for he knows that Molly will eventually forgive him for his earlier attachment.

One realizes that Roger's feelings for Molly are changing, though, because when he sees her at the Hall, beautiful in her evening dress: "He began to feel that admiring deference which most young men experience when conversing with a very pretty girl: a sort of desire to obtain her good opinion in a manner very different to his old familiar friendliness."(p.672) Later, after her constrained visit to Hamley Hall and his uncomfortable conversation with his father, in which the Squire urges Roger as to the suitability of Molly as his wife, Roger wonders whether or not it is too late to ever ask her, because of his first mistaken choice. What Molly sees as brotherly friendliness in him, Roger acknowledges as "patent" "symptoms of his growing love for her"(p.692).

Molly is initially as frank as her feminine modesty will allow her to be. She is happier now, too, than she has been for a long time because "the faint fragrance of a new and unacknowledged hope had stolen into her life"(p.677) for now that Roger is no longer engaged to Cynthia, she can allow herself to hope. No longer does she feel as unhappy as she has since the entrance of the Kirkpatricks into her life, when it seemed to her "'as if I had got too old ever to feel pleasure, much less happiness again'"(p.485), a thought highly reminiscent of Margaret Hale's reaction to her burdens in North and South. Yet, after hearing Mrs. Goodenough's words that Mrs. Gibson is engineering a match between Molly and Roger, her "maiden

modesty"(p.691) is hurt and "her perfect freedom was gone."(p.683) Now, when with Roger, Molly must assume "an air of constraint"(p.685), "of dignified reserve"(p.686), very different from her old naturalness. Roger perceives that something is wrong in Molly's manner with him but does not understand that he is, in effect, the cause of it. Yet Molly is aware that, of all people, Roger is the very one who could help her with her problem of how to behave if it were not for the fact that he is at the heart of the problem. However, in the end, she decides to be her old honest, straightforward self when she answers his query as to whether he has vexed her at all during her stay. Molly believes that, like herself, Roger wants only to have their old filial friendship restored: in this, she is showing that she is still clinging to the adolescent self-delusion that her relationship with Roger should always be a platonic one, though now she is not afraid of her own sexual feelings, as can be seen in her feminine blushes in response to Roger's gaze on his return from Africa. Her real feelings, though perhaps unmaidenly to acknowledge, are sexual. Even Molly's father realizes this when he tells his daughter that Roger cannot visit the house again before his return to Africa because there has been scarlet-fever at Hamley Hall. As Molly toys with her meal, he realizes what her feelings for Roger are. Now, he sees that he must finally relinquish his position as first man in her life: "'Lover versus father!' thought he, half sadly. 'Lover wins.'"(p.701)

At the end of the novel, as it stands, Molly and Roger are not reconciled, though it was Mrs. Gaskell's plan that they would be at the end and even at this stage it is obvious that this is what will happen. Thus, the reader does not see Molly giving up her "maidenly modesty" when she accepts Roger's claims to her, as happens with the heroine in Mary Barton and North and South. Yet, even at this stage of the novel, it is clear that Molly has matured from the young girl seen at the beginning of the novel for she has grown in "sense" and her "spirit" has been moderated - not crushed, as she once thought it would have to be - by this "sense". She has learnt to cope with her step-mother and no longer to resent her presence or her self-centred personality. This is shown subtly in various incidents in the latter part of the novel. In the scene mentioned above, for example, when Mr. Gibson announces at

the dinner-table that Roger will not be able to see Molly and Mrs. Gibson before he leaves for Africa and Molly's appetite disappears, so does Mr. Gibson's when he realizes that he will only ever be the second man in her life now, but "Mrs. Gibson pattered on; and nobody listened."(p.701) Both Molly and Mr. Gibson have adjusted to Mrs. Gibson by not taking her too seriously, for she herself never seriously believes in what she says. In addition, Molly has lost her early illusions about her father's place in her life; about the nature of her life; about the romantic hero-figure as her ideal man; about Roger's place in her affections; and about her own nature as unchangeably passionate and selfish, as she once thought it was. In the process of disillusionment and in her desire to be "good", Molly has become more tolerant, thoughtful, sympathetic, humble and responsible. Her moral courage has been tested, as has her ability to think of others before herself without losing self-esteem and individuality.

Because of her high moral standards, now less inflexible and more practical, and her straightforward warmth and her strength of character, Molly has, by the end of the novel, become known as something of a peacemaker, a female role which Mrs. Gaskell clearly sees as that reserved for mature and maturing women, as has been seen in all the previous novels. For, in order to be needed as a peacemaker - as Molly is, by Cynthia, the Squire and Mrs. Hamley, Mrs. Osborne Hamley and even Mrs. Gibson - a female must be seen as good, thoughtful, capable of empathy and forbearance, and to be strong and secure in her own estimation of herself and her place in the world. Mr. Gibson has been aware of Molly's growing maturity in this respect, among others, for he is often the one who engineers her active helping role, when he perceives a need for it from others. One can only make conjectures as to how much in the unwritten chapter or chapters this talent of Molly's would have been developed. In her peace-making role, developed by increasing moral and emotional maturity, Molly Gibson is like all her forbears in Mrs. Gaskell's novels: Mary Barton was seen by Mrs. Wilson and others as a "ray of sunshine"; Ruth Hilton brought peace and calm into the lives of many unfortunates and even the already peaceful household of the Bensons; Margaret Hale, once the "village peacemaker", comes to bring peace into the lives of the Higgins', as

well as her own family; and even Sylvia Robson, despite her feelings of inadequacy in this respect (like the early Mary Barton) brings peace into Philip's home when she is left in charge of it and into Alice Rose's last years.

Where Molly differs from her predecessors is in her intellectual maturity. She is Mrs. Gaskell's first heroine in her novels who has thirsted for knowledge and been given the means by which to attain it.⁴¹ Because of this, she is given the label "blue-stocking" (p.307) by her step-mother, a term which rankles in her for she thinks that, as Mrs. Gibson puts it: "gentle-people don't like that kind of woman." (p.308) Yet, what Mrs. Gaskell is showing here is that Molly, despite her interest in Science, is not unlady-like in the sense which would hurt Molly but only in the eyes of someone like Mrs. Gibson whose definition of "lady-like" is so narrow and so superficial. One is reminded of Mr. Gibson's words, early in the novel, when Molly declared that she did not want to be a lady, for she had now become a lady in the only sense which Mrs. Gaskell sees as mature. Roger obviously approves of Molly's interest in learning and does not see her as a "blue-stocking" for he prefers her, with her interest in his work and her mature personality, to all the society "ladies" who may tempt another man in his position now as famous scientist. Mrs. Gibson shows her total lack of understanding of his nature when she declares that: "'He will be falling in love with some grandee next, mark my words! They are making a pet and a lion of him, and he's just the kind of weak young man to have his head turned by it all.'" (p.694) Molly's defence of Roger shows just how much she has changed since her youth and how very different she is from the ever-deluded Mrs. Gibson:

'I don't think it is likely,' said Molly stoutly. 'Roger is too sensible for anything of the kind.'

'That's just the fault I always found with him; sensible and cold-hearted! Now, that's a kind of character which may be very valuable, but which revolts me. Give me warmth of heart, even with a little of that extravagance of feeling which misleads the judgement, and conducts into romance.' (p.694)

⁴¹Phillis Holman, in the story "Cousin Phillis", is the outstanding example in Mrs. Gaskell's other works.

In the contrast between these two characters at the end of the novel, can succinctly be seen the difference, in Mrs. Gaskell's mind, between a mature and an immature character: Molly, in supporting qualities of "sense" in Roger, shows herself to have "sense" and to have "spirit" in speaking out her mind thus; Mrs. Gibson, ever-superficial and self-centred, can only value romantic actions even if they are foolish enough to be conducive to danger or even, as in the case of Mr. Kirkpatrick, to death. Nowhere else in Mrs. Gaskell's novels is the contrast between the two types of character brought out so well and so clearly. The irony of her tone in her treatment of Mrs. Gibson is at its strongest; her treatment of her heroine is at its most relaxed and subtlest. Even Cynthia Kirkpatrick, about whom most of Mrs. Gaskell's critics seem to be obsessed, loses some of her fascination and becomes somewhat cloying and irritating, in her echoing of her mother's characteristics, by the end of the novel. Molly stands out clearly beside her as the character whom Mrs. Gaskell endorses as her most vivid, natural and convincing embodiment of female maturity.

In fact, of all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, Molly is the most fully-developed and integrated portrayal of female character maturation. Where Mrs. Gaskell's earlier heroines all appear rather one-sided, something which has caused critics to lump them into separate categories of dull and good or lively and naughty - an over-simplification of Mrs. Gaskell's depictions - Molly is composed of a conglomeration of characteristics which make her a much more interesting and more realistic character than her forbears. At the same time, she is the heroine who is least interfered with by intrusive authorial comment for though she is largely presented in the third person, it is her consciousness of herself which is being given, not Mrs. Gaskell's interpretation of what Molly's thoughts mean. In the same way, Cynthia's contrasting nature is presented in a gently ironic manner in the narrative, rather than in the biting tone of Mrs. Gaskell's earlier condemnation of immature, weak or wicked characters. Even Mrs. Gibson is a restrained, often humorous, portrait when Mrs. Gaskell was capable of being devastatingly cruel with her. These characterizations show how much Mrs. Gaskell has developed technically since her earlier works. Wives and Daughters also demonstrates how much

Mrs. Gaskell has developed in her ideas about maturity since her first novel dealing with the topic. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell's aims were simply to show how an immature young girl could become deluded because of her lack of moral guidance but then becomes disillusioned through the contact of a good influence in her life, because of her acquired, but never exercised, moral foundation. In turn, because of her disillusionment, she endeavours to become a good and self-reliant, and thus a mature, woman. This idea is fundamental to all of Mrs. Gaskell's novels though each brings out a different variation on this basic theme and, in doing so, adds new elements to the theme. However, what Mrs. Gaskell is demonstrating, in all her novels to different degrees, dependent on a female's temperament and circumstances, is that in order to become mature, a character must learn both to be good: to be selfless, thoughtful and kind towards others, to show qualities of tolerance, forbearance and compassion; and to be autonomous: to be responsible for oneself, aware of one's own nature, able to accept oneself and one's limitations, to be independent and to have the courage to stand up for one's principles. In other words, one must be able both to live for others and to be true to oneself. This ideal of maturity is dependent on development in the three major aspects of a character's personality: the intellectual, the emotional and the moral. Naturally, not all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines live up to this ideal: some develop in some aspects only to a certain degree, though in each novel Mrs. Gaskell makes it clear that this is as far as this character can grow. Margaret Hale and Molly Gibson are the characters who come to most nearly approximate Mrs. Gaskell's notion of perfect female maturity for their natures and their situations allow them scope for full development. Nevertheless, all of Mrs. Gaskell's heroines discussed in this thesis can be seen to have matured in the course of the novels, as Mrs. Gaskell wanted them to be seen.

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