UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THE HEROINE OF THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY NOVEL: THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN WRITERS AND THE CHANGE IN APPROACH WHICH THEY ENGENDERED

Echo Irving

I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal - as we are!

Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, Chapter 23, p.281.

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ABSTRACT

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By Echo Irving

This thesis sets out to examine the heroine as presented by selected novelists in the mid-nineteenth century. The study looks particularly at the heroine as created by women writers during this period, but in each chapter, a novel by Charles Dickens, as probably the most outstanding novelist of the day, has been chosen to provide a contrasting male viewpoint. The thesis seeks to establish that in the novels by women writers there is evidence of a strong desire for greater equality of opportunity with men, which pre-dates the formal movement for women's emancipation by fifty years.

The principal novels discussed are: Jane Eyre, Shirley and Villette, by Charlotte Brontë; The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, by Anne Brontë; Mary Barton, Ruth and North and South, by Mrs Gaskell; and Bleak House, Hard Times, Little Dorrit and A Tale of Two Cities, by Charles Dickens.

The novels have been selected to show the heroine in widely differing circumstances, in order to examine how the authors have caused their heroines to respond to, or reject, the challenges presented by these circumstances.

The heroine is discussed firstly in transition from the earlier novel tradition where the heroine is totally dependent upon the hero, to one where she achieves a modest degree of independence. Secondly, she is considered in relation to the new industrial society of the Midlands and the North. Thirdly, she is discussed in circumstances which place her outside conventional society, and finally, she is shown as making overt demands for equality with men. For this type of heroine, marriage is not the prior aim: this characterisation looks forward most strongly to the 'new woman' of the next century.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The novelists whose work is discussed in this thesis are: Anne Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens and Mrs Gaskell, and the particular novels which have been selected are: Charlotte Brontë - Jane Eyre (1847); Anne Brontë - The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848); Elizabeth Gaskell - Mary Barton (1848); Charlotte Brontë - Shirley (1849); Charlotte Brontë - Villette (1853); Charles Dickens - Bleak House (1853); Elizabeth Gaskell - Ruth (1853); Charles Dickens - Hard Times (1854); Charles Dickens - Little Dorrit (1855-7); Elizabeth Gaskell - North and South (1854-5); Charles Dickens - A Tale of Two Cities (1859); Elizabeth Gaskell - Sylvia's Lovers (1863).

The novel, as a major literary form, increased in popularity throughout the nineteenth century. It also proved to be a particularly suitable vehicle for women writers. The interest in domestic subjects allowed women to write from a basis of equal knowledge with men; they were not held back by a limited education. It was possible to combine novel-writing with their traditional roles as homemakers and mothers, and the best of their work equalled, and often surpassed, that of their male counterparts.

Because of the great number of women writing during these middle decades of the nineteenth century, it has been necessary to limit this study to the work of three women and to counterbalance the female viewpoint with that of,probably,the most successful male novelist of the period, Charles Dickens, who was at the height of his creative powers. The selection of his novels was made from those written after he would have had the opportunity of studying the works of these and other women writers.

Women writers tended to create a different kind of heroine which challenged the stereotyped heroines of many male writers. Beauty and passivity were replaced by moral and emotional strength. Their heroines were shown as having passionate feelings, not only about the hero, but about social matters. Whilst marriage was still accepted as the 'most important subject' in a woman's life, it was also recognised that many marriages were unhappy and from these, there was no acceptable means of escape for the woman. For single women, with little money and unexceptional looks, the future was bleak; a life of dependence on relatives, or genteel drudgery as companions and governesses, was all that was open to them.

For this reason, second only to the desire for a good marriage was the desire for financial independence: in nearly all the novels discussed, the heroine experiences financial independence before marriage, usually as the result of a legacy from a long lost relative. It was not possible at that time for a woman to enjoy both matrimony and financial independence. The first of the Matrimonial Acts, the Married Women's Property Act, was not passed until 1882; it enabled women to retain ownership of their own property after marriage.

It may seem perverse, when studying the Brontë sisters, to neglect the work of Emily Brontë in favour of that of her lesser-known sister, Anne. However, because this thesis is looking primarily at women's social aspirations, all the novels selected have settings which directly reflect on some aspect of the situation of women in the society of that time. Wuthering Heights has, of course, its own social reality, but it is isolated from change. The novel has a mystical quality which places it outside a particular time; it is unconcerned with contemporary issues. Charlotte and Anne, on the other hand, address such contemporary social problems as the situation of single women, and those women who placed themselves outside society by leaving their husbands, for whatever reason.

In all the novels under discussion, there is an awareness of the wider areas of social change. Industrialisation had transformed the way of life in the North of England and created an ever widening division between the industrial North and the still largely agrarian South. Raymond Williams says that the growth of industrial institutions had created a new system which:

> in the 1830's is first called Industrialism. In part, this is the acknowledgement of a series of very important technical changes, and of their transforming effect on methods of production. It is also, however, an acknowledgement of the effect of these changes on society as a whole which is similarly transformed[1].

Three themes can be seen as emerging from these novels: the social effects of 'industrialism', a continuing fear that revolution might infect England from the Continent; and the attitudes of the ruling classes towards organised labour, in the form of Chartism or the Trade Union movement.

Mrs Gaskell, who lived in Manchester all her married life, witnessed these developments at first hand and her novels Mary Barton and North and South are the most direct comment on 'industrialism'. While Ruth and Sylvia's Lovers are not directly concerned with industrialisation, they do discuss the need for women, as well as men, to be equipped

to survive in a rapidly changing society. Both Ruth and Sylvia suffer because they are inadequately equipped, emotionally and educationally, to face the challenge of change.

Charlotte Brontë, although she also lived in an industrial area - Haworth was surrounded by rapidly expanding mill towns - was, by nature and upbringing, more detached and ambivalent in her attitude towards the rights of the workers and, in Shirley, indicated clearly that whatever their sufferings, the workers should not try to rule, neither should they be allowed to hold back progress; if they attempt either of these things, then they should be suppressed without pity. However, at the end of Shirley, she indicates that, in the same way, neither the wishes of the old agrarian communities nor desires to preserve the beauty of the landscape must prevent the development of industry and therefore future prosperity. Robert Moore, the industrialist, says to his future bride:

> "I can line yonder barren Hollow with lines of cottages, and rows of cottage-gardens ....."
>
> "Robert! And root up the copse?"
>
> "The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse: the beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street: there shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and cottages on the lonely slopes: the rough pebbled track shall be an even, firm, broad, black, sooty road, bedded with the cinders from my mill; and my mill, Caroline - my mill shall fill its present yard."[2]

Charlotte's sister, Anne, was more concerned with the situation of single women in society, rather than with society in general. The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is particularly concerned with the problem of the social stigma faced by the woman who leaves her husband, however debauched his behaviour might be.

Charles Dickens only wrote one novel which was directly concerned with the industrial North - Hard Times. This was based on a brief visit to Preston, as a reporter, to observe the effects of an extended strike. The novel is allegorical in style and lacks the vision and depth of knowledge of society which is to be found in Bleak House and Little Dorrit. For him, the centre of English society was firmly based in London. While he can show the all-pervading effect of law and bureaucracy spreading from South to North, he does not seem equally able to recognise the influence of the North on the South. However, Mr Rouncewell, the iron-founder in Bleak House, can be seen as an exception since he represents the vitality and flexibility of the new society of the North, as opposed

to the debility and rigidity of the older-established society of the South. He is able to impose his own values on the South.

Dickens is not concerned with a need to improve the status of women. In all his novels, even Bleak House, their destiny is shaped by men; men are the rightful masters.

Despite reservations about social conditions, writers with their roots in the North, such as Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë, were captivated by the possibilities of this new age, which had been made possible by a series of inventions. The main forces to be harnessed to the service of this industrial miracle were steam and water, both of which required a work-force to serve the great engine which powered the machines. It was necessary, therefore, for the first time to bring together large numbers of workers to live close to the central manufactories and, initially, these workers were drawn in from the surrounding countryside. The establishment of a manufactory in an area was enough to turn a tiny village into a community of several thousand souls in a very short time. In 1800 there was no town outside ~~of~~ London which had a population of 100,000, but by 1891 there were twenty-three such towns. The populations of Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield had increased tenfold, while London went from one million in 1801 to four and a half million in 1901. By 1891, a third of the population of England lived either in London or in other cities with 100,000 or more inhabitants[3]. This, of course, gave rise to demands by these new towns for a share in political power in keeping with their size.

Cotton was the first industry to be revolutionized. As late as 1830 cotton was still the only British industry in which the mill, as a centralised base for spinning, carding and later weaving, predominated. Until the 1860s, the factories covered by the new Factory Act, were almost exclusively textile and cotton mills. Cotton was King and Manchester was the centre of the cotton trade. Such inventions as the spinning jenny, the mule and, a little later, the power loom, were comparatively cheap to install and paid for themselves in a very short while through higher output. It was, therefore, quite possible for a manufacturer, like Mr Thornton in North and South, to start off in a small way and to finance further expansion out of current profits. In 1789, Robert Owen borrowed £100 to start himself off in Manchester, and by 1809 he had bought out his partners in the New Lanark Mills for £84,000 each, in cash[4]. By 1833, one and a half million people were directly employed in the cotton trade. By 1860, it almost equalled agriculture in terms of value to the economy, and cotton increased its share of the

market so that between 1816 and 1848, cotton manufactures formed between 40% and 50% of the annual declared value of all British exports. The quantity of raw cotton imported into Britain rose from eleven million pounds in 1785 to five hundred and eighty-eight million pounds in 1850, and the output of cloth increased from forty million yards to two hundred million yards! However, the trade suffered great fluctuations during this period, thus creating cycles of affluence, followed by cycles of destitution, for the cotton-hands.

The rapid increase in population in these cities taxed existing housing and sanitary arrangements, already inadequate, to breaking point. Living conditions were at their best over-crowded and at their worst no more than squalid cellars into which the excrement from open sewers drained. Mrs Gaskell describes such a place:

> Our friends were not dainty, but even they picked their way till they got to some steps leading down into a small area, where a person standing would have his head about one foot below the level of the street, and might at the same time, without the least motion of his body, touch the window of the cellar and the damp muddy wall right opposite. You went down one step even from this foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes were many of them broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the place even at mid-day.[5]

At the bottom of this social structure was what Thomas Carlyle called the 'Sanspotato': the wretched Irish peasant driven from Ireland by the potato famine. These peasants, used to country life, often took a pig to live with them in these cellars. Alex de Tocqueville, writing in 1835, described Manchester as a 'foul drain from which the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilise the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish, here civilisation works its miracles and civilised man is turned back almost into a savage'[6].

Initially, factory workers were drawn from farming communities and accepted hardship, long hours and poor living conditions in return for a cash wage. Because of the demands of the new machines, they developed higher levels of speed and dexterity than had previously been required for agricultural work. In Mary Barton, Mrs Gaskell describes a group of factory girls as having faces of 'below average beauty', but also remarks on the 'acuteness and intelligence of countenance, which has often been noticed in a manufacturing population'[7]. Because they were not as tied to their masters as agricultural workers, being given

a weekly wage rather than being paid in kind, their new masters seem to have felt even less responsibility for them than the old country gentry. They were 'hands' to be laid off or taken on as economics dictated. Money passed from the employer to employee and there the relationship ended. Life in a manufacturing town depended on having a shop to supply the family with food and other commodities which had to be paid for in cash; there was no time to waste on preparing food such as bread. For the first time, everything was purchased, so that when workers were laid off, there was no money to provide food, and no patch of land to provide vegetables. Workers seldom earned enough, for long enough, to put away against such a day. Conditions were probably less harsh than in many agricultural communities but the effect of loss of earnings was more immediate because, for the first time, the relationship between employer and employee was entirely based on what Thomas Carlyle described as the 'cash nexus'. It was the cycles of affluence and destitution which gave rise to frustration - the workers' expectations were constantly being raised, only to be dashed once again.

Because the majority of people were still illiterate, it was left to the literate and socially conscious middle class to articulate their sufferings. As Mrs Gaskell put it, 'to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people; the agony of suffering without the sympathy of the happy, or of erroneously believing that such is the case'[8]. Whilst such writers were not slow to recognise the immense social significance of the Industrial Revolution, because they were middle class, they wrote as observers rather than as participants. Even Dickens, despite his brief experience of working in a blacking factory, cannot be said to have had direct industrial experience (it was not until the 1890s, with increased working-class literacy, that true working-class writers, such as Arthur Morrison, began to emerge). Because they *were* middle class, while writers expressed great indignation at the exploitation of the workers, they expressed even greater indignation at the possibility of workers rebelling against the system which oppressed them.

Industrially-based novels by middle class authors served a dual purpose: they informed their readers of the details of the lives of workers and also extended a warning to their readers that such a powerful force of people, gathered in one place, might, if united in a common cause, rise up against the affluent middle and upper classes in the same way that, only fifty years before, the 'sansculottes' had risen against their masters in France. It was understandable that the

ruling classes were often unable to differentiate between positive movements, such as Chartism and Trade Unionism, and negative movements, such as the Luddites, which attempted to hold back progress by destroying factory machinery, and Captain Swing, which did the same with farm machinery; since it could be seen that all created organisational structures capable of rebelling against the existing order.

As early as 1832, Harriet Martineau published a novel which dealt adversely with trade unionism, A Manchester Strike. In this highly moral tale, the union leader, Allen, was presented as an honest and skilled worker who, nevertheless, ends up sweeping the gutter because he has challenged the laws of Political Economy; laws which were sacrosanct to Harriet Martineau. However, in Hard Times (1854), Charles Dickens went so far as to present these same laws as creating a system which trapped masters and men in a circle of mutual enmity and fear. In Alton Locke (1850), Charles Kingsley described trade unionists in highly melodramatic terms, having them swearing their members to secrecy with terrible blood-thirsty oaths. Mrs Gaskell, in Mary Barton (1848), balanced the picture by presenting the trade unionists as ordinary, reasonable men who could, nevertheless, be driven to terrible acts by the indifference of their masters. One of the most significant of these novels, in terms of its message, was Sybil or The Two Nations (1845) by Benjamin Disraeli. The 'two nations' of the title were the rich and the poor, who Disraeli saw as so disparate in their life styles and opportunities that they were bound to be as hostile to one another as two countries at war. For a time, the heroine, Sybil, believes that the workers' unions would have strength and simplicity, as opposed to the corruption of upper class institutions. However, by the end of the novel, she has discovered that the unions, far from being 'calm and collected, conscious at last of their holy cause', were instead a 'plebeian senate of wild ambitions and sinister and selfish ends'[9], and she comes to accept Egremont's view that the aristocracy are the only true leaders of the people. An advertisement for the book which appeared in The Times on May Day 1845, warned the reader against assuming that the conditions described were exaggerated and it concluded by saying that 'so little do we know of the state of our own country that the air of improbability which the whole truth would inevitably throw over these pages might deter some from their perusal'[10].

The fear of revolution can be detected in nearly all these novels. Since the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars which followed them, Europe had suffered numerous minor eruptions which culminated in a chain

of further smaller revolutions in 1848, during which King Louis-Philippe was put to flight. During the same period, England had also experienced riots and insurrections, many of which were blamed on the Chartist movement. For the middle and upper classes, Chartism was seen as inevitably leading to revolution against the rightful rulers, whereas for the working-classes, it seemed to offer the only real hope of achieving justice and parliamentary reform and representation. Chartism was a symbol even for those workers who were too uneducated to understand its aims. The London Scavengers interviewed by Henry Mayhew declared themselves to be Chartists, while expressing indifference to most social institutions, including politics.

In 1838, the dissolution of the Chartist Convention was followed by insurrections. The arrest of Henry Vincent, a popular figure with the industrial workers of Monmouthshire, led to the establishment of a 'physical force' party and the Newport Rising. On the 3rd November, Chartists from Blackwood, Nantyglo and Pontypool converged on Newport, intending to do no more than secure his release. The authorities, who had been warned of the attack, stationed twenty-eight soldiers in the main hotel. The soldiers fired on the Chartists, killing fifteen. The leaders of the Chartists were convicted of high treason and sentenced to death in January 1840. The sentence was, however, later commuted to transportation for life. While there is no conclusive evidence of a wider conspiracy, further unsuccessful uprisings took place in Dewsbury and Sheffield. The National Charter Association was formed in 1840, and by 1842 it had forty-eight thousand members. In May 1842, a second petition was taken to Parliament but was refused a hearing by a large majority of the Commons. It is the first petition of 1839 which is so sympathetically referred to in Mary Barton. Mrs Gaskell emphasises the lack of violence, the physical hardship and fortitude of the petitioners. She describes the poor workers who started off with such great hopes, only to return embittered that their petition was not even given a hearing. So deep is John Barton's disappointment that he cannot bear to talk about it:

> After a little pause John answered, 'If you please neighbour, I'd rather say nought about that. It's not to be forgotten or forgiven either by me or many another; but I canna tell of our downcasting just as a piece of London news. As long as I live, our rejection that day will bide in my heart; and as long as I live I shall curse them as so cruelly refused to hear us; but I'll not speak of it no more'[11].

In 1842, there was a serious trade depression which resulted in wage cuts and unemployment, and at the same time the price of wheat and bread rose. The so-called 'Plug' riots began in the North Staffordshire coalfields in July, when workers removed the plugs from the boilers of the pit engines in order to enforce a stoppage. Touring groups of strikers spread the action to fifteen counties and, in Manchester alone, one hundred and thirty mills were brought to a standstill.

At this time, probably in the hope of avoiding further suppression, the Chartist and trades delegates were still placing emphasis on 'moral' as opposed to 'physical' force, but despite these precautions, by October 1842 over a thousand arrests had been made and some seven hundred and forty-nine people had been imprisoned for crimes ranging from damaging pit machinery to quenching boilers and looting shops and private houses.

In 1847 there was a poor harvest and, combined with the continuing trade depression, this helped to revive interest in the Chartist movement. As the price of bread continued to rise higher than in any year since 1812, there were disturbances in a number of major cities. On the 6th March 1848, thousands of unemployed people converged on the city hall in Glasgow, complaining about the quality of meals provided by the relief committee. The following day, there was a confrontation with soldiers which resulted in several rioters being shot. The rioters carried the bodies of their dead companions back into the centre of the city and demanded 'blood for blood'. A second confrontation with the soldiers was only just averted. Two days later, riots broke out in Manchester when groups of youth barracked paupers entering the Tib Street workhouse and shouted at those who maintained the 'bastilles'. Another group surged down Chester Street with a loaf stuck on the end of a pole. Fortunately, on this occasion they were dispersed by police, rather than by soldiers. This protest was not related to Chartism, but was directed against the 'labour test', whereby the unemployed had to pick oakum for several hours a day in order to qualify for relief. However, such disturbances encouraged the Chartists to attempt a further petition to Parliament.

At the same time, news was coming through of revolutions on the Continent. The Northern Star rejoiced over the news of the flight of King Louis-Philippe. It was at this stage that the Chartist movement became more militant and there was talk of 'ulterior measures' should this third petition fail to get a hearing. One suggestion was that the Convention should prepare a National Memorial to Queen Victoria to

dissolve Parliament and to 'call to her council such ministers only as will make the People's Charter a cabinet measure'. Parliament reacted by asking the Duke of Wellington to prepare plans for the police to defend London. When it was established that there was to be a meeting on Kennington Common, on the 13th March, to celebrate the French Revolution, twenty thousand special constables were mobilised and two thousand metropolitan police were put on duty. On the 10th April, between four hundred thousand and half a million Chartists gathered on the Common, unarmed but wearing tricolours and cockades. The police summoned their leader, Feargus O'Connor, and warned him that they would oppose the march and that he would be held personally responsible for the consequences. O'Connor must have had in mind the fate of the leaders of the Newport Uprising when he agreed to the banning of the procession. Instead, the Charter was taken to the House of Commons in a cab, and by two o'clock in the afternoon, only five thousand Chartists were left on the Common and they dispersed without any further trouble.

From the 7th to the 10th April, a similar pattern occurred in Manchester and Sheffield. In Manchester, a meeting of between eight thousand and twenty thousand people was held in Smithfield Market, the response to which was the mobilisation of eleven thousand specials and the placing of cannon and armed soldiers in the streets. Again, the uprising did not occur; nor did the Sheffield meeting. Plans were made for simultaneous meetings to be held on Good Friday in Halifax, Bradford, Lancashire and the Midlands. The division between the moderate 'moral' force and the more extreme 'physical' force Chartists became apparent. Further plans were made to confront the London authorities on Bonner's Field, but, once again, the police and soldiers were paraded in force and what might well have ended in a pitched battle, faded out in a few minor scuffles.

The rumours and threats of insurrection continued into the autumn, but because of a large number of arrests and transportations, this great wave of disturbances drew to a close and the real possibility of a revolution in England, similar to the sort which had occurred on the Continent, was averted. However, it was very clear that if there had been a revolution, it would have occurred not in London, but in the great new manufacturing towns of the North, where sufficient numbers of 'hands' were located to provide the 'physical' force required. It also meant that, even with the collapse of Chartism, the great fear of, and hostility to, organised labour was to continue well into the next century and workers would not be able to find a political voice until the

establishment of the Independent Labour Party at the turn of the century. This climate of near-revolution lies behind the views expressed in the novels discussed in this thesis.

The novels written by women offer an interesting commentary on the social revolution, because women were not at the centre of decision-making. While still generally accepting that marriage and children were the destiny of the fortunate woman, these novels express through their heroines a demand for wider opportunities. Characters, such as Caroline Helstone and Margaret Hale, long to be involved in the male-dominated world of commerce and industry. Women writers recognised that if they were to be able to meet the challenge of less protected living, they and their 'sisters' must be given a more practical education. They show themselves to be pragmatists who accept that men would continue for some time to determine the parameters of their lives, but, at the same time, they used their novels to convey to men their wish for change. For the first time women were being published and read in sufficient numbers to be of influence. While male publishers preferred their women writers to concentrate on domestic and feminine subjects (Mrs Gaskell was forced by her publisher to change the title of her first novel from John Barton to Mary Barton) the women continued to increase the power and range of their writing, often using pseudonyms to cover their femininity: the Brontë sisters initially wrote as Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, and Marian Evans adopted the male, nom de plume George Eliot. It is interesting that Lord David Cecil defines Mrs Gaskell as 'a dove'[12] and Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot as 'eagles', principally on the basis that she alone used her married title, *Mrs* Gaskell, whereas one would have thought that this indicated a greater confidence in her ability to write acceptable novels on a wide range of subjects, *as* a woman without attempting to conceal her identity.

It is ironic that a writer such as Charles Dickens, who never discussed the idea of feminine independence in his novels, should have given to Bella Wilfer, in Our Mutual Friend, the sentiment which was later to be taken up by Henrik Ibsen, and which sums up so much of what these women novelists were saying: '"I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house"'[13].

Notes on Chapter I

1 Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, Pelican Edition (Harmondsworth, 1968), p.13.

2 Charlotte Brontë, Shirley, World Classics Edition (Oxford, 1981), p.644.

3 Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities, 57; G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The Common People 1746-1946, University Paperbacks (1964), Ch. XXXVII.

4 E.J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution, Cardinal Edition (1963), p.52.

5 Mrs E. Gaskell, Mary Barton, Penguin Library Edition (Harmondsworth, 1979), p.98.

6 Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland, trans. G. Lawrence and K.P. Meyer, ed. J.P. Meyer, Faber and Faber (1958), pp.107-8.

7 Mary Barton, p.41.

8 Mary Barton, Preface to 1848 Edition.

9 Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil or The Two Nations, The World Classics Edition (Oxford, 1981), Book V, Ch. I, p.290.

10 Sybil or The Two Nations, Preface to 1845 Edition.

11 Mary Barton, p.144.

12 David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation, Fontana Library (1964), p.154.

13 Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, Penguin Classics Edition (Harmondsworth, 1988), p.746.

CHAPTER II THE ROMANTIC HEROINE

The word 'romantic' has been used derogatorily from Roman times up to the present day. Initially, it was used to describe languages which were based on barbarized Latin (Lingua Latina) which, by the eighth century, had become known as Lingua Romantica. These languages were firstly old French (Romanz) then Provençal (Romanso) and later Spanish (Romance). The word 'classical' was used to describe the Latin of the Empire. Therefore, 'classical' came to indicate a perfect form and 'romantic' an imperfect form. Later, the word 'romantic' was applied in France to stories or verse written in the vernacular. By the seventeenth century, the meaning had been extended to mean a fantastic statement or fairy-tale. By the 1630s, the Oxford Dictionary defined it as having the specific meaning of 'a lying tale', while a romancer had come to mean 'a liar'. In the eighteenth century, the word took yet another meaning with the Romantic movement, and was used in connection with art and literature which evoked atmosphere, emotion and fantasy. The word 'Gothic' was used for novels or poems which expressed an extreme form of the romantic with emphasis on passion, suffering, terror and ghostly happenings, usually set amid ruins, wild landscapes and, very often, with the action occurring during thunderstorms. One of the most famous of these novels, and the first, was The Castle of Otranto by Horace Walpole, published in 1765.

Originally, the word 'classical' was applied both to a Roman gentleman of ancient descent and also to a military leader who provided the most expensive of the fighting forces: the cavalry and heavily armed phalanx or 'classis'. According to the Oxford Dictionary, by about 1599 the word had come to mean 'standard', and by 1607, the adjective 'classicall' was being applied to those authors who conformed to the standards of classical antiquity. By the nineteenth century, therefore, heroines of novels could be considered either as 'romantic', because they were characters in a fictitious tale, or as 'Romantic' because they represented the values of that particular movement in English literature.

The founding fathers of the English novel tradition, Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, developed plots based on individual experience, rather than on a collective tradition, and it was the success of this move away from the classical tradition that enabled women writers to make an impact on the novel market and, quite quickly, to establish a substantial readership. Because of the very limited education available to women, even of the middle and upper classes, up to the nineteenth

century, the classical and historical sources which had previously formed the basis of most fictional narratives would have been largely unknown to them. However, once personal experience could be drawn upon, the way was open for the woman novelist. Women who had provided the main readership for novels, now began to draw on their personal experience to provide the novels themselves. However, because of the prescribed nature of these experiences, even such excellent novelists as Jane Austen had to give their novels domestic settings. They were unable to describe such locations as inns, counting-houses and factories because they had seldom visited such places. Mark Twain's criticism of Jane Austen as being wonderful in the drawing room but never going outside it, even if largely true, is somewhat unreasonable, in that it was men who had limited women's sphere of influence, experience and knowledge to this same drawing room.

Even such women writers as Mrs Gaskell, who was exceptional in having first-hand knowledge of life in an industrial town, could have had very little knowledge of how men talked and behaved in their working and social life outside the home. Lord David Cecil criticises Mrs Gaskell for creating unrealistic heroes, because she was 'wholly lacking in the virile qualities'[1]. He claims that this is why she cannot imagine how men behave and speak when not in the company of women, but it is difficult to write about something which you have not experienced in some way. Equally, one could criticise male writers of the same period for not being able to re-create the way women behave and speak when not in the company of men. Nevertheless, women continued to write novels in increasing numbers, equalling the best that men could produce; it must also be admitted that they matched the worst that their male counterparts could produce!

By the mid-nineteenth century, several factors produced a large market for novels: the generally improved level of literacy, the expansion of circulating libraries and, most importantly, increased leisure for some groups of workers, particularly domestic servants who, because they were kept in terms of food and accommodation, had some money to spare for books. This in turn meant that many of these novels were written solely to cash in on the market and were badly written, unrealistic and mainly about ladies of the upper classes. Such novels were much criticised on the grounds that they gave their readers a dangerously unrealistic view of life. Both Mary Barton and Ruth Hilton are shown as reading a great number of this type of novel. Mrs Gaskell seems to suggest that these young women were so filled with the romantic ideas of such novels

that they were unprepared for real life and therefore misinterpreted the intentions of their upper class lovers. Towards the end of the century, there was a levelling-out of demand; the price of novels increased and the number published decreased. This probably contributed to a gradual improvement in the general standard of both writing and publishing.

First reactions to the women novelists seem to have been very similar to that of Dr Johnson towards women preachers: the wonder did not lie in it being done well, but in it being done at all! This reaction was largely due to the fact that with women receiving such a limited education, the stringing together of a few words in a letter was considered to be as much as could be expected, so that the stringing together of sufficient words for a novel was an unusual achievement for a woman, whatever the quality of the completed work. There were of course shining exceptions, such as Fanny Burney and Jane Austen who established a reputation for witty and elegant writing. However, even by the mid-nineteenth century women writers were still expected to confine themselves to women's subjects and to leave the wider sphere to their male counterparts. Mrs Gaskell had intended to call her first novel John Barton, but her publishers influenced her to strengthen the female lead, Mary, and to re-name the book Mary Barton. For much the same reason the Brontë sisters felt compelled to conceal their female identity behind the aliases of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, and their publishers, Smith, Elder and Company, were startled to find that the authors of these powerful stories were middle class provincial ladies.

Women writers were in fact ideally suited to the two categories of novel which were to dominate the market from the late eighteenth century to the present day: Romantic novels of intense emotion, misty landscapes and mysterious happenings, such as Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre, and novels of social realism such as Mary Barton and North and South. In addition, they would provide most of the light romantic fiction of the sort still published by Mills and Boon, and found in such profusion on the shelves of public libraries today. This thesis is concerned with the romantic heroine in terms of the post-eighteenth century non-classical tradition which draws upon personal experience rather than on the myths and legends of antiquity.

The first novel to be discussed, Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë, fulfils many of the criteria of the Romantic novel. Its setting is to some extent outside time and place. We need to know no more than that the county is Yorkshire and the time is the immediate past. From the very beginning, the author creates a world of strong emotions for the

orphaned Jane, which operates in two ways: it demands a strong response from the reader for the plight of the young child and at the same time allows Jane herself to express and experience powerful emotions; she is never portrayed as passive. The County of Yorkshire would be unknown to the majority of Charlotte's readers and would, therefore, have the quality of mystery. In the same way Thornfield Hall is portrayed as a house of mystery, full of secret rooms and ghostly presences.

Of the three sisters who survived into adulthood, Charlotte Brontë was the most ambitious and the only one who lived long enough to leave behind a substantial body of work. Charlotte commenced writing Jane Eyre in 1846 when she was suffering from the disappointment of having been unable to find a publisher for her first novel, The Professor. Her sisters, Emily and Anne, had already found publishers for Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, respectively. In addition, the sisters' plans to open a school on their return from Brussels had come to nothing. In August 1846, Charlotte travelled with her father to Manchester in order for him to have an operation for the removal of cataracts. Charlotte experienced the isolation and strangeness which she always felt in a large city. This sense of isolation was accentuated by the fact that although the rooms they had taken were comfortable, the mistress of the house had gone to the country for her health's sake and Charlotte had the added burden of catering. In a letter home, she claims to be 'somewhat puzzled in managing about provisions; we board ourselves. I find myself excessively ignorant. I can't tell what to order in the way of meat'[2]. With typical stoicism, Charlotte remained with her father during the operation and nursed him alone during the time which followed. During the four days immediately following the operation, he had to be confined to bed in a dark room and she was told that he was 'not to be stirred for four days; he is to speak and be spoken to as little as possible'[3]. Mrs Gaskell was a friend of Charlotte and after her death, Mrs Gaskell was the writer chosen by Mr Brontë to record his daughter's life. The circumstances following Mr Brontë's operation typify the dichotomy between the demands of the family and of writing. Mrs Gaskell describes how Charlotte commenced writing Jane Eyre: 'In those grey, weary, uniform streets, where all faces, save that of her kind doctor, were strange and untouched with sunlight to her, - there and then, did the brave genius begin Jane Eyre'[4]. Much as Mrs Gaskell admired Charlotte as a writer, there is no doubt that she admired the quality of her life even more. She saw Charlotte as displaying the Christian virtues and never hesitating to put her duty before her own

desires. Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë had correspondence on this question of the woman's right to an artistic life and both were in agreement that this creative life must not be put before their duties to their families. While Charlotte, the writer, protested about this, Charlotte, the woman, submitted.

Jane Eyre was published in 1847 and remains one of the best known and most popular of Victorian novels. It is also the novel discussed in this thesis which comes nearest to being 'Gothic'. Basically, the plot contains the stock romantic elements of the poor orphaned girl, ill-treated by those who should have protected her, who goes as a governess to the ward of a gentleman, who lives in a hall in a remote part of the country. Despite her being plain and penniless, Jane Eyre captivates Mr Rochester and he proposes marriage. Mr Rochester is a hero very much in the Gothic manner, with a hidden past, the possibility of a hidden crime, hypnotic eyes and dark looks. His home has a gloomy third storey which, architecturally, does not really fit with the rest of the house, in that it is described as belonging to an earlier period. The words used to describe it include 'dark and low', 'interesting from their air of antiquity', 'a home of the past - a shrine of memory'. It is this attic which houses the most Gothic element of the novel - Mr Rochester's mad wife, who stalks the corridors with lighted candle and bloated face, haunting both Jane and Mr Rochester. On one occasion, Mrs Rochester bites her brother, visiting from the West Indies, so severely that he faints from loss of blood. This suggests something of the classic creature of Gothic Romance - the vampire. Ultimately, the house is reduced to ruins with the mad woman as incendiary. However, because of the freshness of the approach and characterisation of the heroine, the novel never quite becomes Gothic. It is the robust realism of the conversations between the heroine and all those who confront her which marks her as a heroine for the future, even if elements of the story are based on an older tradition. Jane Eyre demands responses, not as a member of the weaker sex, but as someone who is 'equal before God'. It is in this respect that the character looks forward to the twentieth century and the concept of the 'new woman', in a manner matched only by Margaret Hale, the heroine of Mrs Gaskell's later novel, North and South. However, at the same time as making these demands for equality in matters of reason, Jane continues to refer to Mr Rochester as 'Sir' and '*my* master', long after such a style of address is appropriate in their relationship. Therefore, there is a dichotomy at the heart of the book in that Jane demonstrates how a single woman may achieve

independence, both emotionally and physically, and then be prepared to submit to the mastery of the man she has chosen. Jane recognises in Mr Rochester her natural master: a dominating and yet benevolent figure to whom she wishes to submit. By submitting to Mr Rochester, Jane will be liberated, whereas if she had submitted to St John Rivers, she would have been truly imprisoned. It is interesting that when Jane Eyre finally marries Mr Rochester, who cannot be accepted as her moral superior, he has been blinded, scarred and maimed as a result of his 'sin'. It is not difficult in our post-Freudian age to read into these happenings the expression of the frustration and suppression of aspects of Charlotte's own life. Jane Eyre is, therefore, as far beyond the crudities of a 'Gothic' novel as Hamlet is beyond The Revenger's Tragedy.

Although there is a dreamlike quality to the setting of Jane Eyre, which transcends a particular time and place, according to Charlotte's close friend, Ellen Nussey, Thornfield Hall was based on two actual buildings: Ellen Nussey's own home, 'Rydings', where Charlotte had stayed in 1832, and North Lees Farm, which she visited while staying at Hathersage with Ellen Nussey in 1845. This latter building contained a manwoman's chamber and there was a legend that a lunatic had burnt the place down in the seventeenth century. When Jane travels from Gateshead to Lowood, we are told that the distance is fifty miles and that from Lowood to Millcote, the journey took sixteen hours. We are also aware that with each stage in these journeys Jane is moving northwards, but no attempt is made to indicate the atmosphere of a particular country town; Millcote is sketched in with deliberate vagueness: 'a different region to Lowood, more populous, less picturesque: more stirring, less romantic'[5]. The story cannot be given a precise time in history. Apart from minor details, there is nothing in the plot which could not have happened in the previous century. Everything depends on the validity of the characters. In Shirley, the plot is supported by the actual social and economic history of a particular time and place, but in Jane Eyre, the action is self-contained. While ~~she~~ Charlotte Brontë certainly explores aspects of her own past experience, these experiences are developed in a poetic and highly imaginative manner. Probably the most biographical sections of the novel are those based on Charlotte's time at Cowan Bridge School, which she attended for a short time with Emily, and from which her two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, were brought home to die. Maria is almost certainly the model for the saintly Helen Burns. In the same way, the sisters, Diana and Mary Rivers at Moor House, reflect many of the

attitudes and interests of the Brontë sisters, and their old servant, Hannah, can be seen as a reflection of the Brontës' old retainer, Tabby.

With the principal characters, the process of translating experience into fictional representation can be seen as more complex. Writing to her friend, Helen Nussey, in 1849, Charlotte Brontë warns against assuming that her characters are literal portraits of people she has known: 'We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never to *dictate*. The heroines are abstractions, and the heroes also'[6]. As her writing developed, one can follow the working-out of her complex feelings for Monsieur Héger which arose out of her time at the school in Brussels. She deals with this fairly directly in her first and unsuccessful novel, The Professor, and later with greater mastery and insight in Villette. Mr Rochester can be seen as embodying many of her concepts of the ideal man, but, while his character has the arrogance and authority of M. Héger, unlike Héger Rochester is shown as prepared to break the rules of society; if he can only gain Jane by committing bigamy, then he is prepared to do this. He is a Héger, freed of constraints and able to court Jane boldly and openly. One can see that in Rochester's masterful yet tender courtship of Jane, Charlotte is expressing how she would have liked M. Héger to have behaved towards her. However, Jane Eyre is not Charlotte Brontë. Despite Charlotte's much quoted conversation with her sisters when she argued that it was unnecessary to make heroines beautiful and that she would show them '"a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of theirs"'[7], Jane's personality and behaviour are portrayed as stronger and more forthright than Charlotte's own. Jane defies all who try to subdue her spirit. As a small child, Jane pits her will against that of the formidable Mrs Reed: '"People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. *You* are deceitful." Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph I ever felt'[8]. The stern Mrs Reed is reduced to 'rocking herself to and fro, and even twisting her face as if she would cry'. In contrast with Fanny Price's quiet acceptance of inferior status as a poor relation, in Mansfield Park by Jane Austen, Jane Eyre, in a similar if less comfortable situation at Gateshead Hall, responds defiantly to the lady's maid's accusation of striking 'her young master', with '"Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?"' to which she receives the sharp reply, '"No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep"'[9].

Jane's friend at Lowood, Helen Burns, is representative of a Christian ideal of humility in adversity which Jane is shown as resisting. While Helen accepts Miss Scatcherd's severe treatment as a just dislike of her faults, Jane declares '"And if I were in your place I should dislike her; I should resist her; if she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose"'[10].

Throughout the novel, Jane is shown as being acutely aware of her position in the social strata. The reader is continually reminded that, however poor. Jane is 'a lady' and not a servant. Each interview with Mr Rochester is a confrontation, but a confrontation of equals. Jane may call him 'Sir' but it is clear that she will not submit to him emotionally or intellectually. At their first interview Rochester pretends to dismiss outside appearances by saying that Jane 'is not pretty any more than he is handsome'. Despite such protestations, however, both characters are conscious of their lack of conventional good looks. When Jane wishes to cure herself of her feelings for Mr Rochester, she first draws herself in charcoal and then makes an idealised likeness of Miss Ingram on ivory. Earlier in his life, Rochester had made the bitter discovery that Adèle's mother, Céline Varens, a French opera-dancer, had only simulated 'a grande passion' for 'her British gnome'. He has to suffer the chastening experience of hearing her mock him with her lover, 'a young roué of a vicompte', and his revenge is to leave '"a bullet in one of his poor etiolated arms, feeble as the wing of a chicken in the pip"'[11]. He balances this act of cruelty by taking the child, Adèle, who may or may not be his daughter, as his ward. In their second encounter, Rochester claims the right '"to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting"' on the basis of his greater age and '"a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house"'[12]. However, she counters this with the reply that his claim for superiority depends on the '"use you have made of your time and experience"'[13]. On another occasion, he forces Jane to sit quietly in the corner of the drawing room while the arrogant ladies discuss the governesses they have tormented. She hears herself described as having 'all the faults of her class'. Ultimately, Rochester is to reject the outward show of Miss Ingram for the inner graces of Jane; the plainly dressed, slighted governess is to gain the prize. However, Mr Rochester is not such a prize in that he already has a wife, of whom everyone at the Hall, except Jane, is aware. The marriage which Mr Rochester attempts to enter into with Jane, a young woman without a family to investigate and interfere, would not have gone

so far with a wealthy young woman like Miss Ingram. Even when he is preparing to propose to Jane, Rochester continues to torment her with the idea of his marriage to Miss Ingram. Jane challenges him to answer her, not '"through the medium of custom, conventionalities, not even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal - as we are!"'[14] and Rochester accepts this equality with '"As we are!"' This is perhaps one of the most important sentences in the book, in that the young penniless woman claims equality with the wealthy gentleman in every sense, even transcending the grave. In the midst of this near-Gothic novel, we have this statement of great social importance, which was to be echoed by other women writers in a variety of ways. Because Jane thinks Rochester is prepared to marry someone he does not love and respect - Miss Ingram - she even claims that she is better than he. When, after failing to complete the wedding ceremony, he pleads with Jane to live abroad with him as his mistress, she resists the force of his will. The stern values of Lowood prove stronger than her passion for him. When he begs her to consider his 'horrible life when she is gone', she tells him that he must '"Do as I do: trust in God and yourself. Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there"'[15]. Jane rejects compromise and leaves Thornfield Hall with less than she came with. Like King Lear, she is literally cast on the 'blasted heath' and reduced to longing for the porridge put out for the hens. She survives because of the charity of the family at Moor House; she is humbled to the status of a beggar.

In her encounters with St John Rivers, Jane once again demands equality and he is more prepared than Rochester to accede in this respect. He is in physical and mental contrast to Rochester. Physically, in the same way as Miss Ingram, he possesses the type of good looks admired at the time, in that he is tall and slender, with a face which 'riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline: quite a straight classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin'[16]. Unlike Rochester, his passions are spiritual; he is obsessed with a belief in his destiny as a missionary. He demands that Jane should marry him: not out of love, but because he wants her help with his mission; marriage is a compromise for the sake of propriety. Typically, Jane will not accept the compromise. While she is quite prepared to accept his assurance that God is calling her to the missionary field, she will only consent to go as a fellow missionary; not as his wife. He tells her that they must be married and '"undoubtedly enough of love would follow upon marriage to

render the union right even in your eyes"'[17]. Jane's response is instinctive: '"I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St John, and I scorn you when you offer it"'[18]. Although St John Rivers exerts all his enormous will to force her to consent to his plans, she resists it, as she did Rochester's. She is tempted to 'rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own'[19]. It is shortly after this that she seems to hear Rochester's voice and is able to break away from St John's power: 'It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play and in force'[20]. The circle is complete. In St John Rivers, she sees the Christian morality and purpose which she greatly admires, but she also sees the passionless narrowness of these values. Her rejection of St John's concept of Christian duty frees her to return to Mr Rochester. When she decides to make this return, she is responding to her instincts and emotions rather than to reason. When she commences the journey, she has no reason to suppose that Rochester is any more free to marry her than he was when she left. At the same time, she has matured emotionally and has something with which to compare her feelings for Rochester; she can accept the consequences of what she feels for Rochester. Jane recognises that to have yielded to Rochester's request to come away with him as his mistress would have been 'an error of principle', but to have yielded to St John Rivers' proposal of marriage 'would have been an error of judgement'[21], and this,in her new freedom,seems even more serious.

Even more persistently than Mrs Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë addresses the reader directly, allowing Jane to ask for the reader's understanding of her situation. These intrusions take two forms: the first is interrupting a description to address the reader as 'dear reader', 'gentle reader', 'true reader', even 'romantic reader', and of course, most famous of all, 'Reader, I married him'[22]. The second, and more unusual, deliberately reminds the reader that this is a work of imagination, not a true autobiography. This is seen when Rochester takes Jane on an extravagant shopping trip and insists on buying her frocks and jewels 'such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems', she responds by saying, '"You need not look in that way," I said; "If you do, I'll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter."'[23] Again, Charlotte opens Chapter 11 with the words, 'A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when *I* draw up the curtain this time, reader - you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote'[24]. The first device of addressing the reader directly goes back to Fielding and Richardson,

and Charlotte was therefore merely following an established tradition; but the second device of deliberately breaking the illusion by reminding the reader that Jane Eyre exists only within the pages of the novel and that it is the author, Charlotte Brontë, who is the puppet master, is more original and seems to be part of her own development as a writer. She certainly felt less need to use it in her later works.

Despite the timeless and romantic nature of the story and the imagination which presents readers with the Gothic horrors of the 'red room', and the 'Bluebeard's' den on the upper floor at Thornfield, as a character Jane Eyre belongs more easily with Margaret Hale and Shirley Keeldar than with less self-reliant heroines, such as Lucy Manette and Caroline Helstone. In Jane Eyre, Charlotte makes the first tentative request, which she is to develop in Shirley and Villette, that men, because they hold the power over women, must do their duty and improve the situation of women generally, and particularly of women who remain single. She rejects the traditional passive role of women and demands that they be accepted as 'equal before God'. It is the uncompromising moral strength of Jane Eyre, combined with the romantic elements of a passionate nature and a strong will, which make her such an enduring heroine, and although this is the earliest of the three novels discussed in this chapter, it takes a much more positive view of the role of women than does A Tale of Two Cities, published twelve years later.

Although Sylvia's Lovers by Mrs Gaskell was not published until 1863, sixteen years after Jane Eyre, it is still very much in the romantic tradition. It turns away from the contemporary theme of industrialisation which had been the subject of Mrs Gaskell's three previous novels, and is set in the immediate past of the Napoleonic Wars. She places the story against the suitably dramatic and romantic landscape of the North Yorkshire moors and the old whaling town of Whitby. While the period of the novel just precedes the industrialisation of the north of England, it indicates that changes in the social structure are to come and unless people acquire the necessary skills, they will have no place in this new society. Her heroine, Sylvia Robson, refuses to learn one such new skill - reading; she considers it unnecessary for the life of a farmer's daughter. When the unforeseen happens and her father is executed as a result of his involvement in a rebellion against the press gangs, she is unable to guide her faithful farm labourer, Kester, to run the farm because she cannot read the instructions for planting the crops. She is forced to depend on the better educated Philip Hepburn. The writing of this novel so late in Mrs Gaskell's career, when she had established her reputation

with didactic novels, such as Mary Barton, North and South, and Ruth, indicates both the persistence of the romantic tradition and her personal belief in the need to respond to a changing society.

Another reason why Mrs Gaskell chose to set Sylvia's Lovers in the recent past, may have been the anguish she experienced as a result of writing the biography of her friend, Charlotte Brontë: she experienced great difficulty in writing frankly about members of the family still living, and even greater difficulty when it came to people outside the family, some of whom considered themselves to have been maligned in the way they had been represented in the biography. She was threatened with legal action by Lady Scott who, during her first marriage to Mr Robinson, had employed Branwell as a tutor to her children. Mrs Gaskell had indicated the lady's involvement in Branwell's disgrace and subsequent decline. In a similar way, supporters of the Rev. Carus Wilson, who had been Charlotte's model for the Director of Lowood, Mr Brocklehurst, demanded that it be made quite clear that it was the poor diet at the parsonage which had weakened the constitutions of Charlotte's elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, and led to their death from consumption, rather than the conditions at The Clergy Daughters' School.

The experience was a bitter one, as can be seen from her letter to Ellen Nussey on June 16th 1857:

> I am writing as if I were in famous spirits, and I think I *am* so *angry* that I am almost merry in my bitterness, if you know that state of feeling; but I have cried more since I came home that (sic) I ever did in the same space of time before; and never needed kind words so much - and no one gives me them. *I did so try to tell the truth*, and I believe *now* I hit as near the truth as any one *could* do. And I weighed every line with my whole power and heart, so that every line should go to its great purpose of making *her* known and valued, as one who had gone through such a terrible life with a brave and faithful heart[25].

Finally, she submitted a preface to George Smith, her publisher, for the Third Edition which read 'If anybody is displeased with any statement or words in the following pages, I beg leave to with-draw it, and to express my deep regret for having offered so expensive an article as truth to the Public'.

The anguish which she experienced may well account for the lapsing of five years between the publication of The Life of Charlotte Brontë and that of Sylvia's Lovers in 1863. It may also suggest why she turned away from contemporary life to the comparative safety of the recent past. It

is likely that she felt that once-burning issues, such as the pressing of men into the navy, could be more safely discussed after the passage of some sixty or seventy years. Incidents which she describes, such as the burning of the randyvowse house and the freeing of the pressed men by the fishermen of Monkshaven would have been intensely controversial in 1790 but unlikely to be of anything more than historical interest in 1860. It is easier to be frank about tyrannies that no longer exist than to write about the new tyrannies which have taken their place.

There were, however, other reasons which contributed to this delay, since she had considered the subject as early as June 1859. She contacted George Smith to say that Sampson Low had offered £1,000 for a novel in three volumes, but that she would prefer to have £800 from Smith rather than accept £1,000 from Low. Smith responded with a matching offer and terms were agreed. She completed the first two volumes by January 1862 but was unable to complete the third until the end of the year. The cause of the delay was her obligations as the wife of a Minister of Religion, which highlights the conflict between her artistic life and her family obligations. Mrs Gaskell was always aware of the conflict between her supportive role as a wife and mother and the 'self-centred' one of a writer. However, she was quite clear as to which should have priority; a letter to her friend Eliza Fox in February 1850 discusses this conflict: 'One thing is pretty clear, *Women* must give up living an artist's life, if home duties are to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are so small a part of their life'[26]. In the same letter, she goes on to describe Art for women being not so much a driving force as a healthy refuge 'to shelter themselves in when too much pressed upon by daily small Lilliputian arrows of peddling cares'. She describes Art as the magic land where 'King Arthur lies hidden and soothes them with its peace'. Art, therefore, was not seen as 'God's appointed work' but as a necessary escape from the reality of daily life to the magic world of childhood. Although Mrs Gaskell admired Charlotte Brontë's art as a novelist, she admired the quality of her life even more. She saw Charlotte's life as one of suffering, self-denial and obedience to the 'Divine Will', and this is how she portrayed her in the biography. Therefore, when Travers Madge asked Mrs Gaskell to help with relief work during the cotton famine of 1861-64, caused by the blockade of the Southern States during the American Civil War, she immediately put aside the third volume of Sylvia's Lovers for almost a year and turned her attention to practical concerns.

In Sylvia's Lovers she based the town of Monkshaven on the whaling town of Whitby in Yorkshire and, in preparation for the novel, spent some ten days there in October 1859, staying with a Mrs Rose: a name she later appropriated for Alice and Hester Rose in the novel. Her knowledge of the whaling industry and its organisation was taken from William Scoresby's An Account of the Arctic Regions with a History and Description of the Northern Whaling-Fishery (1820). This was also the source of the 'tall' whaling stories so beloved of Kinraid and Daniel Robson.

As in Ruth, Mrs Gaskell uses landscape to indicate the type of people who inhabit it. Just as the land and sea encroach upon one another, so the farmers on the moors above the town and the fishermen in the town itself intermingle and even change roles, in that a fisherman may become a farmer in later life and a young man from a farming family might be drawn to the sea for part of his life:

> But for twenty miles inland there was no forgetting the sea, nor the sea-trade; refuse shell-fish, sea-weed, the offal of the melting-houses, were the staple manure of the district; great ghastly whale-jaws, bleached bare and white, were the arches over the gate-posts to many a field or moorland stretch. Out of every family of several sons, however agricultural their position might be, one had gone to sea, and the mother looked wistfully seaward at the changes of the keen piping moorland winds[27].

This had been the case with Daniel Robson, Sylvia's father, who had been a whaler in his younger days and was now a farmer.

Nevertheless, religious belief marked a clear division between the Quaker families who owned the shops in the small town, and the rest of the community which gave allegiance, much more liberally interpreted, to the Established Church. Quakers, such as the Fosters, Hester and Alice Rose, William Coulson, and the principal male protagonist, Philip Hepburn, are separated from the whalers and farmers by their way of life as traders in the town and by their religious beliefs. Philip Hepburn is related to Sylvia's mother, who accepts and admires his standards, whereas Daniel Robson, Sylvia's father, and Sylvia, who reflects her father's values, prefer the company of the freedom-loving Charlie Kinraid, the whaling specksioneer. Alice Rose had once crossed these barriers by marrying a whaler but the marriage had been a failure. Just as in Mary Barton, Mary's Aunt Esther stands as a warning of what Mary could become if she follows the frivolous side of her nature, so Alice Rose's story is used to remind the reader of the dangers of mixing these two life styles. Alone of Mrs Gaskell's novels, Sylvia's Lovers portrays religion as a

force which constrains rather than liberates, and divides rather than reconciles. The form of Dissent practised by Alice Rose is harsh and oppressive when compared with that attributed to the Bensons in Ruth and the Holmans in Cousin Phillis. Mrs Gaskell appears to be suggesting that suppression of emotion can be as dangerous as the 'enthusiasm' attributed to the Methodists in North and South. Philip Hepburn is attracted to Sylvia because of her vitality and open response to life which is in contrast to his own introverted but sincere religious convictions. In order to gain her, he irretrievably compromises these convictions by betraying Charlie Kinraid to the press gang, and when he marries her he suppresses in Sylvia the very qualities which had attracted him to her in the first place. The reader is therefore presented with an inverted form of Alice Rose's story.

The novel has a secondary social theme in that it explores the disastrous impact of the press gang on the community. The men of Monkshaven are described as being at war with two enemies: the French navy and the English press gang. Just as Mrs Gaskell distances the intensity of the events portrayed in the novel by placing them in the near past, so the men of Monkshaven are shown as distancing themselves from the realities of the Napoleonic wars because of the geographical distance between the English and French coasts. It was not the distant enemy which gave rise to 'passionate anger and thirst for vengeance'[28] but the enemy operating on their own doorstep - the press gang. The atrocities of the press gangs spread like circles on a pond to encompass all the principal characters. Charlie Kinraid is empressed without being able to let Sylvia know that he is still alive; Philip Hepburn succombs to the temptation to use the press gang to rid himself of his rival for Sylvia; and Daniel Robson is hanged for involvement in the burning of the randyvowse house.

As in the case of her first novel, Mary Barton, Mrs Gaskell had intended initially to make a male character, Charlie Kinraid, the centre of the novel and to call it The Specksioneer, but once again she was persuaded by her publisher to place more emphasis on the character of the heroine, Sylvia; so she discarded her second choice of title, Philip's Idol, in favour of Sylvia's Lovers, as suggesting the correct balance with Sylvia at the centre of the story but at the same time indicating the importance of her relationships with the two male characters, Charlie Kinraid and Philip Hepburn.

Sylvia is as much a heroine of her time and place as Mary Barton is of hers. Like all Mrs Gaskell's heroines, with the exception of Molly

Gibson in Wives and Daughters, Sylvia has great physical beauty, but unlike Mary Barton, she does not think of using this asset to acquire social status. The question of class is not central to the story, although it is suggested as a cause for division between the local squirearchy and the tradesmen in their attitude to the press gangs. Sylvia is a country girl of the pre-industrial age; she is not, like Margaret Hale, 'guardian of herself'. She rejects book learning but at the same time prides herself on performing her duties on the farm in a capable manner. She is, therefore, well equipped for the life she intends to lead. However, this attitude makes it impossible for her to adapt to changed circumstances. After the death of her father, she loses the farm because she cannot read well enough to manage things. She reads little better than the farmhand, Kester, and cannot, therefore, guide him as her father had done:

> Sylvia would find the place with all deliberation: and putting her finger under the line to keep the exact place of the word she was reading, she would strive in good earnest to read out the directions given; but when every fourth word had to be spelt, it was rather hopeless work, especially as all these words were unintelligible to the open-mouthed listener, however intent he might be[29].

Even the notice to quit from the estate owner has to be given to Philip to deal with because it is 'full o' long words'. Like Ruth, she is ill-equipped and unsuited emotionally for the kind of independence and responsibility which she is forced into after her parent's death. It is interesting to compare her situation with that of Margaret Hale in North and South, which is placed some fifty years later. Margaret is able to manage the family situation, including her mother's long illness. Sylvia's mother, who had been the strength of the family, declines into senility after the death of the father. In much the same way that Ruth went with Bellingham because she could think of no alternative after her dismissal from the dressmaker's, so Sylvia marries Hepburn because she can think of no other way of providing for her mother and herself. She has been brought up in a way which cannot readily respond to change. Again, this can be compared with Mary Barton's mother who is described as being unsuited to factory work because she is slower and clumsier, although physically more attractive, than the sharper town-bred girls. Sylvia totally lacks the resourcefulness of Mary Barton and Margaret Hale.

Sylvia responds instinctively and emotionally to every situation. This is shown in her response to the wild joy of the women of Monkshaven when the first of the whaling boats returns from its long Arctic voyage.

Sylvia identifies with the crowds as they run through the streets, and she shocks Philip Hepburn by her response to rough girls who await the arrival of the whalers:

> But fifty yards along the staithe they passed five or six girls with flushed faces and careless attire, who had mounted a pile of timber, placed there to season for ship-building, from which, as from the steps of a ladder or staircase, they could command the harbour. They were wild and free in their gestures, and held each other by the hand, and swayed from side to side, stamping their feet in time, as they sang -
>
> Weel may the keel row, the keel row,
> the keel row,
> Weel may the keel row that my laddie's in[30].

When Philip objects to her taking the hand of a girl who has a bad reputation, she can only say, '"When folk are glad I can't help being glad too, and I just put out my hand, and she put out hers"'[31]. Her life expresses the conflict between the austere values of her mother and Philip Hepburn, whose words she respects as being 'scarce, and weigh heavy', and the more open, perhaps less moral, views of her father, Daniel Robson, and her lover, Charlie Kinraid. Mrs Gaskell suggests that Sylvia's intuitive reaction to Philip Hepburn as being unsuitable for her is correct. This conflict is symbolised in Chapter Two, when she has the choice of buying red or grey duffle for a cloak. Sylvia is aware that her mother would prefer the grey, but she herself is drawn to the red. Philip presses her to choose the grey, not because it will wear better but because it is 'a respectable, quiet-looking article'. In purchasing the red material, Sylvia rejects the values of quietness and respectability which are so important to Philip. The red duffle symbolises the excitement and danger of Charlie Kinraid, while the rejected grey suggests Philip's staunch but repressed nature. Just as, for all his faults, Charlie Kinraid is more suited to Sylvia than Philip, so the red duffle is more becoming to Sylvia than the drab grey material. Hester Rose, who serves her, is dressed 'in stuff of sober colours, both in accordance with her own taste, and in unasked compliance with the religious customs of the Fosters'[32]. Philip and Hester are suited to one another by taste and religious custom but held apart by the very similarity of their inhibitions. While they are shown as being at ease in the confined and shadowed interior of the shop, Sylvia is only truly happy in the brightness of the world outside. Sylvia is always described in terms of glowing harvest, whereas Hester is described as 'a star, the brightness of which was only recognised in darkness'. The shop and the living

quarters behind represent security to Philip and a prison to Sylvia. Throughout her marriage to Philip she refuses to be involved in the shop or in the domesticity of the living quarters. This prosperity is rejected along with the values of the Quakers which gave rise to it and she rejects Philip as part of this. She continually escapes to the seashore or the moors above. The birth of a daughter by Philip is described as making her 'a prisoner in her room lying in bed with a little baby by her side'[33]. She is a prisoner because, much as she loves the child, she does not love Philip, the father, and even her respect for him is destroyed by the dreams she has of Charlie Kinraid alive and not drowned as Philip had told her.

The novel portrays a waste of lives which could have had much to offer, but despite this the characters are never given tragic stature. Philip Hepburn is too virtuous to be a villain and Charlie Kinraid too fickle to be a true hero; Sylvia is embittered rather than ennobled by suffering. On his deathbed, Philip says: '"I ha' made thee my idol; and if I could live my life o'er again I would love my God more, and thee less; and then I shouldn't ha' sinned this sin against thee"'[34], but his final request is that she should speak 'one word of love'. Although she fears that she will '"go about among them as gnash their teeth for iver"'[35] she is unable to find the words of love he so desires. She therefore fulfils her own prophecy, spoken long before her marriage to Philip: '"It's not in me to forgive or forget"'. Some years after, Charlie Kinraid returns a Captain in the Royal Navy and, true to his nature, easily reconciles himself to Sylvia's marriage and marries a desirable young heiress. Daniel Robson goes to the hangman without fully comprehending what he is dying for, and his wife declines into senility without him. Mrs Gaskell deliberately robs the conclusion of tragic power by emphasising how quickly 'the memory of man fades away'. Even the cottage where Philip dies so miserably becomes a public baths and the sole custodian of his story is the bathing woman who crudely distorts the facts into a story of a man who 'died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stone-throws away'[36]. Sylvia, who had once been so vibrant and joyous, declines into a 'pale, sad woman, allays dressed in black'[37]. She at last achieves the sobriety which Philip once believed he wanted for her. Hester Rose has to watch the destructive effects of Philip's obsession with Sylvia, without finding fulfilment herself. Only when Sylvia and Philip are dead does she find some happiness as the guardian of Philip's daughter, and even that comfort is eventually removed when the girl marries 'a distant cousin' and like Mary Barton

rejects the old world in favour of the new.

Sylvia's tragedy lies in her inability to change or forgive. She cannot respond to new circumstances as does Margaret Hale, nor can she achieve the spiritual growth which redeems Ruth. She retains her reputation but loses everything else. The great theme of reconciliation which runs so strongly through Mrs Gaskell's work is not apparent in Sylvia's Lovers. For all the beauty of the descriptions and the intensity of the emotions conveyed, the mood is one of disillusion and waste. For the first time, Mrs Gaskell seems to doubt if 'all things will be well', and this mood extends to Cousin Phillis, which was to follow in 1863.

As with Mrs Gaskell's Sylvia's Lovers, so A Tale of Two Cities is one of Charles Dickens's later works, and the last of the novels written in the 1850s discussed in this thesis. Although Dickens can never really be said to present the reader with a self-reliant heroine, in the mould of Margaret Hale or Jane Eyre, there is no doubt that the character of Lucy Manette is a reversion to an earlier and more simplistic concept of the heroine when compared with the more complex Esther Summerson in Bleak House (1853), Louisa Gradgrind in Hard Times(1854) and Amy Dorrit in Little Dorrit (1855). As with Mrs Gaskell, Dickens's decision to revert to the romantic tradition of the historical novel may have been a reaction to matters which disturbed him, both in the conduct of his country and also in his personal life.

with regard to public matters, Dickens commenced writing A Tale of Two Cities in 1859, just two years after the Indian Mutiny. The barbarous acts which the Indians committed against the English during the mutiny and the acts of equal ferocity committed by the English against the Indians afterwards, in the name of justice, were certainly fresh in his mind. His initial sympathy seems to have been with the oppressors rather than the oppressed, as can be seen from a letter which he wrote to Angela Coutts on the 4th October 1857, in which he says that if he were Commander-in-Chief, he would 'exterminate the race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested'[38].

Although, of course, his approach was different, he can be seen as having much the same intention as Mrs Gaskell had in writing Mary Barton - to draw attention to the tragic consequences of ignoring the sufferings of the poor. He had already dealt with this theme in Barnaby Rudge and in Bleak House; in Barnaby Rudge, the violence of the Gordon Riots was shown erupting on the streets of London, and in Bleak House, Dickens dealt with the question metaphorically, as the violence of disease

spreads out from the slum of Tom All Alone's and to the apparently secure ruling classes. In A Tale of Two Cities, he reverts to treating the violence literally - the poor physically spill from the slum of Saint Antoine, destroying all who might have some connection with their former oppression. Dickens's use of metaphor is similarly direct - the wine keg which bursts open, staining the gutters and stones of the slum red and 'many hands too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes'[39]. Someone scrawls 'Blood' on a wall. The book is one of the least subtle of Dickens's novels. He states the message directly and the imagery has the same clarity. It is also one of the shortest of his novels and has little of the rich characterisation which the public had come to expect of him. As with Barnaby Rudge, it received little critical acclaim when it was published. It is a novel of violent contrasts: damnation and salvation, death and resurrection, vengeance and self-sacrifice, and this is foreshadowed in the famous opening paragraph with its series of contradictory statements: 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness ...'[40]. The novel can also be seen as an expression of the inner turmoil which Dickens had been experiencing in connection with his marriage and his affair with the young actress Ellen Ternan.

In 1856, Charles Dickens had collaborated with Wilkie Collins in writing and presenting a melodrama called The Frozen Deep, which was to have far-reaching consequences in so far as his private life was concerned. It was first performed for the family and friends at Tavistock House in January 1857. It was then decided that there should be some public performances for the bereaved family of Douglas Jerrold at The Theatre Royal, Manchester, in August of the same year. Professional actors were engaged; in particular the Ternan family. In this production Wilkie Collins played Frank Alderley and Dickens played Richard Wardour, the hero, who saves Alderley's life at the cost of his own, because Rose Ebsworth, the heroine, favours Aldersley rather than him. Mrs Ternan played Nurse Esther, and her youngest daughter, Ellen, played a minor role as Lucy Crayford. She was eighteen years old at the time. Dickens became deeply enamoured of her and it was this relationship which brought to a head the longstanding discontent which he felt with his own marriage. Matters were made worse when a bracelet, intended as a gift for Ellen, was mistakenly delivered to Tavistock House. Catherine Dickens regarded this as proof of a liaison between her husband and Ellen. Dickens strenuously denied this and, in fact, forced Catherine to pay a social call on Ellen and her mother, as punishment for her

'mistrust'. Although his daughter, Kate, begged her mother not to submit herself to such humiliation, Mrs Dickens did make the visit. It is an indication of Dickens's frame of mind that a little while before this incident, he had given instructions to the family servant, Anne Cornelius, to close up the door between his and Catherine's rooms by placing a set of bookshelves across it.

It was only as recently as 1857 that Richard Bethel had pioneered the Matrimonial Causes Act, which permitted secular divorce on the grounds of adultery only, for the wife, or adultery, cruelty or desertion, on the part of the husband. Dickens clearly had no ground for divorcing Catherine on the grounds of adultery, and very much feared what any open conflict might do to his social position. However, in an atmosphere of bitterness and recrimination, Catherine, encouraged by her mother, demanded that there must be a formal, public separation. She was not prepared to accept, as Dickens had hoped, a position where the marriage was continued as a front. Under the settlement, Catherine was given a modest house of her own and an income of £600 a year. Although she was to have free access to her children and could have them to stay at any time, only Charley was to go with her; the other children were to remain with their father.

Dickens demanded that all his friends should accept only his point of view on the matter and this destroyed a number of friendships. Although he continued to have contact with Angela Burdett-Coutts, their relationship never quite recovered from her well-intentioned attempts at reconciling the two parties. His relationship with Thackeray was quite destroyed. Writing about it afterwards, Kate Dickens said that her father had acted 'like a madman' at this time. Finally, on the 12th June 1857, Dickens had the following statement printed in Household Words:

> By some means, arising out of wickedness, or out of folly, or out of inconceivable wild chance, or out of all three, this trouble has been made the occasion of misrepresentation, most grossly false, most monstrous, and most cruel - involving not only me, but innocent persons dear to my heart, and innocent persons of whom I have no knowledge, if indeed, they have any existence[41].

This statement was also sent to several newspapers including Punch, but the Editor, his friend Mark Lemon, on whose support he had counted, refused to publish it, as did Bradbury and Evans. Because of this, Dickens obtained a High Court ruling dissolving their partnership in All The Year Round, and when the magazine was put up for auction, he purchased it for £3,550. By the fifth number it was selling three times

better than Household Words, and to establish these sales, he planned to start with a new story of his own - A Tale of Two Cities.

The central theme of the novel is death and resurrection. It has two heroes, Charles Darnay who is a handsome young man of high ideals, industrious and sober, and Sydney Carton, very similar in physical appearance, but dissolute and cynical. The plot has some similarities with that of a play about the French Revolution by Watt Phillips, and Dickens also drew on Thomas Carlyle's French Revolution. The concept of the wastrel, Carton, who willingly sacrifices his life for Darnay because he is the one whom Lucy loves, was based on the character of Richard Wardour, which Dickens had played in The Frozen Deep. Darnay was based on the character of Frank Alderley, which had been played by Wilkie Collins. In 1857, Dickens wrote to Angela Coutts saying that the idea of Darnay and Carton had come to him while on the stage during a performance of The Frozen Deep:

> Sometimes of late, when I have been very much excited by the crying of two thousand people over the grave of Richard Wardour, new ideas for a story have come into my head as I lay on the ground, with surprising force and brilliancy. Last night, being quiet here, I noted them down in a little book I keep[42].

It is possible to see the characters of Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton as indicating the two directions in which a young man could go: either the disciplined and purposeful path of Darnay or the undisciplined and purposeless path of Carton. The novel fails to give a convincing explanation as to why a man of Carton's intelligence and background should have become a wastrel in the first place. This type of character is explored more convincingly in Dickens's last complete novel, Our Mutual Friend, in Eugene Wrayburn, but in this case the heroine, Lizzie Hexam, is able to redeem him both physically and emotionally.

This theme of death and resurrection is first indicated when Jerry Cruncher tells Mr Lorry that Dr Manette is 'recalled to life' from 'buriel' in the Bastille; it was of course the storming of the Bastille which marked the beginning of the French Revolution. Ironically, 'resurrection' is given a second and more cynical meaning through the activities of the bank messenger, Jerry Cruncher, who by night augments his wages by acting as a 'resurrectionist': one who takes bodies from their graves in order to sell them for medical research. At the end of the novel, Sydney Carton, laying down his own life to save Charles Darnay, performs the ultimate Christian act and therefore 'resurrects' his soul from death.

Lucy Manette is set at the centre of this novel and she acts as a catalyst for the other characters. Physically, she suggests an idealised Ellen Ternen. Mr Lorry first sees Lucy in contrast to the intense gloom of the hotel room in Dover: 'a short, slight, pretty figure, a quantity of golden hair, a pair of blue eyes that met his own with an inquiring look'[43]. Sydney Carton, in attempting unsuccessfully to rid himself of her spell, reduces her appearance to that of 'a golden-haired doll'[44]. Lucy personifies the feminine ideal for Dickens, in that she is child-like in physical appearance but womanly in her compassion and maturity; she is virginal and yet motherly. All who come in contact with her want to serve her. If the Brothers Cheeryble in Nicholas Nickleby are to be seen as an expression of benevolence, then Lucy Manette can be seen as the expression of feminine goodness. Dickens demands that the reader accepts this in the same way as do the characters within the novel. She illuminates their lives as she illuminates the 'funereal' apartment in the hotel and the moral gloom of the Old Bailey. For Dr Manette she is 'the golden thread that united him to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery: and the sound of her voice, the light of her face, the touch of her hand, had a strong beneficial influence with him almost always'[45]. We never enter into her mind in the same way as we do that of Esther Summerson's in Bleak House. Her character has a two-dimensional quality, so that she suggests a sacred statue or painting; an icon which being in contact with can bestow blessings. She does not have to exert influence, merely to be. Her goodness and compassion are not to be doubted. Her initial response to the father she cannot remember is one of compassion: 'With tears streaming down her face, she put her two hands to her lips, and kissed them to him; then clasped them to her breast, as if she laid his ruined head there'[46]. The very fact that Sydney Carton, who is to love her most of all, tries to dismiss her as a 'golden doll', warns us that she is much more than merely a pretty girl. Immediately on meeting her, Mr Lorry, Miss Pross, Charles Darney and Sydney Carton all become her devoted servants. Of these, only Charles Darney expects, and achieves, anything approaching a normal relationship with her; the rest are content to bathe in the light of her presence. There is no indication of the quality of her intellect; only the quality of her compassion. Like Mary of the Seven Sorrows, she suffers because of this compassion. She is the powerful and yet passive figure around which the other characters revolve. Lucy's emotions are often expressed by her forehead which had 'a singular capacity (remembering how young and smooth it was) of lifting and knitting itself into an expression that was

not quite one of perplexity, or wonder, or alarm, or merely of a bright fixed attention'[47]. Just as Lucy's compassion is expressed by the corrugating of her forehead, so the lack of compassion of Monsieur the Marquis is expressed by the deepening of the indentations above his nostrils, 'They persisted in changing colour sometimes, and they would be occasionally dilated and contracted by something like a faint pulsation'[48].

If Lucy Manette is presented as Dickens's ideal of feminine attraction, then Miss Pross is presented as all that he considered undesirable in a woman's appearance; she is very tall, no longer young, and above all, red-headed. Mr Lorry recognises her as 'one of those unselfish creatures - found *only* among women - who will, for pure love and admiration, bind themselves willing slaves, to youth when they have lost it, to beauty that they never had, to accomplishments that they were never fortunate enough to gain, to bright hopes that never shone upon their own sombre lives'[49]; in other words, the destiny of the spinster so greatly feared by Caroline Helstone in Shirley.

In the case of the two heroes, the contrast is carried even further and there are elements in the characterisation which are reminiscent of Robert and Louis Moore in Shirley. Sydney Carton notes his own physical likeness to Charles Darney and uses it to save Charles's life for the first time, when Darney is on trial at the Old Bailey as a spy. At the end of the novel, he uses it once again in order to save Darney from the guillotine. All this is, of course, done for love of Lucy Manette and not for any feeling he has for the man who is so like him. When he and Darney share a meal following the trial, Carton shows a positive dislike, saying '"Don't let your sober face elate you, however; you don't know what it may come to"'[50]. When he is alone, he addresses his own image in the glass: 'A good reason for taking to a man, that he shows you what you have fallen away from, and what you might have been'[51]. He is portrayed as intelligent and yet purposeless; his talents are wasted playing 'jackal' to the crude Mr Stryver. He is shown as a man in search of a reason for living and he finds this in his homage to Lucy Manette. He loves without hope, or perhaps even wish, of fulfilment. At their first encounter in the Old Bailey, he is the one who notes that she is about to faint, and when she collapses after the sentencing of Darney in France it is Carton who 'with an air about him that was not all of pity - that had a flush of pride in it'[52] carries her to the coach. Only when he has already decided to sacrifice his own life and is certain that they will not meet again, does he allow himself to kiss her. It is her daughter, little Lucie, who recognises the quality of this love, and as a child, is

free to express it:'"Oh look at her, dear Carton! Can you, of all the people who love her, bear to see her so?"'[53]. His last mental image is of the child she is yet to bear 'with a forehead that I know and golden hair'[54].

Charles Darnay is idealistic but purposeful. He has found his reason for living, and although he loves Lucy, one gets the feeling of a life and purpose beyond her. In him, the fearful pride of the Evrémonde's becomes moral strength. He is able to reject both their values and the wealth and position which was his by right of birth. When asked by his uncle how he proposes to live he replies: '"I must do, to live, what others of my countrymen, even with nobility at their backs, may have to do some day - work"'[55]. Although he shares something of the other characters' reverence for Lucy, he has no doubts as to his suitability as a husband. Without being aware of the full details of the crimes which his father and uncle have committed, he is conscious of inheriting with his blood, a share of the responsibility for having '"done wrong, injuring every human creature who came between us and our pleasure"'[56]. When he is tried by the French Tribunal, he shares with his accusers the feeling that simply by being a member of the Evrémonde family, he is guilty of crimes against the people. He has to be redeemed, not only by his own virtue, but by Sydney Carton's sacrifice, willingly given. Ultimately, it is the dissolute, degenerate Sydney Carton who achieves the 'higher love'.

At the pinnacle of the edifice of redeemed and redeemer stands Lucy Manette, passive and golden; the constant light set against the images of blood, decay and violence, which permeate the book. She is the Madonna figure offering her compassion to all who need it. Her physical appearance mirrors her personality. The fact that Dickens placed the novel in the past enabled him, as it did Mrs Gaskell in Shirley, to explore issues which had been cooled by time, but which could offer lessons to the present. Lucy Manette is a timeless figure and would not be out of place in the England of the 1860s. She is given none of the individual quirks of character or appearance which are to be found in the heroines of Charlotte Brontë or Mrs Gaskell. She represents the perfection of womanhood for which Dickens looked, of course without success, in his own life. Radiantly virginal and yet matronly, she falls in love, marries and gives birth, with no development of appearance or character. Her function is not to achieve in her own right, but to inspire the men round her to achieve. She represents the perfection to which they must aspire. Dickens's portrayal of Lucy Manette is an

excellent example of the different approach to the heroine of men and women novelists of this period.

This novel probably comes closer to having a religious theme than any other of Dickens's novels. It marks the beginning of the end of a period in Dickens's personal and creative life during which he took a dark and disordered view of society. Despite the basically violent theme of revolution, the novel does not have the depressive, claustrophobic qualities of Bleak House (1853), Hard Times (1854) or, most strongly of all, Little Dorrit (1857). Although Sydney Carton dies violently by the guillotine, he dies both a hero and 'saved'; he who was once a purposeless drifter has accomplished what he set out to do. He looks forward confidently to 'a far better rest' for himself and a shining future, both for England and for Lucy and her children:

> I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous, and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see Her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name[57].

This contrasts with the sepia tones of the ending of Little Dorrit, with the marriage of Amy and Arthur Clennam. They too go down 'into a modest life of usefulness and happiness' and Amy 'gives a mother's care' not only to her own children, but to her sister Fanny's who had been neglected so that she was free to go into 'Society for ever and a day'; but although they pass into the anonymity of 'the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed', the reader knows that this is not 'the shining city' of Carton's last thoughts but a place of 'sunshine and shade, where the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar'[58]. It is still under the shade of 'the Marshalsea and all its blighted fruits'.

All the heroines discussed in this chapter are firmly rooted in the romantic tradition, but with Jane Eyre and Sylvia Robson, characters created by female writers, the development of these characters directs us towards a new type of heroine who will be more relevant to the demands of the second half of the nineteenth century, whereas the character of Lucy Manette, created by a male writer, remains much more within the confines of the romantic tradition.

It is the earliest of these three novels, Jane Eyre, which presents us with a heroine who points most strongly towards the 'new woman'. The setting and plot of the novel is the most highly romantic of the three novels, impinging in some places on the 'Gothic' tradition in that Jane Eyre, poor and unloved, obtains a place as a governess in a great hall, where the master of the house, going against tradition, offers her

marriage. However, Jane is not beautiful; Charlotte Brontë makes her almost rejoice in her plainness, and Mr Rochester is not a handsome young prince, but a world-weary cynic who, if he had managed to wed Jane, would have committed bigamy. In that sense, therefore, neither are in the romantic tradition. What makes Jane Eyre so exceptional is not the plot and the setting, but the dialogue between Jane and Mr Rochester and between Jane and St John Rivers. Unlike Lucy Manette she is not a passive figure on whose behalf the male characters act, but a strong and purposeful individual with whom the hero interacts. She rejects compromise: she will not live with Rochester except as his wife, neither will she accept the serving of God with St John Rivers as a substitute for human love, and she returns to Mr Rochester without knowing whether he is any more free to marry her than when she left. When she finally accepts him, he is subdued, partially blind and disfigured, whereas she is young, and has the added advantage of financial independence. It is Jane Eyre who makes the ultimate choices and in this sense the character extends well beyond the strictures of the romantic tradition.

Sylvia Robson, the heroine of Sylvia's Lovers, is much more in the romantic tradition, in that she is presented as young, beautiful and innocent, competent only in the domestic skills of a farming community. She rejects new skills, such as literacy, as irrelevant. Although Philip Hepburn tries to teach her to read, she refuses to concentrate and tries to turn his attention to other things:

> "After all," said she, throwing down her pen, and opening and shutting her weary, cramped hand, "I see no good in tiring myself wi' learning for t' write letters when I'se never got one in a' my life. What for should I write answers, when there's niver a one writes to me?"[59]

When her lover, Charlie Kinraid, is taken by the press gang, and she believes him to be dead, and her father is executed for his part in the burning of the randyvowse, Sylvia's life collapses because of her inadequacy. She marries Philip Hepburn, although she believes it to be wrong, simply because she has nowhere else to go. Sylvia, therefore, is presented to us as an illustration of what can happen when someone refuses to equip herself for the world of the future. Sylvia makes no decisions for herself: she allows them to be imposed on her. She lacks the moral strength of Jane Eyre, and also, importantly, the education required to support herself. She has to be supported by a man. Mrs Gaskell shows us the ruin of several lives through Sylvia's inadequacy. Therefore, Sylvia Robson is both a heroine in the romantic tradition and a pointer to the heroine of the present. Mrs Gaskell portrays her as a

young woman of beauty and promise who is unfitted to meet adversity because she elects to remain ignorant.

Of the three heroines, Lucy Manette is most completely confined within the romantic tradition. She is a beautiful, docile creature who is a catalyst for the male characters. She offers a Madonna-like tenderness to Darney, Carton, Lorry, and her father, Dr Manette, but takes little part in the action of the novel; the other characters act for her, protecting and saving her. We see little spiritual development in Lucy. Dickens seems to be suggesting that the young, golden girl of the opening chapters is perfection and therefore must not mature into undesirable middle-age. The conversations which Lucy holds with the male characters never touch on deep issues; she represents a haven away from the 'hurrying feet' of a changing world. In A Tale of Two Cities, Dickens seems to be offering only two models for womankind: that of the young and beautiful woman to be loved, or, for the woman who is older or unlovely, to act as handmaid and protector to the young goddess, as in the case of Miss Pross. It is interesting that in this comparatively late work, Dickens chose to regress from the complexities of characters such as Esther Summerson, Amy Dorrit, or even Louisa Gradgrind. Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë, while still using the romantic tradition, extend beyond it and point the way to a different type of heroine, which will reach fruition in Margaret Hale, Shirley Keeldar and Lucy Snowe. This contrasts with Charles Dickens. However, it is significant that Dickens placed her within a historical theme; one feels that he would have found it difficult to use Lucy Manette in a novel which had a contemporary theme. The fact that A Tale of Two Cities (1857) and Sylvia's Lovers (1863) were published towards the end of the period covered in this thesis, illustrates how the heroine of the earlier Romantic tradition persisted. A comparison between Lucy Manette and Jane Eyre, in a novel written ten years earlier, indicates how clearly Lucy is modelled on an earlier, less complex, and less demanding, concept of the heroine. The novels discussed in this chapter are still to a greater or lesser extent within the romantic tradition, but, whereas the women writers, Charlotte Brontë and Mrs Gaskell, go beyond the limitations of this tradition, Charles Dickens, with A Tale of Two Cities, reverts to it entirely.

Notes on Chapter II

All page references for Jane Eyre are for The Penguin English Library Edition (Aylesbury, 1966); for Sylvia's Lovers, for The Oxford University Press World Classics Edition (Oxford, 1982); for A Tale of Two Cities, for The Penguin Classics Edition (Harmondsworth, 1970).

1 David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists, p.155.

2 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, Penguin English Library Edition (Harmondsworth, 1975), p.302.

3 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.303.

4 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.305.

5 Jane Eyre, p.126.

6 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.388.

7 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.308.

8 Jane Eyre, p.69.

9 Jane Eyre, p.45.

10 Jane Eyre, p.88.

11 Jane Eyre, p.176.

12 Jane Eyre, p.165

13 Jane Eyre, p.165.

14 Jane Eyre, p.281.

15 Jane Eyre, p.343.

16 Jane Eyre, p.371.

17 Jane Eyre, p.433.

18 Jane Eyre, p.433.

19 Jane Eyre, p.443.

20 Jane Eyre, p.445.

21 Jane Eyre, p.443.

22 Jane Eyre, p.474.

23 Jane Eyre, p.297.

24 Jane Eyre, p.125.

25 Letters of Mrs Gaskell, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966), p.454.

26 Letters of Mrs Gaskell, p.106.

27 Sylvia's Lovers, p.5.

28 Sylvia's Lovers, p.8.

29 Sylvia's Lovers, pp.321-2.

30 Sylvia's Lovers, p.19.

31 Sylvia's Lovers, p.27.

32 Sylvia's Lovers, p.24.

33 Sylvia's Lovers, p.350.

34 Sylvia's Lovers, p.495.

35 Sylvia's Lovers, p.496.

36 Sylvia's Lovers, p.502.

37 Sylvia's Lovers, p.502.

38 Letters from Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts 1841-1865, edited by Edgar Johnson (1955), p.350.

39 A Tale of Two Cities, p.28.

40 A Tale of Two Cities, p.1.

41 Quoted in Norman and Jean MacKenzie, Dickens - A Life (Oxford, 1979), p.303.

42 The Letters of Charles Dickens, edited by His Sister-in-Law and His Eldest Daughter, 2 vols (1880), p.876.

43 A Tale of Two Cities, p.52.

44 A Tale of Two Cities, p.121.

45 A Tale of Two Cities, p.110.

46 A Tale of Two Cities, p.74.

47 A Tale of Two Cities, p.52.

48 A Tale of Two Cities, p.140.

49 A Tale of Two Cities, p.126.

50 A Tale of Two Cities, p.116.

51 A Tale of Two Cities, p.116.

52 A Tale of Two Cities, p.364.

53 A Tale of Two Cities, p.364.

54 A Tale of Two Cities, p.404.

55 A Tale of Two Cities, p.155.

56 A Tale of Two Cities, p.154.

57 A Tale of Two Cities, p.404.

58 Little Dorrit, p.895.

59 Sylvia's Lovers, p.107.

CHAPTER III THE HEROINE OF THE INDUSTRIAL NOVEL

The establishment of the new industrial society in the North of England gave a new dimension to the novel: that of the novel which dealt specifically with the problems and opportunities provided by this society. The novels discussed in this chapter fall into this category in that they are based in the North and respond directly to the hardships and opportunities arising from industrialisation. These 'industrial' novels also provided a vehicle for the presentation of a rather different heroine who took a more central role in the action of the plot and was measured by her ability, or failure, to respond to these challenges. Foremost among those writing such novels is Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell.

One of the factors which gives a unique quality to Mrs Gaskell's work is that she is the only major Victorian novelist to have actually lived in one of the new manufacturing towns. She came as a young bride in 1832 and remained in the city for the rest of her life. While she had already had some success with short stories, such as Sketches Among the Poor, published in Blackwood's Magazine in 1837, Libbi Marsh's Three Eras, The Sexton's Hero and Christmas Stories, all published in Howitt's Journal between 1847 and 1848, it was Mary Barton (1848), her first full-length novel, which brought her fame. Her husband, William Gaskell, a Unitarian Minister, encouraged her to write this novel in order to direct her mind away from the death of her baby son; it was a novel based on strong private and public emotions. Her preface stressed that the workers were unable to articulate their feelings and that their very real sufferings were aggravated by the knowledge that the employers did not appear to be affected and bore no share in those sufferings. A recession in trade with the consequent laying off of cotton hands, did not affect the living standards of the mill-owners as immediately as it did that of the operatives. While John Barton's son is dying for lack of nourishment, the wife of the mill-owner, Mrs Hunter, whose husband has just laid him off, is planning to hold a dinner party and is seen by John Barton leaving a grocer's shop laden with rich and expensive luxuries. What makes John Barton decide to kill young Harry Carson is not the attempted seduction of his daughter Mary, of which he is unaware, but Harry Carson's insensitivity in caricaturing the impoverished union representatives as they stand, ragged and starving, before his father and himself. John Barton expresses the feelings of all the subjects of the cartoon when he says:

> "It seems to make me sad that there is any as can make game on what they've never knowed; as can make such laughable pictures on men, whose very hearts

> within 'em are so raw and sore as ours were and are, God help us"[1].

The men are not without humour and to some extent appreciate the skill of the drawing. One of the group, having acknowledged the likeness, says: '"I could laugh at a jest as well as e'er the best on 'em, though it did tell against mysel, if I were not clemming"'[2]. What they cannot bear is that someone in a privileged position, such as young Carson, can portray their sufferings, the very meagreness of their clothing, as nothing more than a joke; to have no sympathy for, or share in, these sufferings. When the men draw lots to decide who shall kill one of the masters, to demonstrate the desperate seriousness of their claims, they use the back of the paper on which the cartoon had been drawn. Mrs Gaskell is not only giving 'utterance to the agony' of the poor, but also warning these same mill-owners that they ignore the cries of their workers at their peril. Her reaction is a Christian one of reconciliation rather than confrontation:

> The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us, and we become their enemies. Then, in the sorrowful moment of triumphant power, their eyes gaze on us with a mute reproach. Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster yet without the inner means for peace and happiness? John Barton became a Chartist, a Communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary. Ay! but being visionary is something. It shows a soul, a being not altogether sensual; a creature who looks forward for others, if not for himself[3].

She shows workers driven to terrible acts of violence, not only against their masters, as in the murder of Harry Carson, but also against fellow workers outside the union, whose misery is at least as great as their own, as when vitriol is thrown in the face of the 'knob-stick', who has been brought in to break the strike. It is this lesser incident which is remembered with most regret by John Barton:

> "But bless your life, none on us would ever throw vitriol again (at least at a knob-stick) if they could see the sight I saw today. The man lay, his face all wrapped in clothes, so I did not see *that*; but not a limb, nor a bit of a limb, could keep from quivering with pain. He would ha' bitten his hand to keep down his moans, but could not, his face hurt him so if he moved it e'er so little"[4].

This theme of reconciliation and recognition of a common brotherhood between all classes and conditions of men runs through several of Mrs Gaskell's novels, but is nowhere as strong as in Mary Barton. John Barton must be reconciled with the 'knob-sticks'; Mr Carson must

ultimately be reconciled with John Barton for the murder of his son, but at the same time her characters in the end conform to middle class values and reject violence and revolution as a means of obtaining social justice. She goes so far as to claim that the middle classes were responsible for the working-class because they 'have made them what they are'. She suggests that the middle class can choose either to elevate the workers above 'the sensual' world or to thrust them down into depravity. John Barton, who is potentially a 'visionary' and great leader, is driven to murder by Carson's indifference to his sufferings. The mill-owners who rule this new society are portrayed as selfish and unfeeling men who regard their workers as less important than the commodities they manufacture. On this basis, she seems to be saying that even within such limitations, if they could offer a small degree of sympathy and understanding, such men as John Barton could fulfil their destiny as leaders, rather than being diverted into acts of destruction. It is money and power, rather than class, which separates the workers and the masters since all the characters are rooted in the working-class. Mr Carson, the mill-owner, started as a weaver and married a girl from the shop-floor. However, because of the upper class attitudes gained from an expensive education, the son, Harry Carson, is divided far further from Mary Barton by class than is his father from John Barton. Mrs Gaskell shows that this new society is rooted as much in terms of cash as rank. The beginnings of a social revolution can be seen in that the sons and daughters of ancient aristocratic families in the South will marry into the families of the wealthy new industrialists of the North, thus ensuring the rise of a new aristocracy. Mary Barton was aware that Harry Carson's mother was once a cotton hand and, being a child of her time, sees no reason why her dream of marrying Harry Carson might not be realised. She fails to recognise the social difference between father and son.

At the time, it was a commonly held view that the troubles of the workers were brought about more by their own improvidence than by prevailing economic conditions. Mrs Gaskell on the other hand sees that the working-class have no power to control their lives in economic terms and shows the workers as victims of wider economic conditions. She suggests that, far from being degraded, the poor show strength of character in adversity which would not be matched by the affluent:

> There were desperate fathers; there were bitter-tongued mothers (O God! what wonder!): there were reckless children; the very closest bonds of nature were snapt in that time of trial and distress. There was Faith such as the rich can never imagine on earth; there was 'Love strong as death'; and

> self-denial, among rude, coarse men, akin to
> that of Sir Philip Sidney's most glorious deed.
> The vices of the poor sometimes astound us *here*;
> but when the secrets of all hearts shall be known,
> their virtues will astound us in far greater
> degree. Of this I am certain[5].

The novel is a plea for the middle class to sympathise with the sufferings of the working-class and to understand the economic basis of these sufferings. Those employed in the factories were totally dependent on cash wages, and food and other commodities were purchased in sufficient amounts for immediate requirements. When she entertains the Wilsons, Mrs Barton instructs Mary to buy 'cut ham', eggs, 'a pennyworth' of milk and a loaf of bread. In a rural community, Mrs Barton would have been more likely to have cut ham off a smoked joint from their own pig, and to have made bread in batches. The standard of living in rural communities was often poorer than that in manufacturing towns but was not so dependent on a shop, which in turn depended on the workers' cash wages. Once John Barton is laid off, we see how quickly the Bartons' home declines from the brightness and warmth of the tea party with the Wilsons, when there was 'the delicious glow of the fire, the bright light that revelled in every corner of the room, the savoury smells, the comfortable sounds of the boiling kettle, and the hissing, frizzling ham'[6] to the situation where there is no money for a fire in the hearth or even enough money to purchase soap and black-lead to keep the room clean. Although Mrs Barton is country born, she is shown as having adapted to the new ways of the town, whereas old Alice Wilson still retains country ways. When she first appears, she has been out all day gathering wild herbs for medicine and when she entertains Mary and Margaret, she does not go to the shop for bread but instead opens a deal box and brings out 'a quantity of the oat bread of the north, the clap-bread of Cumberland and Westmorland' which she has made previously in batches and stored.

The furnishings of the Bartons' home during this period of comparative affluence indicate that the workers have become ready consumers of manufactured products. The curtains are cheap printed cotton, the floor is covered with 'gay-coloured oil-cloth' and there is a tea-caddy and tray of 'japan ware'. All these items are in the contemporary vogue and indicate the purchasing power of a factory hand. However, when the industrial worker was laid off, the wage ceased immediately and the goods had to be sold, or pawned, in order to provide food. The last item to go was usually the bedding. Items of furniture were more easily acquired than in an agricultural community but were just as easily lost during a recession. Mrs Gaskell was seeking to show that the workers had little opportunity

for long-term planning because they were the victims of cycles of affluence and recession, which often meant that all they gained when fully employed was lost when they were laid off because everything in this new industrial society, from housing to food, was based on the weekly wage. What probably increased the sense of hardship was that a family could go from comparative comfort to actual starvation in a matter of weeks. The possibility of achieving far higher standards of living than would have been dreamt of by agricultural labourers was always before the factory hands, but in most cases was never realised for more than a short period at a time. Manchester society is shown as vibrant but volatile: all things are possible but it is life without a safety-net. Nevertheless, as always, the chief burden is carried by those who are least able to help themselves. Mary Barton is a plea for such people; it stresses the value of these workers, not just as a workforce, but as individuals, and in this respect it is significant that she portrays workers, such as John Barton and Job Legh, as having some education and interests outside their daily work; John Barton becomes involved with trade union and Chartist politics, whereas Job Legh prefers to collect biological specimens from all over the world.

The main problem with the character of Mary Barton is that she is a working-class girl portrayed by a writer who was middle class. It is probably this which causes Mary to be given refinements of speech and manner which set her apart from the other female characters in the novel. Alice Wilson, the old country-woman, and Margaret, Mary's friend who loses her sight, are shown as heroic figures who demonstrate the traditional Christian virtues of acceptance of affliction and good humour even in suffering; though tidy in appearance, neither place importance on dress. This indifference to fashion is presented as a virtue in working-class women. Both retain the inflections of speech and the values of the society from which they spring; they are recognisably working-class in appearance and speech. They are shown as accepting their position in society; Mary, on the other hand, cannot be recognised as working-class by her appearance or speech. Her values also have been shaped by the urban society into which she was born, but she does not accept her situation and sees no reason why she should not rise through this society; not by her virtues but by her good looks. She has had little education but is described as having a 'keen practical shrewdness' when dealing with everyday matters, 'which contrasted bewitchingly with the simple foolish unworldly ideas she had picked up from the romances which Miss Simmonds's young ladies were in the habit of recommending to each other'. With a mixture of romantic foolishness and native shrewdness, she hopes that

just as Mrs Carson's good looks as a factory girl had enabled her to capture Mr Carson and so become a wealthy woman, her good looks might enable her to capture Mr Carson's son and become a lady. She chooses to ignore the difference which one generation has made. Young Harry Carson is the product of an expensive education. Because of his father's success, he is able to play the part of a 'gentleman' and therefore never regards Mary as his social equal. As a woman, Mary is not expected to be concerned with political themes and her father's involvement with Chartism is only of interest to her in so far as it affects their life style. The care for dress and manners which are shown as natural in a middle class girl like Margaret Hale, in a working-class girl like Mary are portrayed as indications of vanity and superficiality. Her care in choosing a dress for a visit to Alice Wilson is compared adversely with Margaret's disregard of appearance and preference for 'humble and simple' dress. Mrs Gaskell indicates that Mary's decision to become a dressmaker is made for all the wrong reasons:

> Now while a servant must often drudge and be dirty, must be known as a servant by all who visited her master's house, a dressmaker's apprentice must (or so Mary thought) be always dressed with a certain regard to appearance; must never soil her hands, and need never redden or dirty her face with hard labour[7].

For this, she is prepared to work for two years without remuneration and with hours that depended entirely 'upon the quantity of work Miss Simmonds had to do'. Mrs Gaskell suggests that John Barton rejects domestic service also for the wrong reasons:

> Besides, with his ideas and feelings towards the higher classes, he considered domestic servitude as a species of slavery; a pampering of artificial wants on the one side, a giving-up of every right of leisure by day and quiet by night on the other[8].

Part of Mary's dream is that her Aunt Esther, to whom she has been compared in terms of beauty, has already achieved the rank of a lady. Esther had shown a similar interest in dress to Mary and similarly refused to accept the life of a factory hand. Unknown to Mary, or her father, Esther has become a prostitute, and throughout the book it is suggested that Mary's foolish dreams might lead her along the same path. However, when the history of Esther's 'fall' is finally related, Mrs Gaskell softens the effect by allowing Esther's 'fall' to be for love of a soldier who then deserts her; she only turned to prostitution in an attempt to save the life of her child. It is clear to the reader that Mary is too 'hard-headed' ever to 'fall' because of love.

For the first quarter of the book, Mary is shown as blinded by her determination that things shall be as she wants them to be, rather than as they are. Her spiritual blindness is set against Margaret's physical blindness. Mary justifies her clandestine meetings with Harry Carson by telling herself that they will lead to the honourable prize of matrimony. She believes that her father's feelings of injustice will be salved by a share in the wealth which such a marriage would bring; she too is measuring her own and her father's feelings in terms of money. Her dreams become stronger as the reality of her life becomes increasingly cheerless. The relationship between father and daughter is distorted on both sides by a refusal to face reality. Her dreams have no more substance than the romances which she reads. Young Harry Carson becomes a symbol of prosperity and security; she scarcely registers him as an individual to love. At the same time, she resents Jem Wilson because the love which he expresses for her is rooted in reality and, therefore, challenges these dreams. Mary is portrayed as being in a state of constant conflict between her feelings for Jem Wilson, and her social aspirations as embodied in Harry Carson. Mary's delusions are shallow, whereas her father's are deep. He will cause the tragedy of young Carson's death, but Mary will prevent a second one by saving Jem from wrongful conviction for the murder.

The turmoil of her feelings is suggested in the description of the burning of Carson's factory. The fire is a metaphor for the potentially destructive emotions of her love for Jem. If she admits that love, then she must forego the dreams of position and wealth. She is both drawn and repelled by the force of the flames. The fire is described in terms of a passionate lover, 'licking the black walls with amorous fierceness', and is described as 'powerful', 'magnificent' and 'terrible'. During this sequence, Jem completes the rescue of two trapped workers and is therefore shown as the complete hero. So intense are the emotions which the fire and the rescue engender in Mary that, ultimately, she faints. Initially, Mary resolves her conflict by dismissing Jem's suit. Despite feelings of 'deep and violent emotion', she tells him that she will never marry him (in much the same way as in North and South, Margaret Hale dismisses Mr Thornton). In both cases, Mrs Gaskell is suggesting the conflict felt by young women who had been taught to regard passion as a dangerous, even immoral emotion. It was a commonly held belief that prostitutes were drawn to the life, not so much by economic necessity as by their over-passionate natures. When Jem leaves, as Mary believes never to return, she is at last able to assess her feelings for him and to make a comparison between Jem Wilson and Harry Carson, which leads her away from her

dreams and back to reality:

> 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 gaieties and pomps, all joys and pleasures, unless she might share them with Jem; yes, with him she 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[9].

It is at this point in the narrative that Mrs Gaskell indicates Mary's capacity for spiritual development. She, even more than John Barton, changes and progresses in spiritual terms. From then onwards, she gradually frees herself from self-deception and so becomes a vehicle for reconciliation. Her ordeal as the key witness in the trial of Jem Wilson is described in terms of a Christian martyrdom:

> Many who were looking for mere flesh and blood beauty, mere colouring, were disappointed: for her face was deadly white, and almost set in its expression, while a mournful bewildered soul looked out of the depths of those soft, deep, grey eyes. But others recognised a higher and stranger kind of beauty; one that would keep its hold on the memory for many after years[10].

The superficial beauty of colouring and form is deliberately taken away and the whole description concentrates on Mary's spiritual state. The frivolity and vanity which, at the beginning of the novel, dominated her personality, havebeen expunged by the experience. She has been perfected by suffering and can now proceed to reconcile Mr Carson and her father, John Barton. Mary has made a spiritual journey from which she emerges not only as self-reliant and decisive but also unselfish. She has moved from love of self to love of another. Like Margaret Hale, another of Mrs Gaskell's strong heroines, once her course of action has been completed and Jem is released, she suffers a period of severe mental prostration. Mrs Gaskell's weaker heroines, such as Sylvia and Cousin Phillis, also suffer this type of mental and emotional prostration but, unlike Mary, they never fully recover and are shown as dependent on the male characters to dictate their path. When the men fail them, be they lovers or fathers, they are destroyed. Mary, however, once having decided on a course of action shows herself capable of carrying it through without the advice of parent or lover. Mrs Gaskell seems to be suggesting that the female can only achieve such spiritual development in the single state, because of the traditional attitudes and obligations which come with

marriage. Mary is, above all, a heroine for the times and Mrs Gaskell highlights this by contrasting her with an older woman in Alice Wilson, who is not equipped to meet such a challenge. Alice Wilson is depicted as a good woman, but as almost too passive. There is no really acceptable reason why she never returns to visit her childhood home, other than a lack of will. Her death is shown as returning, not to real childhood, but to a dream world made up of her selective memories. Although virtuous, frugal and industrious (qualities greatly admired in Victorian England) she never achieves full maturity. Another such character, Mrs Wilson, is shown as having been physically maimed by factory work as a girl, and later maimed mentally by an economic system which allows her children to die of starvation. Rather than being ennobled by suffering, she becomes querulous and bitter. Esther has been so damaged by her way of life that even her good intentions turn against her. By trying to conceal from Mary that she has become a prostitute and instead,presenting herself as a prosperous and respectable woman, she causes Mary to regard her long silence as arising from indifference. Esther is permitted no death-bed reconciliation; she dies, crying 'feebly and sadly as long as she had any strength to cry and then she died'[11].

There are two themes of equal importance in the novel: one is the grinding down of the working-classes by the economics of the industrial revolution, with its cycles of prosperity and recession, and the other is the spiritual progress of the individuals within this society. John Barton is an epic figure, capable of deep reasoning and possessing great potential for good. He is shown as being distorted by suffering and injustice so that, for a while at least, his virtues are eclipsed by the bitterness which drives him to murder. At the beginning of the novel, Mary Barton is drawn as a character of lesser stature, but ultimately, it is she who transcends the injustice which has defeated her father. By the end of the novel, it is Mary who has made the greater spiritual journey. Mary was born into, and shaped by, the demands of this new industrial society. She has a quickness of mind, self-reliance and strength of purpose which her country-born mother did not possess. Despite the concessions which Mrs Gaskell makes about Mary's refinement of speech and dress, she represents not the leisured middle class but the new industrial working-class. Her virtues are derived from this thriving, uncomfortable society and are not those usually admired in the Victorian heroine. She belongs with Shirley Keeldar and Margaret Hale, rather than with Louisa Gradgrind and Ruth Hilton.

While Mrs Gaskell established her reputation as a writer able to deal with contemporary themes, Charlotte Brontë always chose to distance herself

from the present by setting her novels back in an undefined period in the immediate past. Exactness of location and historical accuracy were of little interest to her. She felt herself to be unsuited, both by circumstance and experience, to deal with matters which gave writers such as Thackeray and Dickens 'a knowledge of the world'. When Charlotte wrote Shirley in 1848, it was a year of great social unrest both at home and abroad, culminating in the Chartist riots at home and a series of revolutions on the Continent, but she chose to place the novel back in 1811 and 1812, during the Luddite uprisings. She preferred a subject which, because it was distanced in time, could be 'fabricated darkly in the silent workshop of (her) own brain'[12].

Charlotte felt herself unsuited to writing anything approaching a social tract. She wrote bitingly to W.S. Williams on the 28th January 1848, on the dangers of writing about 'details, situations which I do not understand and cannot personally inspect. I would not for the world meddle with, less I should make even a more ridiculous mess of the matter than Mrs Trollope did in her 'Factory Boy' '[13]. She was referring to The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy, by Frances Trollope, which had been published in 1840, with the laudable intention of drawing attention to the terrible working conditions of children in factories. However, its case had been weakened by melodrama and overstatement. Charlotte Brontë had clearly no intention of 'personally inspecting' the life in the towns which surrounded her, or even Haworth.

Although Jane Eyre had proved enormously popular with readers, and was still being reprinted while she was writing Shirley, it had been criticised for excessive melodrama. Charlotte seemed determined to correct this view of her work. She warns the reader in the opening chapter of Shirley not to 'expect passion, and stimulus and melodrama'[14]; instead we are asked to 'calm' our 'expectations' and to settle for 'something as unromantic as Monday morning'. She also makes it clear that she intends to avoid extremes of characterisation:

> Though I describe imperfect characters (every character in this book will be found to be more or less imperfect, my pen refusing to draw anything in the model line), I have not undertaken to handle degraded or utterly infamous ones. Child-torturers, slave masters and drivers, I consign to the hands of jailers; the novelist may be excused from sullying his page with the record of their deeds[15].

Although the Luddite attacks on the mill and later on Robert Moore's person, provide the action of Shirley, it can scarcely be described as an

industrial novel, in that Charlotte has no concern to present a realistic portrait of the lives of the workers. In much the same way, Jane Eyre cannot be said to be principally concerned with improving the conditions within charity institutions. Her workers are minor characters sketched in with broad strokes and have none of the individuality of Mrs Gaskell's cotton workers.

From childhood onwards, she and her brother, Branwell, had been greatly interested in the Napoleonic period. They read accounts of Napoleon's campaigns and drew up lists of his marshals and relatives. In her juvenile writings, her hero was the Duke of Wellington and many of these adventures centred on his fictional sons. While in Shirley, it is the Napoleonic character, Robert Moore, who is the hero, she allows her childhood preference to reassert itself in a discussion between Mr Helstone and Robert Moore on the relative merits of Napoleon and Wellington:

> "But, my dear sir, you can't be serious in what you say. Bonaparte's marshals are great great men, who act under the guidance of an omnipotent master spirit; your Wellington is the most hum-drum of common-place martinets, whose slow mechanical movements are further cramped by an ignorant home-government."
>
> "Wellington is the soul of England. Wellington is the right champion of a good cause; the fit representative of a powerful, a resolute, a sensible, and an honest nation"[16].

In addition to her own interest in the period, Charlotte Brontë was able to draw substantially on her father's direct recollections of Luddite riots, when he was a curate at Hartshead. Rawfolds Mill had been defended by the mill-owner, Mr Cartwright, and an attempt had been made on his life. Mr Brontë's friend, the Reverend Hammond Robertson, on whom the character of Mr Helstone is based, had visited the mills on the morning after the Luddite attack and had congratulated Cartwright on his defence. Charlotte had attended Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head near Huddersfield, first as a pupil and later as a teacher, and must have heard Miss Wooler and her friends talk of that time. Mrs Gaskell describes Miss Wooler as one who had been 'born and bred among this rough, strong, fierce set, and knew the depth of goodness and loyalty that lay beneath their wild manners and insubordinate ways'[17]. Most of the buildings described in the novel are based on actual buildings in the Huddersfield area. Before commencing the writing of Shirley, Charlotte studied the files of the Leeds Mercury between 1811 and 1812. Some of the characteristics which Charlotte gives Robert Moore derive directly from his historical counterpart, William Cartwright, in that Cartwright had foreign

blood and spoke French well. He was also described as having a dark complexion, but the 'southern symmetry, clearness, regularity and chiseling' of his features derive more from Zamorna in Charlotte's juvenile stories. Although historical counterparts have been suggested for a number of the characters, Charlotte makes it clear, in a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey, that they should be regarded as 'abstractions' rather than as 'literal portraits':

> You are not to suppose any of the characters in 'Shirley' are intended as literal portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never *dictate*. The heroines are abstractions, and the heroes also. Qualities I have seen, loved and admired, are here and there put in as decorative gems, to be preserved in that setting[18].

In a similar way, she 'abstracts' the historical facts and changes the sequence of events in order to heighten the impact of a scene. Herbert Rosengarten points out that she makes the frame-breaking incident precede the mill attack 'in order to shape the action towards a climax; and the assault on the mill thus becomes the culmination of the struggle between Moore and the Luddites'[19]. She shows, therefore, her indifference to the historical reality. In the same way, while William Cartwright was relentless in bringing to justice the men engaged in the attack on the mill, she brings her character, Moore, to the point when he at least expresses some understanding of, if not sympathy with, those caught up in the Luddite cause:

> "I saw some, with naturally elevated tendencies and good feelings, kept down amongst sordid privations and harassing griefs. I saw many originally low, and to whom lack of education left scarcely anything but animal wants, disappointed in those wants, ahungered, athirst, and desperate as famished animals. I saw what taught my brain a new lesson, and filled my breast with fresh feelings"[20].

Charlotte emphasises the pointlessness of violence and revenge by having him shot and seriously wounded immediately following this moment of enlightenment; in addition, he is shot down by a madman. Despite this moment of softness, the novel is generally one of confrontation rather than reconciliation. Robert Moore represents progress, so he must triumph over the Luddites. He is presented as one fit to rule and therefore, if the poor beg from him, he must show mercy; not because it is their right, but because it is the way a ruler should behave. Shirley expresses the same views in a conversation with Caroline:

> "Let me listen to Mercy as long as she is near me: her voice once drowned by the shout of ruffian defiance, and I shall be full of impulses to resist and quell. If once the poor gather and rise in the form of the mob, I shall turn against them as an aristocrat: if they bully me, I must defy; if they attack, I must resist - and I will"[21].

The book ends with Moore remorselessly envisaging the destruction of the 'beautiful wide ravine' in order to make way for 'a firm, broad, black, sooty road' leading to his enlarged mill. In exchange, he promises the poor work, while the comparatively well-off who are already established in the area are encouraged to exploit their needs: 'Louis Moore Esq., shall let them a tenement, and Mrs Gill shall mete them a portion till the first pay-day'[22]. There is no compromise; it is possible to have the beautiful rural landscape or the factory, but not both. In the same way, the workers cannot have equality and mercy.

Shirley is not an industrial novel in the same sense as Mary Barton, or Hard Times, where the characters and situations derive directly from the industrial setting. In Shirley, the industrial setting is only important in so far as it impinges on the personal development of the characters. The main theme of the novel is how the two heroines, Shirley and Caroline, will resolve what Mrs Gaskell called 'the subject of a woman's life': finding the right husband. Charlotte Brontë is as keenly aware of this as was Jane Austen writing some forty years earlier. The first Married Woman's Property Act was not passed until 1870; until then, a woman's property passed to her husband upon marriage. Mrs Pryor, Caroline's mother, illustrates the tragic consequence of marrying a dissolute man. If the woman chose to leave her husband, she faced isolation from society, the loss of her children, and a life of penury and loneliness; often, as in the case of Mrs Pryor, under an assumed name. Charlotte's sister, Anne, had explored a similar theme in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848), which is discussed in Chapter Three. Shirley, as a wealthy heiress, must try to ensure that the man she marries will use her money to their mutual benefit. Caroline, on the other hand, lacks money and opportunity. Like the Brontë sisters themselves, she meets few men and of those she does meet, three are impoverished curates looking for a wife with a comfortable dowry. Through Mr Helstone, Charlotte goes on to suggest that even if a man did not waste his wife's property, or live a life of dissipation, he could destroy her character and health by indifference:

> At heart, he could not abide sense in women: he liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible; because they were then in reality what he held them to be,

> and wished them to be, - inferior: toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away[23].

The novel has two heroines, Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone, and two heroes, the brothers Robert and Louis Moore. They seem to have been created to provide the maximum contrast between man and man and woman and woman, in terms of appearance, character and opportunity. Shirley is a wealthy young heiress, dramatic in appearance and character, while Caroline is introverted, modest and, having no money of her own, is entirely dependent upon her uncle, Mr Helstone. Robert Moore is a Napoleonic figure, with dark romantic looks, who represents a new order of men: the captains of industry, resourceful and capable of decisive action. Louis Moore, on the other hand, is that most unromantic of figures, the tutor, 'a satellite' of the main household, 'connected yet apart; ever attendant and yet ever distant'. Just as the quiet, plain governess Jane Eyre captured Mr Rochester by the power of her spirit, so Louis, the despised tutor, will, by the power of his personality, capture Miss Keeldar, 'that great matrimonial prize', despite the competition of his more dashing brother, Robert, and the socially superior Sir Philip Nunnely. In her biography of Charlotte Brontë, Mrs Gaskell suggests that in Shirley, Charlotte was depicting what her sister Emily 'would have been, placed in health and prosperity'[24]. Physically, Shirley is described as being not unlike Caroline Helstone, but with added definition. She is similar to Caroline in stature but 'she might have the advantage by an inch or two'. Whereas Caroline is blonde, 'clear and dark' were Shirley's characteristics. The latter's features, which are described as 'distinguished', can only be summed up by the use of a French phrase, '"fins, gracieux, spirituels"'[25]. The independence of her financial situation permits her a masculine boldness of speech. Even her Christian name had been given in the single form because her parents had wished for a son, but as 'Providence has granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy'[26]. What Mr Helstone cannot tolerate in most women and represses in his niece, he finds attractive in the young heiress. Charlotte does not suggest that this is because Mr Helstone has anything to gain from her, but indicates that it is Shirley's money and social position which, in Mr Helstone's eyes, entitle her to the respect and freedom which would normally be given only to another man. This respect is indicated by his addressing her as though she were the soldier hero of some musical comedy, or a man of action: Captain of Yeomanry, young squire of Briarfield, Captain Shirley, Lord of the Manor of Briarfield, are some of the titles he uses. Margaret Hale,

in Mrs Gaskell's North and South, is the heroine closest to Shirley in terms of the masculine responsibilities which she takes on. We are continually reminded that upon marriage Shirley will lose much of the power and freedom which her money gives her as a single woman. She is aware that the man who marries her will improve himself either financially or socially and probably both. However, in an exchange with Louis Moore, she indicates that she will not enter into a marriage where she is regarded as no more than a dowry: '"Improving a husband! No. I shall insist upon my husband improving me, or else we part"'[27]. In a conversation with her guardian, Mr Sympson, she indicates that her husband 'must be thirty, with the sense of forty'[28]. She quite rightly rejects many of those who seek her hand as mercenary in intent. In the same way that Helstone regarded women as something to 'amuse a vacant hour', so the efforts of the two curates, Malone and Donne, to court her are regarded by Shirley as no more than a diversion for a dull afternoon. Afterwards, they are dismissed ignominiously. She differentiates between them only in that Donne is not 'worth a scene' and Malone is.

When Robert Moore tells Mr Yorke that he has decided to ask Shirley to marry him, not on romantic grounds but because he would be'"rich with her, and ruined without her"'. Mr Yorke's response is that it was 'a sensible resolve'. As Mr Yorke has already been described, perhaps a trifle ironically, as a 'Yorkshire gentleman par excellence', the point is underlined that it was perfectly honourable for a man to regard marriage to an heiress as a legitimate way of restoring his fortunes. Jane Austen had made much the same point for the opposite sex some thirty-eight years earlier, when she commenced Pride and Prejudice with the statement that 'It was a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'. However, Shirley's response to Robert Moore's proposal demands a better reason for marriage than mere financial benefit: '"You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse, rather than like a lover who asked my heart"'[29]. She finally accepts Louis Moore on the basis of mutual love and respect. However, paradoxically, as the poorest of her suitors, he has the most to gain financially. Nevertheless, she indicates that while she is prepared to share with him the benefits of owning property, she is not prepared to abdicate all her responsibilities. To some extent, just as Robert Moore is presented as a new line of hero for the new industrial age, so Shirley is presented as a new type of heroine who is not prepared to accept a passive and submissive role. So far as the law of the land was at that time, Louis Moore would have had total rights over her property once they were married. There is, therefore, the additional implication that,

for all her rashness and hasty judgement, where 'the matter of a woman's life' is concerned, she is wise enough to choose a husband to whom she can safely entrust herself.

Shirley is frequently described in ways which suggest something wild and untamed. Louis Moore calls her his leopardess and she responds by saying that she is glad'"to know her keeper and to be used to him"'[30]. She therefore seems to acknowledge the fact that ultimately, she must be 'tamed' by a man. She challenges the male characters in a manner which would have seemed impossibly bold for Caroline Helstone. Even her emotions are given a masculine robustness. When the curates, Donne and Malone, are put to flight by her dog Tartar, she not only laughs openly at their humiliation, but caresses the dog which caused it, to indicate her ability to control what they fear. Caroline, who witnesses the scene and has an equal lack of respect for the curates, is nevertheless described as 'too true a lady to smile even at any one under mortification'[31]. When Donne angers Shirley with his contempt for his parishioners and Yorkshire in general - '"Wretched place - this Yorkshire," he went on. "I could never have formed an idear of the country had I not seen it; and the people - rich and poor - what a set! How *corse* and uncultivated! They would be scouted in the south"'[32] - she dismisses him instantly, and when he reminds her that he is a clergyman, she retorts, '"Off! Were you an archbishop you have proved yourself no gentleman, and must go. Quick!"'[33]. It is interesting to compare Shirley's own comments about resisting the poor if they rose against the aristocracy, with her contempt for Donne's comment that '"They pos'tively deserve that one should turn a mad cow in amongst them to rout their rabble-ranks ..."'[34]. The only real difference is that Shirley would defend herself from the rabble's power, while Donne would regard the quelling of the mob as 'fun': like fox-hunting, a suitable pursuit for a gentleman. Charlotte makes it plain that Shirley does not conform with what is considered to be maidenly and modest. When her guardian, Mr Sympson, is trying to bring Sir Philip Nunnely 'to the point' of proposing, Shirley is 'persuaded' to sit down and accompany herself in one of Sir Philip's own compositions. The intention is to do no more than to display Shirley's feminine accomplishments, but she sings the ballad with such dramatic force and passion that the Misses Sympson and Sir Philip 'looked upon her, as quiet poultry might look on an egret, an ibis or any other strange fowl', and to pose the question 'was it *proper* to sing with such expression, with such originality - so unlike a schoolgirl?'[35]. They regard such emotion as excessive and therefore improper in a woman. Underlying the scene is the intimation that the ability to express passion is unmaidenly and possibly unchaste. There is nothing

wrong about Sir Philip Nunnely as a suitor for her hand, except that he and his family are 'quiet poultry' with all the small-mindedness and stupidity which this suggests, whereas Shirley is an exotic bird which cannot be confined to domesticity. If she is to make a successful marriage, then her partner must be as unusual as herself. Until very near the end of the book, Robert Moore, with a change of heart, could have provided such a partner. However, in the end, Shirley chooses the less obvious Louis Moore.

The theme of contrast remains in that the dynamic, progressive Shirley marries Louis Moore whose virtues belong more to the past than the future, whereas the modest and self-effacing Caroline marries Robert Moore, a man of the future and someone who embodies many of the advantages and disadvantages of the industrial revolution. It could be that Charlotte Brontë saw these unions as providing a balance, whereas, had the two strong and the two less assertive characters been brought together, the result would have been to cancel out one another's virtues.

When the character of Caroline Helstone is examined, we find a heroine who also rebels against the type of life which she is compelled to live, even if only inwardly. Before Caroline is actually introduced into the story, Robert Moore's sister, Hortense, who represents in female form many of Robert's worst characteristics, such as arrogance and determination, but without his charm and foresight, claims that Caroline is occasionally too reserved, which she does not like'"because it is not sufficiently girlish and submissive"'[36]. Caroline herself 'feels that she is inferior', not only because 'her attainments were fewer than were usually possessed by girls of her age and station'[37], but also because her parents were separated soon after her birth and she has been brought up by her uncle, the Rector: a man not 'much adapted, either by nature or habits, to have charge of a young girl'. She is presented as someone who feels herself to be unloved and of little value. Just as Shirley's independence implies certain dangers, so Caroline's dependence imprisons her in a twilight world. She longs, rather unconventionally, to have been made a boy rather than a girl. She wants to be a clerk in a counting-house rather than 'sitting with Hortense in the parlour'[38]. Just as it has been said that Hamlet was a renaissance man in a feudal situation, so Caroline is revealed as a nineteenth century woman entrapped by the values of the eighteenth century. Her situation is very much that of Charlotte Brontë herself: she needs to marry because the alternative of spinsterhood means poverty and loneliness. However, again like Charlotte, she meets few men, except for the curates whom she dislikes. In reality, Charlotte settled for the Reverend A.B. Nicholls, but in the world of her imagination, she

allows Caroline Helstone not only to marry the dashing, Byronic Robert Moore, but to marry him in the knowledge that it is a union based on love and respect rather than financial considerations. Nevertheless, the initiative remains with the man. The female must accept any disappointment in silence: 'A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing: if she did the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery'[39]. Charlotte frequently describes Caroline's mental anguish in terms of physical torture:

> You hold out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting your palm Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob. For the whole remnant of your life, if you survive the test - some, it is said, die under it - you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive[40].

While Shirley is able to express her emotions by right of her independence, Caroline, as a dependent, must suppress them at all times. Throughout the novel, the differences between the characters of Caroline and Shirley are not so much inherent as induced by circumstance. Shirley has financial independence and, therefore, much of the freedom of speech and manner which is acceptable in a man; Caroline is forced by her lack of financial independence to conform to what is expected of a young unmarried woman. Caroline longs to share Robert's business aspirations. She feels that if she had not been a girl, she would have been more at home with Robert 'in the counting house' rather than with Hortense 'in the parlour'. She recognises that while her feelings for Robert totally absorb her, he is part of a much wider world from which her sex and station must exclude her. Charlotte Brontë would of course know Byron's lines, 'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence'. Much of its meaning is expressed in the scene when Caroline sees Robert in church, but he avoids looking at her: '"Strange that grief should now almost choke me, because another human being's eye has failed to greet mine"'[41].

In a long soliloquy, Caroline ponders on her future and, particularly, on the purpose for which she has been created, the implication being that the prime purpose of a woman's existence is to marry and provide a home for her husband and children. She sees it as a problem which 'most old maids are puzzled to solve' and claims that other people try to solve it for them by suggesting that if God does not intend them to fulfil the first purpose of a woman's life then they must do penance for being

defective by doing good to others, 'to be helpful whenever help is wanted'[42]. Typically, Charlotte causes her character to reject this role because it is 'undue humility' which leads to tyranny. At one point when Robert gives his view of a typical old maid as'"shrivelled, eld, livid and loveless"'[43], she remonstrates with him on the grounds that she too will one day be an old maid, with the implication that he has the power to save her from such a destiny. He shrugs it off with the comment that'"even at fifty you will not be repulsive"'. Caroline herself initially sees one such old maid, Miss Mann, as being of 'goblin-grimness'. However, eventually Caroline understands that the old woman's harsh manner stems more from her circumstances than from inherent bad nature; in other words, the loneliness of being a spinster has made her forbidding, rather than her forbidding nature making her a spinster. Caroline, by giving her attention, gradually draws from her the 'cruel, slow-wasting, obstinate sufferings'[44]. At this point, Charlotte abandons detachment and addresses the reader directly on behalf of all the unloved:

> ... however old, plain, humble, desolate, afflicted we may be, so long as our hearts preserve the feeblest spark of life, they preserve also, shivering near that pale member, a starved, ghostly longing for appreciation and affection[45].

Caroline continues to visit other lonely single women, as if, by finding hidden virtues in them, she can reconcile herself to sharing their fate. As a concession to the Christian virtues which Charlotte Brontë so sincerely believed in, Caroline finds 'goodness' and 'usefulness', but on the other hand finds nothing to stimulate and uplift, 'no high intellect', merely good sense. Without the affection of either parents or lover, Caroline declines in health; 'winter seemed to be conquering her spring: the mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation'[46]. It is significant that at this time of great crisis in her life, Robert describes an occasion when he thought she was waiting in his parlour, only to find 'there was nothing left but the sweep of a white muslin curtain, and a balsam plant in a flower-pot, covered with a flush of bloom'; thus her womanhood is reduced to two external symbols of domesticity: a net curtain and a potted plant. Caroline describes unmarried women as being like 'the houseless and unemployed poor, (who) should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich'[48]. She sees their physical and mental health declining as a result of being 'impotent', 'they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to a wondrous narrowness'. Once again, Charlotte seems to be addressing the 'Men of England' directly, as those with the power to alter things. She begs them to prevent their daughters

'dropping off in consumption or decline', or degenerating 'to sour old maids, - envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them'[49] by seeking an 'interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manoeuvrer, the mischief-making tale-bearer'. She promises that if they do this, their reward will be to make their daughters 'your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age'[50]. Despite this plea, Charlotte clearly envisages any occupation as of secondary importance to the woman's domestic role; as something which would enhance her ability to carry out such roles, rather than supplant them. Like Mrs Gaskell, Charlotte considered it impossible for a woman to live the life of an artist because a woman must always place her domstic responsibilities first. Her art must be a refuge from which one could return rejuvenated to face the challenges of ordinary life, rather than the central purpose of life.

Initially, it would appear that Caroline is a heroine in the more traditional mould: that is, demure, subservient to the male and happy in serving others; whereas Shirley points the way to the 'new woman' who will demand an equal partnership with the male. It is soon apparent, however, that Caroline's conformity is forced on her by circumstance, rather than by inclination, and it is through her that Charlotte Brontë expresses her views on the low status of single women. Shirley is seen, not as a 'new woman', but merely as a wealthy woman whose wealth has purchased her exemption from the role traditionally reserved for the female. The effect of marriage on Shirley's privileged position is hardly touched upon. While Shirley makes it quite clear that she expects marriage to be based upon a partnership rather than a dictatorship, the reader would be aware that once she has given her hand in marriage, it would be entirely up to the husband to decide whether he would accept a partnership or impose a dictatorship. The property laws were still entirely in his favour.

Mrs Pryor, who first appears as companion to Shirley and is later revealed as Caroline's mother, presents the third and most tragic estate for woman: that of the married woman who is driven to leave her husband. Although she is forced to leave her husband because of his depraved nature, the result of her action is to put her outside conventional society. She is forced to live an impoverished and lonely life under an assumed name. With bitterness, she describes the romantic images of marriage fed to young girls: 'They are not like reality, they show you only the green tempting surface of the marsh and give not one faithful or truthful hint of the slough underneath'[51]. Each of the women has a different problem, but each is related to what Mrs Gaskell called *the* subject in a woman's life. Shirley has an embarrassment of suitors, but

she has to be sure that her choice falls on a man who wants her for herself as well as her wealth. Caroline has the problem of finding a husband who would be content with her love alone, while the one man she loves needs to marry money in order to retain his business. Mrs Pryor moves between them as the living warning of the results of marrying the wrong man. Charlotte Brontë makes a number of important statements about the place of women in society, and particularly the spinster, but in the end seems to capitulate and give the male high status by right of natural superiority: 'Indisputably, a great, good, handsome man is the first of created things'[52]. The industrial theme which shows Robert Moore as an industrial emperor in conflict with the Luddites, is presented as subsidiary to the main theme of the novel: the need for a woman to acquire the right husband, which is the same as that of Pride and Prejudice, written nearly half a century earlier.

Hard Times by Charles Dickens, while truly an industrial novel in terms of subject and setting, does not develop the status of the heroine, but returns instead to an older tradition. When Dickens commenced work on Hard Times, in January 1854, he had only just completed the lengthy Bleak House. However, it was necessary to boost the declining sales of Household Words, and it was thought that only a novel by Charles Dickens could guarantee an increase in sales. Although he had complained when writing The Old Curiosity Shop, that the necessity of providing weekly crises or 'cliffhangers' spoilt the rhythm, he once again subjected himself to the discipline of writing weekly instalments. He also imposed the added restriction of compressing the novel into a serial which was less than half the length of Bleak House. When he actually planned the novel, he admitted that this stricture of space proved 'crushing'. He also divided the novel into books, which was a structure which he had attempted but abandoned when writing Oliver Twist. He therefore imposed upon himself great restrictions in terms of length and form which had the result of intensifying his style and of cutting away the ramifications of plot and characterisation which are usually associated with his novels. It is significant that one of the early titles which he considered was Black and White, and certainly it is a novel sketched in with bold, almost impressionistic strokes, rather than with meticulous detail. Reactions to the book also seemed to swing from excessive praise to excessive condemnation. For John Ruskin, Dickens's viewpoint was 'the right one, grossly and sharply told', whereas for Lord Macaulay, it was no more than an exercise in 'sullen socialism'.

The location of the novel in the North placed it outside his usual range of London and the South. He paid a brief visit to Preston in 1854

to gain material on a strike which had been going on for some time. Although he initially wrote to Foster saying 'I am afraid I shall not be able to get much here', he gathered sufficient material for an article which appeared in Household Words on the 11th February 1854, in which he describes two meetings. These same meetings obviously form the basis of the description of the union meeting later recorded in Hard Times. He appears to have been favourably impressed with the efficiency and good order of the meetings, but at the same time to have disliked the influence which the orator, brought in for the occasion, exercised over the workers. This speaker seems to have been the prototype for Slackbridge, the orator who so repels Stephen Blackpool. While Dickens expresses a horror of idleness and seems to feel that such strikes are a waste of time, he also indicates a belief in the men's cause. He appears to share Mrs Gaskell's view that there is a danger of driving the workers to desperation. This is borne out in a letter to her, dated April 21 1854, in which he deplores 'the monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands ...'[53]. In Bleak House Dickens had taken as his theme an antiquated and degraded legal system which not only was indifferent to the feelings of the individuals caught up in its mesh, but which also had the effect of destroying the will to positive action; characters such as Miss Flyte and Richard Carstone waste their lives 'expecting a judgment'. In Hard Times, Dickens turns to the economic system which he sees as trapping masters and operatives in a perpetual round of enmity and fear. Much of what he has to say about the system had already been said, since Hard Times came towards the end of a large number of novels with an industrial theme; it is known that he was greatly impressed by Mrs Gaskell's Mary Barton. He deliberately avoided describing the actual strike in case he conflicted with Mrs Gaskell's North and South, which was serialised in Household Words later in the same year. Dickens describes a world where the 'cash nexus' rules the lives and shapes the environment of both masters and men. Coketown is described as something 'unnatural', imposed on the landscape and painted red and black 'like the painted face of a savage'[54]. No personal eccentricity is allowed to alter its severely functional forms. Just as the buildings are alike, so that 'the jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail; the town-hall might have been either, or both'[55], so the people looked 'equally like one another'. It was a place where the dreary uniformity of factory life had been imposed on the buildings and the people. Mr Gradgrind, who was sufficiently wealthy to have a choice, chose to live in 'a calculated, cast up, balanced, and proved house'[56]. The style of the novel perfectly matches

its subject: it is a severe, pared-down parable in which the characters symbolise certain values. They are in bold outline rather than detail. The square headed, square fingered Mr Gradgrind and the inflated Josiah Bounderby, could easily have appeared in visual form in a Punch cartoon of the time. Mr Sleary's loose eye and lisping speech suggest a natural, if disorderly way of life on which the unnatural order of Coketown cannot be imposed, so that even the squalor and muddle of Sleary's Horseriding is preferable to the order of Coketown; not because it is in itself admirable, but because it stands outside the economic system which has produced Coketown. Sleary's troupe travels from place to place, always camping outside the towns and this suggests that its very lack of apparent structure and purpose will allow it to survive the systems which have produced Coketown. As is so often the case in Dickens's novels, the members of the theatrical troupes are idealised as fulfilled and happy people, as opposed to the depressed people of the towns which they entertain. Dickens seems to see Sleary's Horseriding as embodying the human spirit: disorderly, slovenly, even tawdry, but, most importantly, creative. If their talent to entertain deserts them, as in the case of Sissy Jupe's father, they are compelled to leave the troupe for self-imposed exile. This may suggest Dickens's own fears that his 'talent to amuse' might desert him. If Mrs Sparsit's frustrated energy is symbolised by the cotton stirrup in which she rides nowhere, Mrs Gradgrind's total mental and physical debility is symbolised by the description of her as a 'weak transparency' imperfectly lit from behind. Only on her deathbed does the light flare up for a brief moment when she comes to the vague understanding of what was the missing element in her married life and tries to communicate it in a letter to her husband: '"But there is something - not an Ology at all - that your father has missed, or forgotten Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it"'[57]. It is significant that she can only come near to it when close to Sissy Jupe who, because of her connection with Sleary's Horseriding, has the knowledge instinctively.

Unlike Dickens'sother novels, the plot of Hard Times is comparatively straightforward, with plenty of incident but few mysteries. The only mysterious figure is that of Mrs Pegler, the respectable old woman who is eventually revealed as Bounderby's much maligned mother, but even here, the reader is well prepared for the revelation by Stephen Blackpool's instinctive reaction that 'he had seen the old woman before and not quite liked her'[58]. Initially, it may seem that there was no deeper purpose for the old woman's mysterious behaviour than that Bounderby should be revealed as a hypocrite and a liar, who has degraded his origins in

order to enhance his success. However, examined a little further, the relationship between mother and son symbolises the relationship between master and man in Coketown. It is a relationship founded on the cash nexus, with no regard for human feelings. The old lady receives a very liberal allowance on the understanding that she should 'keep to her own part, and make no boasts about him and not trouble him'[59]. He denies her the emotional relationship natural between mother and son; she in turn accepts the relationship in return for money and is shown as being unable to make moral judgments about her son's behaviour, judging him only in terms of material success. Without knowing it, Stephen Blackpool dislikes her because her excessive self-effacement and pride in her son's achievements are mirror images of Bounderby's excessive boastfulness and arrogance.

Again, unlike Dickens's other novels, Hard Times has no positive hero or heroine and certainly no great villain. Bounderby lacks the intentional villainy of a Quilp or a Rigaud, nor has he the sadistic qualities of a Squeers or Murdstone; his are the brutalities of the economic system which he serves. We are told that with James Harthouse, 'No energetic wickedness ruffled his lassitude'[60]; like Steerforth in David Copperfield, he represents the ineffectual, disenchanted upper classes, toying with politics and seduction. He assesses himself to Louisa accurately as "'a sordid piece of human nature, ready to sell myself at any time for any reasonable sum"'[61].

Although cast in a heroic mould of suffering, Stephen Blackpool lacks the complexity of Mrs Gaskell's marred worker-hero, John Barton. Stephen symbolises the hopeless suffering of all the workers; not only is he tied to a drunken and depraved wife by the matrimonial laws, but he is unable even to find solidarity with his fellow workers in the Union. No explanation is given for Stephen's refusal to join the Union. His defeat by the matrimonial laws is clearly explained, as is his rejection by Bounderby, but his reasons for not joining the Union remain inexplicable, except in terms of Dickens's belief that individual benevolence between individual employer and individual worker is better for society than the bargaining power of a collective workforce. Stephen remains a lightly drawn figure and his life and death come over not so much heroic as pointless. He moves from a symbolic to a literal abyss. He appears to be more a representative figure for all good working men, than an individual. This composite image is further emphasised by Dickens's somewhat crude attempts at the North Country dialect which, unlike his London dialects, seems unrelated to actual speech patterns and could be seen as a contemporary equivalent of the BBC's composite country dialect, 'Mummerset':

'"'Tis all well, Stephen. I have been asleep, myself. 'Tis near three. Hush! I hear the bells"'[62].

When Dickens turns to describing Louisa Gradgrind and Sissy Jupe, the cartoon technique is abandoned and we are presented, particularly in the case of Louisa, with a subtle and unusual characterisation. However, both retain symbolic aspects, in that Louisa represents the logical outcome of her father's system of education, whereas Sissy Jupe, because of her connection with Sleary's Horseriding, represents the human spirit, which cannot be subdued by the system. Bitzer, the model of the system, defines a horse as 'Quadruped, Gramminivorous. Forty teeth'[63], and Sissy is 'thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand', because she cannot reduce the mysterious creature which has been a central part of her life to a series of bald facts. The human spirit is symbolised by the quality of light: Sissy receives 'a deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun', while Bitzer has 'what little colour he ever possessed'[64] drawn from him by the same rays. Sissy is continually referred to in terms of glowing light. The symbolism of light is extended to Mrs Gradgrind, whose personality has been all but extinguished by her husband's system, so that the light shines *through* her. In the same way that the dismal order of Coketown cannot be imposed on Sleary's Horseriding, so the aridity of the Gradgrind household cannot be imposed upon Sissy. Her response to Mr M'Choakumchild's question as to what is the first principle of Political Science is 'To do unto others as I would that they should do to me'[65]. In an exchange between Louisa and Sissy on learning, Louisa responds to Sissy's idea that the more she knew, the better she would be, is 'I don't know that', which suggests Louisa's own awareness that facts without a knowledge of life can be worse than useless. Sissy reacts instinctively, while Louisa tries to rely on reason, because this is all her father's system has allowed her. Louisa recognises that Sissy is '"more useful to my mother and more pleasant with her than I could ever be"' and also, more significantly, that Sissy is '"pleasanter to yourself than I am to myself"'[66]. It is Sissy's influence which softens the regime and helps to prevent Louisa's younger sister from suffering the same emotional deprivations. At her mother's deathbed, Louisa sees that because of this influence, 'her sister's was a better and brighter face than hers had ever been'[67].

Even Mr Gradgrind, while deploring Sissy's lack of response to his education system, acknowledges 'that there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form'[68]. It is significant that when Louisa accepts her father's wish that she should marry Mr Bounderby, Sissy reacts 'in wonder, in pity, in sorrow, in doubt, in a

multitude of emotions', and Louisa senses this reaction: from that moment 'she was impassive, proud and cold - held Sissy at a distance - changed to her altogether'[69]. Louisa's training will not allow her to accept the emotion in her life. She resents Sissy's emotions as a disfigured woman resents beauty in another. After Louisa's flight to her father's house, it is Sissy who confronts Mr Harthouse and by her 'child-like ingenuousness ... her modest fearlessness, her truthfulness which put all artifice aside'[70], overcomes 'his usual weapons'. It is Sissy who through Sleary's Horseriding manages to save Tom from the consequences of his robbery, although in the process 'the whelp' has to be reduced to the status of a circus animal, driven round the ring with the twitch of a whip. Sissy is one of the only characters in the book to be allowed a happy outcome. She is shown as one worthy of motherhood because she will beautify her children's lives with 'those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death'[71].

Louisa and Tom are presented, even as children, as having an air of 'jaded sullenness'. They are the victims of their father's system which has denied them the imaginary world which Dickens saw as necessary for the full development of children: 'No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the moon before it could speak distinctly'[72]. When they are discovered peeping in at the back of the booth of Sleary's Horseriding, whereas Tom gave 'himself up to be taken home like a machine', Louisa attempts to face up to her father. And while Sissy is portrayed as reflecting light, Louisa is described as having light 'with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination'[73]. Her father's reaction is to notice that 'she would have been self-willed but for her bringing up'. His system, therefore, is intended not only to remove fancy and imagination from education, but to subdue the will. This subjection of the will to the power of the machine is necessary for a citizen of Coketown. In both Tom and Louisa the emotions are suppressed rather than destroyed. In Tom's case, this results in a twisting of the emotions so that he can only use Louisa's love for him and can offer nothing in return. He is shown as quite unworthy of Louisa's devotion, but at the same time as the only person on whom she can lavish affection. Louisa is one of the most mysterious of Dickens's heroines, but like nearly all the other characters in the novel, she is defeated by Coketown and the system which it represents. At the end of the novel, unlike Sissy, she is not allowed fulfilment in motherhood: her life must continue as it has started, arid and without comfort. She is found unworthy of motherhood, not because of a moral lapse: she does not actually run away with

Mr Harthouse, but returns to her father's house but, because of her own deprivation she would have nothing to transmit to her children. Both Louisa and Tom direct their rebellion through Bounderby: Tom robs Bounderby's bank and Louisa accepts Bounderby as a husband simply because he is so unattractive to her that no possible demand can be made on her emotions. After Bounderby has kissed her cheek, she tells her brother that '"You may cut the piece out with your penknife if you like, Tom. I wouldn't cry!"'[74]. Mr Gradgrind warns Louisa against basing her decision to marry on anything as 'fanciful' as love, and suggests that she should base it only on 'tangible fact'. Having agreed to marry Bounderby, she has one moment when she expresses her fears:

> "What do I know, father", said Louisa in her quiet manner, "of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished? What escape have I had from the problems that could be demonstrated and realities that could be grasped?" As she said it, she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and slowly opened it as though she were releasing dush or ash[75].

She continually challenges her father on his ideas about education, but until Tom runs away and Louisa returns in a state of collapse, having left Mr Bounderby, Mr Gradgrind's carefully cultivated lack of imagination prevents him from seeing the truth. His system of education involves treating male and female as equal; Louisa is encouraged to make her own decisions but, paradoxically, denied the right sort of knowledge on which to base them. When she confronts her father after leaving Bounderby, she demands that he should save her 'by other means', since she knows that his philosophy and teaching cannot help. Finally she accuses him directly of dooming her to a loveless life. She uses language which likens her emotional self to a garden which, instead of blooming, has become 'a wilderness'. When she falls to the ground, she warns him that she will die if he holds her, because in her spent state, she cannot accept the emotional response which he at last offers. Like Stephen Blackpool, she is the victim of the system. Mrs Sparsit in her envy imagines Louisa coming down a 'mighty Staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom'[76]. Stephen Blackpool has the image of 'the black ladder' down which the bodies of the worn-out workers are 'slid out of this working world'[77]. Stephen ends his life in a literal abyss, while Louisa is left in a metaphorical one.

Louisa is treated by her father as just another product of Coketown; her education is as mechanical as the work within the factories. She is 'chained down by materialistic realities'. She has been denied the fancy

and imagination which Dickens saw as essential to the full growth of the individual. This is expressed through Mr Sleary when he says,'"Don't be croth with uth poor vagabondth. People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it"'[78].

Hard Times has the bleakest ending of any of Dickens's novels: Stephen Blackpool is dead, leaving a mourning Rachel; Tom is exiled on some foreign shore; Mr Gradgrind has had the faith in his system destroyed; Mrs Sparsit has been condemned to a life with Lady Scadgers and her mysterious leg; Louisa is left comfortless and childless without even her brother on which to expend her love. Only the awful Josiah Bounderby and the beautiful Sissy Jupe are allowed fulfilment. Mr Bounderby suffers nothing more than a momentary embarrassment over the revelations that his childhood was not as deprived as he boasted. He returns to a bachelor life without difficulty and apparently continues to prosper. Dickens seems to be suggesting that only a nature like Mr Bounderby's can thrive in Coketown. Sissy Jupe is able to prosper and be happy because she has never accepted the rules by which Coketown operates and can therefore leave them behind her and go out into the sunlight.

Despite their creators' very different approaches, all the heroines in this chapter are concerned with the same problem : that of marrying the right husband, and this has remained a constant theme in novels to this day, even if for 'husband' read 'partner'. Initially, Mary Barton makes the wrong choice in that she is tempted to use her beauty to acquire status and wealth with Harry Carson. However, by the end of the novel, she not only saves Jem's life but in him chooses the right partner for the new age. Jem, the skilled engineer, typifies the positive aspects of industrialisation. Shirley Keeldar, who because of rank and wealth has much to lose on marriage, in Louis Moore chooses a husband whom she can respect. Caroline Helstone comes closest to Louisa Gradgrind in that she is nearly defeated by a system which offers either marriage or the pitiful status of impoverished spinsterhood. She cannot articulate her hopes and fears and has to wait patiently for Robert Moore to discover that he needs her. There is even the hint that her earlier wish to forsake the parlour for the counting-house might be fulfilled. Only Louisa Gradgrind, robbed of vitality and imagination by her father's soulless educational system, is deprived of a happy married life with children, while Sissy Jupe is allowed to achieve this.

Both the women writers, Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë, make very strong pleas for improved opportunities for women. Charlotte pleads in particular for single women to be offered an outlet for their energies,

while Mrs Gaskell sends her heroine, Mary Barton, to the New World with her husband, suggesting a freedom denied in the old. Although marriage remains their central theme, it is visualised as a partnership of shared responsibilities, rather than the traditionally subordinate role described by Dickens, even for the fortunate Sissy Jupe. Shirley and Mary are portrayed as strong and resourceful; at times almost wilful. They represent a mixture of the traditional and the new, whereas Louisa and Sissy remain in the traditional mould of heroine in that their destinies are totally dependent upon men. Louisa is totally crushed by the male influences, first of Mr Gradgrind and later of Mr Bounderby, whereas Sissy survives because the influence of her father and Mr Sleary is stronger than that of Mr Gradgrind. It is, therefore, male influence against male influence, rather than the female arriving at her own conscious decision.

Notes on Chapter III

All page references for Mary Barton are for the Penguin English Library Edition (Aylesbury, 1970); for Shirley, for the Oxford University Press World Classics Edition (Oxford, 1979); for Hard Times, for the Pan Classics Edition (1977).

1 Mary Barton, p.238.

2 Mary Barton, p.238.

3 Mary Barton, p.220.

4 Mary Barton, p.240.

5 Mary Barton, p.96.

6 Mary Barton, p.53.

7 Mary Barton, p.62.

8 Mary Barton, p.61.

9 Mary Barton, p.177.

10 Mary Barton, p.389.

11 Mary Barton, p.465.

12 T.J. Wise and J.A. Symington (eds) The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, 4 vols, (Oxford, 1932), vol. ii, p.184.

13 T.J. Wise and J.A. Symington, The Brontës, vol. ii, p.184.

14 Shirley, p.5.

15 Shirley, p.61.

16 Shirley, p.38.

17 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.142.

18 T.J. Wise and J.A. Symington, The Brontës, vol. iii, p.37.

19 Herbert Rosengarten, Charlotte Brontë's 'Shirley' and the 'Leeds Mercury', Studies in English Literature (16), 1976, pp.591-600.

20 Shirley, p.542.

21 Shirley, p.267.

22 Shirley, p.644.

23 Shirley, p.116.

24 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.379.

25 Shirley, p.198.

26 Shirley, p.198.

27 Shirley, p.619.

28 Shirley, p.552.

29 Shirley, p.534.

30 Shirley, p.623.

31 Shirley, p.278.

32 Shirley, p.288.

33 Shirley, p.289.

34 Shirley, p.288.

35 Shirley, p.545.

36 Shirley, p.67.

37 Shirley, p.76.

38 Shirley, p.77.

39 Shirley, p.105.

40 Shirley, p.105.

41 Shirley, p.172.

42 Shirley, p.174.

43 Shirley, p.177.

44 Shirley, p.180.

45 Shirley, p.180.

46 Shirley, p.184.

47 Shirley, p.255.

48 Shirley, p.391.

49 Shirley, p.392.

50 Shirley, p.393.

51 Shirley, p.379.

52 Shirley, p.219.

53 Charles Dickens, Letters, vol. I, p.355.

54 Hard Times, p.43.

55 Hard Times, p.43.

56 Hard Times, p. 32.

57 Hard Times, p.201.

58 Hard Times, p.92.

59 Hard Times, p.256.

60 Hard Times, p.171.

61 Hard Times, p.174.

62 Hard Times, p.101.

63 Hard Times, p.28.

64 Hard Times, p. 27.

65 Hard Times, p. 73.

66 Hard Times, p. 73.

67 Hard Times, p. 200.

68 Hard Times, p. 105.

69 Hard Times, p. 114.

70 Hard Times, p. 228.

71 Hard Times, p. 288.

72 Hard Times, p. 32.

73 Hard Times, p. 35.

74 Hard Times, p. 42.

75 Hard Times, p. 113.

76 Hard Times, p. 202.

77 Hard Times, p. 82.

78 Hard Times, p. 283.

CHAPTER IV THE HEROINE REJECTED BY SOCIETY

In the previous chapter, the ways in which Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens, chose to portray the heroine ~~was~~ WERE considered in the context of the new industrial society. We saw the emergence of more positive heroines who were, with the exception of Louisa Gradgrind, to some extent freed by this new society. In this chapter, we consider heroines who either through their own actions, as in the case of Ruth Hilton and Helen Huntingdon, or in the case of Amy Dorrit through the actions of her father, have been rejected by society. They are considered both as the products and the victims of that society. Anne Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell both grapple with contentious subjects: Anne Brontë discusses the problems of a wife, Helen Huntingdon, who chooses to leave her husband because of his depraved way of life; Mrs Gaskell looks at a young woman, Ruth Hilton, who forms a relationship with a young man and bears his child out of wedlock. To some extent, both novelists address the same theme: the different moral codes allowed by society to men and women. Little Dorrit is included in this chapter because although Amy Dorrit had herself done nothing to offend society, her father had: as a debtor he was condemned to live in the 'limbo' of the Marshalsea prison and his family had no alternative but to live with him.

Although Ruth and Helen, in differing degrees, break the moral code, none of the heroines breaks the law of the land; all are portrayed as victims of a social system which is particularly hard on women. Ruth errs because she is young and unable to cope with independence; Helen is the victim of her own folly in contracting a bad marriage, and Amy is the victim of her father's financial inadequacy. All are portrayed as extremely 'womanly' in that they are prepared to sacrifice themselves for men: Helen and Ruth for their sons, even though they have rejected the fathers, and Amy for her father, who is in some ways also her child. The greater the original 'fall', the more heroic their final stature. Helen, who has a husband but leaves him, is allowed ultimate happiness in a second marriage, but only after nursing her first husband through his final illness. Ruth, who has 'fallen' further by living with a man outside marriage, needs a greater sacrifice to be redeemed; she actually dies nursing typhoid victims. Even Amy, who has committed no sin, has to nurse her future husband, Arthur Clennam, back to health before she and he can be married and return to normal society. A price is therefore demanded which is in proportion to the original offence.

The earliest of the three novels is The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, which was published in 1848. It was Anne Brontë's second novel, and, like Agnes Grey, the result of 'unpleasant and undreamt of experiences of human

nature'[1]. She commenced writing it at a particularly bad period in the affairs of her family. She had recently returned from five years as a governess in the family of the Rev. Edmund Robinson, where her brother, Branwell, had later joined her as tutor to the son of the household. As a result of Branwell's infatuation with Mrs Robinson, he had embarked on a path of dissipation through drink and drugs which was to lead to his early death in the September of the year that the novel was published. During the same period the sisters saw their dreams of establishing their own school come to nothing.

Although Mr Brontë had been able to provide a home and food for his remaining four children, money for such things as clothing and writing materials had always been short. As Perpetual Curate of Haworth, he received a stipend of only £170 a year, plus £27.13s for maintenance.

At the age of seventeen-and-a-half, Emily took up her only post, as a teacher in a school with forty pupils, near Halifax. She gave the post up after a few months and made no attempt to seek another. Anne took up her first situation as a governess at the age of nineteen. This was with the Ingham family of Blake Hall, Mirfield. It was an unhappy experience since she found the children uncontrollable and she was dismissed after three months. She describes an occasion when the children, having been given scarlet ponchos, galloped off on their ponies 'to be devils'. On the other hand, Mrs Ingham claimed that on another occasion, she entered the school room to find two of her children tied to table legs so that Anne might write in peace; this surely suggests that she was not entirely suited to the post of governess! In the circumstances, Anne was probably fortunate to be dismissed on the grounds of being 'unsuitable' rather than anything more definite. Anne used the experience as the basis of her largely autobiographical first novel, Agnes Grey, which charts the sufferings of a governess and transforms the well-bred Inghams into the 'jumped-up' Broomfields. Her second appointment was with the Robinson family of Thorp Green, near the village of Little Ouseburn, between Boroughbridge and York. She stayed there for five years, unhappily but doggedly, earning her living. She was later joined by Branwell as tutor to the son. With typical impetuosity, Branwell fell in love with the handsome Mrs Robinson. While there is no firm evidence that they were actually lovers, Mrs Gaskell seems quite sure that this was the case. In the first edition of her biography of Charlotte Brontë, she describes him as Mrs Robinson's 'paramour'. Threat of legal action by Mrs Robinson, now re-married, to Sir Edward Dolman Scott, caused her to withdraw it from later editions, but she still stated that 'he died, his pockets filled with her letters, which he carried perpetually about his person, in order that he

might read them as often as he wished'[2]. Anne, of course, was witness to the development of this relationship. She would have been aware of it when she wrote in her Prayer Book that she was 'sick of mankind and their disgusting ways'. Anne, with her high principles and almost obsessive interest in salvation, suffered the double blow of being a silent witness of sin, and of knowing that her brother was a full and eager partner in the 'criminal' relationship. It seems almost certain that Mrs Robinson is represented in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall as the brazen Lady Lowborough. Certainly, elements of her brother's character seem to have been incorporated in Lord Lowborough, at least in the early part of the book when he is going through stages of drunkenness followed by repentance and then further decline. Lord Lowborough eventually reforms but only at the price of great depression. Ironically, he marries in order to aid his reformation, but chooses as his partner Annabella, who marries for position and wealth and then betrays him with Arthur Huntingdon. At the end of the novel Annabella is described as living a life of 'reckless gaiety and dissipation'[3] on the Continent before finally sinking forgotten into 'debt, disgrace and misery[4], and dying at last in 'penury, neglect, and utter wretchedness'. One feels that for Anne, such an end was the only just one; since in reality Mrs Robinson prospered, at least justice could be accorded to the fictional Lady Lowborough. In much the same way, in Agnes Grey, Anne was able to provide her long-suffering governess with a noble and loving curate, Mr Weston, whereas in reality Anne was denied such comfort by the death of William Weightman.

Except for Mrs Gaskell's Ruth, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is the most didactic novel discussed in this thesis. Even by Victorian standards, the preface to the second edition, written in July 1848, is extremely moralistic in tone. It opens with the statement that 'I wish to tell the truth for truth conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it'. It then goes on to spell out the intentions of the novel: 'Is it better to reveal the snares and pitfalls of life to the young and thoughtless traveller, or to cover them with branches and flowers? Oh, Reader! if there were less of this delicate concealment of facts - this whispering 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace, there would be less of sin and misery to the young of both sexes who are left to wring their bitter knowledge from experience'. Anne wanted to show how incorrect she considered many of the accepted ideas on the bringing up of children. She was particularly concerned with the way young girls were protected from experience of life, to such an extent that they had no means of assessing the suitability of a future marriage partner. Young men, on the other hand, were believed to be made more 'manly' by

exposure to temptation but were often not given guidance on resisting it. The young heiress, Helen, is unable to recognise the true nature of a 'scapegrace' such as Arthur Huntingdon and he in turn appears to have been given few moral values on which to base his conduct. Anne is therefore attacking the two extremes of over-exposure and under-exposure to life. In the resulting unhappy marriage, Arthur is shown as reckless and easily bored with his young wife and his country estate. His restless spirit needs the excitement of the city. This in itself is meant to demonstrate faulty judgement. Helen, on the other hand, although virtuous and intially loving, reproaches Arthur and then locks her bedroom door against him, thus inevitably driving him to pursue his pleasures away from her accusing presence. The difference between Branwell's upbringing and that of his sisters must have contributed to Anne's views. As young children, the sisters had been accustomed to accept their father's assessment and to regard Branwell as the future hope of the family. His precocity was encouraged and mistaken for potential genius, when in fact it was the girls who possessed the true genius of the family. Although Patrick Brontë was in many ways exceptionally enlightened with regard to his daughters' education, allowing them scope for creative development, he was also very traditional in viewing his son as more important than his daughters. The drunken, demented spirit of Branwell haunts the novels of the three sisters. Arthur Huntingdon is shown not only drinking himself into collapse, but also taunting Lord Lowborough for trying to resist temptation. Hindley Earnshaw in Wuthering Heights similarly destroys himself. Although other vices are hinted at during his time in London, the two vices for which Huntingdon is 'damned' are drunkenness and infidelity. The implications are that his general moral fibre had been so weakened by drinking bouts that infidelity is bound to follow. However, in the reality of Branwell's experience, drunkenness followed infidelity rather than preceded it.

When Helen Huntingdon, under the assumed name of Mrs Graham, first visits the home of Gilbert Markham, her young son, Arthur, shrinks away from the proffered wine and Mrs Graham admits that she has created his aversion to wines and spirits by giving him spirits-and-water when he is ill. Gilbert's mother sees this as turning the boy into 'the veriest milksop that ever sopped'[5], but Mrs Graham claims that by this means she will 'save him from one degrading vice at least', Later in the book, Helen's own journal reveals that it had been her husband's custom to have the child brought down to dinner 'so as to tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man and sent mamma to the devil when she tried to prevent him'[6]. When Huntingdon

returned to London for the season and Helen had the child to herself, she had been prepared to go much further even than she had admitted to Mrs Markham and introduced a primitive form of aversion therapy. The child was allowed wine whenever he requested it but into it she 'surreptitiously introduced a small quantity of tartar-emetic - just enough to produce inevitable nausea and depression without positive sickness'[7]. This behaviour, bordering on actual cruelty, demonstrates both the strength of Helen's reaction to drunkenness and her often misguided belief in her own judgements. At this first meeting between Gilbert Markham and Helen, Anne Brontë's views on the moral upbringing of children are clearly set out. Gilbert claims that her son cannot be rendered virtuous by such means: '"If you would have your son to walk honourably through the world, you must not attempt to clear the stones from his path, but teach him to walk firmly over them"'[8]. She counters by claiming that the child must be led '"till he has strength to go alone"'. She goes on to say that '"for fifty - or five hundred men that have yielded to temptation, show me one that has had virtue to resist"'[9]. Gilbert's mother introduces the different attitudes towards bringing up girls and boys by claiming that if she treats him like a girl she '"will spoil his spirit, and make a mere Miss Nancy of him"'[10]. Markham claims that if she rears '"an oak sapling in a hothouse, tending it carefully night and day, and shielding it from every breath of wind, you could not expect it to become a hardy tree"'[11]. However, when challenged, he admits that he would shelter a girl in this way. Helen then claims that '"if a woman cannot be too little exposed to temptation, or too little acquainted with vice, or anything connected therewith - it *must* be, either that you think she is essentially so vicious, or so feeble-minded, that she cannot withstand temptation"'[12]. Anne is, therefore, making the surprising claim for a Victorian that, in matters of morality, male and female children should be regarded in the same way, so that the female is not educated to be the perpetual child of the adult male/female partnership. A comparison can be made here with Jane Eyre's demand of Mr Rochester that he answer her '"not through the medium of custom"', but as if they '"stood at God's feet, equal"'. Huntingdon is shown as a man whose maturity had been damaged by too much licence and too little preparation for that licence. Mr Rochester has also been damaged by youthful indulgence and his parents' connivance in a bad marriage. However, being a basically stronger character than Huntingdon, he does not give way to indulgence and is ultimately 'redeemed' by Jane Eyre who is a more self-reliant character than Helen Huntingdon.

Anne's second theme arose directly out of the first, in that it concerns the salvation of the immortal soul. Because Anne was more overtly

religious than the other two sisters, she considers the question of whether or not the soul can expiate the sins committed in this life after death and thus eventually be redeemed. Because Anne was less than two years old when her aunt, Miss Elizabeth Branwell, came to look after them, she formed a close attachment to her, even sleeping in her aunt's room up to her death. She, therefore, missed much of the communal life of her sisters who shared the crowded study above the hall. She was also most directly influenced by her aunt's brand of Wesleyan Methodism. Methodism was at that time divided into two groups: Arminians who, like Wesley, believed that redemption was available to all and that damnation was the price of individual sin, and those like Whitefield who followed Calvin's doctrine of pre-destination, where redemption was only for the 'elect', and the 'non-elect' were damned for eternity. Haworth itself was a stronghold of Methodism; William Grimshaw of Haworth was a famous Methodist and Wesley himself had once taken tea at the parsonage. Aunt Branwell's brand of Methodism weaves its way into the writings of all the sisters. In Shirley there is the great confrontation between the Church of England's school feast and the 'unholy alliance' of 'Dissenting and Methodist schools, the Baptists, Independents and Wesleyans'[13], who attempt to block the march to the church. They are put to rout by the church shouting 'Rule Britannia' loud enough to drown the Dissenters' 'dolorous canticle'. In Wuthering Heights, Lockwood dreams that he is journeying to hear Jabez Branderham preach an unending sermon on 'Seventy Times Seven'. While Anne does not mention Methodism directly, neither does she find it the subject for humour as do her sisters. The Church of England at that time also accepted that damnation was the recompense for individual sin. For most people, and particularly Anne and her aunt, Hell was an actual location where the damned burned in everlasting fire.

In The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Helen's aunt represents the sound religious principles of middle age, which the young and inexperienced girl is bound to reject when she falls in love. Her aunt warns her that in choosing a husband she should'"be blind to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse"'. She goes on to warn her of "'the misery that would overwhelm you, if, after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate"'. Helen, of course, in falling in love with Arthur Huntingdon, chooses such a reprobate. When Huntingdon and Helen are surprised by the aunt embracing in the library, thus breaking the rules of courtship, he claims flippantly that he would'"sacrifice his body and soul"' for her happiness. The aunt takes him up gravely on this point,'"Body and *soul*, Mr Huntingdon - sacrifice your *soul*?"'[14]. When Helen persists in her plan to marry Huntingdon, her aunt puts forward the argument which is to haunt

Helen throughout the book:'"should you pass through life together with tolerable comfort - how will it be in the end, when you see yourselves parted for ever; you perhaps taken into eternal bliss, and he cast into the lake that burneth with unquenchable fire"'[15]. We see Anne's conclusions in Helen's spirited reply:

> '"Not for ever,"' I exclaimed. '"only till he has paid the uttermost farthing", for 'If any man's work abide not the fire, he shall suffer loss, yet himself shall be saved, but so as by fire,' and He that 'is able to subdue all things to Himself, will have all men to be saved,' and 'will in the fulness of time, gather together in one all things in Christ Jesus, who tasted death for every man, and in whom God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven'[16].

When Arthur has a hunting accident and Helen returns to nurse him, he says that she does it only to gain a higher seat in heaven for herself and'"scoop a deeper pit in hell for me"'. When he has a relapse as a result of draining a bottle of 'the strongest wine in the cellar', Anne reworks the parable of Dives and Lazarus. He complains that once she is safe in heaven, and he is'"howling in hell-fire"' she will'"not so much dip the tip of her finger in water to cool my tongue "', which paraphrases Dives' request to Abraham: 'Father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame!'[17]. Helen replies that she would not be able to do what he asked because of'"the great gulf over which I cannot pass"'. The words of the parable are, 'Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence'. However, Helen then goes on to modify the harshness of these words,'"If I could look complacently on in such a case, it would be only from the assurance that you were being purified from your sins, and fitted to enjoy the happiness I felt"'[18].

Anne dwells on Huntingdon's protracted death agony and the onset of mortification. As he is 'dragged almost to the verge of that awful chasm', the idea of divine grace is developed in a discussion between him and Helen. Initially, as an alternative to hell, Arthur hopes that 'there is nothing after', but she assures him that'"there is joy and glory after if you will but try to reach it"'[19]. He rejects the idea of a death-bed repentance, but when she persists that 'sincere repentance' could redeem him, he admits that he'"can't repent; I only fear"'. He regrets having wronged her because she has been good to him, but does not regret offending God:'"What is God? - I cannot see Him or hear Him - God is only

an idea"'[20]. He remains selfish, regretting the thought that she will have happiness after he has gone and wishing he could take her with him, presumably to hell! He finally dies, having gone no farther towards conversion than asking her to pray for him. However, Helen's comments to Frederick Lawrence show how far Anne herself had travelled in resolving the question of salvation. She had clearly rejected pre-destination and accepted damnation as being the price for individual sin, but she also expresses confidence that in Christ all will eventually be redeemed:

> "Oh, Frederick! none can imagine the miseries bodily and mental of that deathbed! How could I endure to think that that poor trembling soul was hurried away to everlasting torment? it would drive me mad! But thank God I have hope - not only from a vague dependence on the possibility that penitence and pardon might have reached him at the last, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass - whatever fate awaits it, still, it is not lost, and God, who hateth nothing that He hath made, *will* bless it in the end!"[21]

After Anne Brontë's death, Charlotte, who made a number of sisterly misjudgements about Anne and Emily, claimed to have found evidence of religious melancholy in Anne's work. Certainly, of the three sisters, Anne was the most conventionally religious and, not unexpectedly, the one most deeply influenced by her aunt's Methodism. However, in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, the conclusions which she comes to on the question of salvation are clearly more hopeful than melancholic, in that redemption is always possible and a soul can work for salvation in the afterlife.

One of the main difficulties of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall lies in the presentation of the heroine, Helen Huntingdon. Despite Gilbert Markham's fascination with her, or perhaps with the mystery surrounding her, she is projected as a self-righteous, even priggish young woman, who seems to have no doubts about her own salvation and the certainty of her place in heaven. Perhaps because Anne uses the character of Helen so directly as a vehicle of her didactic message, and perhaps because Anne shows herself to be a less skilful writer than Emily or Charlotte, it is difficult to respond to Helen with the same sympathy that one feels for Jane Eyre or Caroline Helstone. She lacks the complexity and depth of those two characterisations. However, the major difficulty lies in the structure of the novel itself, which is a story within a story. This same structure was used, most successfully, by ~~her~~ Anne's sister, and closest confidante, Emily, in Wuthering Heights. In The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Gilbert Markham first becomes interested in Helen Huntingdon through reports from his family and friends. Because he does not know her history, he misinterprets her relationship with her brother, Frederick

Lawrence, and takes him for a rival. This leads to his going so far as to physically injure him. Helen then gives him her journal to read, and from this point the bulk of the story is seen through its pages. In much the same way in Wuthering Heights, Lockwood visits Wuthering Heights as an outsider and incorrectly assesses the relationships of the people he meets there. Trapped by the snow storm, he is introduced to the history of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff by reading diary notes made by her on the fly-leaves of books. He then gets the balance of the story from the old housekeeper, Nelly Dean. One wonders why the structure should work satisfactorily in Wuthering Heights, and less so in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. This is probably due to the number of viewpoints through which the reader sees the characters. Anne, by using the journal to convey the whole of the relationship between Helen and Huntingdon, ensures that Helen's sufferings are told entirely from her viewpoint. We are given no other facet of the relationship. The main protagonists, such as Lord Lowborough, Hargrave, Grimsby, and Annabella Wilmot are also only seen through Helen's eyes. In Wuthering Heights, we have a variety of viewpoints. Although the principal narrator remains Nelly Dean, her attitude towards the main characters changes with the circumstances, and despite her basic goodness we are as often reminded of her prejudices and limitations, as we are of Lockwood's.

George Moore, a critic who greatly admired Anne Brontë's writing at a time when it was generally out of favour, considered that the diary 'broke the story in halves'. He claimed that the structure of the novel collapsed half way through:

> Not from lack of genius but of experience. An accident would have saved her, almost any man of letters would have laid his hand upon her arm and said: You must not let your heroine give her diary to the young farmer... Your heroine must tell the young farmer her story, and an entrancing scene you will make of the telling... The presence of your heroine, her voice, her gestures, the questions that would arise and the answers that would be given ... would preserve the atmosphere of a passionate and original love story[22].

However, despite the fact that Helen Huntingdon is poised uneasily between Regency and Victorian England and remains more a mouthpiece for Anne's ideas than a rounded character, she still has the power, if not the passion, which is typical of the writing of the Brontë sisters. This is chiefly seen in her confrontations with Gilbert Markham on the question of bringing up children, and with her husband, Arthur, on the question of salvation. In these conversations with her husband, and with the man who will ultimately be her second husband, Gilbert Markham, Helen,

like Jane Eyre in her exchanges with Mr Rochester, demands that men respond to her, not with the mixture of condescension and reverence which the Victorian male was expected to reserve for an attractive female, but as to someone who was equal both intellectually and morally. Margaret Hale, in North and South, published ten years later in 1854, does not *request* such moral and intellectual quality from her father or Mr Thornton, but rather accepts such equality as her natural right.

We are also shown the gross inequality in matters of property between men and women, mainly because a woman's property passed to her husband upon marriage. Helen, therefore, is left with no means of support when she leaves her husband. Furthermore, as a gentlewoman, Helen is precluded from even the limited forms of employment open to women. Somewhat unusually, she chooses to try and earn a living by painting. Following 'the artistic life' was usually seen as impossible for a woman, and both Charlotte Brontë and Mrs Gaskell are concerned with the conflict between a female's family commitments and the demands of 'the artistic life'. However, Helen, having moved out of the conventional society by leaving her husband is freed to earn her living in an unconventional way. She is forced to live in seclusion, hiding from her husband under the assumed name of ~~Markham~~ Graham, and surviving only because of her brother's help. She is shown as being depressed and impoverished, and one cannot say that she achieves emotional or physical independence. What Helen might have become, had she not had Gilbert's love, can be seen in the character of Mrs Pryor, in Shirley. Mrs Pryor also left her husband because of his depraved way of life. In her case, this also meant leaving her little daughter, Caroline. She too lives under an assumed name, and earns her living as Shirley's companion. She is finally redeemed by being reunited with Caroline. Just as Helen Huntingdon has to nurse her husband through his last illness, before she can return fully to society, so Mrs Pryor has to nurse Caroline through a mental and physical breakdown, caused by her feelings of isolation and rejection. This theme of nursing as an element of redemption is constant in all the novels discussed. Even Amy Dorrit, who has no sins of her own to expiate, has to nurse Arthur Clennam through his mental and physical collapse in the Marshalsea.

Helen Huntingdon, through her youthful inexperience, makes an error of judgement in the choice of a husband and as this, according to Mrs Gaskell, is '*the* subject of a woman's life', the result of this error is either to accept her husband's depraved standards for herself and her son, or to leave him and, in so doing, to place herself outside society. It is only by her husband's death that she is free to return to society and marry Gilbert. While she achieves neither happiness nor independence,

she does, by rejecting her husband's standards, indicate a belief in her own moral values which makes compromise impossible. In Ruth, published nine years later, Mrs Gaskell gave her heroine a more lowly station in society, but again, because of youthful inexperience and poor education, Ruth is drawn into a relationship with Mr Bellingham, which places her outside the bounds of society. However, despite her greater 'sin', she achieves far more independence than was possible for Helen Huntingdon. She is redeemed, not by marriage, but by her own heroic self-sacrifice in nursing her former lover. Mr Bellingham causes her initial 'fall' and finally her death: he 'infects' her metaphorically with sin at the beginning and physically with typhus at the end.

Ruth, published in 1853, was Mrs Gaskell's third major novel and probably her most didactic work. She had already approached the subject of 'fallen women' very frankly through Esther in Mary Barton (1848), and in the short story Lizzie Leigh (1850). In Ruth she decided to take the bold step of making a 'fallen woman' the main character of the novel - the heroine. However, although the concept was initially bold, she seems to have decided later to modify the extent of Ruth's fall so that, unlike Esther or Lizzie Leigh, she never actually becomes a prostitute and is only briefly a 'kept woman'. Unlike these two characters, Ruth's sufferings are emotional rather than physical and she is never reduced to actually walking the streets or serving a prison sentence. Two factors may have contributed to Mrs Gaskell's apparent loss of courage: firstly, that she was the wife of a Unitarian minister and whatever she wrote was likely to affect his reputation as well as her own, and secondly that, as Ruth was to be the main character, it was necessary not to alienate the reader from her. Despite this, the book brought Mrs Gaskell considerable adverse criticism, for which she seems to have been partially prepared and appears to have been as much amused as disturbed by it. This mood of amused exasperation can be seen in a letter to her friend, Elizabeth Fox, in 1853:

> I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it. I do so manage to shock people. Now would you have burnt the 1st vol. of Ruth as so very bad? Yet two men have; and a third has forbidden his wife to read it; they sit next to me in Chapel and you can't think how 'improper' I feel under their eyes[23]

However, on the other hand, she received great support from many of her fellow writers, such as Charles Kingsley and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Charlotte Brontë was so impressed with Mrs Gaskell's subject that she agreed to hold back publication of Villette in order that the two books should not appear to be in competition. It is a measure of the tolerance

that lay at the heart of Unitarianism that William Gaskell should not only have permitted his wife to write on such a subject, but even to have encouraged her. It is difficult to imagine the wife of an Anglican clergyman of the same period being allowed such freedom.

Mrs Gaskell was writing at a time when sexual matters were treated with great discretion and were alluded to rather than directly stated. Nevertheless, a skilful writer could always manage to say what he or she wished, indirectly, thus avoiding the risk of offending the reading public. Circulating libraries, serialisation and more general literacy, had created a much wider readership than ever before, and in Mr Podsnap's reminder that nothing should be written which would bring a blush into the cheek of a young person[24], Dickens was doing no more than exaggerate genuine attitudes. Dickens himself always complied with these unwritten rules so that, although the introduction to the 1841 edition of Oliver Twist referred to Nancy as a 'prostitute', the word was deleted from the preface to the 1867 edition. William Makepeace Thackeray on the other hand, in his preface to Catherine (1848) took the view that if something brought a blush to a maiden's cheek, it was equally unsuitable for the opposite sex to read:

> All novels are, or should be written for both men and woman to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming to a man.

Prostitution was, however, recognised as one of the great social evils of the period and Mrs Gaskell, living as she did in a large industrial city, would have been aware of the problem, and would probably have come into contact with 'fallen women' as part of her duties as the wife of a minister. One of her motives for writing Ruth was personal involvement with the case of a young girl of sixteen, the orphaned daughter of an Irish clergyman, who had been committed to the New Bailey prison convicted of thieving and prostitution. Knowing of Charles Dickens's connection with Miss Coutts, in providing refuges for 'fallen women' Mrs Gaskell sought his help and, as a result, the girl was taken to one of Miss Coutts's refuges and later re-settled in South Africa.

Within a decade of the publication of Ruth, two large-scale factual surveys on prostitution were published. The first, by Dr William Acton - Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Garrison Towns (1857)[25] - considered the question mainly from a medical point of view, whereas Henry Mayhew's survey - Those That Will Not Work (1866), the fourth volume of his London Labour and the London

Poor - was more concerned with the sociological perspective. Mayhew disputed the claim that there were only 8,000 prostitutes in London and put the actual figure at closer to 80,000. He stressed the impossibility of ascertaining a more exact figure because of the fluctuation in numbers. He saw prostitution as an 'inevitable attendant upon extended civilisation and increased population'[26]. While both Mayhew and Acton believed that the basic cause of prostitution was economic, Mayhew believed that there were many women who were psychologically suited to the life because of their 'volatile and thoughtless character, which qualities are of course at variance with the existence of respectability'[27]. Acton gave no indication that he had found evidence of prostitutes having common characteristics. He took the practical view that prostitution would always exist and could only be controlled by being recognised officially, as in Continental countries. Both men recorded cases of women who regarded prostitution as just another form of business transaction and at a later stage returned to more regular modes of life. A kept mistress interviewed by Mayhew and questioned on what she thought would eventually become of her replied:'"What an absurd question. I could marry tomorrow if I liked"'[28]. Acton stated that:

> I have every reason to believe that by far the greater number of women who have resorted to prostitution for a livelihood, return sooner or later to a more or less regular course of life... Incumbrances rarely attend the prostitute who flies from the horror of her position[29].

In literature, however, the 'fallen woman' was more usually portrayed as a tormented creature destined, at worst, for an early and often violent death, like Nancy in Dickens's Oliver Twist, or at best, like Little Emily in David Copperfield, to live out a lonely and single life, separated from those she loved. Nina Auerbach sees this tradition, that the fallen woman must die at the end of the novel, as the one firm distinction between fallen and respectable women:

> Conventionally, the fallen woman must die at the end of her story, perhaps because death rather than marriage is the one implacable human change, the only honorable symbol of her fall's transforming power. Death does not simply punish or obliterate the fallen woman: its ritual appearance alone does her justice[30].

Mrs Gaskell conforms with this tradition in her treatment of Esther, Lizzie and Ruth. Esther is described as dying 'crying feebly and sadly as long as she had any strength to cry'[31]. Lizzie Leigh lives out the remainder of her life segregated from the community which she served in a 'cottage so secluded that, until you drop into that very hollow where it

is placed, you do not see it'[32]. Ruth dies a heroic death as a result of nursing typhus victims. While Lizzie Leigh does not herself die young, her illegitimate child, the visible proof of her sin, does, and the rebuke of society is extended beyond death in that the child has to be buried on the open moor, rather than in the churchyard, in the same way that, in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles, written thirty-seven years later, the parson will not allow Tess's child to be buried in the churchyard. In Adam Bede (1858), George Eliot has the 'fallen woman', Hetty Sorrel, committing the ultimate sin of destroying her own child. In contrast, all Mrs Gaskell's 'fallen women' are devoted mothers.

While Mrs Gaskell might appear to extend this tradition to Ruth, in that she dies young and unmarried, the conformity is superficial for Ruth dies young, not because she has been 'transformed by sin', but because she has been 'transformed' by grace and her life perfected. Death is not the ultimate penance, as with Esther, but an indication of Ruth's salvation. Her penance has been worked out in her life and her death is portrayed as an apotheosis.

There are parallels between the real-life case with which Mrs Gaskell was involved and the character Ruth, in that Ruth is also an orphan, although the daughter of a farmer rather than a clergyman. She too is sixteen at the commencement of the story and, like the girl, is apprenticed to a dressmaker. The girl Mrs Gaskell befriended was forced into prostitution when she was dismissed from her apprenticeship and Ruth enters into a relationship with Bellingham as a result of her dismissal by the dressmaker, Mrs Mason. However, after that, reality and fiction diverge. Ruth, because of the Bensons' protection, never becomes a prostitute or a thief and instead of having to live out her life in South Africa, remains in England to die a heroine's death. Mrs Gaskell's intention would seem to show how an innocent young woman could be 'driven into hopeless sin', rather than to explore, yet again, the sad path of prostitution. While the integrity of the original idea is never quite lost, one of the main difficulties with this novel lies in the need to maintain the reader's belief in Ruth's continuing innocence. Mrs Gaskell's excessive discretion about the physical nature of Ruth's relationship with Bellingham can be seen as arising less from fear of offending the reading public, than from fear that the concept of Ruth's innocence cannot be sustained if she is shown as deriving pleasure from the physical union with Mr Bellingham. There was a common belief at the time that women became prostitutes because of excessive sexual desire which were considered particularly unnatural in women. When, after their first night together, Ruth steals to the window to contemplate 'the everlasting hills', no reference is made

to the fact that Bellingham is asleep in the bed she has just left. She is not permitted the sort of 'hearty feeling' which is permitted to Bellingham. Hazel Mews says of Ruth:

> Even if ignorance is conceded, would not the shock of discovery of what was involved in cohabitation have had a greater effect upon a young girl's mind than is portrayed in the book, especially on the mind of a girl so 'pensive and tender'?'[33]

'Fallen women' were generally portrayed in literature as either predators or victims. Ruth falls into the second category. She has the beauty but not the liveliness of Sylvia Robson, nor the native wit of Mary Barton, nor the strength of character and education of Margaret Hale: 'She was little accustomed to oppose the wishes of any one; obedient and docile by nature, and unsuspicious and innocent of any harmful consequences'[34]. Her reaction to most of the crises in her life is indecision. She enters into her relationship with Bellingham, not so much for love, as did Esther with her soldier-lover, but because she is unable to summon up the energy to return to the care of her father's old servant: at the crucial moment 'her energy left her, she became stupid and languid, and incapable of spirited exertion'[35]. Mrs Gaskell sets before the reader what might in some ways be seen as the ideal of Victorian maidenhood - beautiful, docile, innocent and ignorant, and then she challenges the reader to consider what would become of such a girl, so ill-equipped to face the world or to understand the double standard controlling the behaviour of men and women. She expresses her views on this double standard through the maid at the hotel in Wales where Ruth and Bellingham first stay: '"Indeed and young men will be young men; and as long as their fathers and mothers shut their eyes, it's none of my business to go about asking questions"'[36]. Both Ruth and Bellingham suffer in different ways from lack of proper parental guidance. Ruth has lost both her parents, and Bellingham's mother uses her position to indulge or control him 'as her wayward disposition and her love of power prompted her'[37]. Bellingham is actively discouraged by his mother from helping the girl he has seduced and abandoned, and probably the most severely critical passage in any of Mrs Gaskell's novels is the one where Mrs Bellingham 'advises' Ruth on her future conduct:

> "I wish to exhort you to repentance, and to remind you that you will not have your own guilt alone upon your head, but that of any young man whom you may succeed in entrapping into vice. I shall pray that you may turn to an honest life, and I strongly recommend you, if indeed you are not 'dead in trespasses and sins', to enter some penitentiary"[38].

When, following this interview, Ruth becomes too ill to travel, Mrs Bellingham again advocates the penitentiary as a suitable place for her. It is only after the baptism of her son that Ruth is transformed from a passive figure responding to the will of others, into a woman capable of positive action; it is the love of her child which makes this possible. Once again, Mrs Gaskell brings in the theme of reconciliation. Ruth's great act of reconciliation is with God rather than man; she is never reconciled with Bellingham. As she develops spiritually, Bellingham has to be rejected. In this context, marriage with Bellingham would be a compromise to gain the approval of society. Although Ruth is allowed no such compromise, if Mr Benson and his sister had not compromised with their sense of truth, Ruth would have found no resting place to achieve this spiritual awakening. If Mr Benson represents Christ in man, then his sister represents humanity - well-meaning but fallible; she deals not with abstractions but with realities. When her brother tells her Ruth's history, her first reaction is that 'it would be better for her to die at once'[39], but, faced with the reality of Ruth, she is immediately full of pity for 'the poor lovely creature who lay thus stricken and felled'[40]. In the same way, she is shocked by the idea of Ruth's pregnancy, because, unlike her brother Thurston, she cannot separate the sin from its consequences. Nevertheless, she cherishes the child which results from that sin. It is Miss Benson who persuades her brother to go against his conscience and conceal the truth of Ruth's past from the small community in which they live. Mrs Gaskell appears to suggest that a compromise between purely spiritual values and more practical considerations is necessary in an imperfect world. However, later in the book, when Mr Bradshaw accuses Benson of deception in introducing Ruth into his household, Benson accepts the rebuke and repents his 'connivance at the falsehood', but he qualifies this when speaking to Ruth by making it clear that this is not so much because of the falsehood itself, but because, by accepting the need to deceive, he had shown insufficient faith in God in that '"We have dreaded men too much, and God too little, in the course we have taken"'[41].

When Ruth encounters Bellingham again, as Mr Donne the proposed Member of Parliament being put forward by Mr Bradwhaw, she is strong enough to reject his offer of marriage, despite the fact that in worldly terms this is a logical and acceptable compromise which will give Ruth respectability in the eyes of society. His offer is shown as a last attempt to gain control over two possessions, his mistress and his son. Ruth rejects him because she has far outgrown him and her spiritual liveliness cannot be tied to his spiritual deadness. This is the point at which she finally accepts full responsibility for her own decisions and

from then on she progresses to the stage of accepting a wider responsibility when she volunteers as a nurse during an outbreak of typhus in the town. When Mr Benson asks her to consider carefully in case she should leave Leonard motherless, she replies: '"Yes! I have thought and I have weighed. But through the very midst of all my fears and thoughts I have felt that I must go"'[42]. The measurement of her spiritual growth lies in the difference between the girl who went to London with Bellingham because she was unable to decide on an alternative course of action, and the woman who had 'weighed' her decision.

Throughout the book, Ruth's state of mind is equated with the quality of light. She is first seen bathed in bright colour as she passes in front of an old stained-glass window at her place of work: 'through which the moonlight fell on her with a glory of colours'[43]. There is the double implication of the cold virginal moonlight, translated by its passage through the glass into sensual colour, and the traditional association of stained-glass with the representation of the saints. This is emphasised by the use of the word 'glory' to describe the light which falls on Ruth. There is also, of course, a reminder of Keats's 'Eve of St Agnes' when the virginal, but about to be seduced, Madeline, stands before a casement which 'threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast'. During her time as a seamstress with Mrs Mason, her sense of grief and loss are defined by her choice of the 'coldest and darkest seat' in the room whre she looks, not at reality but on the painted 'remnant of the beauty of the old drawing-room'[44]. Following Bellingham's invitation to her to accompany him to London, her vagueness as to the implications of what she is doing is indicated by her seeing the future as 'wrapped in a golden mist which she did not care to penetrate; but if he, her sun, was out of sight and gone, the golden mist became dark heavy gloom through which no hope could come'[45]. However, later in the book when she re-encounters Bellingham at Abermouth, the imagery is reversed so that when he is present the shore becomes grey and misty, but when she rejects his offer of marriage and he leaves, she sees through closed lids the scene once again bathed in 'a ruddy blaze of light. The clouds had parted away and the sun was going down in the crimson glory behind the distant purple hills'[46].

When Ruth first accompanies Bellingham to Wales, she is described as leaving the bed she shared with him to 'steal to the window to see the white moonlight, which gave a new aspect to the everlasting hills'[47]. The 'new sense' which opens up to Ruth is not linked with the man in the bed in the darkness of the room behind her, but with the grandeur and purity of the scene outside the window. In such ways as this Mrs Gaskell separates Ruth's soul from her physical actions. When Ruth dies of typhus

and Bellingham surveys her dead body, once again she is bathed in white light streaming through the open window from the snowy scene outside while he stands in the darkness:

> He stood in the humble low-roofed attic, the window open and the tops of the distant snow-coloured hills filling up the whiteness of the general aspect. He muffled himself up in his cloak, and shuddered, while Sally reverently drew down the sheet, and showed the beautiful, calm still face, on which the last rapturous smile still lingered, giving an ineffable look of bright serenity. Her arms were crossed over her breast; the wimple-like cap marked the perfect oval of her face[48].

Earlier in the book, when Ruth first comes to live with the Bensons, the servant Sally insists that if Ruth is going to 'sham' widowhood, she must display the physical evidence of it by cropping her hair and wearing a cap: '"Widows wears these sorts of caps, and has their hair cut off; and whether widows wear wedding-rings or not, they shall have their hair cut off - they shall"'[49]. In a more direct way than Miss Benson, Sally is insisting that Ruth shall learn how her actions 'ought to be viewed'. Mrs Gaskell uses this scene to transform an act of deliberate humiliation into one which illuminates the grace of the sufferer because of Ruth's 'soft, yet dignified submission'. When Sally displays Ruth's dead face to Bellingham, Sally is once again presiding over a ritual which suggests the passing of someone under religious vows. On this occasion, the cap is directly compared to a wimple. In death, Ruth is once again returned to a state of virginal purity which Bellingham cannot touch.

Ruth suffers perhaps from too much special pleading by Mrs Gaskell; she seems unwilling to allow the character to be justified by the strength of the writing. More than in any other of her novels she addresses the reader directly with such admonitions as 'Remember how young and innocent, and motherless she was!'. On another occasion she reminds the reader that Ruth is 'snow pure'. It is difficult to accept the complete lack of artifice in the character and one longs for some of the more comfortable failings of Mary Barton or Sylvia Robson. However, for Mrs Gaskell to succeed in her purpose, it is essential that the character should be without guile; Ruth must be shown as being brought to the state of 'fallen woman', not because she is 'volatile and thoughtless' but because she is too innocent and trusting. She succumbs to Bellingham, not because of excessive sexual desire but because she has no-one to turn to when Mrs Mason turns her away. However, because Ruth is so obviously virtuous by nature, the characterisation does little to advance the understanding of the less virtuous 'fallen women'. In this respect Esther, in Mary Barton, is a far more successful characterisation.

Initially, Ruth, like Sylvia, is portrayed as a young woman whose education has not fitted her for an independent role in the industrial society of the nineteenth century. She dreams romantically of the past. Having lost her parents and her home, she is exposed far too rapidly to the hard, materialistic values of her employer, Mrs Mason, and her seducer, Mr Bellingham. However, in the second half of the novel, following the birth of her illegitimate son, she gradually gains education from Mr Benson, so that by the end of the novel, she is capable of maintaining herself and her child and actually ministering to the community by nursing the typhus victims. Ruth's spiritual growth is matched by her growth of independence in practical matters; the dream-like inadequacy of her youth is left behind, whereas Sylvia Robson never achieves independence either spiritually or physically. While Ruth, therefore, conforms in many respects in the way it treats the 'fallen woman', it also makes a strong plea for understanding, in that Ruth is portrayed as neither 'volatile' nor 'thoughtless', but more the victim of a young man's selfishness and irresponsibility.

Whereas The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Ruth are concerned with the situation of particular individuals in society, Little Dorrit is more concerned with the structure of society itself. It is a novel about all that is worst in Victorian values. People are shown as admiring only those who succeed and punishing severely those who attempt to achieve this success but fail. To this extent Old Dorrit is a devotee of a false religion, while Mr Merdle, the financier, is the high priest. Little Dorrit was published in monthly parts between December 1855 and June 1857, when Dickens was at the height of his literary powers. However, in his personal life, he was keenly aware of the retreat of youth, and this regret was accentuated by the mixture of frustration and guilt which he felt in connection with his marriage; he was to separate from his wife Catherine in 1858. The circumstances of this very public breakdown of marriage are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

In addition to the tumult in his personal life, he was also disturbed about aspects of public life and the conduct of government at this time. In 1849, the Chartist movement, in which he had taken a personal interest, collapsed. This was largely due to an inexperienced leadership which proved unable to withstand the organised response of government, under the leadership of the Duke of Wellington. This, again, is discussed in more detail in the section on Mary Barton in Chapter Two. Letters which Dickens wrote at that time indicate that he felt that this greatly reduced the chances of ordinary people having a say in the government of the country. The Crimean War (1854-56) which, like most wars, had

started on a wave of patriotic fervour, was dragging on in an atmosphere of public disillusion. Improved systems of communication had led to a greater awareness of the conditions being endured by the troops. Correspondents, such as William Russell of The Times, were able to send first-hand accounts direct from the war zone. These reports drew attention to the often unnecessary sufferings of the soldiers and made connections between these sufferings and the mismanagement of the war by government departments. Since the military command did not, as yet, appreciate the impact that such reports could have, while they gave Russell neither help nor protection, neither did they censor his reports.

Dickens saw both the failure of the people to gain a greater part in the exercise of power, and the failure of the government to exercise effectively the power which they had so jealously retained. Dickens was, therefore, at the beginning of a period of crisis in connection with his personal life and his public concerns.

Little Dorrit, like Bleak House before it, has as its central metaphor the dead hand of bureaucracy. In Bleak House, the Court of Chancery was the place where judgements were never arrived at, and in Little Dorrit, the Circumlocution Office is the place where nothing is ever done: 'Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving - HOW NOT TO DO IT'[50]. In one way or another it frustrates the wishes of all the characters in the novel. The Barnacles who rule it, while being totally and wilfully inefficient in ministering to the needs of the country, are expert and cunning in maintaining their own positions in society. As their name suggests, they cling tenaciously to the rock of government, allowing no room for genuinely creative and industrious men, such as Daniel Doyce.

Merdle, the financier, also reflects Dickens's doubts about the state of the nation. He is shown as one with a 'dread disease' with which he is infecting the whole nation - the desire to speculate. Even such usually cautious men as Clennam and Pancks are infected. Dickens was concerned with the lust of people to make profits, not out of their own industry and invention, but by speculation. He saw this as a natural consequence of government by the few for their own benefit; it is a fitting occupation for Barnacles. The character of Merdle was based on that of John Sadler, Member of Parliament for Carlow, who poisoned himself in 1847, shortly before it was revealed that he had been involved in a fraud concerning the Tipperary Bank, Irish land and Swedish railway shares. In a letter to John Foster in April 1856, Dickens wrote: 'I had a general idea of the business before the Sadler affair, but I shaped Mr Merdle out of that

precious rascality'[51]. It is likely that he also had in mind the career of George Hudson (1800-71), the 'Railway King', a York draper who, before allegations of fraud were proved against him, managed to gain control of a third of the British Railway system. Thomas Carlyle wrote of Hudson:

> What the desire of every heart was, Hudson had, or seemed to have produced: Scrip out of which profit could be made. They 'voted' for him by purchasing his scrip with a profit for him. Every vote was the spontaneous product of those men's deepest insights and most practical convictions, about Hudson and themselves and this Universe[52].

The attitude summed up so marvellously by Carlyle, is reflected in Mr Dorrit's humility before the great Merdle, despite the fact that Merdle personifies the very temptation to speculate which had kept Mr Dorrit in the Marshalsea for so long. Mr Dorrit bows down, literally and metaphorically before these values which have ruined him once and will do so again. His own bitter experience does not cause him to question or doubt that these values are true ones:

> Then leaning on Mr Merdle's arm did Mr Dorrit descend the staircase, seeing the worshippers on the steps and feeling that the light of Mr Merdle shone by reflection on himself. Then the carriage, and the ride to the City; and the people looked at them, and the hats that flew off grey heads; and the general bowing and crouching before this wonderful mortal the like of which prostration of spirit was not to be seen - no, by Heaven, no![53]

Dickens's father, John Dickens, had been detained in the Marshalsea for debt in 1824. It had been a period of misery and loneliness for Charles since, as a child of only twelve, he had been excluded from joining the family in prison because of lack of space; instead, he was placed in poor lodgings in Camden Town, with a Mrs Roylande, later to be transformed into Mrs Pipchin in Dombey and Son. His father paid for the lodgings, but out of his earnings of six shillings a week from his work in Jonathan Warren's blacking factory, Charles had to pay for all his other needs, including food. The memories of this time remained with him for life; he felt degraded by his work in the blacking factory and neglected by his family. In between work and sleep he roamed the streets of London, 'insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed'.

Little Dorrit illustrates Dickens's retrospective method of dealing with actual events, in that the conditions relating to imprisonment for debt, which he condemns in the novel, had been substantially reformed by the time that it was published. The Marshalsea was no longer used as a prison after 1842. Imprisonment for small debts ceased altogether in 1844

and for major debts in 1869. However, this short period in his life of intense, isolated misery remained a constant source of imagery in his novels. Throughout his life he remained fascinated by prisons. Not only did he describe prisons and prisoners in his novels, but he also visited them in England, America, France and Italy. He visited one in New York very soon after his arrival there, and described it as 'a dismal building pile of bastard Egyptian, like an enchanter's palace in a melodrama: a famous prison called The Toombs'[54]. In his preface to the 1857 edition of Little Dorrit, he reminds the reader of the background to the 'fiction' of the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office and 'the extravagant conception of Mr Merdle', and then goes on to describe a recent visit to Bermondsey where he found part of the old Marshalsea 'metamorphosed into a butter shop'. He describes locating the main block of rooms where Little Dorrit was born. He seems to suggest that the spirit of the Marshalsea continues, even though the reality has been disguised and fragmented. The historical miseries of the past and present join with the crowding ghosts of Dickens's own life.

Prison provides the second metaphor of the novel in that Dickens suggests that a society designed to benefit a limited number of privileged people is a prison from which nobody can be freed. The Marshalsea casts a shadow on the lives of those who have not even seen the actual wall casting it. Class and money cannot free the individual from this prison; they merely provide an alternative form of imprisonment. In the case of Mrs Gowan's Grace and Favour house at Hampton Court, the 'prison' is eagerly sought as a socially desirable habitat, regardless of its inconvenience. Her son describes her as living in 'a most primitive manner down in the dreary red-brick dungeon at Hampton Court'[55].

The Dorrit family measure everything which they experience in prosperity against their memories of the Marshalsea; the Marshalsea rather than freedom is the lasting reality for them. Little Dorrit leans over her balcony in Venice and looks at the water 'as if, in the general vision, it might run dry and show her the prison again, and herself, and the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed'[56]. When she is in the Alps, she writes to Arthur Clennam that she feels 'as if the Marshalsea must be behind that great rock'[57]. The faded hangings on the walls of the mouldering Venetian palace which the family rent and where Fanny 'displays herself to great advantage on the sofa', are described as 'having claimed kindred with the waifs of seaweed drifting under the windows, or clinging to the walls and weeping for their imprisoned relations'[58]. Fanny, in her attempts to gain Mr Sparkler as a husband, is said to have 'an air of negligence upon her

that doubled Mr Sparkler's fetters, and riveted them'[59]. Mr Merdle's actual arrest at the end of the novel is anticipated in his gestures which describe his hands 'crossed under his unwilling coat-cuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody'[60]. Both Mr Dorrit and Mr Merdle create 'jailers' to humiliate them by hiring men servants who reduce them to fear in case these 'experts' recognise them as counterfeit gentlemen.

Mrs General is the jailer-in-chief to the Dorrit family, engaged by Mr Dorrit to put 'a surface' on Amy and Fanny. She is frequently referred to as 'the varnisher'. While Fanny appears to reject the person of Mrs General, it is she, rather than Little Dorrit who most readily acquires a 'surface'. Amy on the other hand silently rejects these values and cannot be 'varnished'. Mrs General describes perfect breeding as forming 'no opinions' and never being 'demonstrative', and Mrs Merdle tells her husband,'"I don't want you to take any trouble upon yourself, or to try to be fascinating. I simply request you to care about nothing - or seem to care about nothing - as everybody else does"'[61]. Mr Merdle, in turn, tells his wife that he expects nothing from her but 'surface': '"You supply manner, and I supply money"'. As Mrs General is referred to as 'the varnisher', so Mrs Merdle is referred to as 'the bosom'. Her beautiful bosom does not attract Merdle because it offers comfort or repose, but because it provides the perfect setting for the visual evidence of his wealth: 'It was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon'[62].

In the case of Mrs Clennam, initially the imprisonment is chosen rather than imposed, in that she chooses to be confined to her room with an undefined weakness which seems to have no actual physical cause. However, when her complicated revenge against her dead husband and his dead mistress (Arthur Clennam's real mother) fails, the self-imprisonment becomes total in that she suffers a stroke which renders her speechless and immobile although 'looking attentively at those about her and appearing to understand what they said; but the rigid silence she had so long held was evermore enforced upon her'[63]. Mrs Clennam is imprisoned by her belief in a fierce God who permits no forgiveness; she is, therefore, unable to accept Amy Dorrit's forgiveness because freely given. Since her prison-like home literally collapses, the terms of her creed demand that her body becomes the prison cell encapsulating her soul.

With the exception of Little Dorrit, all the female characters are shown as being imprisoned by society in one way or another. Miss Wade, 'the self-tormentor', dwells on real and imagined wrongs and imprisons herself in her own sufferings. Initially, she is able to adversely influence

the passionate and humiliated orphan, Tattycoram, but fails to fully possess her. Eventually Tattycoram returns to the kindly, but extremely insensitive Meagles. Her return provides one of the least satisfactory passages in the novel. While Tattycoram pleads for forgiveness, saying that she has improved and is '"Not so bad as I was. I am bad enough, but not so bad as I was, indeed"'[64], and Meagles agrees to 'forgive and forget', he is permitted no similar self-revelation of his own shortcomings in the treatment of the little maid. He still shows no recognition of her identity, as an individual rather than a foundling, with his own beloved daughter, Pet.

Flora Finching's dream of a new romance out of old ashes is dashed, not because she has become foolish, since it is clear that she has always been that, but because she has committed the unforgivable sin of growing older. What was endearing to Arthur Clennam in the slim young virgin, is intolerable in the plump matron. Flora had entered into an arid marriage for the sake of 'comfort' and the vicious senile aunt is a fitting bequest from such a union. Flora, however, is saved from becoming a 'self-tormentor' because of her genuine kindness and brief moments of self-knowledge. She is able, without jealousy, to accept Little Dorrit as Arthur Clennam's new love and to do so with humour and affection:

> "The withered chaplet my dear," said Flora with great enjoyment, "is then perished the column is crumbled and the pyramid is standing upside down upon its what's-his-name call it not giddiness call it not weakness call it not folly I must now retire into privacy and look upon the ashes of departed joys no more but taking a further liberty of paying for the pastry which has formed the humble pretext of our interview will for ever say Adieu!"[65]

There may also be a suggestion here of how Dickens would have liked his wife to respond to his liaison with Ellen Ternan.

The character of Flora was based on that of Maria Beadnell, the attractive, if rather silly daughter of a bank manager, with whom Dickens had fallen in love as a young man. She married another, but Dickens retained his romantic feelings for her for twenty years, until she returned from Paris and he found her, as might have been expected, older, stouter and plainer. The characterisation of Flora seems to represent a curious mixture of affection and contempt, not only for the foolish Flora, but also for Arthur Clennam's failure to understand that the passing of time has 'withered the chaplet' of his youthful romance. However, in the case of Clennam, being a man, the closing of the door on his youthful romance with Flora, allows the 'door to softly open' to mature love in the form of Little Dorrit. Flora, by maturing, has forfeited the right to romance.

She must for ever be comforted by 'kidney ones' and pastries.

Pet, the pampered and over-protected daughter of the Meagles is described as having 'an air of timidity and dependence which was the best weakness in the world and gave her the only crowning charm a girl so pretty and pleasant could have been without'[66]. Pet's timidity and dependence are celebrated as virtues, but it is these 'virtues' which lead her to imprison herself in a marriage with the painter Gowan, a minor member of the Barnacle clan who, by the end of the novel, is already showing signs of indifference towards her.

In contrast, Fanny Dorrit chooses to marry the vapid Mr Sparkler, partly in the hope that he will substantiate her flimsy position in society and therefore wipe out the reality of the Marshalsea, but also to humiliate Mrs Merdle, whom she considers has slighted her because of her past:

> "That piece of insolence may think, now, that it would be a great success to get her son off upon me and shelve me. But, perhaps she little thinks how I would retort upon her if I married her son. I would oppose her in everything, and compete with her. I would make it the business of my life"[67].

While Fanny continually chides Little Dorrit for being a 'true child of prison', it is she who runs headlong into the greatest prison of all: a loveless marriage.

The characters can broadly be divided into those who attempt to manipulate and control society for their own ends, those who are manipulated by society, and the golden characters, such as Little Dorrit, who are neither manipulators or manipulated, in that they never allow their principles to be compromised by the values of society. Such characters as the Barnacles, Mrs Merdle, Mrs General, Mr Casby and the Gowans, end the story in much the same situation in which they began it. They are all 'surface' and can, therefore, only be scratched by experience, rather than being truly damaged Mr Pancks begins the story as a minor manipulator, but by becoming aware of his role, achieves a degree of self-knowledge. He is a fitting instrument of punishment for Casby, in that by cropping Casby's hair and hat, he reveals him, not as venerable 'Patriarch', but as a 'bare polled, goggle-eyed, big-headed lumbering personage ... not in the least venerable'[68], from which he flees as from a monster. However, the punishment has been inflicted, not because Pancks sees anything intrinsically wrong in 'squeezing' the poor, but because he is infuriated that Casby has not the courage to reveal his true nature, but hides behind the superficial trappings of benevolent old age. Goodness is measured in this novel by the degree to which a character can transcend the limitations of

society and do what is morally right, rather than expedient. It is those characters who attempt to be manipulators, but fail, who suffer the greatest injury. Mr Merdle is driven to suicide when his fraud is revealed but throughout the novel, he lingers on the edge of the story in increasing misery; a ghost at his own feast. We are never allowed to see into the soul of Merdle. He is portrayed as both victim and predator of the society on which he feeds and which, in turn, feeds off *his* failings.

It is significant that the novel begins and ends in prison and that in between all the main characters experience literal, as well as metaphorical, imprisonment. The novel opens, somewhat uncharacteristically for Dickens, in the city of Marseilles which is 'oppressed' by the glaring sun. Within the town are two types of prison. The first is described as a 'villainous prison', which receives only the 'refuse of reflected light'[69] through its gratings, and houses the arch-criminal Rigaud, or Blandois, and the petty criminal, John Baptist Cavalletto, who is to be unwillingly involved in the others' crimes. The prison taint affects everything: 'the imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damp, the imprisoned men'[70]. This idea of a prison taint is later to be extended to the Dorrit family even after they leave the Marshalsea. The second 'prison' is the quarantine barracks where the Meagles family, their maid Tattycoram, Arthur Clennam and Miss Wade, are held on suspicion of carrying the plague because they have travelled to Marseilles from the East and 'the East is the country of the plague'. Although conditions in the barracks are much pleasanter than in the town prison, the two have things in common: firstly, they deprive the characters of liberty, and secondly, they bring together disparate people who will, from then on, have dealings with one another.

In the second book, representatives of these two groups of prisoners are brought together in 'the freezing silence and solitude' of the St Bernard Hospice. The hospice represents yet another sort of prison: one entered voluntarily by both the monks who maintain it and the travellers to whom it appears 'like another Ark' in the barrenness and desolation of the pass at night. The chaos and disorder of the arrival of the travellers is contrasted with the silence and order of the 'grated house' where the bodies of the travellers who did not reach the hospice in time are kept:

> The mother, storm-belated many winters ago, still standing in the corner with her baby at her breast; the man who had frozen with his arm raised to his mouth in fear or hunger, still pressing it with his dry lips after years and years. An awful company, mysteriously come together[71].

Here is yet another variation on Dickens' theme, mentioned in a letter to John Foster, dated the 19th August, 1855, of 'people coming together, in a chance way, as fellow travellers, and being in the same place ignorant of one another, as it happens in life, and to connect them afterwards'.

The novel comes to its conclusion with Arthur Clennam imprisoned in the Marshalsea for debt, following the collapse of Merdle's financial empire. Clennam and Amy leave the Marshalsea to go directly to the church, where she had previously been baptised as a child of the Marshalsea, to be married. The fierce, destructive light of Marseilles, the tainted gloom of the prison, and the stifling heat of the Marshalsea, are translated into the temperate sunlight of the church, 'shining on them through the painted figure of their Saviour on the window'[72]. Arthur Clennam and Amy left behind the extremes of wealth and poverty, as represented by the Merdle empire and the Marshalsea, and 'went down to a *modest* life of usefulness and happiness'[73].

Although Little Dorrit personifies many of Dickens's ideals of womanhood, in that she is apparently submissive and self-effacing, she also emerges as one of the strongest of all his heroines. She is not only self-reliant, but supports the rest of her family including her father, and her future husband, Arthur Clennam. She alone faces the truth about herself and her family, and therefore has nothing to fear. She cannot have the 'surface' removed, because she conceals nothing about herself. Throughout the novel, she occupies the role of both 'child' and 'mother'. To her father, she is both dutiful daughter and tender mother; to the middle-aged 'child', Maggie, she is 'Little Mother'. Arthur Clennam initially refers to her as a child, and in a letter to him from Venice, she describes herself as 'your poor child', which mirrors Maggie's way of referring to herself as Amy's 'poor child'. Her physical littleness is emphasised. When Clennam first sees her at his mother's house, he describes her 'diminutive figure, small features and slight spare dress' as giving her 'the appearance of being much younger than she was'[74]. On the night when she and Maggie are shut out and experience the horrors of complete homelessness, the 'fallen woman' they encounter on the bridge, mistakes Maggie for the mother and Little Dorrit for the child, and chides Maggie for having '"no feeling, that you keep her out in the cruel streets at such a time as this? Have you no eyes that you don't see how delicate and slender she is?"'[75] She recoils when she realises that Little Dorrit is a woman, crying, '"I never should have touched you but I thought you were a child"'[76]. Little Dorrit in return, asked to be allowed to speak to her '"as if I really were a child"'. In each case, the reasoning

seems to be that a child represents untainted purity.

Little Dorrit is the true 'mother' as well as the 'child' of the Marshalsea, whereas Old Dorrit is never a true 'father' of the Marshalsea or of his family. Paradoxically, however, within the confines of the prison, she finds a surrogate father in the turnkey on 'the lock'. It is he who thinks to provide her with 'a little arm-chair by the high fender' and a doll to dress, and who later takes her outside the prison on Sunday afternoons to 'some meadows or green lanes that had been elaborately appointed by the turnkey in the course of the week'[77] Arthur Clennam never experiences true childhood, because he never knows his true mother. Both literally and metaphorically, Mrs Clennam is not a mother to him and her reasons for bringing him up as her own child are based on hate rather than love. By taking the child away from her husband's mistress, she is revenged on both the true mother and her husband. She, like Miss Wade, is a self-tormentor. It is interesting to compare the vengeful emotions of Mrs Clennam in fostering her rival's child, with the kindly, if slightly contemptuous feelings behind Mr Rochester's fostering of Adèle, the daughter of his unfaithful mistress in Jane Eyre. If he cannot feel love, at least he feels sufficient concern not to abandon her. Also in Jane Eyre we have another example of a false maternal relationship, in Mrs Reed's hatred of the young Jane Eyre, despite her dead husband's wishes that the child should be brought up with his own children. However, the fact that Jane, unlike Arthur Clennam, is aware of the true nature of the relationship gives her the strength to fight back. Arthur Clennam has the burden of feeling himself to be emotionally alienated from a woman to whom he believes he owes natural affection; the conflict destroys his youth and energy and projects him into premature middle age. It is only when he is reborn by casting off his sense of guilt that he is able to meet Little Dorrit as a man meets a woman, rejecting the false roles of father to child. The ritual burning of the codicil to the will, without first reading it, allows Eurydice to lead Orpheus out of Hades, because he trusts her to do so and she does not look back at the past. However, although Amy conceals nothing about herself, in assuming the false role of mother to her father and Arthur Clennam, she aids their self-deception; she connives in Old Dorrit's 'pious frauds' as 'Father of the Marshalsea' by pretending that she has no work, because'"it would be a new distress to him even to know that I earn a little money"'. She also adds to Arthur Clennam's emotional conflict by not revealing what she knows about his family secret - the fact that he is not Mrs Clennam's son. In both cases, her intentions are good, in that she wishes to protect the two men, but the actual result is harmful in that it protects

them from facing reality. It is interesting that here it is the woman who protects the man by withholding information.

Edmund Wilson suggests that a sense of futility pervades the novel: 'In general, the magnanimous, the simple of heart, the amiable, the loving and the honest are frustrated, subdued or destroyed'[78]. However, the evidence of the text suggests quite the opposite in that it is only the truly good who are not frustrated, subdued or destroyed. They suffer but grow through these sufferings so that they are left with the promise of true happiness. It is this process of learning and developing which most clearly differentiates the truly good from the rest. If, as has been suggested, Rigaud is the embodiment of evil, then, like Marlowe's Dr Faustus, that evil is totally destroyed with Mrs Clennam's house of secrets and deception. As with Satis House in Great Expectations, the purging of the evil requires the destruction of the fabric which has housed it.

Both Esther Summerson in Bleak House and Amy Dorrit in Little Dorrit, represent a development in Dickens's characterisation of women, in that they are more complex characters than previous heroines and their thoughts and actions are analysed in as great, if not greater, depth than those of the male characters. The plots of the novels revolve round them, whereas in earlier novels the heroines are little more than female presences on the fringe of the main movement of the novel, whose function is to inspire action and reaction on the part of the male characters. However, in A Tale of Two Cities (discussed in Chapter Two), which followed Little Dorrit, Dickens somewhat surprisingly appears to revert to a more simplistic characterisation of the heroine, which in Little Dorrit is reserved for minor characters such as Pet Meagles. Although both Lucy Manette and Amy Dorrit are the daughters of men whose minds have, to some extent, been unbalanced by long imprisonment, and both offer their fathers tender and unselfish care, they have little else in common. Lucy Manette is portrayed as young, beautiful and highly desirable, whereas Amy Dorrit is without physical beauty, at twenty-two no longer quite so young, unobtrusive and introspective. Lucy is loved by the handsome, young and nobly born Charles Darney, and also by the dissipated but potentially heroic Sydney Carton, whereas Amy is first loved by the turnkey's son, young John Chivery, who is described as being 'small of stature, with rather weak legs and very weak light hair'[79] and much later by the prematurely middle-aged and care-worn Arthur Clennam. Lucy inspires the male characters to do deeds of heroism; she is the altar at which others sacrifice. Amy Dorrit sacrifices herself for others; she works to maintain her family and for their success. While in the end

she does receive love, it is not, as with Lucy, a natural tribute to youth and beauty. However, it is suggested that this love, because it is based on enduring attractions of character, will not, like Arthur's youthful feelings for Flora Finching, be affected by the passage of time.

Dickens always made himself aware of current literary trends. It seems almost certain that he was influenced by such significant contemporary women novelists as Charlotte Brontë and Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell, who had presented their readers with female characters of depth and subtlety. These characters were usually shown as attempting to come to terms with a society which denied women a role independent of men. Dickens was particularly impressed by Mrs Gaskell. He was familiar with her work through Household Words, which had published a number of her short stories, but it was the sucess of her first full-length novel, Mary Barton (1848) which caused him to commission her to serialise her novel North and South in Household Words, between 1854 and 1855. Her relationship with Dickens as her editor was not a happy one. She found it difficult to comply with the restriction of space inherent in the serial, and although she later serialised Wives and Daughters in the Cornhill Magazine, she never allowed Dickens to exercise that sort of editorial control over her work again. However, Dickens was clearly both influenced and impressed by her writing and her views on contemporary social problems. Margaret Hale, the heroine of North and South, while recognisably feminine and domesticated, is also the instigator of action. She is portrayed as a natural leader rather than as a passive character on whose behalf the hero takes action. Dickens must also have been aware of the success of Jane Eyre (1847) which has as its heroine a young woman who, like Little Dorrit, is unobtrusive, poor and without beauty, and yet overcomes the society which attempts to humiliate her. While Dickens does not go so far in expressing his heroine's emotions, as Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë, it is interesting that, like Jane Eyre, Little Dorrit offers her love to the stricken Arthur Clennam on two occasions, with a directness not usually permitted to Victorian heroines. On the first occasion, when Clennam is in the Marshalsea, she begs him to take her fortune:'"My friend - dear - take all I have, and make it a Blessing to me!"'[80]. On the second occasion she offers him a love which consists both of partnership and service:

> "I am happy in being with you in this prison, as I should be happy in coming back to it with you, if it should be the will of God, and comforting and serving you with all my love and truth. I am yours anywhere, everywhere! I love you dearly! I would rather pass my life here with you, and go out daily, working for our bread, than I would have the greatest

> fortune that ever was told, and be the greatest lady that ever was honoured"[81].

Arthur and Amy enter into marriage with a great respect for one another's character. Pet Meagles is deceived because she enters into marriage without any real knowledge of life on which to make her choice of partner. Fanny Dorrit is deceived because she seeks only social position from her husband.

The over-riding theme of the novel is prison, but within this, Society itself is seen as representing a series of prisons. Society with a capital 'S' is personified by the Merdles, the staff of the Circumlocution Office, and all those on the fringe who live off its delusions. The Marshalsea represents no more than an alternative society, in which Mr Dorrit lives out the shadow of the role he would like to have played in wider society. The irony is that when a second fortune gives him the means to enter Society, he displays all the inadequacies which put him into the Marshalsea in the first place. Bleeding Heart Yard represents yet another prison of the working poor who 'set up their rest among its faded glories, as Arabs of the desert pitch their tents among the fallen stones of the Pyramids'[82]. Over this society rules the brooding presence of the landlord, 'the Patriarch', as represented by the rent collector, Mr Pancks. 'Gaining time' from Mr Pancks is the one thing which unites this disparate group. The principal characters briefly enter and leave the various societies, and it is significant that at the end of the novel, while Arthur and Amy go down to a life of 'usefulness and happiness', Amy's ambitious sister is left 'going into Society for ever and a day', thus suggesting a terrible limbo of useless activity.

In the characters of Helen Huntingdon and Ruth Hilton, Anne Brontë and Mrs Gaskell are concerned with the problems of women who have been so over-protected from a knowledge of worldly matters that they are unable to make wise decisions about their own actions. Helen enters into a marriage with an unsuitable partner, and Ruth allows herself to drift into a liaison with an unscrupulous young man. In both The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Ruth, the heroines are shown dealing with the consequences of these unwise actions and, in so doing, they each achieve some measure of independence, although Ruth's is greater than Helen's. Both novels pose questions about the type of knowledge and experience which it is suitable for a young woman, as opposed to a young man, to possess. Both in the case of Bellingham and of Huntingdon, their faults of character are attributed to faulty upbringing. Whereas Anne Brontë allows her heroine a direct confrontation with Mrs Markham on the different ways of bringing up male and female children, Mrs Gaskell chooses to show how Bellingham

acquired his faulty values through the interview between Mrs Bellingham and Ruth, during her son's illness. While Helen only achieves full happiness when she re-marries Gilbert Markham, Ruth re-discovers her happiness in serving others, even to the extent of sacrificing her own life. She makes the carefully reasoned decision to risk her life by nursing typhus patients and, in particular, the father of her child, Bellingham.

At the beginning of Little Dorrit, Amy is described as being 'worldly wise in hard and poor necessities' but 'innocent in all things else'[83]; Dickens gives Amy an inherent wisdom and compassion. Born in a prison, she is the only character in the novel who not only frees herself of its influence, but assists others, such as her father and Arthur Clennam, to free themselves, at least partially, from its influence. It is she who instinctively understands that her father will not be able to deal with the outside world when freedom comes: 'People might not think so well of him outside as they do there. He might not be so gently dealt with outside as they do there'[84]. Amy grows in emotional stature rather than knowledge through the novel. Her strength is revealed to us in a series of relationships. Although she is not actually a mother like Helen and Ruth, she is the compassionate nurse-mother so beloved of Victorian writers. All three heroines are shown as nursing the male characters in the novels: Helen nurses her husband through his last illness, Ruth nurses Bellingham through typhus, and Amy nurses Clennam through his mental and physical collapse in the Marshalsea.

All the novels deal with difficult subjects: those by Anne Brontë and Mrs Gaskell deal with problems which particularly apply to the situation of women in society and show how these young women cope with independence, whereas Little Dorrit deals with problems relating to the whole structure of society. One feels that had the novel been placed back a hundred years, the situation in which Amy Dorrit found herself would not be very different and her response to it would not depend on education or upbringing. Dickens seems to suggest that good women are given wisdom and understanding and do not have to acquire it. Amy's sister and brother are shown as damaged by their experiences in the Marshalsea and it is hinted, by the characteristics they have inherited from their father; Amy, with the same inheritance, is unmarked by it. Dickens, therefore, is not concerned with his heroine's response to a particular social problem; he is, however, concerned with the state of society as a whole.

Notes on Chapter IV

All page references to Ruth by Elizabeth Gaskell are to the Everyman Edition (Guildford, 1982); to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Brontë to the Penguin English Library Edition (Harmondsworth, 1980); to Little Dorrit by Charles Dickens to the Penguin English Library Edition (Harmondsworth, 1980).

1 Diary - paper, 31 July 1845, quoted in Introduction to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.9.

2 The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.283.

3 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.459.

4 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.460.

5 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.54.

6 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.356.

7 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.375.

8 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.54.

9 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.54.

10 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.55.

11 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.57.

12 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, pp.56-57.

13 Shirley, p.304.

14 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.189.

15 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.191.

16 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.191.

17 The King James Bible, Luke xvi, v.24.

18 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.446.

19 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.450.

20 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.450.

21 The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, p.452.

22 George Moore, Conversations in Ebury Street, (1930), p.218.

23 The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester, 1966), No. 150.

24 Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, p.175.

25 Quoted in Nina Auerbach, 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', Nineteenth Century Fiction (1981), pp.31-2.

26 London 's Underworld: Being Selections from 'Those That Will Not Work' the Fourth Volume of 'London Labour and the London Poor' by Henry Mayhew, edited by Peter Quennell, 3 vols

27 London's Underworld: etc., p.36.

28 London's Underworld: etc., p.37.

29 Quoted in Nina Auerbach, 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', Nineteenth Century Fiction (1981), pp.31-2.

30 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', p.32.

31 Mary Barton, p.465.

32 Elizabeth Gaskell, 'Lizzie Leigh', Four Stories, Pandora Press (London, 1983), p.76.

33 Hazel Mews, Frail Vessels: Women's Role in Women's Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot (196), p.86.

34 Ruth, p.60.

35 Ruth, p.60.

36 Ruth, p.64.

37 Ruth, p.31.

38 Ruth, p.91.

39 Ruth, p.111.

40 Ruth, p.113.

41 Ruth, p.353.

42 Ruth, pp.421-2.

43 Ruth, p.3.

44 Ruth, p.6.

45 Ruth, p.56.

46 Ruth, p.302.

47 Ruth, p.64.

48 Ruth, p.447.

49 Ruth, p.143.

50 Little Dorrit, p.145.

51 John Foster, The Life of Charles Dickens, edited by A.J. Hoppe (1966), i, p.25.

52 Thomas Carlyle, Latter Day Pamphlets (1850), pp.228-30.

53 Little Dorrit, p.677.

54 Charles Dickens, American Notebook, Ch. VI in Christopher Hibbert, The Making of Charles Dickens (1967), p.61.

55 Little Dorrit, p.359.

56 Little Dorrit, p.520.

57 Little Dorrit, p.522.

58 Little Dorrit, p.553.

59 Little Dorrit, p.554.

60 Little Dorrit, p.445.

61 Little Dorrit, p.447.

62 Little Dorrit, p.293.

63 Little Dorrit, p.863.

64 Little Dorrit, p.880.

65 Little Dorrit, p.888.

66 Little Dorrit, pp.54-5.

67 Little Dorrit, pp.649-50.

68 Little Dorrit, p.872.

69 Little Dorrit, p.40.

70 Little Dorrit, p.41.

71 Little Dorrit, p.484.

72 Little Dorrit, p.894.

73 Little Dorrit, p.895.

74 Little Dorrit, p.93.

75 Little Dorrit, pp.217-8.

76 Little Dorrit, p.218

77 Little Dorrit, p.110.

78 Edmund Wilson, The Wound and the Bow (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), p.401.

79 Little Dorrit, p.255

80 Little Dorrit, p.828.

81 Little Dorrit, p.886.

82 Little Dorrit, p.176.

83 Little Dorrit, p.118.

84 Little Dorrit, p.139.

CHAPTER V THE HEROINE ALONE

In the previous chapter, the heroines discussed did not choose independence but had it forced upon them because society rejected them. Of the three, only Ruth Hilton achieved any degree of independence and self-sufficiency and the price demanded for this was a heroic death. For Helen Huntingdon and Amy Dorrit, a happy ending is signified by marriage and, therefore, by implication, submission once again to male authority.

The heroines discussed in this chapter all achieve a far greater degree of self-sufficiency and can, therefore, be seen to more truly represent a new, less passive heroine: of a type enthusiastically ascribed to by women writers but less easily adopted by male writers. While the conditions of Esther Summerson's birth are the cause of her unhappy childhood, neither she nor Margaret Hale and Lucy Snowe can be seen as outraging contemporary society; they were not, therefore, rejected by it. However, varying circumstances make it necessary for them to stand alone, instead of depending on the support and leadership of fathers, brothers or husbands; in some cases, they go so far as to assume many of the responsibilities traditionally reserved for the males of the household. At the beginning of Villette, Lucy Snowe faces the likelihood that she will not marry, because she lacks conventional good looks and, more importantly, money and connections. Charlotte Brontë shows how Lucy is able to achieve independence so that, despite the loss of her one true love, Paul Emanuel, she not only achieves modest commercial success but actually finds peace of mind. It is in North and South that we find, in Margaret Hale, a representative of this new type of heroine. By the end of the novel she has achieved complete financial independence and this, in turn, allows her far greater emotional independence, so that it is she who chooses to accept Mr Thornton and enters this marriage, not only as life partner, but also as the senior partner in a joint business enterprise. Mrs Gaskell, therefore, is seen to advocate equality of status as a recipe for happiness. Esther Summerson, in Bleak House, is, with the possible exception of Amy Dorrit, Dickens's most complex and deeply realised heroine, but she is behind Lucy Snowe and Margaret Hale in terms of the degree of independence which she achieves, or desires. Esther, therefore, marks a significant change in Dickens's approach to female characterisation, rather than representing any great step forward in the characterisation of women in novels of the period. However, it is very significant that, as W.J. Harvey points out in Bleak House: The Double Narrative[1], out of sixty-nine chapters, thirty-four are narrated by Esther.

Although, since it was serialised between March 1852 and September 1853, Bleak House is the earliest of the three novels discussed, the pattern of previous chapters has been maintained and Dickens, as the only male writer, has been placed last.

North and South was first published in serial form in Household Words between 1854 and 1855, immediately following Dickens's own parable on industrialisation, Hard Times. It was Dickens's enthusiasm for Mrs Gaskell's first industrial novel, Mary Barton (1848), which led him to persuade her to contribute to his magazine. In a letter to her, dated 31st January ~~1850~~ 1850, he said:

> I do not know what your literary vows of temperance or abstinence may be, but as I do honestly know that there is no living writer whose aid I would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of Mary Barton (a book that most profoundly affected and impressed me) I venture to ask you whether you can give me any hope that you will write a short tale, or any number of tales, for the projected pages[2].

However, despite Dickens's enthusiasm for the project, Mrs Gaskell found the experience of writing to the disciplines of space and time, imposed upon the writer by the serial form, artistically unsatisfactory. She was particularly concerned that the structure of the novel had been weakened by the need to contract the last section to the length of the final double instalment in January 1855. When the novel was published by Chapman and Hall later that year, the concluding chapter (Chapter 44) of the serialisation was expanded into five chapters - chapters 44 to 48. Whereas in Household Words, the time-span of Margaret's second stay in Harley Street, and Mr Bell's visits there, is shortened, so that the chapter ends with Mr Bell's death in his rooms in Oxford, while Margaret is visiting him, in the novel, Mr Bell's death does not occur until Chapter 48, two chapters before the end. In the serialisation, this contraction caused two important episodes to be omitted: firstly, the conversation between Mr Bell and Mr Henry Lennox, and secondly, Mr Bell's visit to Helstone with Margaret. The first scene exposes the cynicism of the young lawyer, which illustrated his unsuitability as a husband for Margaret whose character, like that of her father, is incapable of compromise. The omission of the second scene, the visit to Helstone, means that there is no balanced perspective between North and South, such as is provided by Chapter 46, 'Once and Now', in the novel.

Mrs Gaskell had been aware that the main theme of Dickens's own novel, Hard Times, currently being serialised in Household Words, was also industrialisation and, therefore, before writing her own chapter on a strike, she wrote to Dickens to enquire as to whether he intended to

include a chapter on the same subject. He replied that 'he had no intention of striking'. He went on to say that, 'the monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands, are within my scheme, but I am not going to strike, so don't be afraid of me'[3]. To a great extent, therefore, Dickens was covering the same area as Mrs Gaskell's first novel, Mary Barton, in which she had expressed views which were at variance with contemporary thought on trade unions. Living as she did in Manchester, she was soon made aware of the outraged feelings among the manufacturers, many of whom would attend the church where her husband was the minister, that the unions had been treated too sympathetically and the employers too harshly. It would be reasonable to see North and South as an attempt to redress the balance, particularly if one compares the characterisation of the harsh, insensitive Carson in Mary Barton with the thoughtful and humane Thornton in North and South. However, its central theme is much wider than either Mary Barton or Hard Times, in that it is concerned with the ever widening gap in understanding between the still mainly rural South and the rapidly changing and expanding industrial North. The importance of place is vital to the novel; it is the differences between Helstone and Milton Northern which give the novel an unusual breadth of canvas. The third location, London, is a place of transition for Margaret Hale and it is significant that the novel begins and ends there. It is Margaret's feelings about these three places and her ability to adapt to the very differing demands which each makes upon her which indicates the development of her character. In London, Margaret is an outsider, dependent upon her aunt for her position in society; at the beginning of the novel, she is shown as the poor relation, treated with kindness as something between a companion and a servant. Although she appears to accept the situation, she still retains the image of herself as a young child in Helstone 'brought all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play, and the lessons of her cousin Edith'[4]. Although her kind, complacent aunt, Mrs Shaw, cannot be compared with Jane Eyre's awful guardian, Mrs Reed, on that first night Margaret had been bidden by the nurse to cease her tears 'because it would disturb Miss Edith'. When she returns to her aunt's house at the end of the novel, we see how she tries to establish her own position by following such charitable pursuits as *she* deems to be of value. However, on this occasion her position is strengthened by the fact that she has become financially independent, having inherited Mr Bell's fortune. In Helstone, Margaret knows the landscape and the people - all is familiar and while change does occur, as

she sees when she returns to Helstone for a visit, that change is at a much slower pace than in Milton-Northern; Milton-Northern represents uncharted territory for her, offering challenge and opportunity. In Milton, Margaret has no pre-established social position or duties. When she first meets Nicholas and Bessie Higgins, she behaves as if she were still the Vicar's daughter, by giving the sick girl a bunch of wild flowers and asking for her address in order to call upon her. Her changed situation is brought home to her when the girl's father first queries her reason for asking for this information and then invites her to call, as if they were of equal social status. Nicholas asks her to call, not because she is her father's daughter, but because he finds her personality attractive. For the first time, she establishes a relationship which does not depend on the social status of her father or her aunt.

While Margaret was living in Harley Street, Helstone became a dream for Margaret, so that when she returns there, for the first time as a young adult, she finds 'Her out-of-doors life was perfect. Her in-doors life had its drawbacks'[5]; she becomes aware of the emotional problems of her parents. When her father resigns his living because of doubts about 'conformity to the Liturgy', the family is symbolically driven out of Eden into the harsh new world of Milton-Northern. The second time she returns to Helstone it is as an outsider, a visitor. It is then she sees that great changes have occurred: the vicarage has been modernised to meet the needs of the new incumbent and his large young family; the old ruined cottage which she had once sketched had been pulled down and she has to face the fact that its replacement is 'tidy and respectable', if not so picturesque as the old one. Both her own parents, and the old man who used to live in the cottage, are now dead. Even in this rural haven the old has given way to the new, the picturesque to the practical. She recognises that changes have taken place in her own attitudes as well and that Helstone contains her past rather than her future. However, the importance of that past is indicated by the impact of Margaret's memories of Helstone on the two men who love her, Thornton and Lennox. Each in turn makes a pilgrimage to the village, in the hope that the place will reveal something about Margaret which cannot be discovered in Milton-Northern or London. The roses which Lennox teases out of Margaret at the beginning of the novel, provide the link with the final scene between Margaret and Thornton. Thornton takes from his pocket some dead roses from Helstone which for him symbolise the death of Margaret's love. However, crushed in the hands of the lovers as they embrace, we see that the roses symbolise Margaret's memories of Helstone, rather than her feelings for Thornton.

Margaret Hale is probably one of the most emancipated heroines of Victorian literature. Of Mrs Gaskell's heroines, she is the one best equipped to go beyond the purely domestic into the wider world of men; the world of work. She dominates the novel and initiates much of the action. Mr Thornton describes her as 'a guardian of herself', but she is also the guardian of others. Mrs Gaskell makes her heroic in mind and body by endowing her with exceptional intelligence, strength of character and beauty. Although Margaret is only eighteen at the commencement of the story, her appearance and manner suggest a more mature woman. She can be quite closely associated with the appearance and character of her creator. Mrs Gaskell uses adjectives such as 'haughty', 'regal', 'queenly' and 'splendid' to describe her bearing. Susanna Winkworth described Mrs Gaskell as 'a noble-looking woman, with a queenly presence'[6]. The crayon drawing by George Richmond in the National Portrait Gallery suggests the original of Margaret's 'short curled upper lip, round massive up-turned chin'[7]. She is the main 'eye' of the story and the link between all the other main characters, from Nicholas Higgins, the out-of-work weaver, to John Thornton, the manufacturer. It is interesting that Mrs Gaskell never feels the need to plead for Margaret directly with the reader, as she does for Mary Barton, Ruth and Sylvia. This again suggests her close identification with this character.

While it is Margaret's beauty which instantly attracts men to her, she retains their devotion by the force of her personality. The shrewd, cynical London barrister, Henry Lennox, intends to marry a woman with money in order to establish his future, but he is so fascinated by Margaret that he is 'carried out of his usual habits by force of Passion'[8] and proposes, only to be rejected. Her father's old friend, Mr Bell, meets her briefly and on that basis decides to leave her his entire fortune. He tells Thornton that '"to have loved her without return would have lifted you higher than all those, be they who they may, that have ever known her to love"'[9]. This somewhat extravagant language is the only point in the book when we are reminded of Dickens's passive 'goddess', Lucy Manette. It is significant that the phrases are put into the mouth of an old man, Mr Bell, who represents past values, rather than into that of Mr Thornton, who represents the new values of Milton-Northern. If it is the story of Margaret Hale, it is nearly as much that of John Thornton, the self-sufficient, self-made manufacturer, whose whole life is disrupted by her influence. He is thirty when the novel opens and, despite his success, his desire to employ Mr Hale as a tutor indicates his wish to widen his education beyond the needs of his business. As Margaret Hale says to her father, '"What in the world do manufacturers want with the

classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?"'[10]. The novel follows his emotional maturing, which develops as a result of his association with Margaret. The principal theme of the novel is the development of this relationship between Thornton and Margaret, and the reconciliation of these two proud individuals is the culmination of a series of such reconciliations. Widening out from this individual relationship, Mrs Gaskell discusses the social relationship between master and man; the requirement to answer Christ's question: 'Who is my neighbour?'; the need for reconciliation between employers and those they employ and in turn, for reconciliation between union men and 'knob-sticks', as strike-breakers are called. Nicholas Higgins, who is in many ways a very similar character to John Barton, is saved from following Barton's path to murder by the suicide of his neighbour, John Boucher, a weak man who kills himself because he has betrayed the union. As in Mary Barton, Mrs Gaskell's principal theme is that of reconciliation; this reconciliation is experienced individually, but crosses traditional differences of money and class.

While Margaret Hale is portrayed as being adept at the traditional female domestic skills of home-making and entertaining, she is also shown as being capable of decisive action in areas which were usually the preserves of the Victorian male. If, as Lord David Cecil suggests, Mrs Gaskell wrote from the viewpoint of a woman 'who looked up to men as her sex's rightful and benevolent masters'[11], then Margaret Hale represents an aberration on her part, since she is portrayed as one who controls, rather than is controlled. She is shown as someone to whom the male characters aspire. She lacks the docility which many male Victorian writers portrayed as an essential female virtue. Not only does she have the ability to make the male characters feel unworthy of her, but she also revels in their abasement! When she rejects Lennox's proposal, she experiences a 'twinge of contempt mingle itself with her pain at having refused him'[12]. Lennox's response to this humiliation is not resentment but even greater admiration:'"I believe I love you more than ever - if I do not hate you - for the disdain with which you have listened to me during this last half-hour "'[13]. In the same way, when she rejects Thornton's proposal after the strike, she tells him that his way of speaking '"shocks me. It is blasphemous"'. In response, he becomes even more abject, feeling 'he could have thrown himself at her feet and kissed the hem of her garment'[14]. Even at the end of the novel when they are finally reconciled, it is Thornton who lowers himself, physically, to 'bring his face to a level with her ear'[15]. One cannot help feeling that in Mrs Gaskell's portrayal of Margaret Hale, there is an element of wish-

fulfilment, in that she allows her heroine to exercise a degree of power over the male sex which she herself would have been unlikely to have experienced in life. In one respect, Margaret Hale conforms with Victorian traditions that a woman should be uninformed on the subject of sex until marriage enforced a sudden awareness! Since, however, Mrs Gaskell will not permit a double standard for men and women, she requires that her hero, John Thornton, should be as sexually inexperienced as her heroine. This is, of course, the same requirement put forward by Helen Huntingdon, in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, on the correct upbringing of children. It could also be this belief which makes Lord David Cecil regard ~~her~~ Mrs Gaskell's portrayal of men as unconvincing. One of the reasons why Henry Lennox is portrayed as an unsuitable partner for Margaret Hale is that he has experience with women. When he visits Margaret with the intention of proposing, he uses some sketches he has made of her in order to make her aware of his romantic interest in her, but Margaret fails to appreciate the subtle undertones of his conversation! 'A regular London girl would understand the implied meaning of that speech' thought Mr Lennox. 'She would be up to looking through every speech that a young man made her for the arrière-pensée of a compliment'[16]. Mrs Gaskell indicates, by Margaret's instinctive reaction, her superior moral values: 'She wished herself back with her mother - her father - anywhere away from him'[17]. She is only prepared to tolerate his proposal because she can 'put an end to it with her high maidenly dignity'[18]. By placing this proposal so early in the narrative, Mrs Gaskell suggests what would have been an unsuitable match for Margaret; to have married Lennox would have been too much the conventional reaction of a young unmarried woman, without a fortune, whereas Margaret is, in most respects, an unconventional woman for whom an exceptional partner must be found. John Thornton, the 'new man', is shown as such an exceptional person, and the second half of the book is dominated by Margaret's confusion over the feelings which he arouses in her. When Thornton proposes to her after the strike, Margaret rejects him because she believes he does this because of her 'unmaidenly' actions during the strike. Hazel Mews suggests that 'she suffers suitable agonies of maidenly shame over the recollection of her impulsive act in defending Mr Thornton at the riot'[19], but it is more likely that her 'shame' is related more to the physical emotions which she experienced when she 'threw her arms around him, she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond'[20]. Mrs Gaskell compromises, to some extent, with traditional concepts of maidenly modesty by expressing these emotions more explicitly through the man, Mr Thornton: 'He could not forget the touch of her arms around his neck,

impatiently felt as it had been at the time; but now the recollection of her clinging defence of him, seemed to thrill him through and through - to melt away every resolution, all powers of self-control, as if it were wax before a fire'[21]. Although experienced in commerce, Thornton is portrayed as being as sexually unawakened as Margaret, and, therefore, unlike the experienced Lennox, a suitable partner for her. When he proposes to her, he lowers his voice 'to such a tender intensity of passion that she shivered and trembled before him'[22]. While Thornton is described as being 'thrilled through and through' by the recollection of Margaret's 'soft clinging', Margaret herself is denied such an explicitly physical reaction; the most she is permitted is to 'shiver and tremble' at the sound of his voice, and it is left to the reader to decide whether this derives from fear or ecstasy. Despite the insistence on intellectual parity between Thornton and Margaret, one of the most effective scenes is one where he is taking tea with the Hales and, while supposedly listening to her father, is in fact completely distracted by Margaret's physical presence and in particular by the behaviour of a bracelet which she is wearing. She continually pushes this up her arm, only for it to gradually slip down to her wrist again. Margaret is quite unaware that she is distracting him; there is no coquetry on her side. It provides an amusing counterpoint to the rather formal verbal exchanges. The sexual symbolism is remarkably explicit. He watches as 'it tightened her soft flesh; and then to mark the loosening - the fall'[23]. On another occasion, when Margaret attends a large formal dinner at his home, he is described as being continually aware of her physical presence: 'Only, he knew what she was doing - or not doing - better than he knew the movements of anyone else in the room'[24]. We are, by these descriptions, reminded that while Mr Thornton may be drawn to her personality and even to her intellect, he is principally attracted by her appearance. Unlike writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Mrs Gaskell clearly believes that a heroine should be beautiful and perhaps she also sees this beauty as making intelligence and self-reliance more acceptable to men. As a beautiful woman herself, she may have found it hard to believe that plain women could attract a husband of merit. Above all, she may well have believed that the reading public required the heroine of a novel to have beauty.

Margaret assumes many of the responsibilities which would naturally have fallen on the male head of the household, while at the same time retaining those particularly feminine duties of caring for the sick and visiting the poor. This crossing of the male/female barriers is indicated early in the novel when her father is preparing to tell her that he has decided that he must relinquish his living:

> "Margaret!" said Mr Hale at last, in a sort of sudden desperate way that made her start. "Is that tapestry thing of immediate consequence? I mean can you leave it and come into my study? I want to speak to you about something very serious to us all" [25]

In addition to the symbolic act of setting aside her woman's work, the tapestry, in order to shoulder the responsibilities that had been her father's alone, she passes literally from the female domain of the drawing room into the male territory of the study. It is she who compels the doctor to tell her the true nature of her mother's illness and then undertakes to break the news to her father. She does not seem to think it necessary to mention to her father either Lennox's or Thornton's proposals of marriage to her. When she and her father dine at the Thorntons', Margaret chooses the company of the men as preferable to the ladies who are 'employing themselves in taking notes of the dinner and criticizing each other's dresses'[26]. She sees the men's conversation about business matters as 'something larger and grander than the petty interests of the women which the ladies had been talking about'[27]. For the first time, she is impressed by Thornton as a man of importance in the community, 'his whole manner, as master of the house, and entertainer of his friends, was so straightforward yet simple and modest, as to be thoroughly dignified. Margaret thought she had never seen him to so much advantage'[28]. When the strikers storm Thornton's mill, she refuses to retire with the other women to the upper floor, and challenges Thornton to face the mob: '"Go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man"'[29]. When the mob threatens them, she again reverses the traditional roles of the male as protector and the female as the one to be protected, and shields his body with her own. In the final reconciliation between Margaret and Mr Thornton, when he proposes marriage, she prefaces her acceptance by offering to supply the working capital for his mill: '"If you would take some money of mine, eighteen thousand and fifty-seven pounds, lying at this moment unused in the bank, and bringing me in only two and a half per cent - you could pay me much better interest"'[30]. She therefore becomes his partner in business as well as his partner in life.

One of the factors which sets Elizabeth Gaskell apart from the Victorian Establishment is that she was the wife of a Unitarian Minister; she was at the centre of a close-knit religious community and yet outside the Establishment as represented by the Church of England. Nineteenth-century Christianity was fiercely sectarian and everyone regarded any different shade of opinion as a threat. Unitarians placed particular emphasis on reconciliation and toleration of other Christian creeds, but

nevertheless, Joseph Priestley, the founder of Unitarianism felt able to write of 'the gross delusions of Papists who, after relinquishing reason, have been made to believe a lie'[31]. While there is nothing in Mrs Gaskell's novels which approaches the bigotry with regard to Roman Catholicism contained in Villette, in her private life Mrs Gaskell was greatly distressed when her daughter, Marianne, was attracted towards that creed. Despite Mrs Gaskell's genuine tolerance, it is significant that in Ruth, it is Mr Benson, the Dissenting Minister, who personifies Christian virtues, whereas Mr Hale, the Anglican clergyman in North and South, is shown as full of doubt and inadequate to deal with the crises in his own life. However, she showed an almost greater distrust of 'enthusiasm' or Methodism. In North and South, the dying mill-girl, Bessie Higgins, is portrayed in a state of hysteria, brought about by reading the Book of Revelations, without the education to interpret it: '"I believe, perhaps more than yo' do o' what's to come. I read the Book o' Revelations until I know it off by heart, and I never doubt when I'm waking, and in my senses, of all the glory I'm to come to"'[32]. The nature of Unitarians permitted a wide range of beliefs; Mrs Gaskell inclined towards the 'Arian viewpoint', whereby Christ was accepted as divine, but subsidiary to The One God. The most explicit statement of her beliefs in this connection is contained in a letter to Marianne in 1854:

> I know it is wrong not to clear our minds as much as possible as to the nature of that God, and tender Saviour, whom we cannot love properly unless we try and define them clearly to ourselves. Do you understand me my darling? I have often wished to talk with you about this. Then the one thing I am clear and sure about is that Jesus Christ was not equal to His Father, that, however divine a being he was not God; and that worship as God addressed to him is therefore wrong in me ...[33]

While she continually questions Christian attitudes in general, she seems unconcerned with questions of theology and authority. This is particularly noticeable in North and South, where Mr Hales's 'doubts' seem little more than a device which moves the family from the security of a rural parish to the uncertainty of life in a large industrial town, without the protection of the Established Church. Although Mr Hale talks of his 'painful, miserable doubts', he quickly reassures Margaret that these are not concerned with religion, but rather with 'the authority of the Church' and 'conformity to the Liturgy'. However, Mrs Gaskell carefully avoids defining the precise nature of this conflict. In Early Victorian Novelists, Lord David Cecil suggests that it is Mrs Gaskell's basic lack of intellectual rigour which makes her avoid discussion of such fundamental religious issues, but it is more likely that, as a Unitarian, she felt the

need to tread cautiously in such matters. It would, in fact, be difficult to establish simply from reading her novels that Mrs Gaskell was a Unitarian, or even a Dissenter. Much closer to her interests was concern with the conflict between 'the Divine Will' for an individual and the individual's own will. She saw the individual as having a series of obligations to fulfil: firstly to the Divine Will, secondly to society, and thirdly to his or her own talents and abilities. The greatest difficulty lay in establishing what God's will was, but once understood, the carrying out of that purpose was the only course open to a confessing Christian. Only by submission to the Divine Will were we released from the 'unholy' state of self-centredness. It is never clear as to which denomination Thornton belongs, but when, after the death of Mrs Hale, he visits Mr Hale, we are told that, 'Man of action as he was, busy in the world's great battle, there was a deeper religion binding him to God in his heart, in spite of his strong wilfulness, through all his mistakes'[34]. Again, although Mr Hale has relinquished his living because of private doubts, he is still able to bring comfort to others. After Bessy's death, Higgins visits Mr Hale and is invited to join in family prayers. The Unitarian message of reconciliation between all Christian creeds is explicitly spelt out in the conclusion to this chapter: 'Margaret the Churchwoman, her father, the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm'[35].

Mrs Gaskell anticipated particular difficulty for the woman who had artistic talent, and her own life provides evidence of an uneasy compromise between her supportive role of wife and mother and the 'self-centred' and therefore 'unholy' role of writer. However, she considered the regulation of the home and the care and upbringing of children to be the paramount concern of women. Art was for her a necessary escape from the grinding reality of daily life into a magic world of childhood. It would be possible to see Margaret Hale as the expression of such escapes from the reality of Mrs Gaskell's own life into a world where the woman can openly leave the drawing room for the greater world of commerce. Margaret is able to do all those things which Caroline Helstone, in Shirley, so longed to be able to do. However, Margaret is shown as being equally involved in the traditional occupations of the middle class woman - serving tea and visiting the sick. Mrs Gaskell demonstrates the importance of pressing muslins in the correct way and decorating the drawing room in an attractive manner. When Mr Thornton first visits the Hales for tea, he is struck by the contrast between his own 'handsome, ponderous' dining room, where the only books are religious commentaries set out on the table for decoration rather than use, and the Hales' drawing room, where 'books, not

cared for on account of their bindings solely, lay on one table, as if recently put down'[36]. A similar comparison is made between Mrs Thornton's expensive 'stout black silk, of which not a thread was worn or discoloured', and Margaret's inexpensive but attractive muslin gown. The Thorntons express the new Northern values based on affluence through expensive, rather tasteless furniture and books bought for their expensive bindings, whereas the Hales' older, Southern civilisation is expressed in taste rather than money. The simple cocoa-nut cakes offered to Mr Thornton are given dignity by the social ritual which accompanies them. Margaret, on the other hand, is overpowered by the amount of food provided at Mr Thornton's dinner party: 'one half of the quantity would have been enough, and the effect lighter and more elegant'[37]. Mr Thornton is drawn to Margaret as much by her social manners as by her beauty and her character.

While it might be going too far to claim that the novel is a direct plea for women's emancipation, it must be seen, with Charlotte Brontë's Shirley, as presenting very strong arguments for women to be allowed to leave the confines of the drawing room and participate in the world of men, without being accused of being unfeminine. Mrs Gaskell also seems to be indicating that such a transition could occur more easily in the fluid, still developing society of the North, than in the more traditional society of the South. Without having the financial independence of Shirley Keeldar, Margaret still manages to leave the drawing room's confines for the wider domain of commerce. In her personal life, she makes decisions without consulting her father, to an extent which is surprising for the time and cannot be accounted for entirely by his weakness and confusion. Margaret is probably the nearest of all Victorian heroines to the 'new woman' of early twentieth-century literature. She is shown as progressive and able; a remarkable heroine for the 1850s.

If Margaret Hale is the most progressive of the heroines discussed in this chapter, then Lucy Snowe is the most truly alone. At the beginning of Villette she is shown as being without close relatives, money, influence, social position or even good looks. Like Esther Summerson in Bleak House, her circumstances have robbed her of her youth; although not yet twenty-three, Lucy describes herself as 'thin, haggard and hollow-eyed; like a sitter-up at night, like an overwrought servant, or a placeless person in debt'[38]. Against this physical weakness, she describes her spirit as 'nourished and nerved with the vigour'[39] of youth. During the course of the novel, Lucy learns to support herself entirely through her own resources and finally, survives the loss of her one true love, Paul Emanuel, and goes on to achieve a degree of material prosperity and

spiritual peace.

Villette was Charlotte's last and, arguably, greatest novel. It was written during a period of great emotional stress. In May 1849, Anne, the last of her sisters, died in Scarborough, leaving Charlotte alone with her aging father; at the same time, she was experiencing public recognition as an important writer and an established literary figure. She visited London and met other writers such as William Makepeace Thackeray and Harriet Martineau. She also formed a strong friendship with Mrs Gaskell, visiting her in Manchester and having her to stay at the parsonage. A crisis in her personal life occurred in 1852 when the Rev. Arthur Nicholls, who had been a curate at Haworth since 1845, proposed marriage to Charlotte. Although she very much wished to marry, her father's objections to the match were so violent that she felt that she had no alternative but to refuse Nicholls, and he left Haworth in May 1853. The character of Lucy Snowe seems to be more closely related to Charlotte herself than any other of her heroines and Lucy's sufferings can be seen as a reflection of the turmoil of her emotions during that period. It is significant that Lucy is portrayed as an orphan. Lucy's sufferings, at least in the first half of the novel, are caused by the fact that the man she thinks she loves, Graham Bretton, loves another, whereas Charlotte's sufferings were those of a dutiful daughter who finds a conflict between her duty to her father and her own needs. In the novel, this conflict is reflected in the character of Paul Emanuel, who is forced to choose between loyalty to his family and loyalty to Lucy. Charlotte chose gradually to break down her father's opposition to her marriage to Arthur Nicholls and this she was finally successful in doing. Nicholls returned to Haworth as curate in April 1854 and Charlotte and he were married in June of that year. Charlotte experienced a brief period of happiness and contentment with him, but by March the following year had died as a result of a pregnancy which she was too frail to bear. Villette contains many passages which indicate her emotional conflict at the time when she was writing it. The setting also returns to that of her first, unsuccessful, novel, The Professor, which was not published until after her death, and probably would not have been then, had it not been for the reputation established by her later work. The plot of this first novel was based on her experiences as a student teacher at the Pensionnat Héger in Brussels, between 1842 and 1844, and in particular the suffering caused by her unrequited love for Monsieur Héger. However, whereas The Professor had all the failings of a first novel, Villette demonstrates Charlotte's mastery of the novel form. In The Professor, the principal character is a man, William Crimsworth, whereas in Villette, the

principal character is Lucy Snowe, who also narrates her own story. The heroine of The Professor, Frances Henri, although showing spirit and a strongly developed sense of moral values typical of all Charlotte's heroines, is subsidiary to the hero and exists principally to be saved by him. It seems likely that when Charlotte wrote The Professor, her feelings of unfulfilled love for Monsieur Hegér were too intimate to be written about from the female point of view and an attempt at detachment was made by using a male narrator to filter these memories. However, eight years later, when Charlotte came to write Villette, she felt able to revert to a heroine as the narrator and centre of the story. Although the hero, Paul Emanuel, assists her in achieving independence, Lucy is portrayed as largely responsible for what she accomplishes. The reader is left confident that, despite the loss of Paul Emanuel - surely the most determinedly unromantic ending of all her novels - she will be strong enough to survive.

At the beginning of the novel, Lucy likens the lives of 'many women and girls' to being on a boat, 'slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass - the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed'[40]. Charlotte presents us with the image of women being kept becalmed by men, away from the pressures of life. However, the steersman also has his eyes closed, which suggests that even the men, who claim to be directing the women's lives, are in a dreamlike state which lacks direction and purpose. Lucy Snowe is destined to escape this calm by 'somehow having fallen overboard', ~~perhaps due to~~ because of 'a wreck at last'. This imagery suggests that once this security is lost, both 'basking, plump women' and the dreaming steersman would perish. It is the outcast, the woman who has been forced out of this 'cushioned' environment, who suffers but survives, even though she experiences 'a long time - of cold, of danger, of contention'[41]. In this passage lies the essential content of the novel. It is symbolic that while the novel ends with a storm and a shipwreck which takes Paul Emanuel away from Lucy for ever, Lucy remains, independent with a school which 'flourishes', a house which is 'ready' and a garden which is 'in bloom'[42]. She has survived the years of 'contention' and found a qualified peace.

Like her sisters, and indeed many other women of this time, Charlotte longed for independence and a degree of prosperity. On the 30th January, 1846, a week before she sent off the first work the Brontë sisters offered for publication, Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, she wrote to Miss Wooler, her former teacher, saying:

> There is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own

> way through life quietly persevering - without support of husband or brother and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upwards retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures and fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend[43].

Lucy Snowe represents such a woman but she does not gain this state of equilibrium easily. Like Jane Eyre, she is haunted by a ghostly presence which is later proved to have a physical reality. It seems possible that Charlotte got the idea of the nun disguise from the narrative poem, Don Juan by Lord Byron; the Brontës were known to have read his work. In Canto XVI, written in 1824, Don Juan is visited by the ghost of a monk, 'arrayed in cowl and beads and dusty garb ...' When Don Juan follows it:

> Back fell the sable frock and dreary cowl,
> And they revealed - alas! that e'er they should!
> In full, voluptuous, but not o'ergrown bulk,
> The phantom of her frolic Grace - Fitz-Fulke![44]

The Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, who is said to love 'tracasserie' had disguised herself as a monk in order to contrive a clandestine meeting with Don Juan. Despite the reversal of roles - in Byron's poem, it is a woman who dresses as a monk in order to meet a man, whereas in Villette, it is a man who dresses as a nun in order to meet a woman - there is a basic similarity both in the situation and in the frivolous and immoral characters involved. However, in Villette, the scenes are filled with menace for Lucy Snowe, whereas in Don Juan, the verses are intended to evoke amusement. The revelation that the ghostly presence at Thornfield Hall is Mr Rochester's mad wife, has, obviously, tremendous importance to Jane Eyre's future as it forces her to leave Thornfield Hall. In the case of Lucy Snowe, the physical reality of the ghostly nun proves to have more in common with farce than tragedy. Instead of being the ghost of a long-dead nun, reputed to have been buried alive by her order for a love affair, it is no more than a ruse adopted by Monsieur le Compte de Hamel to enable him to have assignations with a student, Ginevra Fanshawe. Both 'ghosts' haunt the attics of the houses and one might relate this to the states of mind of Lucy and Jane, as both appear at times of the heroines' greatest stress. The 'ghosts' can be seen to symbolise the confusion of feelings being experienced by Jane and Lucy. It is significant that, by the time that the true nature of the nun is revealed to Lucy, she has passed through her great crisis of despair and been reborn in the confidence of Paul Emanuel's love. Jane Eyre, Caroline Helstone, Margaret Hale and Lucy Snowe, all experience periods of mental and physical

prostration arising out of feelings of rejection and loneliness: Jane Eyre experiences true destitution after leaving Mr Rochester; Caroline Helstone suffers brain fever when she believes that Robert Moore is to marry Shirley Keeldar; Margaret Hale collapses after the death of her mother when she believes that John Thornton has been alienated, and Lucy Snowe collapses when she is left alone in the school during the long school holiday, with only a mental defective as company. In all these instances, the characters have sustained themselves with great fortitude, only to be overwhelmed by nameless fears and feelings of desolation when they believe the men they love are lost to them. Each is restored to health by experiencing love from others. Jane Eyre gains the love and respect of Diana and Mary Rivers; Caroline Helstone is nursed to health by Mrs Pryor who then reveals herself as the mother Caroline had believed to be dead; Margaret is restored by Mr Bell's kindness and confidence, and Lucy Snowe is helped to recovery by finding her relatives, Graham and Mrs Bretton. However, in the case of Charlotte Brontë's heroines, Jane and Lucy, the discovery which overcomes one crisis in their lives initiates another, in that Jane has to withstand St John Rivers's demand that she should replace her physical love for Mr Rochester, with spiritual service to God (and incidentally St John Rivers!); while Lucy Snowe suffers rejection in that her love for Graham Bretton is unrequited. Graham Bretton, who is portrayed as handsome, kind but also thoughtless, represents the sort of love which Lucy will never gain, because it is attracted to external beauty, which Lucy cannot offer: 'No need to ponder the cause or the course of that sigh; I knew it was wakened by beauty. I knew it pursued Ginevra'[45]. This cycle of rejection based on physical appearance, is continued when Lucy is describing Paul Emanuel as 'pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a harsh apparition, with his close-shorn black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek, his wide and quivering nostril'[46]. Again, Ginevra rejects Graham Bretton, whom she dubs 'old Red Whiskers', in favour of the dapper, but worthless, Count Hamal. However, because Graham Bretton is a character who is destined to be fortunate, regardless of virtue, he finally combines fortune and beauty by marrying the beautiful and wise Paulina Bassompierre, who as 'Polly' can be seen as the child which Lucy will never have. After her breakdown, Lucy prays for strength to 'bear the pains He has appointed', and expresses certainty that 'at some hour, though perhaps not *your* hour, the waiting waters will stir; in *some* shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed, which your heart loved, and for which it bled'[47]. Ultimately, she recognises 'that shape' as Paul Emanuel. At the end of the novel she says of him:

> He deemed me born under his star: he seemed to have spread over me its beam like a banner. Once - unknown and unloved, I held him harsh and strange; the low stature, the wiry make, the angles, the darkness, the manner displeased me. Now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection, having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart - I preferred him before all humanity[48].

It is interesting that Lucy initially rejects Paul Emanuel's 'dark' appearance, in favour of Graham Bretton's Anglo-Saxon fairness, because Charlotte Brontë consistently made her heroes to be olive-skinned, dark-eyed and un-English in appearance. Mr Rochester, Robert Moore and Paul Emanuel were all in this mould, whereas those male characters which are wrong for the heroine - St John Rivers and Graham Bretton - are portrayed as fair and conventionally handsome. Just as Charlotte denies Lucy physical beauty and attractiveness, to a greater degree than to any of her previous heroines, so she denies Paul Emanuel the Byronic mystery and physical stature of Mr Rochester and the Napoleonic intellect of Robert Moore. It is almost as if she is saying to the reader, ultimately none of these things is important; all that matters is that two people can deem themselves 'born under the same star', that their souls are 'equal before God'; that they are a match spiritually.

However, while she favoured un-English looks, Charlotte clearly regarded the English character as superior. The pupils of the pensionnat are portrayed as unintelligent and lacking in concentration. Their values, which are the same as those of their Principal, Madame Beck, are entirely venal. Even Paul Emanuel's dedication to his dead fiancée has been engineered by his dependants to ensure his continued financial support; secondary to this is their fear that Lucy might attempt to convert him to the Protestant faith. It is even suggested that Justine Marie's choice of a cloistered life was made not so much as a search for spiritual fulfilment but a retreat from the demands of ordinary life and the difficulties of standing up to her family, who opposed her marriage to Paul Emanuel once his fortune was lost. Paul Emanuel's legacy from this sterile relationship is the terrible Madame Walravens, whom Lucy initially likens to 'Cunegonde, the sorceress! Malevola, the evil fairy'[49]. Such grotesque characterisation is unusual for Charlotte and it is interesting to draw comparisons between Madame Walravens and the vicious and senile aunt in Little Dorrit, who is Flora Finching's 'bequest' from her marriage of convenience to Mr Finching. Certainly, in Jane Eyre the description of Mrs Rochester is grotesque and suggests all that one fears madness to be. Jane describes the face as 'a savage face. I wish I

could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!'[50]. However, Charlotte was describing a state of mind expressed in the physical and it was extreme because the state was extreme, whereas Madame Walravens is not mad, but merely malevolent; even her name suggests ill-will.

The Belgian character at its best and worst is portrayed most vividly in the complex person of Madame Beck, the Principal of the pensionnat. At various times in the novel, Madame Beck is alternately Lucy's ally and her adversary. Madame Beck and Lucy Snowe view one another with both respect and dislike. While Lucy is shown as being as capable of watching and waiting as Madame Beck, Charlotte makes it quite clear that Madame Beck's values are based entirely on expediency, whereas Lucy's cannot be compromised by self-interest: 'interest was the master-key of Madame's nature - the mainspring of her motives - the alpha and omega of her life'[51]. Charlotte's assessment of the Belgian character is shown in a letter which she wrote from Brussels in 1842:

> If the national character of the Belgians is to be measured by the character of most of the girls in this school, it is a character singularly cold, selfish, animal and inferior. They are very mutinous and difficult for the teachers to manage; and their principles are rotten to the core[52].

Lucy describes Madame Beck as being 'a most consistent character; forbearing with all the world and tender to no part of it'[53] and sums up the paradox of her character as: 'Wise, firm, faithless; secret, crafty, passionless; watchful and inscrutable; acute and insensate - withal perfectly decorous'[54]. She rules by surveillance and espionage from which neither pupils nor staff are exempt. Lucy recognises that this 'decorous' surveillance is the prime justification of the school. This is demonstrated in the description of the ball which concludes Madame's Fête day. She 'daringly' invites young men of the best families, related to the pupils, but then makes sure they never get the opportunity to dance with the girls. She scores a number of points by doing this:

> In the first place, the parents were made accomplices to the deed, for it was only through their mediation it was brought about. Secondly: the admission of these rattlesnakes, so fascinating and so dangerous, served to draw out Madame precisely in her strongest character - that of a first-rate "surveillante." Thirdly: their presence furnished a most piquant ingredient to the entertainment: the pupils knew it, and saw it, and the view of such golden apples shining afar off, animated them with a spirit no other circumstance could have kindled[55].

If Charlotte fundamentally disapproved of the moral basis of Belgian education, she clearly approved of the way the system was operated and saw it as beneficial to the pupils, although underlying this approval is the implied criticism that it is only the basic inferiority of the Belgian character which makes such an easy and comfortable regime necessary:

> No minds were overtasked; the lessons were well distributed and made incomparably easy to the learner; there was a liberty of amusement, and a provision of exercise which kept the girls healthy; the food was abundant and good; neither pale nor puny faces were anywhere to be seen in the Rue Fossette[56].

It is Madame Beck who gives Lucy her first opportunity to progress from nursemaid to teacher and in fact challenges her to do so. Despite the help which Madame Beck gives Lucy, because self-interest is the 'master-key' of Madame's character, ultimately she has to be regarded as Lucy's adversary. Lucy says of her: 'Yet woe be to that man or woman who relied on her one inch beyond the point where it was her interest to be trustworthy'[57]. However, it can be seen that Lucy Snowe is prepared to use Madame Beck as much, if not more, than Madame Beck is prepared to use her. While the balance of mutual usefulness is maintained, they are able to work well together. It is only when Paul Emanuel shows that his feelings for Lucy are strong enough to cause him to put them above his feelings for his family, and therefore Madame's interests are in danger of being compromised, that this balance is lost and these two strong female characters must part.

If Lucy regards Madame Beck with a mixture of respect and dislike, she displays only contempt for her fellow teachers and students. The teacher who receives the full force of this contempt is Mademoiselle St Pierre, a Parisienne, who is described as being 'externally refined' but 'at heart corrupt - without a creed, without a principle, without an affection'[58]. Perhaps, however, Mademoiselle St Pierre's worst offence is that 'her eye was upon Monsieur Emanuel', not out of true affection but because she wanted 'to have some one to work for her - a husband who would pay her debts (she was woefully encumbered with debt), supply her wardrobe, and leave her at liberty'[59]. Charlotte Brontë, therefore, through Lucy Snowe, is clearly rejecting reasons for marriage which would have been acceptable to many of her readers. More positively, she seems to be indicating, as she did in Shirley, that there is virtue in a woman being able to maintain herself by her own ability. Mademoiselle St Pierre's interest in appearance is shown as vanity and, even more importantly, she is shown as improvident. She has, therefore, all the

weaknesses of Ginevra Fanshawe, without the youth and beauty to achieve her ends. It is therefore essential that the hero, Paul Emanuel, is shown as having 'pierced in its hiding-place the last lurking thought of the heart, and discerned under florid veilings the bare, barren places of the spirit'[60].

If Graham Bretton represents the man whose love Lucy Snowe can never gain, then Ginevra Fanshawe can be seen as the sort of woman Lucy should not *want* to be. Ginevra, an English girl who through being educated abroad has adopted the worst characteristics of the Continental character, is described as having 'a fair fragile style of beauty' with a 'light, careless temperament'. Lucy and Ginevra first encounter one another on the channel crossing. From the very beginning Ginevra burdens Lucy with her physical and spiritual shortcomings. She has been to so many foreign schools that she claims to have no sense of identity and to not even be sure what the difference is between Romanism and Protestantism. Both Lucy and Ginevra suffer from seasickness, but whereas Lucy endures stoically, Ginevra is described as tormenting Lucy with 'unsparing selfishness during the whole time of our mutual distress'[61]. This first meeting sets the tone for their relationship. Lucy has to suffer the revelation that Graham Bretton loves Ginevra because of her beauty, and Ginevra herself constantly reminds Lucy that she is neither young nor beautiful. At one point she forces Lucy to stand beside her in front of a mirror and, having surveyed their two images, declares, '"I would not be you for a kingdom"'[62]. When she tries to force Lucy to admit that 'in her heart' she would like to change places, Lucy responds that Ginevra, being heartless, has no place in her heart and says that '"I only occasionally turn you over in my brain"'. Ginevra, therefore, like Madame Beck, is considered as without true feeling. Her pleasure consists in'"breaking the hearts of two gentlemen, and it is the dying look I had from one of them just now which puts me in such good spirits"'[63]. Ginevra is endowed with the physical attractiveness which Lucy lacks, but she is also deprived in that she lacks spiritual beauty. Because of this essential superficiality she can only use her beauty to tease; ultimately, she chooses to marry a man as heartless and superficial as herself. Although the character is unlikeable, it is treated with humour. She professes to enjoy Lucy's company, because she can '"take me at my lowest, and know me to be coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish, and all the other sweet things you and I have agreed to be a part of my character"'[64]. It is this robust acceptance of her shortcomings, combined with a determination 'to enjoy youth', which partially redeems her. Unlike Mademoiselle St Pierre, she is exactly what she appears to be but, because

of her physical beauty, men, and Graham Bretton in particular, excuse her faults. Because of her total insensitivity, she is the cause of much mental suffering to Lucy; in order to visit Ginevra in the school, Monsieur le Compte de Hamal adopts the disguise of a nun and it is this which so terrifies Lucy when she encounters him in the attic. Ginevra's final act before running away with her lover, is to leave a bolster on Lucy's bed dressed in the nun's robes. However, at this stage, Lucy is strong enough to defy the 'spectra' and recognise it for what it is:

> In a moment, without exclamation, I had rushed on the haunted couch; nothing leaped out, or sprung, or stirred; all the movement was mine, so was all life, the reality, the substance, the force; as my instinct felt. I tore her up - the incubus! I held her on high - the goblin! I shook her loose - the mystery! And down she fell - down all around me - down in shreds and fragments - and I trode upon her[65].

From that moment on, she is 'relieved from all sense of the spectral and unearthly'. Ginevra, with her beauty is nevertheless shown as being denied the most important thing - the ability to feel deeply and therefore to suffer. This ability to meet suffering 'single-handed' is shown as the most significant indication of growth in character, so to do as Ginevra does and call out 'lustily for sympathy and aid', is an indication of perpetual immaturity. It is Lucy Snowe's capacity to suffer intensely and yet to overcome this suffering with positive action - not to die, but to survive - which is Charlotte Brontë's final measure of the successful Christian life. Even when Lucy believes that Paul Emanuel might be about to take as his bride a young girl, who is eventually revealed as soon to marry another, Lucy is able to accept it as the price of salvation: 'Truth stripped away Falsehood, and Flattery and Expectancy, and here I stand - free'[66]. Charlotte allows her heroine no more than a brief afternoon of happiness with Paul Emanuel, when the two explore the little house and school which he has prepared for her with such care. They share a meal together and then turn away from Eden back to the real world of Madame Beck:

> We walked back to the Rue Fossette by moonlight - such moonlight as fell on Eden - shining through the shades of the Great Garden, and haply gilding a path glorious for a step divine - a Presence nameless. Once in their lives some men and women go back to these first fresh days of our great Sire and Mother - taste that grand morning's dew - bathe in its sunrise[67].

Although Lucy Snowe is not granted the traditional happy ending of marriage, given to Jane Eyre, Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone, she

and Paul Emanuel are given a brief time together of full understanding and mutual love; he has prepared a future for her because he has to go away on a voyage from which he may not return. What saves Lucy from despair when he is lost at sea, is the recognition that she is truly loved; much of her earlier anguish, like that of Caroline Helstone, has arisen from the feeling that, since she is unloved, she may be unlovable. Paul Emanuel, by proving to her that she could arouse deep and constant love, grants her, not only physical independence in running her own establishment, but spiritual freedom. Therefore, although Lucy Snowe remains within many of the confines of Victorian tradition, emotionally, she is the most independent of the three heroines under discussion; she has learnt to live alone.

Although, as previously mentioned, Bleak House is the earliest of the three books discussed in this chapter, it represents a major change in Dickens's characterisation of women. Esther Summerson, although more traditional than Margaret Hale and Lucy Snowe, who were created by women writers, displays a strength of character, determination and power to act decisively which Dickens usually reserved for his heroes. It is significant that whereas thirty-five chapters are narrated in the omniscient third person, thirty-four are narrated by Esther; nowhere else in Dickens's novels do we find the heroine being given such a direct voice. She is not central to the theme of Chancery; she is an observer of its folly, the inheritor of the ashes of her parents' destructive passion. She is shown as part of a chain of events unfolded in the novel; her tragedy is not knowing how she fits into the order of things. Until Lady Dedlock reveals herself as Esther's mother, she is continually attempting to justify her place in a society which might, quite arbitrarily, decide to reject her. This confusion is symbolised in Esther's delirium when she has smallpox:

> Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which *I* was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing[68].

Esther, as an individual seeking to find her place in a series of interlocking relationships, provides the necessary focus for a novel which attempts to show England itself as one nation, regardless of whether or not individual groups within society recognise this. Dickens portrays English society as being formed out of this chain of relationships, so that the death of the least regarded member, Jo the crossing sweeper, affects, directly or indirectly, all the other characters, up to the most

highly regarded, Lord and Lady Dedlock. Dickens describes the country as being covered by twin 'miasmas': a metaphorical fog of litigation hanging over the High Court of Chancery at the top and a literal contagion, smallpox, spreading upwards from the bottom of society, as typified by the dreadful slum of Tom All Alone's:

> There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestillential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high[69].

It is the first of three novels concerning the 'state of the nation', the second being Hard Times (1854) and the third, Little Dorrit (1855); both these last have already been discussed in this thesis. In this novel, Dickens is addressing the same social problem as Disraeli in Sybil or The Two Nations, but comes to rather different conclusions. Disraeli bases his plea for reform on the injustice represented by such social inequality and division, whereas Dickens warns that, in terms of disease, we are indeed one nation because disease respects neither rank nor individual. He portrays those with power and authority as being unwilling to act. The Law, in the form of the High Court of Chancery, is shrouded in a perpetual fog of litigation; it is a place where litigants, such as Miss Flite, await, but never receive, judgement. Miss Flite says, '"I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment"'[70]. The Law is portrayed as existing to give employment to lawyers rather than to facilitate justice, in the same way that the Circumlocution Office in Little Dorrit exists to provide preferment for the Barnacles, rather than to provide sound government.

Chesney Wold, which represents the old nobility, is described as being continually shrouded in rain. The fires which blaze in the hearths are made up of 'Dedlock timber and antediluvian forest'[71]. The present Dedlocks warm themselves on energy from the past and contribute nothing to replace what they are consuming. Dickens portrays an England where those who have power and knowledge choose to do nothing, and those at the bottom of the social structure without either, are indirectly avenged on those who have ignored their sufferings, by spreading disease and

corruption upwards.

Within this great scheme of inter-locking relationships, is the theme of public accountability for private sin. This is personified by Lady Dedlock, whose pose of patrician detachment conceals the guilt of having had a liaison prior to her marriage to Lord Dedlock, which had produced a child, Esther Summerson. It is this private sin, remorselessly pursued by the lawyer, Tulkinghorn, which finally brings about both Lady Dedlock's and his own death.

Dickens, however, appears to have been unable to reconcile his conflicting attitudes towards Lady Dedlock's 'sin'. On one level, she is presented as a flawed heroine who lacked the courage to marry for love rather than position, while at another level, she becomes a figure out of melodrama ; the guilty woman with a hidden past. As with Tom All Alone's, the festering sore of her guilt, and her failure to acknowledge her daughter, affects the lives of those around her: her dull but loyal husband, Lord Dedlock, and her illegitimate daughter Esther. It is Esther who suffers the stigma of illegitimacy, to the extent where her birthday is regarded by her aunt as a day of mourning. However, Dickens finally resolves the conflict by making Lady Dedlock die, in the tradition of a true Magdalene, suffering agonies of remorse, at the gates of the horrible graveyard where her lover is buried.

It is possible to see echoes of Jane Eyre in Esther's background, in that both Esther and Jane are orphans and both are subjected to the rule of a harsh and unjust relative. There, however, the similarity ends; Jane is shown as fighting Mrs Reed's dislike with an even stronger emotion - hate - whereas Esther is shown as accepting without question her aunt's assessment of her worth: '"Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it"'[72]. However, unlike Miss Wade in Little Dorrit, the injustice does not leave Esther with a hatred of the human race; she remains a loving spirit. What she is left with is the need to justify her existence in others' eyes. Because of her Godmother's harsh judgment, she finds it difficult to accept that she can be loved for herself rather than her good works. Throughout Esther's own narrative she continually, and most irritatingly, reminds the reader of some comment made on her virtue and good nature; unlike Jane Eyre, she has no concept of personal worth. It is for this reason that she quotes Ada's comment on her kindness to Mrs Jellyby's children: '"Esther was their friend directly"'[73]. On another occasion she rather coyly records: 'I don't know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible'[74]. While it is just possible to accept this in her

personal narrative, where it can be seen as a private account intended for personal comfort and reassurance, it is difficult to reconcile the arch tones in which she addresses herself, such as 'My dear' and even 'My plain dear', with the depth of insight which Dickens grants her on other occasions. The arch tone dominates when she opens her narrative:

> I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that. I can remember, when I was a very little girl indeed, I used to say to my doll, when we were alone together, "Now Dolly, I am not clever, you know very well, and you must be patient with me, like a dear"[75].

But on another occasion, we find her displaying great shrewdness and depth of insight in her assessment of Prince Turveydrop:

> His little dancing-shoes were particularly diminutive and he had a little innocent, feminine manner, which not only appealed to me in an amiable way, but made this singular effect upon me: that I received the impression that he was like his mother, and that his mother had not been considered or well used[76].

In the same way, the irony contained in her reply to Miss Flite's suggestion that Mr Woodcourt deserved a title, seems also beyond the range suggested by some of her remarks: 'I said it was not the custom in England to confer titles on men distinguished by peaceful service, however good and great; unless occasionally, when they consisted of the accumulation of some very large amounts of money'[77]. One feels that Dickens's own voice speaks directly here.

Since these contrasts in style do not relate chronologically to the development of Esther's character, one must assume that they are an indication of the difficulty which Dickens found in maintaining the persona of Esther in her personal narrative.

Esther is also endowed with foresight to an astonishing degree. This is necessary because one of her functions in the structure of the novel is to indicate, or point the way, to the series of interwoven mysteries which, as in all Dickens's novels, form the basis of the complex plot. When Esther is faced with apparently meaningless episodes, it is this foresight which nudges the reader towards future developments; again, quite a legitimate device when the author assumes the omniscient viewpoint. An instance is when she first sees Lady Dedlock in the church at Chesney Wold:

> It was easy to know that the ceremonious, gouty, grey-haired gentleman, the only other occupant of the

> great pew, was Sir Leicester Dedlock; and that the lady was Lady Dedlock. But why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances; and why I should be so fluttered and troubled (for I was still), by having casually met her eyes; I could not think[78].

Similarly, on the night she goes to visit Jo the crossing sweeper, with the result that she catches smallpox from him, she has a premonition of what is to come: 'I had for a moment an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was. I know it was then, and there that I had it'[79].

W.J. Harvey, in his essay on The Double Narrative, suggests that one of the functions of Esther's narrative is to control Dickens's runaway imagination. It is necessary to portray her as insipid and dull, in order to provide a contrast with 'the liveliness, fantastication and poetic density of texture that we typically associate with Dickens'[80]. I feel, however, that these lapses from one style to the other also suggest the difficulties which Dickens experienced in telling the story through the heroine rather than the hero.

Unusually for Dickens, Esther is presented as ~~someone~~ a woman to be admired more for her qualities than her appearance. However, perhaps like Mrs Gaskell, he found it difficult to justify a plain heroine. Unlike Jane Eyre, Esther starts the story with beauty, and it is only when the virtue of her character has been established that this source of vanity is removed. We are never given a direct description of Esther; her appearance is revealed by comparison with that of Lady Dedlock. Mr Guppy and Mr George, without recognising the connection, see a likeness to Lady Dedlock. The only physical description of Esther after her illness is given to Mr Woodcourt by the brickmaker's wife:'"And that young lady that was such a pretty dear, caught his illness, lost her beautiful looks, and wouldn't hardly be known for the same young lady now, if it wasn't for her angel temper, and her pretty shape, and her sweet voice"'[81]. Esther says of this loss:

> It was not like what I had expected; but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me. I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this[82].

How great these changes are is never made clear, but certainly Mr Guppy is put off by what he sees. In some ways, it is when this admiration, which she had not sought or valued, is withdrawn, that the reader is made most conscious of her loss. However, since her appearance is largely

restored by the end of the novel, this suggests that it was more a matter of complexion than actual distortion of the features. Like Oliver Twist and Little Nell, Esther represents a purity which cannot be corrupted by the circumstances of her birth or the influence of those around her.

One of the results of her illegitimacy seems to be that she forfeits her rights to a normal youth. Although his intentions are kindly, it is Mr Jarndyce who enforces middle-aged status upon her. Her role as housekeeper and as chaperone to Ada, reinforces this artificial 'middle age' and has the effect of making us overlook the fact that she is only two years older than Richard and Ada. In much the same way, we are surprised to be reminded that Nellie Dean, in Wuthering Heights, is the same age as Hindley Earnshaw and only a few years older than Catherine and Heathcliff. Even the variety of nicknames given to her, while rooted in affection, are more suitable to middle age than youth:

> This was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort, that my own name soon became quite lost among them[83].

The instant transition from childhood to responsible middle age could be linked with the traditional role of the 'poor relation' in Victorian society; just as the children of the poor have no time for the play of childhood, but move almost instantly into the adult world of survival, so Esther, without dowry or name, can be seen as forfeiting youth and being placed on the same rung of the social ladder as a widow. Caroline Helstone in Shirley, having no money of her own, and doubts about her background, is shown as feeling that she cannot expect to marry Robert Moore. However, unlike Esther, she does not docilely accept the role of poor relation and longs to be allowed to earn her living as a clerk in Moore's warehouse. Lucy Snowe is also shown as recognising from the very beginning that she cannot expect to marry and therefore at first accepts the debilitating role of companion to an old woman. Before embarking for Boue-Marine, she assesses her situation:

> I had nothing to lose. Unutterable loathing of a desolate existence past, forbade return. If I failed in what I now designed to undertake who, save myself, would suffer? If I died far away from - home, I was going to say, but I had no home - from England, then, who would weep[84].

As would be expected of a Brontë heroine, she fights and survives, but Esther, who, but for John Jarndyce, would have been in a similar situation, embraces the role of housekeeper and chaperone with enthusiasm.

Almost immediately upon her arrival at Bleak House, her role is defined in relation to Ada's; Ada, the heiress, is permitted her youth but Esther is expected to assume responsibility:

> Our luggage having arrived, and being all at hand, I was dressed in a few minutes, and engaged in putting my worldly goods away, when a maid (not the one in attendance upon Ada, but another, whom I had not seen) brought a basket into my room, with two bunches of keys in it, all labelled.
>
> "For you, miss, if you please," said she.
>
> "For me?" said I.
>
> "The housekeeping keys, miss"[85].

Having discovered that Mr Jarndyce is not her father, which she had once dreamed he might prove to be, she faces life in the new home by reminding herself: '"Esther, Esther, Esther! Duty, my dear!" and gave my little basket of housekeeping keys such a shake, that they sounded like little bells, and rang me hopefully to bed'[86]. The keys 'ring' rather than wedding bells. She continually reminds the reader that she is 'so happy and so honoured there'[87]; in other words, the role of housekeeper is the most she should expect out of life. Her guardian insists on defining her middle-aged role by giving her yet another 'affectionate' nickname, which suggests middle age: '"You are clever enough to be the good little woman of our lives, here, my dear," he returned playfully; "the little *old* woman of the Child's (I don't mean Skimpole's) Rhyme"'[88]. Even when the dreadful illness of smallpox is coming upon her she makes careful, mature, plans to ensure that Ada does not catch the infection and thereby lose her natural right to youth and beauty. Her assumption of the 'motherly' role towards her 'children', Richard and Ada, is contrasted with the lack of motherliness shown by Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle who profess compassion to distant peoples, but show little to their own families.

Unlike Jane Eyre, the effect of Esther's early upbringing seems to have made security more important than passion in her relationships with men. She experiences no misgivings when contemplating marriage with John Jarndyce, who is in his sixties! Her most passionate act is the burning of Woodcourt's flowers which she has pressed, when she believes herself bound to John Jarndyce. Although she finally marries Woodcourt, and Dickens sketches in their mutual happiness, her real passion seems to be reserved for Ada. The description of Esther's much loved doll, 'her beautiful complexion and rosy lips staring at me'[89] closely matches her description of Ada when she first sees her in Mr Kenge's chambers: 'such a beautiful girl with such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright, innocent, trusting face'[90]. One is also reminded of the description of Lucy

Manette, the heroine of A Tale of Two Cities. Esther constantly refers to Ada's golden beauty; it reassures her in moments of crisis and when she falls into the illness which is to rob her of much of her own looks, she seeks comfort from being reminded of Ada's beauty:

> "How does my own Pride look, Charley?" I inquired.
>
> "Disappointed, miss," said Charley, peeping through the curtain.
>
> "But I know she is very beautiful this morning."
>
> "She is indeed, miss," answered Charley, peeping. "Still looking up at the window."
>
> With her blue clear eyes, God bless them, always loveliest when raised like that![91]

This open expression of passionate admiration for another woman seems to have been quite acceptable in Victorian literature, but is more common in that written by men and it probably reflects the male view of female sexuality, or rather the lack of it. There is no similar expression of passionate regard for the beauty of another woman to be found in the work of the women novelists studied in this thesis. While both Caroline Helstone and Jane Eyre compare themselves, adversely, with other characters, there is no dwelling on childlike beauty such as is found in Bleak House. In fact, these heroines often find some failing in the envied beauty to balance matters. It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that Ada remains Dickens's ideal of female beauty: blonde, innocent and permanently immature. Esther Summerson and Amy Dorrit are exceptions to the rule, and this is reinforced by the fact that Dickens reverts quite happily from the complexities of Esther to the simplicity and idealisation of Lucy Manette.

We are told very little of Ada's background, other than that she is, with Richard, a Ward in Chancery. Throughout her life she is protected from experience and responsibility, both by Mr Jarndyce and Esther. When Ada is kept apart from Esther to protect her from contracting smallpox, her reaction is more that of a fretful child than a woman. Esther describes hearing 'my Ada crying at the door, day and night; I had heard her calling to me that I was cruel and did not love her'[92]. Ada's one excursion into independent action is when she marries Richard and this proves to be a disaster for both of them. After his death, she returns gratefully to the second Bleak House and reverts to the role of a child. Even the outcome of the marriage, a boy called Richard, is described by Esther as 'my Richard', and as having 'two mamas'. Ada also reverts to addressing John Jarndyce by the protective, immature title of 'Guardian'; she is never allowed to be a guardian of herself or of others.

In Bleak House, we are offered two ideals of womanhood. In Esther, we are shown the perfect wife, able to assume the roles of adviser, comforter, nurse and mother, while remaining at all times submissive to the wishes of the males in her life. In Ada, we are given the child-wife, so beloved of Dickens. She is the perfect object of male devotion. Like the loving and ineffective Dora in David Copperfield, and the golden-haired Lucy Manette in A Tale of Two Cities, Ada has a child-like perception housed in the body of a beautiful young woman; she is therefore sexually accessible but emotionally undemanding. Dickens frequently reverts to this type of heroine, even though, through Flora Finching in Little Dorrit, he also shows how unromantic the middle age of such a woman would be.

On the other hand, Esther also represents a new type of heroine for Dickens. He is prepared to tell the major part of the story through her; although only ~~nine~~ eleven of the sixty-seven chapters are actually headed 'Esther's Narrative', the whole story is directly or indirectly experienced through her. While Amy Dorrit is only allowed to express herself through her letters, Esther is given formal recognition as the narrator. The device of 'Esther's Narrative' is principally used by Dickens when he wishes to provide two perspectives on some major development in the plot. In most of these instances 'Esther's Narrative' follows an account in the third person. In Chapter 22, for example, an account in the third person of Jo's encounter with Mademoiselle Hortense at Mr Tulkinghorn's chambers, when he mistakes her veiled figure for that of Lady Dedlock, is followed in Chapter 23 by 'Esther's Narrative', in which she describes her encounter with this same maid in different circumstances. Similarly, in Chapter 56, a third-person account of Mr Bucket's investigations into Lady Dedlock's disappearance, is followed in Chapter 57, by 'Esther's Narrative', which conveys her personal views and involvement in the pursuit. The tone of 'Esther's Narrative' emphasises the contrast between the dramatic events taking place and the simple, direct way in which Esther tells her story. The fact that Dickens does not always succeed in maintaining the tone of 'Esther's Narrative' does not take away from the subtlety and complexity of what was being attempted. None of the female novelists discussed in this thesis attempt anything so advanced in terms of the structure of narration. Esther would, in many ways, be more acceptable and believable as a heroine to the Victorians than Jane Eyre, and certainly more so than Margaret Hale, in that, ultimately, she finds complete fulfilment within the conventional roles of wife and mother and makes no demands for equality with the male. At the same time, unlike Dora Copperfield and Lucy Manette, she is not passive and is shown as being capable of making decisions and surviving

great personal difficulties through the quality of her character. She belongs, therefore, with Margaret Hale and Lucy Snowe in that she represents a definite change in the way the heroine is portrayed. Dickens was, of course, familiar with the work of Mrs Gaskell, and almost certainly with that of Anne and Charlotte Brontë. This change of approach, whereby the heroine is allowed to tell her own story and be responsible for herself and others, suggests a response by Dickens to the work of women writers. He was always alert to the demands of the market and one can see this as recognition of their increasing importance as *novelists*, regardless of gender.

Notes on Chapter V

All page references to North and South by Mrs Gaskell are to The Penguin English Library Edition (Harmondsworth, 1979); to Villette by Charlotte Brontë to The Everyman Library Edition (Letchworth, 1979); and to Little Dorrit by Charles Dickens to The Penguin Classics Edition (Harmondsworth, 1988).

1 A.E. Dyson (ed.), Charles Dickens's Bleak House, 'The Double Narrative', (1965), p.225.

2 Charles Dickens, Letters, edited by Walter Dexter, 3 vols (1938), ii, p.202.

3 Charles Dickens's Letters, i, p.335.

4 North and South, p.38.

5 North and South, p.38.

6 M.J. Shaen (ed.), Memorials of Two Sisters (1908), quoted in Angus Easson, Elizabeth Gaskell (London, 1979).

7 North and South, p.48.

8 North and South, p.62.

9 North and South, p.444.

10 North and South, p.72.

11 Lord David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation, p.153.

12 North and South, p.62.

13 North and South, p.63.

14 North and South, p.254.

15 North and South, p.529.

16 North and South, p.58.

17 North and South, p.58.

18 North and South, p.60.

19 Hazel Mews, Frail Vessels, p.92.

20 North and South, p.234.

21 North and South, p.251.

22 North and South, p.253.

23 North and South, p.120.

24 North and South, p.215.

25 North and South, p.65.

26 North and South, p.215.

27 North and South, p.216.

28 North and South, p.216.

29 North and South, p.232.

30 North and South, p.529.

31 Joseph Priestley, An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity (1771, 3rd edn), pp.4, 5.

32 North and South, p.146.

33 The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, p.860.

34 North and South, p.348.

35 North and South, pp.296,7.

36 North and South, p.120.

37 North and South, p.213.

38 Villette, p.35.

39 Villette, p.36.

40 Villette, p.28.

41 Villette, p.28.

42 Villette, p.450.

43 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.289.

44 Lord Byron, The Complete Works, ed. Jerome J. McGann, vol. V (Oxford, 1986), p.656.

45 Villette, p.164.

46 Villette, p.114.

47 Villette, p.161.

48 Villette, p.448.

49 Villette, p.354.

50 Jane Eyre, p.311.

51 Villette, p.63.

52 Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, p.240.

53 Villette, p.81.

54 Villette, p.64.

55 Villette, p.128.

56 Villette, p.63.

57 Villette, p.63.

58 Villette, p.63.

59 Villette, p.306.

60 Villette, p.306.

61 Villette, p.48.

62 Villette, p.129.

63 Villette, p.130.

64 Villette, p.80.

65 Villette, p.429.

66 Villette, p.426.

67 Villette, p.447.

68 Bleak House, p.544.

69 Bleak House, p.683.

70 Bleak House, p.81.

71 Bleak House, p.445

72 Bleak House, p.65.

73 Bleak House, p.114.

74 Bleak House, p.162.

75 Bleak House, p.62.

76 Bleak House, p.242.

77 Bleak House, p.556.

78 Bleak House, p.304.

79 Bleak House, pp. 484, 485.

80 A.E. Dyson (ed.), Bleak House: The Double Narrative, p.227.

81 Bleak House, p.688.

82 Bleak House, p.559.

83 Bleak House, p.148.

84 Villette, p.41.

85 Bleak House, p.118.

86 Bleak House, p.131.

87 Bleak House, p.144.

88 Bleak House, p.147.

89 Bleak House, p.62.

90 Bleak House, p.77.

91 Bleak House, p.497.

92 Bleak House, p.544.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSIONS

This thesis attempts to show that within the work of the three women novelists discussed, there is strong evidence of dissatisfaction with the situation of women in mid-nineteenth century society; a society which was almost entirely male dominated. In particular, concern is expressed over financial dependence and the few opportunities open to the single woman who needed to work. All the writers are drawn from middle class backgrounds and, with the exception of Mary Barton, their heroines are also middle class.

The progress of the heroine from dependent to independent cannot be charted chronologically, even within the short timespan of this thesis. Mrs Gaskell, for example, having written novels 'with a purpose', such as Mary Barton, North and South, and Ruth, then, perhaps tiring of the struggle, reverted to novels which were more traditional in subject, such as Cousin Phillis and Wives and Daughters. Unfortunately, because Anne Brontë only left behind two novels, it is difficult to assess how her portrayal of the heroine might have developed. However, a comparison between Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon indicates a progress from the downtrodden governess, Agnes, to the determined Helen, who attempts to alter her situation. Charlotte Brontë on the other hand, did leave behind a sufficient body of work to indicate a steady progress, from Jane Eyre (1847) who, although she demanded spiritual equality with Mr Rochester 'at God's feet'[1], was still prepared to call him 'Master', to Lucy Snowe (1853), who overcomes suffering and pain to achieve spiritual and material independence:

> The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart[2].

She suffers greatly at the loss of Paul Emanuel, but she survives and even flourishes. She does not dwindle into an old maid; the fate so feared by Charlotte's earlier heroine, Caroline Helstone.

Charles Dickens was selected to provide a balance to the female viewpoint because he was possibly the most successful novelist of the period; certainly the most successful male novelist. It is difficult to find in his work any interest in an independent role for women in society. Whilst he was concerned with many important contemporary issues and campaigned for everything from workhouses and sanitation to the state of London's graveyards and 'fallen' women, he seems to visualise the destiny of woman only in terms of the destiny of man. He seems to think it

unsuitable for married women to be concerned with social problems outside their own families. Mrs Jellyby in Bleak House, is shown as being involved with various nebulous and ineffectual charities, while at the same time neglecting her own children. It is the motherly Esther Summerson who takes on the family and guides it. Dickens describes this as 'telescopic philanthropy'. Another 'reformer' in the same novel, Mrs Pardiggle, is described as 'a formidable style of lady, with spectacles, a prominent nose, and a loud voice, who had the effect of wanting a great deal of room'[3]. Esther describes Mrs Pardiggle's children as not merely looking 'weazened and shrivelled - though they were certainly that too', but as looking 'absolutely ferocious with discontent'[4].

The theme of independent womanhood is consistent throughout the writing of these women novelists and this theme of independence takes in other strands, such as the need for women to retain control over their own finances after marriage, and for wider opportunities to be available to single women who have to work in order to support themselves. In many of these novels by women, the heroine experiences a brief period of financial independence: Shirley Keeldar has wealth from the start, but Jane Eyre, Margaret Hale and Helen Huntingdon are all left legacies, which gives them the experience of financial independence before entering marriage. Lucy Snowe is given the even more important opportunity of permanent independence in the form of an establishment which she can run as she chooses. The exceptions, Sylvia Robson, Caroline Helstone and Ruth Hilton, all suffer as a direct result of this lack of financial independence. Sylvia Robson marries Philip Hepburn solely to provide a home for herself and her mother. Caroline Helstone is only saved from embittered spinsterhood because Robert Moore's business is restored by a repeal of the Orders in Council on the 18th of June, 1812 and he is, therefore, able to marry Caroline without a dowry. We are left in no doubt that Robert Moore would have placed his need to finance his business enterprises before his love for Caroline. Ruth Hilton 'falls' to Mr Bellingham mainly because she has been dismissed by Mrs Mason and has not the initiative to seek an alternative. Mary Barton, like Ruth Hilton, is a poor girl, but unlike Ruth, is equipped to support herself; she is a product of the new industrial society where both men and women expect to work. In contrast, none of Dickens's heroines achieves financial independence; in all cases their poverty or affluence is dictated by a man, be he father or benefactor. Esther Summerson, in Bleak House, comes the closest to independence of any of his heroines. While she is still subservient to men, in comparison with Margaret Hale and Lucy Snowe, she is central to the action of the story and, alone of Dickens's

heroines, narrates a substantial part of the story: ~~ten~~ eleven out of the sixty-seven chapters are headed 'Esther's Narrative'. She is portrayed as the balancing factor in the novel. The principal male characters, such as Mr Jarndyce and Richard Carstone, are portrayed as being emotionally damaged by the effects of the endless Chancery case of Jarndyce versus Jarndyce. By marrying Dr Woodcourt, Esther allies herself with a hopeful and positive future, rejecting the destructive past of Chancery.

The wish that women should have wider opportunities to work and support themselves is expressed explicitly through Caroline Helstone and Margaret Hale, and implicitly in all the other novels written by women under discussion in this thesis. Both Caroline and Margaret long to be involved in the male world of commerce and industry; Caroline, condemned to learn the art of 'Belgian' darning from Mademoiselle Hortense, secretly wishes that:

> Nature had made her a boy instead of a girl, that she might ask Robert to let her be his clerk, and sit with him in the counting-house, instead of sitting with Hortense in the parlour[5].

while Margaret, at one of Mr Thornton's dinner parties, is shown as bored with the company of women:

> She was glad when the gentlemen came, not merely because she caught her father's eye to brighten her sleepiness up; but because she could listen to something larger and grander than the petty interests which the ladies had been talking about. She liked the exultation in the sense of power which these Milton men had[6].

At one point in Shirley, Charlotte Brontë directly addresses the 'Men of England':

> Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids, envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them; or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage, which to celibacy is denied[7].

An important element in Ruth Hilton's redemption is her ability to play a useful part in society as a nurse; it is this new-found independence which gives her the strength to repudiate, not only her former way of life, but also Mr Bellingham himself. Sylvia Robson, on the other hand, never gains control over her own life and dwindles into an ineffective

shadowy figure: 'A pale, sad woman, allays dressed in black'[8] who dies before her daughter grows up.

The third strand in this theme of independence is that of education; if women are to meet the challenge of less protected living, then they require a suitable education; the old skills which fitted them for a confined, domestic life are not enough. Mary Barton, simply by being born into an industrial community, is shown as being more able to meet its challenges than was her pretty, country-born mother. Nearly all the problems in Sylvia Robson's life can be related to her rejection of such basic educational skills as reading and writing. She rejects these as unnecessary for the life on the farm which she intends to live. For this reason she cannot adapt when her father is executed and is unable to conduct the day-to-day business of the farm. Ruth Hilton, at the beginning of Ruth, is shown as a dreamy, rather inadequate girl, unfitted for independence. By the end of the novel, she has become a capable nurse and even the saviour of the community. When Margaret Hale marries Mr Thornton, she enters into a business partnership as well as a life partnership. Shirley Keeldar makes it plain that when she entrusts Louis Moore with her wealth, she is not abdicating: '"I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property; but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my part well"'[9]. Lucy Snowe, because of her education and Paul Emanuel's support initially, is able to go beyond the conventional role for single women, that of governess, and become the proprietor of her own establishment. Even the character of Madame Beck is treated in two ways by Charlotte Brontë: on the one hand, Madame Beck is to be deplored for her cunning and deceit, but on the other hand, she is to be admired for her ability as an astute, successful business woman; this ability profits both her and her students.

While Dickens decries the destructive quality of Louisa Gradgrind's education, he does not appear to consider that women require an education beyond that which equips them to run a household. Esther Summerson is seen as successful because she is able to take over the running of Bleak House for her guardian, Mr Jarndyce, whereas poor Dora Copperfield is presented as an unsuitable partner for David, because she cannot organise her household and therefore makes life uncomfortable for her husband. Lucy Manette's principal roles are as nurse to her father, and mother to Charles Darney's children. When affluence returns to the Dorrits, the education which Mr Dorrit purchases for his daughters is shown as worthless. He tells Little Dorrit:

> "It is for your sake that I wish you, under the auspices of Mrs General, to form a - hum - a

> surface. It is for your sake that I wish you to have a - ha - truly refined mind, and (in the striking words of Mrs General) to be ignorant of everything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant"[10].

It is a mark of Amy Dorrit's virtue that she rejects this form of education. Dickens, therefore, appears to reject education for women as being, at best, unnecessary and, at worst, destructive. It is, therefore, ironic that it should be Dickens who gives to Bella Wilfer in Our Mutual Friend, the sentiment, later to be used by Henrik Ibsen as the title of a play, which has become a metaphor for the feminist movement, '"I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house"'[11].

More selectively, in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Anne Brontë discusses the need for women to have some escape from a marriage which has become intolerable. Helen Huntingdon is portrayed as a determined woman who rebels against a system of upbringing which gives men and women different moral values. In Ruth, Mrs Gaskell takes another emotive subject: that of the 'fallen woman'. She suggests that this might not be due so much to natural vice and excessive sexual desires, which was a commonly held view, but rather to the lack of other means of support. Ruth goes with Mr Bellingham because she is not equipped for independence and does not know what else to do when her employer, Mrs Mason, dismisses her. Esther, in Mary Barton, becomes a prostitute because her soldier lover has left her and she needs medicine for her sick child. Mrs Gaskell suggests, therefore, an economic reason and this is borne out by a survey, carried out in 1857, by Dr William Acton: Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Garrison Towns. Although it must be acknowledged that Mrs Gaskell compromises over the extent of Ruth's fall, since she never actually takes to the streets, it must still be recognised as a very daring departure for a minister's wife to make a 'fallen woman' the heroine of one of her novels. It also shows a degree of partnership in the Gaskells' marriage in that her husband agreed to the writing and publication of a novel on such a subject.

In order to develop this theme of female independence, the novels have been grouped into chapters according to the strength and centrality of this theme and the response of the heroines to the challenges which it represents.

In Chapter Two, The Romantic Heroine, the novels have been selected because their heroines represent the transition to a new type of heroine from an earlier tradition of a passive heroine on whose behalf the male characters, usually the hero, took action, and whose sphere of

responsibility was confined to the home. This new heroine is portrayed as capable of initiating action and aspiring to a degree of independence. Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre is, without doubt, the prototype for this new heroine. She revels in conflict and is unwilling to compromise either on her moral standards, or on the question of love; she rejects St John Rivers's proposal of a partnership of service, but at the same time is prepared to accept Mr Rochester as her 'master'. 'Reader, I married him'[12], perhaps sums up this attitude; on the one hand it indicates tranquil acceptance of marriage as Jane's true destiny, but on the other, it emphasises that it is Jane who marries Mr Rochester; having chosen to leave him rather than accept anything less than marriage, she has chosen to return. Mrs Gaskell's Sylvia, while more firmly in the earlier tradition of the passive heroine, also acts as a warning that the woman who does not fit herself for change and independence may well end up trapped, rather than fulfilled, by marriage. Mrs Gaskell draws a picture of two wasted lives, in that both Sylvia and Philip suffer because of this marriage of convenience. Although both Jane Eyre and Sylvia's Lovers are set back a little from the period in which they were written, they are not, like A Tale of Two Cities, true historical novels. It is more possible to accept Lucy Manette in a historical setting, since she belongs entirely to an earlier tradition and represents a return by Dickens to an earlier and more simplistic characterisation. Her fair, almost angelic presence, is all that is needed to stimulate the hero into acts of self-sacrifice and devotion. She is entirely dependent upon the male characters for support and advice; at no point does she initiate action.

In Chapter Three, The Heroine of the Industrial Novel, the heroine is considered within the context of the new industrial society of the Midlands and the North. This new society is portrayed as presenting both challenges and opportunities and the heroine can be measured by her ability to respond to these. In Mary Barton, Mrs Gaskell creates a rather unusual heroine in that she is working-class, although in the same way as Dickens with Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend, Mrs Gaskell gives her refinement of manner and speech which make her unlike the other working-class girls in her novels. She was born into an industrial society and both her parents are mill-hands. Mary is beautiful and her central dilemma is whether to use this beauty to marry the mill-owner's son, Harry Carson, and thus move herself into the affluent middle class, or to marry Jem Wilson, a young man of her own class, but representing a new type of factory worker: not just a hand but a skilled engineer. It is only when Jem is unjustly accused of killing Harry Carson that Mary

initiates action; she traces a key witness to Liverpool and then stands up in court to give evidence on Jem's behalf. She is shown as going through this ordeal mainly on her own, without support from a man. In the end, Mary and Jem reject even this new society for Canada, with the implication that here is a society, yet to be shaped, where Jem and Mary will not be the underlings. In Shirley, Charlotte Brontë has two heroines: Shirley Keeldar who has the temporary freedom of being a wealthy heiress, and Caroline Helstone who is totally dependent upon her uncle and is, therefore, without any freedom. Shirley is aware that she will surrender her financial freedom upon marriage and the choice of a husband is therefore vital to her happiness. Finally, she chooses, not the Napoleonic Robert Moore, but his brother Louis, who holds the little-valued position of private tutor. She thus rejects the accepted role of the heiress whose fortune can mend a husband's fortune, or be wasted by him. Caroline, in marrying Robert Moore is allowed to fulfil the longings expressed throughout the book of having a part in the world of commerce and industry; the counting-house rather than the parlour. In contrast, Louisa Gradgrind in Hard Times, is completely overwhelmed by male influence; her father distorts her childhood, by his system of education which discounts creativity and imagination, and her young womanhood by forcing her into marriage with Mr Bounderby, a marriage so empty and repellent to her that she accepts the attentions of the worthless Mr Harthouse. Dickens portrays her life, like her mother's to some extent, as barren, physically and emotionally. She lacks the vitality to act on her own behalf. This suggests that, for Dickens, the new industrial society was a negative rather than a positive force.

In Chapter Four, The Heroine Rejected by Society, the heroine is considered in terms of not being accepted by society, either as a result of her own actions or those of others. The heroine is forced into independence, rather than seeking it. To some extent, she is shown as being 'punished' by society. Finally, however, she is seen as being accepted back within it, usually as a result of her own intiatives. The most positive of these characters is Helen Huntingdon, in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. The novel opens with her living as a widow with her small son, under the assumed name of Mrs Graham. The story is principally narrated by the hero, Gilbert Markham, but because of the obvious limitations of this choice of narrator, at one point in the story, Helen's past history is told to the hero, using 'a thick album or manuscript volume', which she hands to Gilbert. This records, in a series of diary entries, her disastrous marriage to Mr Huntingdon. She is shown as being guilty of youthful folly by entering into the marriage against the wishes

of her aunt and discounting the evidence which she already has of his unsuitability. She finally takes the momentous step of leaving him because he is corrupting her young son. Helen then is shown both as traditional young heroine and daring revolutionary: in leaving her husband, she takes responsibility for herself *and* her child. This can be compared with Mrs Pryor, in Shirley, who also finds it necessary to leave her husband, but in so doing, loses control over her daughter, Caroline Helstone. Both Mrs Pryor and Caroline are only made 'well' when they are united once again. It is significant that Helen is not successful in her attempt to support herself by means of her painting; she requires the help of her brother and of Gilbert Markham. The novel ends with her inheriting a second fortune and entering into a second marriage with Gilbert and therefore willingly surrendering her independence once again; the implication being that she will be safe with Gilbert. In Amy Dorrit, Dickens presents us with a more complex and subtle heroine than we have seen in his earlier novels. Amy does some sewing to support her brothers and sisters; she assumes the role of parent because her father has been proved inadequate to fill this role. It is ironic that he is known as 'The father of the Marshalsea', when he is unable to be a father to his own family. Physically, Amy is almost insignificant. When Arthur Clennam questions Mrs Flintwinch about her, she replies: '"Oh! She? Little Dorrit? *She's* nothing; she's a whim of - hers"'[13]. Emotionally, Little Dorrit is perhaps the most independent of Dickens's heroines. If she does not respond to the challenges of a new society, this is because she has been held back by the effect of the Marshalsea and what it represents. She is unable to save either her father, or her brother and sister, from the effects of this prison existence on their characters; in affluence, they only make new prisons for themselves. Her one success is Arthur Clennam; it is Amy who 'lovingly closed his eyes upon the Marshalsea and all its blighted fruits'[14]. The novel ends with Arthur and Amy going 'quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed'[15]. This suggests an equality in their relationship which has not been apparent in Dickens's earlier novels. Little Dorrit makes the decision for herself to burn the codicil to the will of Gilbert Clennam. As she would inherit a thousand guineas by the conditions of this codicil and she is planning to marry Arthur Clennam, she can be seen as making a decision on his behalf and it is this decision which finally releases them both from the shadow of the Marshalsea. It seems reasonable that this characterisation is Dickens's response to the type of heroine being created by contemporary women writers. However, it is the complexity of the characterisation which makes it inter-

sting rather than any concept of female independence.

In Chapter Five, The Heroine Alone, three heroines are considered who make overt demands for equality and who achieve by their own initiative considerable independence. They appear to seek out such independence rather than having it imposed upon them by circumstances, like the heroines discussed in the previous chapter. Although different, both Margaret Hale and Lucy Snowe are portrayed as particularly strong characters who are able to take responsibility for their own lives. Of the two, Lucy Snowe achieves the most complete material and emotional independence in that, ultimately, she is able to survive without the companionship of Mr Emanuel. Charlotte Brontë allows her neither good looks, nor youth, nor money. The struggle is intense and Lucy is portrayed as suffering what today would be called a nervous breakdown. However, she survives this with added strength. The key to this emotional independence is the love and support of Mr Emanuel; it is this love which frees her from the burden of being unloved. Even when it is indicated that he will not return from his voyage, we are left with the confidence that she will survive; she has achieved true independence. Mrs Gaskell's Margaret Hale never suffers from lack of affection; she is portrayed as beautiful and loved, not only by Mr Lennox and Mr Thornton, but also by ordinary working people, such as Nicholas and Bessy Higgins. Although she was brought up in the South, she is able to adapt and respond to the challenges of the industrial society of the North. She assumes nearly all the traditional male roles including, at one point, actually defending the hero, Mr Thornton, from physical hurt. While she is fascinated by the male world of commerce and industry, she is also able to fulfil the traditional feminine roles of creating an attractive home and ministering to the sick and poor. At the end of the novel, because of a convenient legacy, she is able to restore Mr Thornton's fortune and enter into true partnership with him. Margaret's struggles are less intense emotionally than Lucy Snowe's, but physically, she moves more completely into the new mould than any of the heroines discussed in this thesis. With Esther Summerson, in Bleak House, Dickens presents us with another complex characterisation. While remaining entirely within the confines of domesticity, Esther becomes both mentor and counsellor to that household. For the first time, Dickens places a substantial proportion of the narration into the mouth of a woman. Because of her illegitimacy, she is an outsider and this grants her a clear vision; unlike so many of the characters in Bleak House, the Courts of Chancery hold no fascination for her. This enables her to help both her guardian and others who waste their lives awaiting a judgement. It is

significant that when her guardian, Mr Jarndyce, frees her from her promise to marry him, thus allowing her to marry Dr Allan Woodcourt, he still ties her to the existing domestic situation, by building a second 'Bleak House' for her to preside over, 'a rustic cottage of doll's rooms'[16]. It is as if Dickens found it impossible to grant even this most complex of his heroines full independence from male domination; the ghost of Dame Durden remains. Mr Jarndyce's dictatorship may be a benign one, but it is, nevertheless, a dictatorship.

The women novelists discussed in this thesis offer an interesting commentary both on the social revolution going on in England at the time, and the shadow of 'bloody' revolution cast from the Continent; they advocate both change and stability. While they express the wish for greater financial independence, wider opportunities for employment and a closer involvement with the world outside the drawing room, they are, above all, pragmatists; they accept that it is men who will continue to determine the parameters of their lives. ~~Both~~ Charlotte and Anne Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, are in no doubt as to where their duty lies, the demands of family life must take precedence over their artistic life. As Mrs Gaskell said, quoted more fully earlier in this thesis, Art could only be regarded as a refuge from the 'daily Lilliputian arrows of peddling cares'. They considered it impossible for a woman to 'live' the artistic life in the same way as a man. It was perhaps necessary to be forced out of this mould, as was George Eliot when an affair with a married man necessitated her living abroad, for even such great novelists, as these woman undoubtedly were, to regard themselves primarily as artists.

There is no doubt that they allowed their heroines greater freedom of action than they ever obtained for themselves. However, although Mrs Gaskell continued to balance the demands of her husband and daughters against the demands of her writing, she managed a number of Continental visits without her husband and, shortly before her death, even managed to purchase a retirement home without her husband's prior agreement; this somewhat balances the well-known story of Mr Gaskell pocketing the fee for her first novel. Perhaps Charlotte Brontë's greatest act of self-determination was persuading her father to allow her to marry the Reverend Mr Nicholls.

The influence of Elizabeth Gaskell, Anne and Charlotte Brontë is subtle and difficult to measure in historical terms; it lay solely in their success as novelists. Both men and woman read their books and important contemporary male novelists, such as Dickens and Thackeray, expressed admiration for the quality of their work.

The heroines of these novels were complex and yet ordinary middle class women, often lacking both beauty and money. These heroines were placed at the centre of the action of the novels and moved beyond the purely domestic situation. These women novelists were not, therefore, revolutionaries in the way in which they lived their own lives, but in the ideas which they expressed through their heroines. Central to their thinking was that women should be shown as capable of solving things for themselves, of initiating action and not being wholly dependent upon men. It must, however, be conceded that of the twelve novels discussed in detail in this thesis, eight end in happy marriages; the four which do not are Sylvia's Lovers, Hard Times, Ruth and Villette. In these exceptions to the rule, we find that Sylvia Robson and Louisa Gradgrind have been devitalised and emotionally destroyed by their dependence on the men in the story, be they fathers or husbands. In the case of Ruth Hilton and Lucy Snowe, their destinies are fulfilled by the end of the novel and marriage would be superfluous to their personal salvation. The novelists concede, therefore, that marriage remains the single most important decision of a woman's life, but for the first time demand that women be educated to make this decision and to understand the consequences of entrusting themselves to the wrong man. There is a balance of passion and reason in their writing which demands attention. Dickens was certainly interested in their writing, particularly that of Mrs Gaskell whom he commissioned to write North and South for serial publication. There is certainly a different approach to the heroine in his later novels, such as Bleak House, Little Dorrit and Our Mutual Friend; while never actually advocating an independent role for women, he does at least suggest in his characterisation that such heroines as Esther Summerson and Amy Dorrit had the ability to manage their own lives and even to influence the male characters in a positive way. However, in none of his novels does he show any real discussion taking place between the hero and the heroine. This contrasts strongly with the novels written by women. It is significant that in nearly all the novels by women under discussion, there are long sections devoted to discussion between the hero and heroine, covering moral and ethical themes. Mr Rochester debates with Jane Eyre on a wide variety of topics; Shirley Keeldar discusses moral issues, including the balance of power within marriage, with Louis Moore, while Caroline Helstone suffers acute frustration from being unable to discuss business matters with Robert Moore. Helen Huntingdon scandalises Gilbert Markham's mother by speculating on the trouble caused by not bringing up boys and girls to the same moral standard. Paul Emanual spends considerable time discussing ethical questions with Lucy Snowe, including the truth of Roman Catholi-

cism; it is significant that, at the end of the novel, he acknowledges her right to retain her Anglican faith:

> "Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for 'Lucy'"[17].

Perhaps, above all, these women novelists wanted men to recognise that they had minds of similar quality to the male and were able to discuss abstract questions which went beyond the domestic and frivolous.

The influence of these women novelists was significant because it was not strident. There can be little doubt that they changed the concept of the heroine and for the first time gave her not only a form but a mind and, most certainly, a *will* of her own.

Notes on Chapter VI

1 Jane Eyre, p.281.

2 Villette, p.449.

3 Bleak House, p.151.

4 Bleak House, p.151.

5 Shirley, p.77.

6 North and South, p.217.

7 Shirley, p.392.

8 Sylvia's Lovers, p.502.

9 Shirley, p.624.

10 Little Dorrit, p.533.

11 Our Mutual Friend, p.746.

12 Jane Eyre, p.474.

13 Little Dorrit, p.80.

14 Little Dorrit, p.895.

15 Little Dorrit, p.895.

16 Bleak House, p.912.

17 Villette, p.450.

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