Mrs. Gaskell's Industrial Novels: Mary Barton and North and South

Yvette D. Marambaud

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MRS. GASKELL'S INDUSTRIAL NOVELS:
MARY BARTON AND NORTH AND SOUTH

BY

YVETTE D. MARAMBAUD

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
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FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Since 1910, when Mrs. Gaskell's centenary was celebrated, few articles have been written about her. Except for her Life of Charlotte Brontë, she is not really well known in America. Few people read her tales or her short stories, and her novels are quite neglected. Yet her industrial novels, Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855), were very successful when they were first published. Carlyle, Dickens and Maria Edgeworth publicly praised the author of these books. The critic John McVeagh states:

To her contemporaries Mrs. Gaskell seemed a thoroughly modern writer. She began her career as a novelist by dealing with the latest and most pressing social problems of the day, and some of her importance seemed to be that she presented what had never before been shown in fiction.¹

Mary Barton was an immediate success — perhaps in part because of the controversies it aroused.

Mrs. Gaskell was no professional writer. Her family and domestic life claimed her, and her modesty prevented her from gaining any publicity. Just before
she died she insisted that no biography be written about her. This wish was respected by her daughters, who carefully kept her letters and private writings secret. The critic Gerald Sanders tried to give as complete a view as possible of Mrs. Gaskell's life and works, but the first full-length portrait of Mrs. Gaskell and the first complete picture of her novels was drawn less than twenty years ago by Annette B. Hopkins, who was able to examine some manuscripts and family letters that had never been made use of before. In recent years Mrs. Gaskell's works seem to have regained some of their popularity, perhaps mainly for the picture they give us of the early Victorian period.

The fact is that, like Jane Austen, Mrs. Gaskell always wrote about what she knew; her past experiences appear in Mary Barton and in North and South, most fully in the latter. As McVeagh points out,

All her stories tell something of her life and the places in which she lived. Like all the Victorian novelists she used actual people for her originals, though her imagination played a great part.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born in 1810 in Chelsea, in southwest London. Her father had been a minister of the Unitarian Church, but in 1797 he had resigned from the ministry and after a failure
in scientific farming had engaged in private tutoring. Left motherless at the age of thirteen months, little Elizabeth was brought up by her mother's family in Knutsford, a village in the heart of agricultural Cheshire. She spent her childhood in the quiet happiness of country life, until she went to a boarding school in Stratford-upon-Avon to complete her studies. She was "an omnivorous reader," much attached to the works of Cowper, Crabbe and Goldsmith. In 1832, she married William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, the son of a Lancashire manufacturer. Mrs. Gaskell had to give up her beloved village to settle with her husband in Manchester, which was growing rapidly under the effects of the industrial revolution. Elizabeth never liked this sordid, grimy city, which she found gloomy and depressing. But the young couple were happy with the children that were born to them. Annette B. Hopkins writes that

as her children begun to grow out of babyhood, Elizabeth must have often reflected on the contrast between their environment and the simple, cleanly surroundings, the pleasant country scenes in which she herself had been brought up. For love of the country was always stronger and deeper in her than her humanitarianism.

In 1845, the loss of her only son, aged one, was a dreadful blow for Mrs. Gaskell. For weeks she was ill, and obsessed with death. To distract her from
her sorrow, William Gaskell urged his wife to write. As Elizabeth had always been interested in authorship, this suggestion proved an effectual remedy for her breakdown. During the following year she set herself to the writing of *Mary Barton*.

There is, from *Mary Barton* to *North and South*, an evolution not only in Mrs. Gaskell's position as an observer of the problems of industrialism, but also in her literary value as a novelist. This twofold evolution is a feature of all "romans à thèse": the less dominant the purpose is, the more freedom the writer has to develop his literary skill; if, on the contrary, the thesis comes into the foreground, the creation of the characters and the spontaneity of the style are likely to suffer. That is the impression Elizabeth Barrett Browning had when she read *Mary Barton*:

For *Mary Barton* I am a little, little disappointed, do you know.... there is power and truth — she can shake and she can pierce — but I wish half the book away, it is so tedious every now and then; and besides I want more beauty, more air from the universal world — these class books must always be defective as works of art.7

Mrs. Gaskell gradually abandons the "purpose"; *North and South* is her last industrial novel; her other works no longer deal with social difficulties, but mainly with country life. She detaches herself from
the contemporary problems in order to reach a more universal kind of interest. Actually, between *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, she reveals

the gradual emergence of a human interest not tied to time and place. For all their controversial quality, their real center is the protagonists' struggles as individuals to reconcile the complexities of existence, stated in whatever terms. Their value lies in the insistence, made fictionally credible, that arbitrary judgments are without meaning when related to the human situation.

This first industrial novel was obviously a "novel with a purpose," and *North and South* was, in a way, a sequel to *Mary Barton* in the sense that she wrote it to redress the imbalance which she had created in her first work. But in her second novel, as Margaret Ganz points out,

Mrs. Gaskell chose to treat her social theme in a manner which suggests both a decline in her emotional commitment to social justice and an increase in her artistic proficiency. Indeed, in this case, the two phenomena are closely related.

Her last industrial novel is "her last effort to set straight a world which seemed to her out of joint." It is a transition towards her following works, *Sylvia's Lovers*, *Cousin Phillis* (1863), *Wives and Daughters* (1866), which are of a very different kind; they are country novels and comedies of manners, and none of them deals with the social difficulties of her time. Pollard comments on this evolution:
North and South is a didactic work, a "roman à thèse," like Mary Barton, but the thesis is much less dominant.... In North and South Mrs. Gaskell has finally decided that a novel must be, primarily, not about things but about people, not just about people but about persons. Before this novel, she had been interested mainly in individuals as they were affected by social and economic forces. The interest is still important, but she has now found that what one person means to another is the novel's supreme concern. The technical advance in her powers as a novelist went hand in hand in North and South with this new recognition of what her novels must really be about.11

Just as Mary Barton had marked the beginning of Mrs. Gaskell's literary career, North and South marked a step in her evolution as a novelist.
CHAPTER II
INFLUENCES UPON MRS. GASKELL

The evolution between Mrs. Gaskell's industrial novels had several causes. The author's personality underwent some change due to her awareness of the social circumstances of the time and the influence of Carlyle's ideas, which had spread widely in the eighteen-forties. She was also very sensitive to the critics' judgments, and probably had them in mind when she wrote her second industrial novel. Actually this evolution is perhaps less due to a change in Mrs. Gaskell's feelings than to the general trend that influenced the social novel after the "Hungry Forties".

Originally, Mrs. Gaskell did not intend to write a novel with a social purpose. Her first impulse was to write about country life. She explained in her preface that she turned away from this kind of subject because she observed the misery around her in Manchester:

Living in Manchester, but with a deep relish and fond admiration for the country, my first thought was to find a frame-work for my story in some rural scene; and I had already made a little progress in a tale, the period of which was more
than a century ago, and the place on the borders of Yorkshire, when I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided. I had always felt a deep sympathy with the care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men.1

Thus, in *Mary Barton* Mrs. Gaskell became the spokesman of the working class. She gives a realistic picture of the squalid slums in the industrial areas, of the miserable conditions of life of the proletariat in the manufacturing cities, when England was in the full process of its industrial revolution. Gerald Sanders sums up this state most clearly:

Society was in the disorganized condition which resulted from the substitution of machinery for manual labor and the extension of communication and transportation which enlarged the area of factory employment. Manufacturing industries were fast replacing agricultural and other rural industrial activities; and labor saving machinery was fast accumulating wealth for the manufacturers, while it was depriving thousands of workingmen of employment. Because of the decline of agriculture, hordes of rural inhabitants sought the cities in hope of employment, and the cities, ill regulated, overcrowded, and unsanitary, became centers of pestilence and famine. The increase of population greatly depressed wages, and at the same time a protective tariff held prices high. More than this, the fashionable Benthamite philosophy of the time, seconded by the interests of the middle-class electorate, advocated the ultimate application of the law of competition, with neither state supervision nor philanthropic effort to render it less stringent.2
Mrs. Gaskell describes the outward features of this situation — the unpaved, muddy streets, with ill-smelling gutters, bordered with dark, damp, dirty houses:

You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window panes, many of them, were broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the place even at midday. After the account I have given of the state of the street, no one can be surprised that on going into the cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so fetid as almost to knock the two men down. Quickly recovering themselves, as those inured to such things do, they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay, wet brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fireplace was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's lair, and cried in the dark loneliness.

Mrs. Gaskell was aware of the effects of suffering on the individual's character, and Mary Barton portrays the psychological evolution of a "good, steady workman" into an extremist. Too many trials and privations, too much incomprehension and suffering, transform indignation into anger and a well-balanced man into a murderer. As Sanders points out, John Barton changes from "a man of simple and trusting faith with a sensitive and kindly attitude towards his fellowmen, to one whose mind is so warped that he can at last look upon murder itself as an act of justice."
After the death of his wife, and that of his son for want of food, John Barton loses his job. His daughter Mary, who sees him mute and depressed, tries to soothe and comfort him.

Once, when she asked him as he sat, grimed, unshaven, and gaunt, after a day's fasting, over the fire, why he did not get relief from the town, he turned around, with grim wrath; and said, "I don't want money, child! D--n their charity and their money! I want work, and it is my right. I want work!"

While privations have killed his son, John Barton sees the millowners' wealth increase. He desperately tries to discover the causes of this injustice. For some time he thinks that the rulers are responsible for it, and places his trust in workers' movements. But Chartism proves to be ineffective, and John Barton despairs of mankind. He becomes an outcast and is unable to adapt himself to the society in which he lives. In Mrs. Gaskell's mind, he is partly responsible for his own failure. As MoVeagh explains, "despair is unrealistic, therefore condemned." Love and understanding might have saved him. One can excuse John Barton's attitude, but not approve of it. His renunciation makes him lose Mrs. Gaskell's sympathy. Though she pities him, she is too hopeful to accept his pessimistic abandonment. He gradually loses his place as the hero of the novel, and Mary becomes the
main character. At the same time as her father sinks into despair and crime, we witness her evolution from a superficial, childish girl, seduced for a time by the flattering attentions of Mr. Carson, into a responsible woman, knowing where her affections really lie, and conscious of the true values of life. Mary Barton, however, does not appear as a complex character.

As Pollard states,

the heroine's history is one of action rather than of feeling... what she does is more interesting than what she is. She is an actor rather than a character.7

All along the novel runs the reconciliation motif. It is in understanding and compromise that the solution lies. In the end, old Mr. Carson realizes

that a perfect understanding and complete confidence and love might exist between masters and men; that the truth might be recognized that the interests of one were the interests of all, and, as such, required the consideration and deliberation of all; that hence it was most desirable to have educated workers, capable of judging, not mere machines of ignorant men; and to have them bound to their employers by the ties of respect and affection, not by mere money bargains alone; in short, to acknowledge the spirit of Christ as the regulating law between both parties.8

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Gaskell was influenced by Carlyle, as were almost all the novelists of the eighteen-forties. According to Kathleen Tillotson, "All serious novelists were affected by him in some degree, both in ways common to all and individually modified; and it
is an influence not merely upon the content but upon the mood and temper of the novel." This influence could hardly be avoided, for Carlyle was one of the dominant writers in the eighteen-forties, and, as David Masson shows, he enjoyed an enormous popularity:

In and from 1840 [his] name was running like wildfire through the British Islands and through English-speaking America; there was the utmost avidity for his books... especially among the young men; phrases from them were in all young men's mouths and were affecting the public speech.

Kingsley contributed to the propagation of Carlyle's views in Yeast and Alton Locke; as for Mary Barton, it is, according to Kathleen Tillotson, "built on the assumptions of Chartism and Past and Present; John Barton is the very type involved in Sartor."

In fact, the title-page motto of Mary Barton is a quotation from Carlyle:

"How knowest thou," may the distressed Novelist exclaim, "that I, here where I sit, am the Foolishest of existing mortals; that this my Long-ear of a fictitious Biography shall not find one and the other, into whose still longer ears it may be the means, under Providence, of instilling somewhat?" We answer, "None knows, none can certainly know: therefore, write on, worthy Brother, even as thou canst, even as it is given thee."

When Mary Barton was published, Carlyle warmly praised the novel in a letter addressed to its author:

We have read your book here, my wife first and then I; both of us with real pleasure.
A beautiful, cheerfully pious, social, clear and observant character is everywhere recognisable in the writer, which sense is the welcoming sight any writer can show in his books; your field is moreover new, important, full of rich material. The result is a book deserving to take its place far above the ordinary garbage of novels.13

Mary Barton was successful partly because it came at the right hour: 1848 was the year of the revolutions all over Europe. Before Mary Barton, the social novel had not yet won real popularity and prestige. Mrs. Trollope, the mother of Anthony Trollope, attempted to give a faithful picture of the society of the early nineteenth century, but she was very vague. Mrs. Tonna, also a social novelist of the 1830s and 1840s, was too violent. Disraeli in Sybil was more interested in politics than in workers as individuals. As Miss Hopkins observed,

Mary Barton was the first novel to combine sincerity of purpose, convincing portrayal of character and a largely unprejudiced picture of certain aspects of industrial life. Modern studies on the Industrial Revolution, when placed beside this book, show that Mrs. Gaskell is, on the whole, trustworthy.14

But most of all, Miss Hopkins thinks, the novel bears the mark of the time when it was written:

Mary Barton should be read as a product of this age of transition in which western civilization was gradually turning from an agricultural to an urban basis — perhaps the chief social transformation in human history, before our present age. Though a simple story, it is a
faithful mirror of the wretchedness of the industrial masses — their spiritual unrest, their physical discomfort — a wretchedness born partly of their own ignorance, but more of forces beyond their control and largely unintelligible to them. The author, herself, could have realized but dimly the ultimate meaning of the turmoil of her generation. Yet she was aware of the conflicting currents of political and social thought.\textsuperscript{15}

In fact, the social value of Mrs. Gaskell's first novel is of a most particular kind. Kathleen Tillotson remarked:

> It would be better ... to remove from Mary Barton the old tag of "novel with a purpose," implying social, extra-artistic purpose. It was indeed, more perhaps than any other of the time, a novel with a social effect.\textsuperscript{16}

But that effect was not Mrs. Gaskell's essential aim when she wrote:

> I can not (it is not \textit{will} not) write at all if I ever think of my readers, and what impression I am making on them. "If they don't like me, they must lump me," to use a Lancashire proverb. It is from no despising my readers. I am sure I don't do that, but if I ever let the thought or consciousness of them come between me and my subject I could not write at all.\textsuperscript{17}

When all is said, the social effect of the novel was very strong. Though Mrs. Gaskell does not stand \textit{a priori} against the millowners, the story is told from the workers' point of view. The conservative press denounced the author of \textit{Mary Barton} as being prejudiced in favor of the workers, while, of course, the liberal magazines praised the picture given of
the relationship between masters and men. In the Edinburgh Review, William Rathbone Greg vigorously attacked Mrs. Gaskell's economic position. Her novel, he said,

is pervaded by one fatally false idea which seems to have taken possession of the writer's mind ... that the poor are to look to the rich, and not to themselves, for relief and rescue from their degraded condition and social misery. An impression more utterly erroneous, or more lamentably mischievous, it is difficult to conceive.\(^{18}\)

The occasional adverse criticism of this order is itself a tribute to the power of the novel, and though Mrs. Gaskell disclaimed a knowledge of political economy, the political economists viewed her as an apt pupil and an interesting social novelist. She received many letters representing many shades of opinion.\(^{19}\) Three years earlier, Sybil had met no such wide and warmhearted response, in spite of the fame of its phrase "the two nations" — the rich and the poor. The reason of this different reception by the public is, according to A. Stanton Whitfield, that Mrs. Gaskell's motive "was humane rather than political. In Sybil, Disraeli had provided a book of principles. Mrs. Gaskell's books are studies of characters and scenes."\(^{20}\)

Perhaps Mrs. Gaskell remembered Greg's criticism when she wrote North and South. Of course, Greg himself
was prejudiced, for he was a millowner until 1850. But it must be acknowledged that, as Pollard says, "there is much in North and South to suggest that [Mrs. Gaskell] was trying to redress the balance of the scales which some had felt she had so strongly weighted in one direction in Mary Barton."21 Her second industrial novel still denounces the misery of the working class; but the problems of industrial society are not seen through the workers' eyes only. The difficulties met by the millowners are shown as well as those of their men. The narrator is no longer one of the confronted parties, but an outsider. Margaret Hale's position is very much the same as Mrs. Gaskell's when she came to Manchester. Brought up in the south, she has to go to Milton-Northern where her father — a clergyman turned dissenter, almost like Mrs. Gaskell's father — tutors a young millowner anxious to get some culture. Margaret belongs neither to the class of the masters nor to the proletariat. She is a witness of their relationship, not a participant. Hence a more balanced picture than in Mary Barton. As McVeagh shows, the didactic intention always remains hidden behind the fictional interest:

The demonstration of working-class indignation, the explanation of strikes, the depiction of suffering are here made fictionally credible by the use of Margaret Hale as the central
character. She is involved in the situation as an outsider, and her learning of it is bound up with her growing knowledge of herself. The reader, interested in her as a person, learns through her experiences what Mrs. Gaskell has to tell him. Margaret's questioning of Higgins and his of her both draw out the relevant information and push forward the plot, and there is correspondingly less strain than in Mary Barton between the story's inner pressures and didactic aim.  

The novelist and her social ideas are far less obtrusive in the second book. According to Pollard,  

North and South is both less didactic and less dramatized than Mary Barton. We are much less conscious of the author's own presence. It is more properly dramatic than its predecessor; much more is left to the characters in the book.  

It is not that Mrs. Gaskell's opinions had changed in the years that followed the publication of Mary Barton. North and South, however, appeared as a serial in 1855, and dealt with the years 1853-55. As Louis Cazamian points out,  

the tone of philanthropic literature is no longer the same after 1850. A new timidity had deeply affected the most ardent apostles of interventionism; the imaginative impression left over from the Paris revolution, the vague sentiment that moderation was necessary after such excesses, the fear of awakening an imperfectly extinguished conflagration -- all these more or less consciously directed good will towards prudent solutions. Mrs. Gaskell had not escaped these general influences.  

Besides, the "Hungry Forties" were over; the conditions of life of the working class were a little better, the relations between masters and men less tense.
Sanders explains that, living in Manchester, Mrs. Gaskell saw these ameliorations and consequently felt "that there was less need to write appeals for them. There was need, however, to say something for the long-suffering manufacturers, who for many years had borne the brunt of all attacks made in favor of the operatives." 25

The themes exposed in Mrs. Gaskell's industrial novels obviously bear a resemblance to those developed by Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854) and by Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley* (1849). It is difficult to know exactly the extent of the effect these novels had on Mrs. Gaskell. They cannot have influenced her when she wrote *Mary Barton*, since they were published later; it is even probable that the reverse happened, as Mrs. Gaskell's novel for the first time exposed clearly a trend of thought that was to develop in the following years. *Hard Times* and *Shirley* may however have had a bearing on the writing of *North and South*, although there is no evidence of the degree to which they influenced Mrs. Gaskell. There are obvious connections in the settings of these novels; the three of them deal with the human problems of the eighteen-forties and attack the Benthamite doctrine of utilitarianism. Dickens's characters, however, are very different from
John Thornton or Nicholas Higgins; they appear much more like caricatures. The social criticism is bitter and more ironical on the part of Dickens; despite a common subject-matter, the atmosphere of *Hard Times* is different from that of *North and South*, and the picture presented by Dickens seems more pessimistic. The similarities that appear among the works of Dickens, Charlotte Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell may be explained, not by a direct influence of one writer upon the others, but by the novelists' belonging to the same circle of friends who met frequently, exchanged ideas about the problems of the day, and experienced the same set of social and intellectual influences.
CHAPTER III

SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCES

Mary Barton and North and South are frequently read for the historical picture they give us of the mid-nineteenth century rather than for their literary merits. Their sociological significances are certainly an important aspect of Mrs. Gaskell's industrial novels. The author drew a faithful portrayal of the problems arising from the changes of her times: religious doubt, social and economic transformations, and the necessity of a psychological adaptation. She even attempted to propose a solution to these difficulties. In both novels she asked for understanding and good will, which she considered the only remedy to problems that were not only social or political, but mainly human. North and South, as well as Mary Barton, is a story of change: religious, economic, social and psychological changes.

The matter of religious belief plays an important role, though its treatment is rather vague. Mr. Hale, the country vicar, torn by doubt, decides, for conscience's sake, to leave his ministry. He feels
unable to perform his duties as he should in accordance with his vows:

You would not understand it all, if I told you — my anxiety, for years past, to know whether I had any right to hold my living — my efforts to quench my smouldering doubts by the authority of the Church. Oh! Margaret, how I love the holy church from which I am to be shut out!¹

His doubts are not concerned with religion so much as with religious institutions, as he tells Margaret: "No, no doubts as to religion, not the slightest injury to that."² This idea, however, is developed only insofar as the change in Mr. Hale's situation is necessary to the plot. It is more of a technical device than a philosophical study of religious doubt. Miss Hopkins comments: "What Established tenets he can no longer subscribe to is never made clear; he becomes a Dissenter in the literal, negative sense of the term."³ His leaving his Hampshire village to become a tutor in Milton Northern paves the way for a change of scenery and for the appearance on the stage of John Thornton, the northern self-made man.

Other allusions to religion relate to the atheism of the workers. Nicholas Higgins, the millworker and union leader, represents the religious disbelief of his class. Hardships have turned him away from religion. He explains to Mr. Hale:
As I was a-saying, sir, I reckon yo'd not ha' much belief in yo' if yo' lived here — if yo' d been bred here. I ax your pardon if I use wrong words; but what I mean by belief just now, is a-thinking on sayings and maxims and promises made by folk yo' never saw about the things and the life yo' never saw, nor no one else. Now, yo' say these are true things, and true sayings, and a true life. I just say, where's the proof?

His philosophy of life is obviously one based on firsthand experience of reality, to the exclusion of any metaphysical truth. He is concerned with concrete facts and behavior, and like many of his fellow-citizens at the time and since, he believes only what he sees. He is typical of the positivism of modern man, in that he puts his own reason and sensorial experiences before intuitive experience, which is the basis of faith. Higgins is also keenly aware of the true nature of the religion practised by so many of his contemporaries: those who preached the Gospel of Christianity and personal self-sacrifice were often, in fact, very slow to practice these same precepts, and it is such hypocrisy that he criticizes so bitterly when he refers to those people who profess belief in the Bible and purport to live by Christian principles. He says of them:

Well, I sees these people. Their lives is pretty much open to me. They're real folk. They don't believe i' the Bible — not they. They may say they do, for form's sake. But
Lord, sir, d' ye think their first cry i' th' morning is "What shall I do to get hold on eternal life?" or "What shall I do to fill my purse this blessed day? Where shall I go? What bargains shall I strike?"?

Such an attitude is probably typical of the kind of mistrust and cynicism which dominated the thinking of the working classes towards their social superiors.

Bessy, the daughter of Nicholas Higgins, is representative of another religious trend of her day. She belongs to the strong Protestant tradition, pessimistic in its outlook, and rather reminiscent of the seventeenth-century Jansenist movement in France. She believes she is predestined to damnation and her only means of salvation lies not in her hands but in a sudden release of grace from God. It is an egocentric mysticism; human relationships are neglected in favor of individual revelation. Bessy is representative of those people for whom religion was little more than a comforter, a kind of soporific which helps to bear the problems and hardships of this life by speculation upon a dreamy afterlife. She seems to justify Marx's opinion that religion was the opium of the people. But this sort of religion is far from the right one, in Mrs. Gaskell's opinion.

It is Margaret that expresses Mrs. Gaskell's ideas and attitude. She represents the quest for a
new approach to religion and human relations. In the conditions of life of the North, she emerges as a sort of nineteenth-century apostle; her constant guide is the Bible. Unlike Bessy, she is convinced of the goodness of mankind. Like Mrs. Gaskell and Carlyle, she is an advocate of spiritual values in human life and feelings. This spiritual quality finds its way naturally into her everyday conduct. These are signs of a new charity such as existed among the evangelical nonconformists of the time. Her religion is based on reconciliation, self-sacrifice and mutual tolerance, and thus follows exactly the same trend as her ideas about the social problem. All these religious aspects are nowhere really developed at length, but form an underlying belief of primary importance. As Sanders points out, the theme recurs throughout the novel:

All through North and South runs a religious motif. Belief in Christianity and immortality is discussed frequently by Margaret and Bessie Higgins and Nicholas Higgins. The latter doubted the existence of life after death, but in response Margaret declared her utter faith in the teachings of the New Testament, and to her as to the dying factory girl Revelations held a wonderful promise. Mrs. Gaskell went out of her way to describe a scene in which Margaret first persuades Higgins to visit her father and then has him stay for family prayer, showing the Churchwoman, the Infidel and the Dissenter kneeling together; and at the end of the scene she adds "it did them no harm."6

The economic and social changes are described
with greater precision, mainly through contrasts. The very title of the novel exemplifies this use of parallels and oppositions to stress the upheaval of English society in the middle of the nineteenth century. Mrs. Gaskell had first thought of Margaret Hale as a title, but Dickens suggested North and South, which was much more evocative, and not unlike Disraeli’s Sybilla or the Two Nations. "The contrast that the title implies is fundamental, and Mrs. Gaskell employs that contrast with consummate skill throughout the novel."7 She depicts the landscape of the industrial areas, and that of agricultural England; the dark, grimy slums of Milton and the pretty cottages of Helstone; the ungraciousness of Northerners and the gentleness of Southerners; the born gentlemen and the self-made men; the somewhat paternalistic attitude of the good lady in Hampshire, visiting and helping the poor, and the independence of the people of Lancashire, who do not accept charity: "It contrasts an empty society life with a life of usefulness. It pits Established Doctrine against Dissent, and agnosticism against both."8

On a philosophical level, it presents "the controversy which was at the center of English moral philosophy for more than a century following the
writing of Jeremy Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation.*\(^9\) This conflict was between the Utilitarians and those that Jerome Schneewind calls the "Intuitionists."\(^{10}\) The former believed that inductive evidence was necessary to moral judgment, while the latter protested that no evidence was needed and that we know by intuition what we ought to do. For the Utilitarians the greatest moral problem lies in not knowing what we ought to do; but as soon as we do know what is right, the problem is solved. For the Intuitionists, on the contrary, the difficulty is not to discover how we ought to act; most of the time, we know what is right, but we do not always wish to do it; the problem is to bring ourselves to act accordingly to our knowledge. The Utilitarians gave priority to results over motives, while the Intuitionists accorded a greater place to intentions. The former believed in a certain determinism, the latter adopted more libertarian views and believed in free will. The Utilitarians thought that moral knowledge did not have a motivating force; hence the necessity of sanctions attached to duties. The Intuitionists said that no sanctions were needed, for moral knowledge does give us a sufficient motive for doing what is right. To sum up these oppositions, the
Utilitarian ethics, somewhat impersonal, were adapted to life in a city or large society, while the Intuitionist morality was more personal because it was drawn from life in small community groups, the family circle or little villages. This conflict between two theories, Schneewind observes, appears in *North and South*:

Mrs. Gaskell shows us an Intuitionist conscience without qualms in *North and South*, but she shows us at the same time a world full of problems for it. When Margaret hears that other people would think the lie she told to save her brother quite justifiable, she replies: "What other people may think of the rightness or wrongness is nothing in comparison of my own deep knowledge, my innate conviction that it is wrong." (Ch. XLVI). But Margaret must come to terms with Darkshire and with Mr. Thornton, whose life and views incarnate the Utilitarianism of the industrial North. To his belief in the sufficiency of the cast nexus between man and man is opposed her insistence on a closer personal relationship, and it is in conjunction with the growth of his personal feelings for her that his morality undergoes a change.

The psychological problems arising from the change of English society in the mid-nineteenth century are evoked through the characters of John Thornton and Margaret Hale. Their confronting personalities represent two different attitudes towards a changing world. In *North and South*, the social and economic problems are no longer the main point of the story, as in *Mary Barton*. They become minor
elements, the psychological and dramatic interests being much more important, so that Miss Hopkins could go so far as to write about it: "It is emphatically a story of growth, of the gradual alteration in views and attitudes that takes place in the minds of the two central persons."¹²

Margaret, born in the South, was educated in Hampshire. Though relatively poor, she has had the opportunity to attend a few parties in the London society, and she has the behavior, if not the birth, of a lady. Her pride is aristocratic, and her conception of society is widely different from John Thornton's. Her first reaction is to despise those Northern masters who make money but who are so lacking in culture that they have to engage a tutor, and she declares scornfully: "What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?"¹³

John Thornton is the very picture of the self-made man who has developed with the industrial revolution. Uneducated, born poor, he has worked hard to reach his position. He is not ashamed of his humble origin and does not hide it. His mother even boasts of it, and she cannot understand why her son wants to acquire learning. She associates the notion of
culture with idle, unproductive gentlemen:

Classics may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the country or in colleges, but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of to-day.... Having many interests does not suit the life of a Milton manufacturer. It is, or ought to be, enough for him to have one great desire, and to bring all the purposes of his life to bear on the fulfilment of that.14

John Thornton believes in the possibility of a man to reach a high position through hard work and tenacity: "It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour."15 Consequently, having succeeded through dogged persistence and hard work, Thornton thinks that the poor are responsible for their failure. They are "lazy, self-indulgent, sensual people," and he "looks upon them with contempt for their poorness of character."16 Thornton has the confidence of his age in material progress; he feels the inward strength and the sense of security which developed among some of the early Victorians. Margaret, who has noticed this, likes

the exultation in the sense of power which these Milton men had.... They seemed to defy the old limits of possibility, in a kind of fine intoxication, caused by the recollection of what had been achieved, and what yet should be... there was much to admire in their forgetfulness of themselves and the present, in their
anticipated triumphs over all inanimate matter at some future time, which none of them should live to see.  

Thornton looks upon his role in the industrial development as a kind of mission contributing to the progress of civilization. He is just as proud as Margaret. He despises inherited fortunes and names, but his pride makes him also an aristocratic figure in his own way — perhaps the same kind of aristocrat as those of the Noblesse d'Empire which rose in France at the beginning of that century, and whose members were mostly self-made men of lowly origin.

These two proud personalities clash as soon as they meet, just like the two worlds which they represent. Their opposite conceptions of society can be summed up in a conversation that they have about "men" and "gentlemen." Margaret is talking of a Mr. Morrison:

"He cannot be a gentleman — is he?"
"I am not quite the person to decide on another's gentlemanliness, Miss Hale. I mean, I don't quite understand your application of the word. But I should say that this Morrison is no true man..."
"I suspect my 'gentleman' includes your 'true man'."
"And a great deal more, you would imply. I differ from you. A man is to me a higher and a completer being than a gentleman."
"What do you mean? asked Margaret. We must understand the word differently."
"I take it that 'gentleman' is a term that only
describes a person in his relations to others; but when we speak of him as 'a man', we consider him not merely with regard to his fellowmen, but in relation to himself — to life — to time — to eternity."

When Margaret arrives at Milton, her attitude towards the poor is that of the "good lady" of the South, somewhat patronizing and paternalistic. Gradually it changes to respect for the independent workers who do not accept her pity. Thornton, though not a worker but a manufacturer, is also endowed with this love of independence; he respects the private lives of his men, and his indifference towards them comes from his refusal to intrude into their privacy. He is a defender of the economic doctrine of laissez-faire, and he thinks that everyone should be free to rule his business as he wants. When the conditions of trade with America become such that he needs to lower the wages of his workers, he does not trouble to explain why; and of course the men, who do not know his reasons, get angry and go on strike. Margaret, who does not condemn the lowering of the wages because she understands the cause of it, thinks that the workers should also be acquainted with the facts and explained the reasons of the crisis. For Miss Hopkins, "Thornton is an excellent picture of the industrial autocrat; Margaret's position is very much that of
the Christian Socialist."^{19}

It is only through many conversations and arguments that they reach a common understanding and gain mutual respect. As Pollard points out,

the love of Thornton and Margaret symbolizes both the union of North and South and the completion of their respective individual enlightenments. It is a fitting sign also for the triumph of understanding, humanity and humility.^{20}

Margaret is far from being a mere puppet, as is so often the case in the real "roman à thèse." She has her own personality. Yet she is largely Mrs. Gaskell's spokesman. Through her conversations, both with Higgins, the worker, and Thornton, the millowner, she comes to the conclusion "that there are two sides to the industrial conflict as to any human problem."^{21} She comes to understand rich and poor, masters and men, and thus to find (or so she thinks) a means to reconcile capital and labor, "the two nations." Neither is entirely guiltless nor entirely to blame. As Hugh Walker explains,

the lesson of the book is that the evils of the factory system are due, not to the wickedness of either the one class or the other, but to that absence of human relations between them, which renders mutual comprehension almost impossible and misjudgment almost inevitable.^{22}

With the qualifications that have already been made, *Mary Barton* and *North and South* are "novels with
a purpose." In both books, Mrs. Gaskell's aim was to depict the unsatisfactory relationship between masters and men in a changing society, and above all to find a remedy. But she was no expert on such problems, and as early as 1848 in the preface to *Mary Barton* she had warned her public: "I know nothing of political economy or the theories of trade. I have tried to write truthfully. And if my accounts agree or clash with any system the agreement or disagreement is unintentional."23 In spite of her modesty in this statement, a critic claimed that "she was not entirely ignorant of current economic doctrines. What she does mean here is that her concern is not with theories but with facts."24 Another seconded him and concluded that she was a realist, who "preferred facts to speculation."25 Indeed, Mrs. Gaskell was too sensitive to human individuality to propose elaborate and abstract systems as a remedy to a problem which was not only economic but social, and consequently human. Though her didactic purpose hardly went beyond the duty of Christian charity and mutual sympathy, she stressed with feminine sensibility the psychological aspects of the reaction which had already started against the dogma of economic egoism. She considered the future of man rather than his present, as Josephine Johnston said:
The essence of her philosophy was that she saw the individual potentially. She discarded all the common criteria, such as wealth, position, and religion; she judged man from the standpoint of what he might become, not from the viewpoint of what he was.26

Though there is an evolution in her point of view from *Mary Barton* to *North and South*, the conclusions that Mrs. Gaskell draws are very much alike. She cannot understand why there should exist "this unhappy state of things between those so bound to each other by common interests, as the employers and the employed must ever be."27

For her, the solution does not lie in any political action, but in sincere cooperation: "This co-operation should come through the individual rather than through the mass, and through voluntary acts rather than through parliamentary laws."28 The cooperation achieved by Higgins and Thornton at the end of *North and South* is an instance of the remedy proposed by Mrs. Gaskell. The problem can only be solved on the individual level, through goodwill, mutual understanding and personal acquaintance. Amid the social and economic currents that were then sweeping over England, she felt that each side must concede many things in order to reach some sort of peace and harmony.

This was very far from a systematic solution
indeed, and many people must have been disappointed by such a limited proposition. Mrs. Gaskell did not offer any miraculous remedy, any plan that would solve all the problems at once. Bartho and Dobrée smile at her naïveté: like Kingsley she believed "that all that was needed was a change of heart among the employers and nicely-behaved employees."

Yet this was not naïveté, and Mrs. Gaskell was no mere complacent optimist. She very well knew that the process would be long, and never complete; there would always be people who refused to understand others. She could only try to draw the attention of the public to the necessity of more humane and sympathetic relationships. Miss Hopkins comments that

a deep-rooted tenet in her social philosophy was her belief in the capacity of human beings to rise above their passions and meet on a plane of rational intercourse. She believed that Christian ethics could and should be made to work.

There are in Mrs. Gaskell's works some of the paradoxes typical of the Victorian writers: some accused her of a certain complacency, yet she saw the evils of her time; she was a down-to-earth woman, yet she was optimistic and confident in the future; she was enough of a conformist to accept the frame imposed by her society, yet she wrote her novels
with the aim of encouraging a change in the minds of some people. Mrs. Gaskell was well aware that everything was far from perfect. She looked at her epoch without blinding herself to its defect, but she accepted it. She was too much of a realist to shut herself into an ivory tower, close her eyes and give up the struggle. Though she described sordid misery, social unrest, religious doubt, and the poor adaptation of people to their world in that time of transition, she was no pessimist. In the words of Louis Cazamian,

> When she portrays industrial conflicts (as in *Mary Barton*), or the contrast between the kindly civilization of the agricultural south, and the keen individualism of the north, with its feverish absorption in the progress of machinery (*North and South*), her pages have a virtue of human persuasion, and played a prominent part among the most active suggestions making for the solidarity which was from that time gradually recognized.\(^\text{31}\)

She set her hopes on the possibilities of men and the efficacy of action. She believed that something could and must be done, not through drastic reform or revolution, but through some sort of compromise. In the period of unprecedented social upheaval in which she lived, she tried to adopt both a realistic and an optimistic view of things, and "recommended adaptation and tolerance between human beings as a means of
promoting a stable and happy society." The solution she proposed was that of a woman who, though conscious of the defects of her world, identified herself with it and found a remedy within the framework of society. Her position was similar to that of Charles Kingsley and of those who were called "the Christian idealists."

And yet, as Pollard points out, Mrs. Gaskell was not really an idealist:

[She] cherishes no over-simplification, no sentimental view of the workers. She sees them as individuals, differing as much from each other as the members of any other class of society. They do not automatically qualify for sympathy.

She knew how limited her solution was. She had no illusions as to its extent and was conscious that it would never be fully carried out, for it was based on human nature and on an individual effort to understand and love other people. Like everything that is human, it could not be absolute and systematic.

This seemingly flimsy solution may be considered a weakness in Mrs. Gaskell's social novels. It might be claimed, however, that it is the human aspect of her philosophy which gives her remedy its full value. Some may judge it to be too simple, but there is much truth and much wisdom in its quiet view of social
relations. While carefully avoiding over-sentimentality and sensationalism, she wrote, according to Mrs. Tillotson, "always with the purpose, unconscious perhaps, of promoting sympathy, not sharpening antagonisms; between religions, classes, sexes, generations: on the quiet assumption that to know is to understand, to forgive, and even to respect."
CHAPTER IV
LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

The problem, in all novels with a purpose, is obviously that the artistic aspect of the work might be neglected in favor of the political, social, or moral aim of the writer. Many "romans à thèse" have disappeared from literature when the subjects they treated found solutions, or if they remained, it was as sociological documents rather than as literary creations. Such is not the case with Mrs. Gaskell's industrial novels. *Mary Barton*, and even more *North and South*, present an interest beyond that of historical evidence. Their literary significance was acknowledged by all critics, even those who offered some reservations, like Lord David Cecil. *Mary Barton* is generally considered somewhat inferior to *North and South*, but according to Mrs. Tillotson,

*Mary Barton* was the novel she felt compelled to write, whose instant popularity smoothed her whole subsequent literary career, and the work which set free her powers. Not itself a great novel, it is the first novel of a great novelist.¹
Even in this first novel, the reader can already detect the qualities that developed later in *North and South*. Though the critics do not always agree on the unity or the structure of Mrs. Gaskell's novels, all praise the charm and picturesqueness of her style, which gives her realism a personal touch.

There is in *Mary Barton* a remarkable unity, which does not lie only in the sociological or moral aspects of the novel. According to Mrs. Tillotson, "it has a more complex unity than that of social purpose, a unity rather of theme and tone." Mrs. Gaskell's social passages are always perfectly integrated into the plot or the psychology of her characters. Comparing her technique to that of Dickens or Charlotte Brontë, David Cecil writes that "her books have none of their digressions and irrelevancies; her every episode has its part to play in the development of the plot." Passages that could have been long and tedious descriptions are made essential to the evolution of the characters. They are not elements over-added in order to show at length the evils of the time; they are part of the story.

As Mrs. Tillotson points out,

The grimmest episode in *Mary Barton*, John Barton's visit to the Davenport family, dying of fever in their cellar dwelling, could easily
have been merely documentary and detachable; instead it is made an essential stage in Barton's experience, part of the way of the novel. As often with Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions, it makes its effect by slow persistent accumulation; the reader is enmeshed in its detail before he is aware, and engaged as a complete human being, not a politician or philanthropist. 4

In *North and South* as well, the descriptions of the life in Milton are not superfluous pieces of propaganda. The industrial town is presented to the reader as it appears to Margaret Hale, and her reactions reveal her character. The social picture is interesting, not merely from the historical point of view, but also insofar as it contributes to the psychological evolution of Margaret. The "purpose" of the novel is thus artistically integrated into the general development of the story, and it stands in accordance with the psychology of the characters.

The unity of both novels lies partly in the psychological consistency of the heroes. Mrs. Tillotson writes that *Mary Barton* has the unity of a single character."5 In spite of the title, John Barton is the main protagonist. Though Mary emerges as a more active heroine after the murder and seems to dominate the last chapters of the novel, Mrs. Tillotson shows that her father remains

central both to the mere narrative and to the
theme of class antagonism.... But he is also bigger than the events, even than the clashing social forces which they represent, rebelling against more than society; marked with ... tragic irrationality.... Emphatically, he is not put forward as a type of the working classes.... Nor is his story simply (as some reviewers thought) a moral fable showing why working men turn chartists and assassins; it is the timeless history of how a man full of human kindness is hardened into (and by) hatred and violence.6

John Barton does not merely represent the worker of the eighteen-forties, struggling with his problems; he is a tragic hero, who stands for the much broader theme of man fighting against the universe. He is, as Margaret Ganz writes, "unable of resignation. His tragedy, like that of so many heroes, has its root in his rebellion against fate."7

North and South presents a slightly different psychological unity in that there are two main characters instead of one. John Thornton's evolution is parallel to that of Margaret Hale, though in the opposite direction. Mrs. Gaskell describes this gradual change with great minuteness. She tells the least steps that imperceptibly bring together these two opposite characters. Louis Cazamian considers this psychological evolution the main action of North and South:

The novel certainly is interesting in the picture it gives of the social contrast between the North and the South, but mostly in the psychological
subtlety with which the protagonists are opposed. The moral dilemma presented in the novel has a stern and strong beauty and shows the richness of interior life of some of Mrs. Gaskell's characters.8

For Miss Hopkins, "there is in the adroit, apparently spontaneously effected character interrelations a resemblance to Jane Austen."9 The simultaneous evolution of John and Margaret "could in fact be described as a Victorian Pride and Prejudice."10 But Miriam Allot does not agree with this judgment, and would rather relate Mrs. Gaskell's fiction with the psychological novel of the twentieth century:

North and South is not, as some critics have thought, a Victorian Pride and Prejudice. Instead of looking back to Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy, Margaret and Thornton look forward — as do George Eliot's Felix Holt and Esther Lyon — to the emotional entanglements of a later age, when the pattern of society adds new complications to the relationships between men and women. D. H. Lawrence's contentious lovers are their twentieth-century descendants.11

In fact, these two opinions are perhaps less conflicting than they seem to be at first. The former emphasizes what appears nowadays to be a somewhat conservative view of the psychology of the characters; the latter insists on the germ of a deeper analysis of the intimate relationships between men and women. Both aspects do appear in Mrs. Gaskell's novel, and they are connected with the significant psychological
changes that both Margaret Hale and John Thornton undergo. The interaction of these two characters upon each other is shown in a very consistent way. According to Pollard, the author's awareness of the way in which characters interact and her representation of this interaction marks the greatest advance in Mrs. Gaskell's practice of the craft of fiction in *North and South* as compared with her previous works.12

David Cecil criticizes the psychological value of Mrs. Gaskell's heroes and heroines. He acknowledges that she can draw excellent portraits of young girls; her feminine sensibility enables her to convey life to her heroines with much subtlety. Yet he writes that Mrs. Gaskell is not always successful, even with these. When she leaves her own ground for that of George Eliot and tries to describe an "unusual" girl of serious interests and independent character, like Margaret Hale, the result is only a monument of maidenly priggishness.13

Margaret may appear a little old-fashioned nowadays; maidenly reserve is no longer very much praised as a virtue, and Margaret may be considered a hypocrite by a twentieth-century reader. Yet in the eighteen-fifties she certainly did not appear to be a snob or a prude. She must be set back in the context of her time, and her attitude should not be judged according to modern standards. In spite of
David Cecil's opinion, Margaret does have her own personality; she may be a little stiff in her behavior, but that is not due to any deficiency of the author; it is part of Margaret's character. Proud of her native South, she has a tendency to haughtiness towards Northerners; the daughter of a clergyman, she has been trained to have a serious, moral mind. These features are not imposed upon her by the writer; they are a consequence of her upbringing, even though she may not be a very common type of woman.

In regard to male heroes, David Cecil thinks Mrs. Gaskell unable to create good masculine characters:

Mrs. Gaskell cannot draw a full-length portrait of a man. This is, of course, true up to a point of most women novelists. But of none, not even of Charlotte Brontë, is it so glaringly true as of Mrs. Gaskell. The drawing-room walls hid most of man's life from her; Mrs. Gaskell never had a chance of seeing men as they are with other men, men at their work, men at sport or drinking, or any other specifically masculine recreation.14

This general statement is hardly true in regard to John Barton or John Thornton. The implicit proof of it is that, in certain passages where David Cecil gives examples of masculine characters to whom this reflection applies, nowhere does he mention either Barton or Thornton. John Barton is seen drinking or swearing, he is seen conversing with other men in
trade-unions meetings. As for John Thornton, without being what the critic describes as "a huge, clumsy, hairy creature incapable of understanding those aspects of life which most interested [Mrs. Gaskell],"\textsuperscript{15} he is far from a submissive, effeminate kind of man. Sanders finds him "stern but attractive, not the caveman type, as Charlotte Brontë's heroes were prone to be, yet masculine in every fibre of his being just as Margaret is thoroughly feminine."\textsuperscript{16} Precisely because of the moderation and subtlety with which his personality is drawn, and the avoidance of any extreme features, he is very consistent — probably one of the most convincing of Mrs. Gaskell's masculine characters. David Shusterman expresses his conviction that "except for the appealing figure of Margaret Hale herself Thornton is the most interesting and dominant character in \textit{North and South}."\textsuperscript{17}

There are in \textit{North and South} a number of secondary characters who are drawn less cleverly than John and Margaret. Their defect does not really lie in a lack of consistency in their personality; but they are sometimes mere types, lacking in vividness. Mrs. Hale is too helpless and hardly comes alive, though Sanders says she is "as natural as pen can make her."\textsuperscript{18} As for Fanny Thornton, she is almost
a caricature of the girl who wants to play the lady.
On the contrary, Mrs. Thornton is, according to Miss Hopkins,

an iron woman in an iron milieu, a woman who might have been a caricature, but one who, in spite of an occasional flight into melodramatic rhetoric, still manages to keep human. Beneath her stern exterior there is shyness, and with all her fierce desire for her son's success, she can, in a crisis, be selfless.19

Also, Nicholas Higgins, uneducated, rough, stubborn, but intelligent, is, as Miss Hopkins remarks, "drawn by one who knew the Manchester working men at first hand."20 But however precisely drawn, these minor characters remain in the background, the stress being laid on the changing personalities of John and Margaret. The unity of the novel is thus preserved as far as the psychological aspect is concerned.

On the dramatic level as well, unity is maintained throughout both novels; there is only one main action, even if secondary events occur simultaneously. There is no gratuitous incident; everything contributes to the dénouement; there is no inconsistency between different scenes; all are well inscribed in the development of the story. Though he agrees on these points, David Cecil makes a few objections as to the technical skill of Mrs. Gaskell. The first criticism is that her books are sometimes too long:
She never seems to have realized that a slight inspiration like hers should be embodied in a slight structure, that you cannot paint a life-size portrait in water-colors. In consequence, though her gift for telling a story enables her to keep one interested till the end of the book, it does not always keep one appreciative. We find ourselves unable to respond for hundreds of pages together to a stimulus at once so mild and so monotonous.21

Another drawback, in David Cecil's opinion, is that Mrs. Gaskell, in building the plot of her novels, does not seem to take into account the psychological features of her heroes:

The structure of her stories is, as in Dickens, a framework imagined separately from the characters; not, as in the masterpieces of form, in Adolphe or Persuasion, their inevitable product.22

This may be true of some of Mrs. Gaskell's other novels, but in Mary Barton or North and South the plot and the characters are in perfect agreement. Both are stories of some psychological evolution caused by social changes; this seems to give credence to David Cecil in the sense that the outside events react on the characters instead of the psychology of the protagonists deciding the course of the action. It must be remembered, however, that both novels were written around 1850, while Adolphe was composed in the eighteenth century, and Jane Austen, though she wrote in the early nineteenth century, belongs
in many respects to the preceding century. In the eighteenth century, the individual could still be considered separately from the social and political background of his time, as a small world in himself, who could decide for himself without being influenced by external events. In the mid-nineteenth century, this conception of man had changed. He could no longer be considered separately from his environment, for he was a product of this environment. Whether he wanted it or not, he was influenced by the changes of his century. Instead of determining the course of the action, his personality very often was the result of a series of components of his time.

There is nothing surprising in the idea that transformations in the external world necessitate an internal adaptation on the part of the individual; this problem is very much discussed nowadays, since it is the subject of a recent best-seller, _The Future Shock_, by the sociologist Alvin Toffler. Thus, in this sense, the cause and effect system in Mrs. Gaskell's industrial novels may be considered to be reversed in comparison with Benjamin Constant's or Jane Austen's works. But even thus, the plot and the characters have not been imagined separately. They are intimately linked: the personality of the heroes
is influenced by external events, but the action also springs from their reactions to these events. The degradation of John Barton is a consequence of the hard times he lives in, but it is also the cause of the crime he commits; he is led to despair by circumstances, and despair leads him to become a murderer. In this way the plot and the characters are inscribed in a series of causes and effects, one constantly reacting upon the other.

David Cecil adds that, even considered separately from the characters, the plots of Mrs. Gaskell's novels are not always very good in themselves. "They have the usual Victorian faults: they are often improbable and stagey, relying on coincidence and unexpected strokes of fortune." There is no doubt that the action of Mary Barton relies too much on death scenes, for example. Archie Whitfield agrees that we are given the luxury of too many death-bed scenes (Mrs. Barton, the Wilson twins, George Wilson, Davenport, Esther, Alice, and Barton are killed off); Mrs. Gaskell's art was not sufficiently consummate to dispense with them. The same criticism could apply to North and South, in which there occur the death of Mrs. Hale, Bessie Higgins, Mr. Hale, Mr. Bell and Boucher. Pollard, however, comments that "the dangers of sentimentality that so often intrude upon death scenes are, on the
whole, successfully avoided."26

In his Introduction to the Knutsford Edition, Sir Adolphus Ward warmly praised Mrs. Gaskell for the structure of North and South:

The construction of North and South may in my judgment be rightly described as almost faultless. There is not an incident in the story which does not bear upon its progress. There is no dissipation of interest; and the attention of the reader is kept throughout in perfect suspense.27

In fact, there are in North and South a few passages which may appear as strokes of fortune or coincidences: the inheritance from Mr. Bell at the end of the novel comes very opportunely for Margaret; Pollard writes that "by his convenient death Bell is something of a deus ex machina."28 Yet it does not strike the reader as a really unexpected event created by the writer for the necessity of the plot. Mr. Bell was an old friend of Mr. Hale, he was childless, and had fatherly feelings for Margaret; there is nothing surprising in his legacy. If it is a stroke of fortune, it is very cleverly integrated into the story.

Another incident may be a little more difficult to accept. Margaret's brother, Frederick, chased by the police for mutiny, visits his family secretly. Thornton, who sees him kiss Margaret at the station when he leaves, believes him to be her lover. The
episode about Frederick's visit seems to be somehow an overadded element, since nothing really results from it. In Sanders' opinion, "Frederick in reality acts merely a puppet's part, entangling the action for Margaret and Thornton, and is then shunted off with perfect indifference when he has fulfilled his allotted part."\(^{29}\) However, it is not an improbable situation; there is certainly a coincidence in the fact that Thornton mistakes Margaret's brother for her lover, and that she has to lie to him then in order to avoid giving Frederick away; but it is perfectly credible, thanks to the masterful skill with which Mrs. Gaskell deals with the episode. Frederick's visit and Margaret's lie about it lead to two effects: on a psychological level Thornton loses faith in Margaret; on a moral level Mrs. Gaskell considers the effect of lying. She seems to have been much pre-occupied with this problem, which recurs in many other novels: can a lie be justified if its aim is to save a person? Or is it better to tell the truth at any cost? Several pages deal with this dilemma; the chapter is entitled "False and True" and begins with this stanza:

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Truth will fail thee never, never!
Though thy bark be tempest driven,
Though each plank be rent and riven,
Truth will bear thee on for ever!\(^{30}\)
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On the whole, the episode remains well integrated into the plot. In itself it might have been a digression or a coincidence, but here again Mrs. Gaskell's art adapted it perfectly to the story.

In fact, most critics have acknowledged that Mrs. Gaskell's narrative skill was superior to the structure of her novels, and David Cecil admits that the cleverness of her presentation saves some episodes that might otherwise have seemed unexpected in the course of the story.

Mrs. Gaskell's style is better than her form; indeed, it is one of her chief glories. It is not, of course, a great style; it lacks the spare athletic vigor of the best plain stylists, and the magnificence of the best elaborate ones. Moreover, her want of intellectual grasp makes it at times both loose and wordy. But in its way it is as important an agent in her achievement as Thackeray's own. It is the same sort as his; that English, at once pure and colloquial, easy and fastidious, introduced into English by the eighteenth-century essayists. It has all their elegance and consistency, yet it has its own flavor. Mrs. Gaskell's feminine sensibility shows itself as much in her choice of words as in her treatment of her material. Her every page has its happy turn of phrase, and her characteristic flexibility, too.31

The style, even more than the structure of Mrs. Gaskell's novels, contributes to the creation of true-to-life characters and of a coherent and convincing background. Though a few weaknesses may be detected in the building of the plot or in certain minor
characters, they are redeemed by the style, which prevents the general tone of the novel to become too sentimental. Actually, Mrs. Gaskell's prose style is characterized by two main tendencies that might be considered somewhat contradictory: a deep realism, which was one of the writer's aims, and at the same time a picturesque, almost poetic, quality.

Mrs. Gaskell's style bears the mark of her femininity. Like Jane Austen, she is a miniature painter; she has the same simplicity of style as well as the same eye for detail. As David Cecil puts it, "her settings are put before us in the Dutch manner, with a multitude of minute strokes of observation." Mrs. Gaskell can describe a landscape in such a way as to make it easily perceived by the reader's mind. The accumulation of details and the richness and precision of her vocabulary contribute to create this vivid picture. In the first chapter of *Mary Barton*, Mrs. Gaskell introduces her public into the background of the story in an almost cinematographic manner:

Close by [this field] is a deep, clear pond, reflecting in its dark green depths the shadowy trees that bent over it to exclude the sun. The only place where its banks are shelving is on the side next to a rambling farm-yard, belonging to one of those old world, gabled, black and white houses I named above, overlooking the field through which the public footpath leads. The porch of this farm-house
is covered by a rose-tree; and the little garden surrounding it is crowded with a medley of old-fashioned herbs and flowers, planted long ago, when the garden was the only druggist's shop within reach, and allowed to grow in scrambling and wild luxuriance — roses, lavender, sage, balm (for tea), rosemary, pinks, and wall-flowers, onions and jessamine, in most republican and indiscriminate order. This farmhouse and garden are within a hundred yards of the stile of which I spoke, leading from the large pasture field into a smaller one, divided by a hedge of hawthorn and blackthorn; and near this stile, on the further side, there runs a tale that primroses may often be found, and occasionally the blue sweet violet on the grassy hedge bank.33

The "Freen Heys Fields" near Manchester are thus vividly created in front of the reader; colors and shapes are meticulously described, and the reference to herbs and plants even suggests their fragrance. Of course, the main difference from Jane Austen is that it is the countryside Mrs. Gaskell describes here, instead of a drawing-room or the dress of a person. Jane Austen did not develop descriptions of nature as did the nineteenth-century novelists; but like Jane Austen, Mrs. Gaskell paints places and people that were familiar to her, and she shows a remarkable skill in revealing details about them. Freen Heys Fields and the people who meet there seem to be quite real in her mind when she describes them. The precision of the picture reminds us of the way in which Flaubert introduces us into Yonville l'Abbaye,
the village of *Madame Bovary*. And his famous chapter on "Les Comices Agricoles" is not without similarity to Mrs. Gaskell's picture of the lower-class people coming to the Fields on a holiday:

Groups of merry and somewhat loud-talking girls, whose ages might range from twelve to twenty, came by with a buoyant step. They were most of them factory girls, and wore the usual out-of-doors dress of that particular class of maidens; namely, a shawl, which at mid-day or in fine weather was allowed to be merely a shawl, but towards evening, or if the day were chilly, became a sort of Spanish mantilla or Scotch plaid, and was brought over the head and hung loosely down, or was pinned under the chin in no unpicturesque fashion.... There was also numbers of boys, or rather young men, rambling among these fields, ready to bandy jokes with anyone, and particularly ready to enter into conversation with the girls who, however, held themselves aloof, not in shy, but rather in an independent way, assuming an indifferent manner to the noisy wit or obstreperous compliments of the lads. Here and there came a sober, quiet couple, either whispering lovers, or husband and wife, as the case might be; and if the latter, they were seldom encumbered by an infant, carried for the most part by the father, while occasionally even three or four little toddlers had been carried or dragged thus far, in order that the whole family might enjoy the delicious May afternoon together.34

In depicting the girls, the young men, or the couples, Mrs. Gaskell knows how to present the significant details that bring life into her descriptions. It is a widely spread opinion that, though Mrs. Gaskell could write very artistically about the country, she was not so convincing in her pictures of the
industrial world. Yet one of her best descriptions in North and South is that of an angry town during a strike. The heat, the buzzing and the talking, the gatherings — and at the same time the silence of the machines in the mill — all this conveys an impression of uneasiness and oppression. Natural images recur frequently. The crowd is compared to a wave about to destroy everything. The general atmosphere is like that of a storm brewing, with its sudden quiet moments appearing simultaneously with the distant roar approaching. Along with Margaret, the reader gradually discovers that something is amiss in the manufacturing city. One whole passage is built upon increasing evidence of impending violence:

It was too hot to walk very quickly. An August sun beat straight down into the street at three o'clock in the afternoon. Margaret went along without noticing anything very different from usual in the first mile and a half of her journey.... But, by and by, she was struck with an unusual heaving among the mass of people in the crowded road on which she was entering. They did not appear to be moving on, so much as talking, and listening, and buzzing with excitement without much stirring from the spot where they might happen to be.... She had got into Marlborough Street before the full conviction forced itself upon her that there was a restless, oppressive sense of irritation abroad among the people; a thunderous atmosphere, morally as well as physically, around her. From every narrow lane opening out on Marlborough Street came up a low distant roar, as if myriads of fierce indignant voices....
Marlborough Street itself was the focus of all those human eyes, that betrayed intensest interest of various kinds; some fierce with anger, some lowering with relentless threats, some dilated with fear, or imploring entreaty. ... [Margaret] looked round and heard the first long far-off roll of the tempest — saw the first slow-surging wave of the dark crowd come, with its threatening crest, tumble over, and retreat, at the far end of the street, which a moment ago seemed so full of repressed noise, but which now was ominously still.... She went across the yard and up the steps to the house door [of the Thorntons]. There was no near sound — no steam engine at work with beat and pant — no clack of machinery, no mingling and clashing of many sharp voices; but far away, the ominous gathering roar, deep-clamouring.36

In this climactic passage built on Margaret's progressive realization of what is happening in the town, Mrs. Gaskell's art is obviously based on an accumulation of significant details. Sounds are particularly important. The movements of the crowd are also accurately represented. The number of synonyms expressing heat, oppression, roars and "repressed noise" make a feeling of uneasiness come over the reader, just as Margaret, though preoccupied with her dying mother, becomes more and more concerned at the unexpected attitude of the crowd. Many critics condemn Mrs. Gaskell's industrial novels because they think that in them "she writes outside her range"37 and that she should have limited herself to the drawing-room instead of describing the crowds
of industrial England. Yet in this passage it is obvious that Mrs. Gaskell knew what she was depicting. Her description of a menacing crowd has the authenticity of experience. All details are exactly those that have impressed anyone who has witnessed a strike. She probably could not have described it with such vividness without having had a firsthand experience of that kind of social strife.

Mrs. Gaskell's command of detail is often considered a part of her feminine qualities. According to David Cecil, other aspects of her style are also typically feminine:

Taste for instance; the Victorian lady was brought up before all things to be careful not to offend against the canons of good taste. And so apt and dutiful a pupil as Mrs. Gaskell profited to the full by this instruction. She was sometimes weak and often uninspired; she did not know how to be awkward, obtrusive or over-florid. In consequence she can write on the most delicate subjects without jarring on the reader's susceptibility. She can be sweet without silliness, and arch without vulgarity. Over regret for old love, the beauty of helpless innocence, the tenderness of mothers, all the treacherous emotional swamps in which a thousand writers have sunk, overwhelmed in glutinous gush, she passes unscathed. She never, as Dickens does, makes nauseating an effect of simple pathos by dressing it up in all the airs and graces of an elaborate rhetoric. And though like Trollope she is sometimes dull, unlike him she is never commonplace. Her unfailing literary good breeding invests her flattest pages with a sort of gentle distinction.
Mary Barton and North and South might have been mere melodramas if Mrs. Gaskell had given free rein to imagination, clichés and passionate feelings. But her sense of propriety creates a kind of reserve which always sets her stories within the limits of good taste. Though the tone may change from the romantic to the prosaic, from the prosaic to the melancholy, from the melancholy to a touch of humor, it never shocks the reader as being out of place.

On the contrary, David Cecil considers this variety of tone a particular charm in Mrs. Gaskell's prose:

grave and comic, the lyrical and the pathetic, chase each other across her pages, checkering their clear surface with an incessant delightful play of shadow and sunshine.\(^{39}\)

Even in the midst of serious passages putting the emphasis on the workers' unhappy situation, there is always a little touch of humor, as in these words uttered by Mrs. Wilson in Mary Barton:

I say it's Prince Albert as ought to be asked how he'd like his missis to be from home when he comes in, tired and worn, and wanting someone to cheer him; and may-be, her to come in by-and-bye, just as tired and down in th' mouth; and he'd like for her never to be at home to see to th' cleaning of his house, or to keep a bright fire in his grate. Let alone his meals being all hugger-mugger and comfortless. I'd be bound, prince as he is, if his missis served him so, he'd be off to a gin-palace, or summut o' that kind. So why can't he make a law against
poor folks' wives working in factories?  

Though this passage expresses the author's objection to factory work for women, Mrs. Wilson's conviction that the problem could easily be solved if only it were brought close to the royal home is at once absurd and touching in its naïveté. In the same manner, John Barton's description of the fashionable life in London is both amusing and pathetic, while it is also, implicitly, a satirical denunciation of the idle rich.

Well, them undertaker folk are driving a pretty trade in London. Wellnigh every lady we saw in a carriage had hired one of them plumes for the day, and had it piddle nodding on her head. It were th' Queen drawing-room, they said, and th' carriages went bowling along toward her house, some wi' dressed up gentlemen like circus folk in 'em, and rucks of ladies in others. Carriages themselves were great shakes too. Some o' th' gentlemen as couldn't get inside hung on behind, wi' nosegays to smell at, and sticks to keep off folk as might splash their silk-stockings. I wondered why they didn't hire a cab rather than hang on like a whip-behind boy; but I suppose they wished to keep wi' their wives, Darby and Joan like.41

As Louis Cazamian points out, this mixture of naïveté and humor is considered a distinctive feature of the Lancashire people.42 It is a source of pathos, but in the same time it counters acts sentimentality by making the reader smile. It also adds to the liveliness and picturesqueness of the characters.
Besides Mrs. Gaskell's taste and variety of tone, another of her assets is her freshness of outlook.

According to David Cecil,

though Mrs. Gaskell was subtle, she was not sophisticated.... Cloistered like a young girl in her convent of peaceful domesticity, she never lost the young girl's eager-eyed response to the world. Mrs. Gaskell had not a chance to grow blasé. Her mental palate, fed always, as it were, on the fruit and frothing milk of her nursery days, kept a nursery simplicity and gusto. And in consequence her whole picture of life is touched with a particular dewy freshness, shimmers with a vivifying, softening spring light. It does not matter that she had nothing very new to say.... The unsophisticated, whole-hearted way in which she responds to her inspiration enables her successfully to dare the danger of the obvious.... No matter how trite what she wishes to say, she says it as for the first time; and we, caught by the youthful infection of her spirit, listen to it as for the first time too.43

Her description of the Freen Heys Field, mentioned before, is a good example of her freshness of outlook; there is nothing new in it; the landscape she paints is a very common one in England; but she paints it with such simplicity and youthful freshness that it gives a peculiar charm to a type of countryside that people would hardly notice otherwise. As David Cecil observes,

her imagination grows neither orchids nor forest trees; but only old-fashioned garden flowers — pinks and stocks and striped sweet-williams. But stocks and sweet-williams have an effluence of their own — and a delicious one. So has Mrs. Gaskell's imagination — it breathes a charm
at once exquisite and natural, homely and delicate; the charm of an untaught voice, that is always perfectly true and pure, of a child's unconscious grace of movement.

The liveliness and charm of Mrs. Gaskell's prose is due not only to this fresh outlook, rich vocabulary and vivid descriptions; it is also the result of a language perfectly adapted to the personality of each character. In *North and South* for instance, at one time Margaret Hale and Nicholas Higgins discuss the strike (chapter XVII). Through the words they use, we can feel the difference in their general attitude. Higgins's sentences are always exclamative or affirmative, thus suggesting the certainty he has of being right; on the contrary, Margaret seldom makes any statement, and she limits herself to questions or suppositions. Higgins uses military terms ("dying at my post," "my cause," "stand up and fight hard"); his vocabulary is that of conflict, stubborn resistance and violence. On the other hand, Margaret's speech is characterized by the number of adverbs expressing doubt ("may-be," "surely," "it must be"). Her position is that of conciliation. She tries to find explanations for the conflict, and she uses the language of reason:

Ask some of your masters. Surely they will give you a reason for it. It is not merely
an arbitrary decision of theirs, come to without reason.... The state of trade may be such as not to enable them to give you the same remuneration.45

But Higgins will not listen to logical argumentation, and he opposes it through exclamations: "State o' trade! That's just a piece o' masters' humbug! It's rate o' wages I was talking of."46 His angry talk, the lack of logic in his one-sided views, the subjectivity of his approach to the problem (he constantly uses the first person) are in utter contrast with Margaret's precise questions and her clear and reasonable reflections.

The use of dialect holds an important place in North and South as well as in Mary Barton. Mrs. Gaskell avoided making her "low" characters talk in a literary way. The workingmen talk in both novels as they talked in real life in Manchester in the middle of the nineteenth century. Mrs. Gaskell does not limit the characteristics of their language to a few grammatical mistakes or mispronunciations of words, as Smollett or Cowper did. She conscientiously studied the Lancashire speech, with the help of her husband. The latter was also interested in the dialects of common folk and gave lectures on the subject.

In Mary Barton the Lancashire dialect is spoken
by John Barton, George Wilson and Job Legh. Mary Barton also uses it, but to a lesser degree. In her first novel, Mrs. Gaskell had not reached the mastery she acquired later, and sometimes John Barton loses some of his patois because the author feels a special interest in what he is saying and forgets how he should say it; or else there is a climax in the action which makes her neglect the use of dialect. In *North and South* the workers (Higgins, Bessy, and their family and friends) constantly employ Lancashire patois. By that time, Mrs. Gaskell had achieved a real mastery of the Manchester dialect, and her second work does not have these little deficiencies that the reader can sometimes detect in *Mary Barton*.

Mrs. Gaskell really improved her knowledge and handling of dialect between 1848 and 1855. This is obvious if we compare a passage of *Mary Barton* and one of *North and South*.

And what good have they ever done me that I should like them?... If I am sick, do they come and nurse me? If my child lies dying (as poor Tom lay, with his white wan lips quivering, for want of better food than I could give him), does the rich man bring the wine or broth that might save his life? If I am out of work for weeks in the bad times, and winter comes, with black frost and keen east wind, and there is no coal for the grate, and no clothes for the bed, and the thin bones are seen through the ragged clothes, does the rich man share his plenty with me, as he ought to do, if his
religion wasn't a humbug?\textsuperscript{47}

This is familiar speech, but it is not exactly the patois of Lancashire. Mrs. Gaskell is so much interested in the ideas developed by John Barton that she somewhat neglects the form. There are no such inconsistencies in North and South. When Boucher develops the same points as John Barton did before, Mrs. Gaskell no longer lets herself be carried away by the meaning of the passage and remains very faithful to the dialect in which the worker always expresses himself:

It's no use, Higgins. Hoo cannot live long a' this'n. Hoo's just sinking away — not for want o' meat hersel' — but because hoo cannot stand th' sight o' the little ones clemming. Ay, clemming! Five shilling a week may do well enough for thee, wi' but two mouths to fill, and one on 'em a wench who can welly earn her own meat. But it's clemming to us. An' I tell thee plain — if hoo dies, as I'm 'feard hoo will afore we've getten th' five per cent, I'll fling th' money back i' th' master's face, and say — "Be damned to yo'; be damned to th' whole cruel world o' yo'; that could na leave me th' best wife that ever bore childer to a man!" An' look thee, lad, I'll hate thee, and th' whole pack o' th' Union. Ay, an' chase yo' through heaven wi' my hatred — I will, lad! I will — if yo're leading me astray i' this matter.\textsuperscript{48}

Sanders, who devotes a whole chapter of his study of Mrs. Gaskell to her use of dialect, sums up its characteristics thus:

The two most common differences between the
language of the Manchester artisans and the language of literary persons are, first, the change in the pronunciation of words by internal changes, by cutting off syllables at the beginning or at the end of the words, and by running two words together; and secondly, by using words entirely different from those customary in literary English.49

Examples are not lacking in Mary Barton and North and South to illustrate this statement. Among the words which have been contracted or distorted in their pronunciation are the following: "telled"(told), "seed" (seen), "heered"(heard), "we'en"(we han, we have), "they'n"(they han, they have), "shanna"(shall not), "whatten"(what han, what have), "yo'n"(you han, you have), "fra"(from), "yo"(you), "childer"(children), "summat"(somewhat), "hobbut"(nought but, only), "lile" (little), "forrard"(forward), "warn't"(were not), "their'n"(theirs), "I'se"(I is, I am), "reet"(right), "arter"(after), "waur"(worse), etc.... Some words are typical patois terms, totally unknown in standard English: "dree"(bad, cold, hard), "ðwan"(faint), "nesk"(tender), "clemmed"(starved), "gloppened"(frightened, amazed), "knobstick"(strike-breaker), "dark" (blind), "deaved"(made deaf), "ossed"(promised), "pottered"(perplex), "gradely"(good, decent), "peach"(inform), "maggot"(peculiar idea), "gapeseying"(staring like an idiot).
Sanders gives a few examples of terms that are better understood from whole phrases: "in course yo'd ha' known," "I'm obligated to pin my waistcoat," "he was going to set him a part of the way" (to accompany him), "don't go on talking a-that-ns" (in that way). "Ay" is used almost universally by Mrs. Gaskell for "yes" in the workmen's language.

Some of these dialect words were used by Chaucer and Shakespeare in a much more elevated literary context: "clem" (starve), "liefer" (rather), "nesh" (fresh). But they passed from use by educated people while remaining in the speech of the lower classes. Some of the expressions used by Mrs. Gaskell's characters can still be heard nowadays in some remote parts of Lancashire. Sanders, however, writes that "Mrs. Gaskell's service in preserving such expressions was considerable." He declares that, from a philological point of view, Mrs. Gaskell's works are interesting evidence of the state of the English language in the north of England at the time of Queen Victoria:

An examination of the English Dialect Dictionary will show how heavily its editors leaned upon her work and the work of her husband in illustrating Lancashire usage, a fine tribute to the care she exercised in reporting faithfully and precisely the forms of speech represented in her novels.

On a literary plane, Mrs. Gaskell's use of dialect
was something new. Maria Edgeworth had brought some patois interest with her Castle Rackrent, but it had never been treated with much precision. Sanders shows the influence that Mrs. Gaskell's use of dialect had on later novelists:

That Mrs. Gaskell did much to fix the place of dialect in fiction in her day and in subsequent times is perhaps easier to assert than to prove; but a careful study of fiction from the beginning of the century to its close demonstrates that before she wrote, the use of dialectal terms in fiction was at best a haphazard business. It was done to some extent, but on the whole it was done very poorly. Mrs. Gaskell handled a difficult dialect with surprising ability, seeing how little had been done before her time. The dialect poetry of Burns, and of other Scottish and of Irish poets, cannot of course be considered, since they wrote in what was really a living language, with a literary history such as literary English has. Her task was to catch the phrasing of good English words that had been corrupted by the folk speech, and of words that had been preserved in folk speech long after their day in good usage had passed, and to render these faithfully. She did it surprisingly well, and others, seeing how well she had managed, and in consequence how much more life-like her book seemed, followed her example. And to-day the novelist would have a hard time indeed who represented ignorant and illiterate characters as speaking in the English of cultivated persons.... At no time after her day did the use of dialect descend to the low place it occupied before her time.53

Mrs. Gaskell's clever handling of dialect contributes to the vividness of her "low" characters. One can feel that Mrs. Gaskell knew the characters she was describing and was sensitive to their pic-
turesqueness. In a way, she was a poet. Like Goldsmith she sang the charm of the English countryside, the hills, flowers and cottages. But, as David Cecil points out, "unlike Cowper and Goldsmith, she lived after the romantic movement. And in consequence her poetic range extends, as theirs did not, to include the picturesque." She could appreciate the flavor of ballads which were popular among the lower classes. In _Mary Barton_, she frequently quotes the at-once comic and pathetic songs of the Lancashire people, such as "The Oldham Weaver." It is typical of the early-nineteenth-century ballads, and deals with the crisis in the weaving industry around 1815-1820, caused by the invention of the steam-loom. It is written in the Lancashire dialect, and a poetic element certainly springs from the popular simplicity of the lines. It has the charm of ancient folk songs. Mrs. Gaskell herself explains:

The air to which this is sung is a kind of droning recitative, depending much on expression and feeling. To read it, it may, perhaps, seem humorous; but it is that humour which is near akin to pathos, and to those who have seen the distress it describes, it is a powerfully pathetic song.

Picturesque too is Job Legh, Mary Barton's grandfather, an old man belonging to a certain class of men in Manchester, which Mrs. Gaskell describes as unknown
to most people: there are among these weavers men who have an interest in Newton's *Principia* or who are devoted to natural history; "there are botanists among them... there are entomologists..."  

Job Legh, with his "spectacles pushed up so as to rest midway on his forehead," is an unforgettable representative of this kind of man.

He was a little, wiry-looking old man, who moved with a jerking motion, as if his limbs were worked by a string like a child's toy, with dun-coloured hair lying thin and soft at the back and sides of his head; his forehead was so large it seemed to overbalance the rest of his face, which had, indeed, lost its natural contour by the absence of all the teeth. The eyes absolutely gleamed with intelligence; so keen, so observant, you felt as if they were almost wizard-like. Indeed the whole room looked not unlike a wizard's dwelling. Instead of pictures were hung rude wooden frames of impaled insects; the little table was covered with cabalistic books; and besides them lay a case of mysterious instruments, one of which Job Legh was using when his grand-daughter entered.

The world thus created by Mrs. Gaskell is drawn with much realism. It is not, however, the kind of realism that the naturalistic writers tried to achieve at the end of the century. Mrs. Gaskell does not seek sordid details. She does not emphasize the animal instincts in Man. She does not believe in Man being the victim of fate and hostile forces working against him, as the naturalists did. On these points she is
very far away from them, and her outlook on life is the opposite of the pessimism of the naturalists. Yet she does not conceal the misery and distresses of her time. Her novels are based on a close observation of her contemporaries. The accumulation of concrete details about the setting, the way of life of her characters, their various attitudes — everything contributes to the precision of the picture she draws of industrial England in the early Victorian period.

Yet Elizabeth Barrett Browning did not like this realism in the style of *Mary Barton*. She considered it "slovenly and given to a kind of phraseology which would be vulgar even as colloquial English." On the other hand, the critic of the *Prospective Review* wrote that it was "full of life and colour, betraying a quick observant eye" and called the novel "a poem in prose." McVeagh said that *Mary Barton* and *North and South* were "the first serious attempts in literature to present the unadorned realities of the industrial age." And yet in both novels there is this particular charm, and the interest we feel goes far beyond that stimulated by a purely sociological document. *Sybil* and *Alton Locke* were inspired by the same social conditions and the same anxiety about them, but Mrs. Gaskell differs
from Disraeli and Kingsley in the fact that she has no axe to grind, and thus shows a wider impartiality and a more tender humanity. Her two novels were honest, truthful portrayals of some aspects of the Industrial Revolution.

Yet, as Miss Hopkins points out, "to those who have become accustomed to the appalling realism or naturalism in the fiction of the present age, the realism of Elizabeth Gaskell and other Victorian novelists seems almost like romanticism." Miss Hopkins calls it "selective" realism and compares it to the kind of realism that is practised by Thackeray, Jane Austen, Trollope or George Eliot,

the only kind permissible in a period that demanded of the novel that it should have an influence for good and be suitable for reading in the family circle.... Forced to write with this limitation in view, [the early Victorian writer] often became too highly selective, too prone to ignore or to treat vaguely the sordid, the vicious, the indecent. This is especially true in regard to their management of sexual passion; they either blurred or distorted the picture. But sometimes they compensated for this inadequacy by the use of suggestion. Elizabeth Gaskell's realism is selective; it is also suggestive.64

This is true of Mary Barton and of North and South. In both novels passion plays an important part, though more is suggested than actually shown. In Ruth Mrs. Gaskell had gone as far as she dared, and she had the
example of the Brontës, whose novels had been judged so coarse that no woman could be their author. "Mrs. Gaskell," Miss Hopkins says, "understood passion (though she has been accused of being innocent of this emotion), but for the sake of decency she left something to the reader's imagination."\(^{65}\)

Thus again her realism was different from that of the naturalistic writers, such as Zola, whose descriptions were, in David Cecil's opinion, "photographs, not pictures."\(^{66}\) It is quite different with the Victorian novelists, whose works, far from being mere reproductions, are "colored by individuality" and are the outcome of a real "act of creation."\(^{67}\) The landscapes of rural Hampshire or industrial Lancashire described by Mrs. Gaskell differ by more than mere physical traits from the foggy, noisy London of Dickens, or the West End of Thackeray, or the Yorkshire moorland of the Brontës. Though scrupulously faithful to reality, Mrs. Gaskell's picture of England contains something of her own personality. Hence the literary value of her novels: she was able to construct a coherent world and to create heroes with lives of their own. The significance of her work is not only sociological and historical, but also psychological, dramatic and literary.
This technical achievement was indeed Mrs. Gaskell’s essential aim, as appears from a letter that she wrote in 1859 to a young novelist who asked for advice. She explained her conception of the purpose and requisites of a good novel. First of all, it should not be written "merely to introduce certain opinions and thoughts. If so, you had better have condensed them into the shape of an essay." This is not a novel at all. And she added:

The plot must grow, and culminate in a crisis; not a character must be introduced who does not conduce to this growth and progress of events.... Then set to and imagine yourself a spectator and auditor of every scene and event! Work hard at this till it become a reality to you, a thing you have to recollect and describe and report fully and accurately as it struck you, in order that your reader may have it equally before him. Don’t intrude yourself into your description. If you but think eagerly of your story till you see it in action, words, good simple strong words, will come, just as if you saw an accident in the street that impressed you strongly you would describe it forcibly.

Cut your epithets short. Find one, whenever you can, that will do in the place of two. Of two words choose the simplest.68

This concern for plot and style, already apparent in the study of the two novels, is typical of a novelist who, though dealing with a social subject, chose first to entertain the reader and to write, as far as was within her powers, a work of art. In Shiv Kumar’s opinion,
One of the most pleasurable features of Victorian fiction is the refuge that it provides from the precipitate tempo of the modern age. The ideal procedure in reading a novel by Thackeray or Dickens, Kingsley or Mrs. Gaskell, Borrow or Bulwer-Lytton, is to forget about technical analysis and stylistic devices, to spread the reading over several weeks as an intermittent relief from more strenuous tasks, and to enter with imaginative sympathy the author's fully realized world, which is just as vivid as the actual world around us, just as unreasonable in its mixture of triviality and crisis, of absurdity and profundity, just as frustrating in its irreconciled tensions, and which nevertheless in some elusive way is an individual work of art, surviving apart from temporal vicissitudes. After one has finished reading such a novel for the sheer pleasure of the vicarious experience that it provides, one can then look back over its voluminous bulk and recognize the artistic dexterity and the creative insight with which it was construed.69

This is true of Mrs. Gaskell's novels. They can be read as a testimony of the time, but they carry a human interest far beyond their social sphere. Though David Cecil claimed that "both books are primarily sociological pamphlets," and "not living literature,"70 other critics in our time have justifiably upheld the opposite view:

Characteristically, Mrs. Gaskell makes no large claims, advocating only the gradual amelioration of conditions on an individual basis. This avoidance of theoretical solutions to social problems keeps her novels from abstraction and is what makes them still readable when the problems have disappeared.71

In fact, Mrs. Gaskell's "industrial" novels often have to bear the handicap of their label. Like most
social novels of the mid-nineteenth century, they appear too tame to many modern writers who find their effort at compromise almost "hypocritical" — an all too frequent term to qualify the Victorians. And perhaps they have the further handicap of being very much a woman's novels, still less dependent on systems and theories. And yet, partly because they are concerned with individuals, they stand out from the run of "novels with a purpose" — not less truthful than others of their kind, nor less passionate, but more compassionate though impartial. This is what Mrs. Tillotson liked in them:

There is no patronage or condescension towards suffering. The denizens of the "other nation" are neither harrowing victims nor heroic martyrs; they are shown in their natural dignity.72
CHAPTER V

THE CRITICAL STATUS OF MARY BARTON AND NORTH AND SOUTH

Mrs. Gaskell's popularity has varied much according to the times; her own epoch was certainly more favorable to her than the present days. Even among modern critics, opinions differ widely concerning the significance of her industrial novels. It is strange to note also that Mrs. Gaskell's status is different in Europe and in America. While in England and on the Continent Mrs. Gaskell is as famous as Disraeli or Kingsley or even perhaps George Eliot, in America her name is often unknown. Miss Hopkins gives examples of two lists of writers presented in 1901 for "The Book Lovers' Reading Club Hand Book to Accompany the Reading Course entitled The World's Great Women Novelists." One of these lists was established by an Englishwoman, Mrs. Ward, the other by an American lady, Miss Phelps. Miss Hopkins comments that, "without stopping to quarrel with these lists, we may remark the inclusion of Elizabeth Gaskell's name in the English one and the absence in the American." And when any of Mrs. Gaskell's works
are mentioned in the United States, they are generally 
The Life of Charlotte Brontë or Cranford, while in 
England her most popular works are probably Wives and 
Daughters and North and South. These novels were also 
successful in France. Mary Barton was translated into 
French in 1856, as was North and South in 1859. 
Most foreign criticism of Mrs. Gaskell came from France, 
mainly from Forgues, Prosper Mérimée, Emile Montégut 
and Louis Cazamian.

It is difficult to explain the very different 
reactions on the part of the public and critics on both 
sides of the Atlantic. In Europe, Mrs. Gaskell is 
sometimes placed on a level with Jane Austen, Charlotte 
Brontë and George Eliot. Maxwell Gray finds in the 
work of Mrs. Gaskell much of what is best and most 
distinctive in Jane Austen and George Eliot, but he 
thinks she does not have "the unique and almost consuming 
fire and passion of Charlotte Brontë." Yet George 
Eliot herself linked Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth 
Gaskell together as realists:

Two celebrated women whose works have produced 
an extraordinary sensation — the authoress 
of Jane Eyre and the authoress of Mary Barton — 
owe their success to the union of rare yet 
indispensable qualities. They have both given 
imaginative expression to actual experience; 
they have not invented but reproduced; they 
have preferred the truth such as their own 
experience testified, to the vague, false,
conventional notions current in the circulating libraries.\textsuperscript{6}

In a letter dated November 11, 1859, George Eliot again insisted on the common points between the two friends:

There was indeed more affinity between these two remarkable women than might appear on the surface, both rooted in the provinces, both lovers of farms and countryside, both interested in dissenting circles and earnestly concerned with social problems.\textsuperscript{7}

But, for Pollard, the contemporary writer to whom Mrs. Gaskell may most easily be compared is George Eliot herself.

There are obvious differences, but they are mainly differences of degree rather than of kind. George Eliot is a more massive writer, more massive in intellect, in moral group, in psychological understanding, in mastery of the feelings, but we have her own word for the extent to which \textit{Scenes from Clerical Life} and \textit{Adam Bede} were indebted to Mrs. Gaskell's work.\textsuperscript{8}

Mrs. Gaskell's status as a novelist is very differently acknowledged by modern critics. Two examples representative of this disagreement are the conflicting opinions of Lord David Cecil and John McVeagh. In 1934, David Cecil wrote a very harsh criticism of Mrs. Gaskell's industrial novels:

Mrs. Gaskell lived a large part of her life at Manchester, during the first period of the Industrial Revolution. And she was horrified by the bad conditions in which the poor lived, and by the un-Christian spirit that possessed both
employers and employed. She therefore wrote both *Mary Barton* and *North and South* in order to expose these evils and suggest a remedy. It would have been impossible for her, if she had tried, to have found a subject less suited to her talents. It was neither domestic nor pastoral. It gave scope neither to the humorous, the pathetic nor the charming. Further, it entailed an understanding of economics and history wholly outside the range of her Victorian feminine intellect. And the only emotions it could involve were masculine and violent ones. Mrs. Gaskell makes a creditable effort to overcome her natural deficiencies; she fills her pages with scenes of strife and sociological argument, with pitiless employers and ragged starving cotton-spinners—but all in vain. Her employers and spinners are wooden mouthpieces, not flesh-and-blood individuals; her arguments are anthologies of platitude; her riot and strike scenes are her usual melodrama. 9

Such an accusation is the outcome of extreme opinions about Mrs. Gaskell's novels and, as is the case with everything that is extreme, it is partially untrue. There may be some weaknesses in these novels, especially in *Mary Barton*, but David Cecil's judgment is perhaps too hasty and contemptuous to be easily accepted. John McVeagh defends an exactly opposite viewpoint:

Mrs. Gaskell is a writer worthy of study in that her novels reflect the moods and problems of her society, or that part of society which she knew well, with the minimum of distortion or exaggeration; as if it was her aim to portray in fiction precisely what it felt like to live in the England of the early and middle nineteenth century. She avoids the extraordinary, the sensational and the false as a general rule, dealing rather with real problems, ordinary
people, likely situations; her presentation is matter-of-fact, her style straightforward, her conclusions simple and wise. Yet she is not dull. The ordinariness comes from a rigorous self-discipline, not from a barren imagination.... [In her work] are contained the reactions and wise judgments of a quick sensibility to the demands and stresses of her age. In a period noted for the sensational, romantic or satirical excess of its fiction — one thinks, for instance, of Dickens, the Brontës, Thackeray — ... Mrs. Gaskell's chief qualities seem to be the rational sanity of her judgments and the clear realism of her world.10

The modern reader's verdict, anywhere between these two judgments, is bound to be largely subjective and to reflect his own personality and taste.

What is Mrs. Gaskell's position in literature today? H. P. Collins is rather pessimistic about it, and feels that

the mood of the twentieth century is far from favorable to Elizabeth Gaskell, her tone in fiction is unsophisticated and démodé; the style is neither intellectually modulated nor terse and colloquial and it is unlikely that a culture already impatient of convention will ever be attuned to it.11

Certainly Mrs. Gaskell is not the kind of writer that is "fashionable" nowadays. Her novels are too simple, too tame, too conventional for the taste of the modern public. And yet they have that special charm that can still attract readers. Elizabeth Haldane sums up Mrs. Gaskell's position in literature as one of transition,
transition from the story-tellers of old days to the problem-writers of to-day. She is, however truly a Victorian, a portent of what is to come. We cling to her because she is still simple and direct, but the life that followed was to be neither simple nor direct, and so she is read as part of history — but a very important part of it as well as a very delightful one.12

Perhaps this judgment explains the attitude of the twentieth-century public towards Mrs. Gaskell. Some find her works old-fashioned and show a slight contempt, others still appreciate the charm of her simplicity. It is a pity that Mrs. Gaskell's novels are generally read today as "part of history." Even though her industrial novels are interesting from a historical point of view, their literary significance, despite a few weaknesses, deserves to be acknowledged and appreciated by a larger public.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

2 Gerald Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell (New Haven, 1929).
4 Esther Chadwick, Introduction to North and South (London, 1914), p. XIV.
5 Hopkins, p. 29.
6 Ibid., p. 55.
8 McVeagh, p. 24.
10 Sanders, p. 74.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Mrs. Gaskell, Mary Barton (Leipzig, 1869), "Preface", p. vii.
2 Sanders, pp. 20-21.
3 Mary Barton, pp. 57-58.
4 Sanders, p. 27.
5 Mary Barton, p. 114.
6 MoVeagh, p. 65.
7 Pollard, p. 56.
8 Mary Barton, p. 394.
14 Hopkins, p. 71.
15 Ibid., pp. 73-74.
16 Tillotson, p. 222.
21 Pollard, p. 108.
22 McVeagh, pp. 15-16.
23 Pollard, p. 118.
25 Sanders, p. 67.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Mrs. Gaskell, North and South (London, 1914), pp. 29-30.

2 Ibid., p. 29.
3 Hopkins, p. 140.
4 North and South, p. 218.
5 Ibid.
6 Sanders, pp. 72-73.
7 Pollard, p. 110.
8 Hopkins, p. 140.

11 Ibid., p. 41.
12 Hopkins, p. 139.
13 North and South, p. 34.
14 Ibid., pp. 107-108.
15 Ibid., p. 78.
16 Ibid., p. 79.
17 Ibid., p. 157.
18 Ibid., p. 158.
19 Hopkins, p. 141.
20 Pollard, p. 136.
21 McVeagh, p. 16.
24 Hopkins, p. 74.
28 Sanders, p. 66.
30 Hopkins, p. 78.
32 McVeagh, p. 5.
33 Pollard, p. 126.
34 Tillotson, p. 221.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 Tillotson, p. 203.
2 Ibid., p. 211.
5 Ibid., p. 211.
6 Ibid.
7 Ganz, p. 58.
8 Cazamian, pp. 138-139.
9 Hopkins, p. 327.
10 Ibid., p. 139.
12 Pollard, p. 134.
13 Cecil, p. 199.
14 Ibid., p. 195.
15 Ibid.
16 Sanders, p. 69.
18 Sanders, p. 69.
Hopkins, p. 142.
Ibid., p. 143.
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Cecil, p. 216.
Whitfield, p. 119.
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Sir Adolphus Ward, Introduction to the Knutford edition of *North and South*, p. xxiv. Quoted by Sanders, p. 69.
Pollard, p. 118.
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*North and South*, p. 261.
Cecil, p. 217.
Ibid., p. 189.
*Mary Barton*, p. 2.
Ibid., pp. 2-3.
Cecil, p. 221.
*North and South*, pp. 165-166.
Cecil, p. 216.
Ibid., p. 188.
Ibid.
*Mary Barton*, p. 120.
Ibid., pp. 99-100.
42 Benjamin Cazamian, p. 129.
43 Cecil, pp. 192-193.
44 Ibid., p. 194.
45 North and South, p. 129.
46 Ibid.
47 Mary Barton, p. 7.
48 North and South, p. 148.
49 Sanders, p. 146.
50 Ibid., p. 147.
51 Ibid., p. 153.
52 Ibid., p. 155.
53 Ibid., p. 154.
54 Cecil, p. 215.
55 Mary Barton, pp. 32-33.
56 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
57 Ibid., p. 35.
58 Ibid., p. 36.
59 Ibid.
60 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, p. 472.
61 Review of Mary Barton: Prospective Review, V (February 1849), 36-57.
62 McVeagh, p. 3.
63 Hopkins, p. 325.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.

67 Ibid.


70 Cecil, p. 184.

71 McVeagh, p. 21.

72 Tillotson, p. 203.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V


2 Marie Barton, par Mrs. Gaskell; roman anglais traduit par Mlle Morel (Paris, 1856).


4 Paul Emile Daurand, a minor man of letters in the mid-nineteenth century, wrote many articles on English literature under the pen-names of Forgues and Old Nick.


8 Pollard, p. 261.

9 Cecil, p. 221.

10 McVeagh, pp. 1-2.

12 Haldane, p. 310.
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