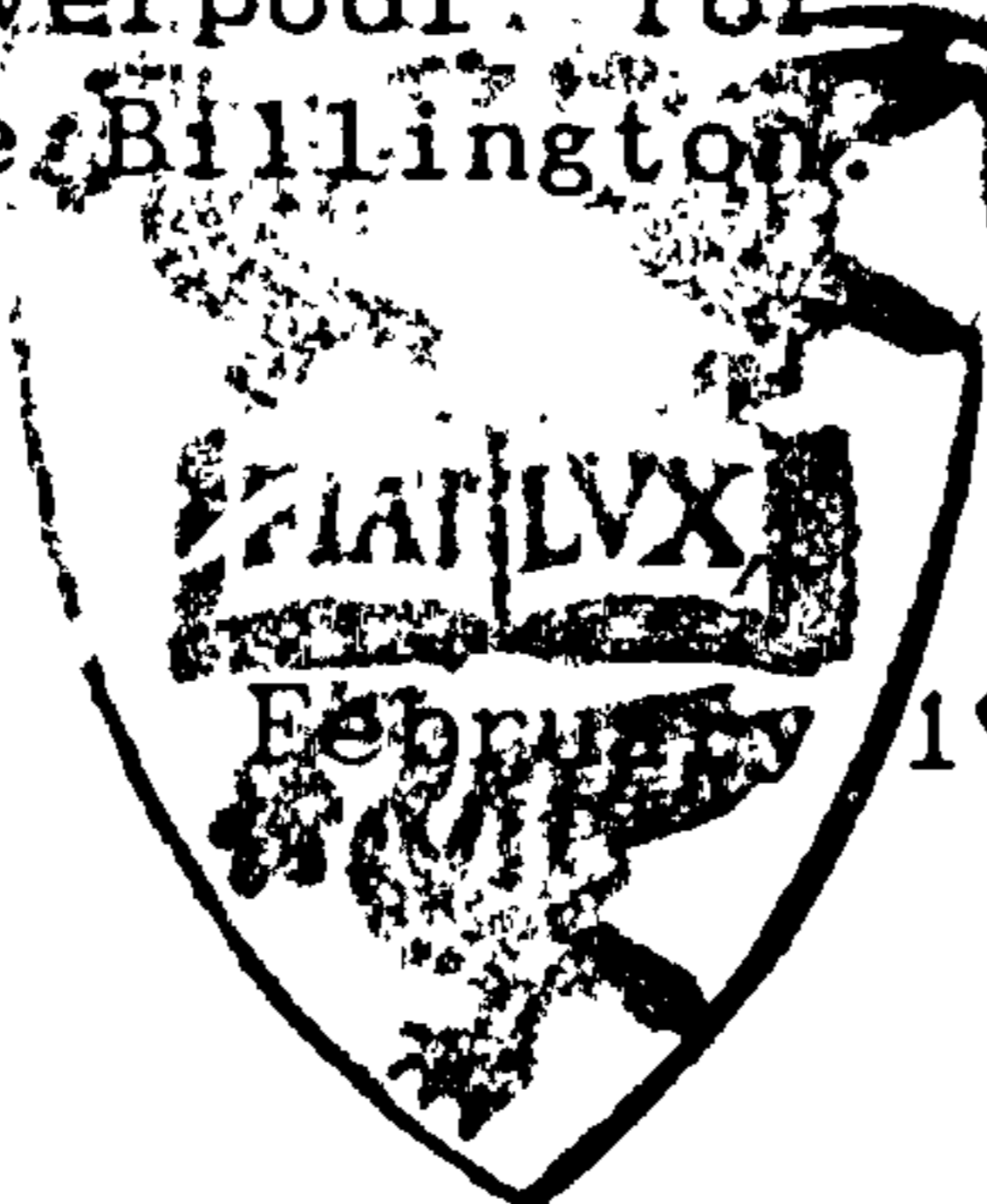


MRS GASKELL: ENGLAND'S TOLSTOY?

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SUMMARY

This thesis is a comparative study of Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy, which also seeks to establish the importance of these writers in relation to secularization in the English Victorian period as a whole. In Chapter One, by way of establishing the primary concerns of the thesis, I explore the relationship between Wives and Daughters and Mrs Gaskell's 'model' for her final work - Maria Edgeworth's Helen. I argue that Helen can be regarded as a paradigm of the fall from eighteenth-century ethical formalism to the more psychological narrative sequence of the nineteenth century. The remainder of the thesis is, broadly speaking, an examination of the consequences for the nineteenth-century novel of the loss of absolute values which we see taking place in Helen, and a study of the differing responses to that loss which the work of Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy, but also that of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, represent.

Chapter Two seeks to give a full account of the realist vision which, in Wives and Daughters, replaces the formalism of Helen. Using the original manuscript of the novel, I seek to establish the characteristic implicitness of Mrs Gaskell's accepting life-vision. In Chapter Three, looking firstly at Mrs Gaskell's 'industrial' novels, Mary Barton and North and South, and secondly at Sylvia's Lovers and Cousin Phillis, I argue that Mrs Gaskell was not a socio-political writer primarily and that her mode of realism is a novelistic version, in fact, of the Ruskinian religious ideal of naturalism in art.

In Chapter Four, where the comparison explicitly begins, I examine the extent to which Anna Karenina finds its equivalent, in England, in Wives and Daughters. Looking at these novels in relation also to George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, I argue that Tolstoyan realism is distinctive for combining the immersed realist mode I describe as characteristic of Mrs Gaskell in Chapters Two and Three and the more explicit mode of life-interrogating realism we associate with George Eliot. I go on to argue in Chapter Five - looking also now at War and Peace - that, in combining in addition the concerns of Thomas Hardy, Tolstoy stands as a single representative of everything that was of significance to nineteenth-century English novelists. Turning finally in Chapter Five to Resurrection, I examine that aspect of Tolstoy which makes him, in many ways, the novelist that the English Victorian period was looking for - namely, his religious quest for the moral and spiritual absolutes which we see Mrs Gaskell leaving tacit or loosening in the shift from Helen to Wives and Daughters. I conclude with a study of the shorter parables of Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy by way of demonstrating that, despite their similarities, these writers in the end represent two opposing responses, world-views and finally theologies in relation to conditions within a fallen, relative world.

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A Note on References

References provided in the footnotes to the thesis are supplemented by more detailed textual information in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis began life as a comparative study whose principal aim was to establish the similarities between the realist visions of Mrs Gaskell and Leo Tolstoy. For it was in the acknowledged greatness of Tolstoy's form of realism - his capacity for 'being the great world he writes about'¹ as John Bayley puts it - that I found the neglected hallmarks of Mrs Gaskell's own genius: a capacity for being as slow as the life she pictures; for sheerly inhabiting the multitudinous forms within life; and for faithfully rendering the dense complexity of life's matter and its amorphous resistance to category or formal solution. By putting the case that Wives and Daughters is the nearest equivalent we have in England to Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, I hoped to demonstrate that Mrs Gaskell's own talent for reproducing, as it seems, the very texture of life itself, was not merely the happy gift of a minor or provincial writer but the outcome of a vision far closer than has been acknowledged to the grand Tolstoyan scale.²

1. John Bayley, Tolstoy and the Novel (London, 1966), p. 33.

2. It was E.M. Forster - one of the few critics who has ever spoken of these two writers in the same breath - who claimed that Mrs Gaskell's works were 'little [provincial] mansions' in comparison with the 'mighty edifices' of Tolstoy, Aspects of the Novel, first published 1927, edited by Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1990), pp. 26-7.

In addition to teasing out these similarities, however, it was part of my original design to use the contrasts between the two writers to help to elicit the basis of Mrs Gaskell's apparently easy acceptance of life's relative form. For there is, of course, no equivalent in Mrs Gaskell to Tolstoy's Levin or the religious seeking element which he stands for in Tolstoy's work. Yet I hoped to show that the absence of a Levin does not amount to a different weighing of the importance of religious matters on Mrs Gaskell's part, but to a difference of theology. By setting the increasingly troubled explicitness of Tolstoy against the implicitness of Mrs Gaskell, I intended to show not only that a form of religious faith lies behind Mrs Gaskell's apparent immersion in the ordinary, but that her novels are the supreme embodiment of that faith.

I have abandoned neither of these original intentions. The nature of Mrs Gaskell's subtly relaxed world-view is established in Chapter One, in contrast with Maria Edgeworth, and demonstrated in relation to the manuscript of Wives and Daughters in Chapter Two. Moreover, the findings of this thesis have repeatedly confirmed my original intuition that we need the example of Tolstoy to begin to recognise and to value the subtle achievements of Mrs Gaskell. Yet as my work on the thesis progressed it became increasingly clear that Tolstoy is a crucial figure not only in relation to Mrs Gaskell herself, but in relation to

the English Victorian period as a whole. For I found the scope of the thesis involuntarily widening - to include the vision of George Eliot in Chapter Four and the vision of Thomas Hardy in Chapter Five - under pressure from the sheer range of Tolstoy himself. For it is just not possible, I discovered, to find a single English equivalent of Tolstoy. Rather, it is as if, in England, Tolstoy is split between a range of nineteenth-century writers, such that only a reading of many Victorian tensions in many Victorian authors can begin to equal his variety and the moral and mortal problems he represents.

Tolstoy, I have come to conclude, is the great missing figure of the English Victorian period, and as such is a crucial addition, I would argue, to any course on Victorian literary studies. For not only does Tolstoy comprise within himself everything that the English nineteenth century was suffering from - the absence of God, the loss of absolute meaning and the consequent 'homelessness', as Lukacs puts it, of the human soul³. In earnestly seeking a religious resolution to these problems and a return to a spiritual absolute, Tolstoy also helps us to see how secular a project Victorian realism essentially was. 'The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God', said Lukacs⁴.

3. Georg Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, first published 1920, translated by Anna Bostock (London, 1971), p. 41.

4. *ibid.* p. 88.

Yet what Tolstoy shows us, sheerly by his absence from the English Victorian age, is that this was an age which had itself abandoned God and which was seeking not a return to the absolute but its replacement in a relative human world. Beside Tolstoy's urgent, dogged quest for religious meaning, even George Eliot's earnest attempt to rescue meaning through the form of the novel begins to seem as fallen and despairing in its way as Hardy's bitter renunciation of any hope of finding meaning. What Tolstoy demonstrates to us, in fact, is that the closest we come in the English nineteenth-century novel to some kind of religious vision within a Godless world is in the immanent realist faith of Mrs Gaskell. I discuss this form of faith in Chapter Three and again in Chapter Five as something which lies deeper than the socio-political concerns of Mrs Gaskell's work - concerns which Gaskell criticism of the last few decades has tended to emphasise⁵. By way of attempting to correct this emphasis, I argue that what lies

5. Mrs Gaskell's reputation as a 'social-problem' novelist was established in the late 1950's and 1960's by the work of such writers as Arnold Kettle, Raymond Williams and John Lucas. (I refer to their work below, Chapter Three.) The recent emphasis upon Mrs Gaskell as a woman writer has tended to confirm rather than challenge the view that she was a socio-political writer primarily. Indeed Kate Flint, in one of the most recent studies of Mrs Gaskell, seeks to show that Mrs Gaskell's social concerns and the fact of her being a woman writer are 'inextricably linked' and concludes that 'the strength of Gaskell's fiction lies in her capacity to dramatize, investigate, and exploit the forces of social change', Elizabeth Gaskell (Plymouth, 1995), pp. 10, 68.

behind Mrs Gaskell's socio-political concerns and behind her whole procedure as a realist novelist, is a faith in the real which is exactly analogous to the religious realism that John Ruskin (one of Mrs Gaskell's favourite writers) stands for in relation to the visual arts.

The concerns of this thesis are finally as much theological, then, as they are literary. Indeed, it is my conclusion that we have in the end to choose between Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy and that the choice is a metaphysical not an aesthetic one. Nevertheless, it is the theology of these writers' literary works that is my interest and not an examination of their beliefs in biographical terms, even as the biographical facts cannot be ignored. For it is by no means irrelevant to this study that Mrs Gaskell's formal religious faith was a settled and lifelong one, where Tolstoy's entire life was one of intense religious struggle. It is of great relevance, in fact, that Mrs Gaskell's Unitarian faith committed her to an essentially practical theology, where Tolstoy characteristically looked beyond this life for some quasi-transcendent religious truth. Yet I emphasise that it is with how these contrasting beliefs offer and express themselves within the form of the realist novel that I am principally concerned in this thesis.

In attempting to give an account of these alternative visions, I have of necessity concentrated largely on the

'epic' forms of these writers. For what Tolstoy and Mrs Gaskell offer to us are life-visions in the most literal sense of that term. These are massive, all-encompassing visions whose sheer breadth demands the large looseness⁶ of the epic form, and it is only by careful study of the longer works that the characteristics of these visions can be brought fully to light. I look more specifically at the shorter works of Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy in the conclusion of the thesis where I use them as images of what has already been established by my study of the lengthier works. And whilst I regret that I have been forced to overlook some of the merits of the shorter works - particularly in the case of Mrs Gaskell whose short stories have until recently been neglected - I hope to have done some justice to Mrs Gaskell's whole oeuvre by seeking to establish in Chapters Two and Three how, in my view, her characteristically implicit mode of writing deserves to be read.

Whilst Mrs Gaskell's relation to Tolstoy is adumbrated in Chapters Two and Three, it is not until Chapter Four that I start to bring the work of the two writers together for comparison. My procedure in this respect relates to the

6. For it was James, of course, who described Tolstoy's novels as 'large, loose baggy monsters': Henry James, Preface to The Tragic Muse, (preface) first published 1907-9, in The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism, edited by Roger Gard (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), p. 515.

subject-matter of my conclusion - namely, the difficulty I describe there of inhabiting these two contrasting authorial minds at one and the same time. I found that it was only by trying thoroughly to enter into the habits and vision of one mind before crossing over, as it were, to the other that I could begin to get a full purchase on each vision and also establish the irresolvable conflict of world-view which these writers present. Once I do begin to hold both writers in mind for the purposes of contrast and comparison, I continue to examine them in relation to one another through to the end of the thesis, bringing in George Eliot as a necessary third term, and Thomas Hardy as a necessary fourth, in Chapters Four and Five respectively.

In establishing the relationships and differences between these various authorial modes and views, I shall at times tax the reader by concentrating closely on fairly long extracts from the novels. The method is unavoidable, since it is often in the move from sentence to sentence or from paragraph to paragraph, I have found, that the underlying metaphysic of the prose discloses itself, and the significance of these small moves can only be recognised within the context of the larger sequences of which they are a part.

I should add as a final preliminary that whilst I have consulted the original Russian throughout my study of Tolstoy, I have included reference to it only where the

Russian differs in some significant way from the translation, or where I wish to reassure the reader, particularly when applying close reading to the prose, that the published translation is accurate. Wherever possible I have used Aylmer and/or Louise Maude's translations, since they have proved to be the most faithful. The Russian edition I have used of the Collected Works of Tolstoy is based on the definitive text of his works, first published in Moscow in 1970.

CHAPTER ONE

HELEN and WIVES AND DAUGHTERS

I want to establish, first of all, the apparently acquiescent form of Mrs Gaskell's writing by means of a contrast. Although it is not possible to say exactly when Mrs Gaskell read Maria Edgeworth's novel, 'there can be no doubt,' as Marilyn Butler says 'that Mrs Gaskell knew Helen'.¹ In this chapter I offer the relationship between Helen and Wives and Daughters as a symptomatic re-writing on Mrs Gaskell's part. I will argue that it is symptomatic of a shift from an old world order to a more fluid world that only a nineteenth-century realist novel can convey. For Helen is like an eighteenth-century novel, or at least a novel committed to the eighteenth-century vision, written in

1. 'According to Lucy Poate Stebbins [A Victorian Album (London, 1946), p. 126], 'Helen was a favourite of Mrs Gaskell's.' See Marilyn Butler, 'The Uniqueness of Cynthia Kirkpatrick: Elizabeth Gaskell's Wives and Daughters and Maria Edgeworth's Helen', Review of English Studies, New Series, Vol. XXIII (Oxford, 1972) 278-90, (p. 282). Maria Edgeworth was a close friend (and correspondent until her death) of Mrs Gaskell's elderly cousin Mary Holland - 'the reputed prototype of "Deborah Jenkyns" [in Cranford]' says Winifred Gerin. 'The model of elegant writing advocated by "Cousin Mary" was to be sought in the works of Maria Edgeworth, with which [Mary Holland's] house was stocked', Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography. (Oxford, 1977), pp. 18-19. Jenny Uglow similarly points out that Maria Edgeworth's novels were read by Mrs Gaskell from her earliest years: see Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories (London, 1993), p. 42.

a nineteenth century increasingly going in a different direction.

I. An Older World: Helen

The possibility of having a good society which would safeguard its members against telling lies is a thought to impress anyone who would naturally wish to be truthful and is not always so.² In particular it would attract anyone who, reading the passage which follows, would like to think that they are like Helen, but fear that in the event they may be more like Cecilia.

'Now I must go,' says Helen as she prepares to face Lady Davenant, Cecilia's mother and her own mentor, and confess the debt that, under Cecilia's encouragement, she has incurred during Lady Davenant's absence:

'Where!' said Cecilia; 'you look as if you had heard a knell that summoned you - what are you going to do?'

'To tell all my follies to Lady Davenant.'

'Tell your follies to nobody but me,' cried Lady Cecilia. 'I have enough of my own to sympathise with you, but do not go and tell them to my mother of all people; she, who has none of her own, how can you expect any mercy?'

2. It is a possibility which William Godwin ponders in Political Justice: 'Did every man ... regard himself as not authorised to conceal any part of his character and conduct, this circumstance alone would prevent millions of actions from being perpetrated, in which we are now induced to engage by the prospect of secrecy and impunity', An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, first published 1793, edited by Isaac Kramnick, third edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), p. 311 ('Of Sincerity').

'I do not; I am content to bear all the blame I so richly deserve, but I know that after she has heard me, she will tell me what I ought to do, she will find out some way of settling it all rightly, and if that can but be, I do not care how much I suffer. So the sooner I go to her the better,' said Helen.

'But you need not be in such a hurry; do not be like the man who said, "Je veux etre l'enfant prodigue, je veux etre l'enfant perdu." L'enfant prodigue, well and good, but why l'enfant perdu?'

'My dear Cecilia, do not play with me - do not stop me,' said Helen anxiously. 'It is serious with me now, and it is as much as I can do - '

Cecilia let her go, but trembled for her, as she looked after her, and saw her stop at her mother's door.³

A Cecilia might say that it is easier to own up if only a person is like Helen. She might be right. For Helen will tell the truth because she cannot do otherwise, where Cecilia would lie because she can. Cecilia is not against truth: telling the truth would even be preferable were it not unbearable. 'How can you expect any mercy?' she asks. Even Cecilia would prefer to admit to breaking the rules, if admitting to what she had done were itself a means of getting away with it or at least rid of it. But to be sure of escape, Cecilia would have to confess to someone more or less like herself - able to forgive her as she forgives herself because capable of that collusive 'sympathy' with her own folly which she herself has with Helen's: 'Tell

3. Maria Edgeworth, Helen, first published 1834, edited by Maggie Gee (London, 1987), p. 217. Hereafter cited as H.

your follies to nobody but me ... I have enough of my own to sympathise with you ... she ... has none.' Only were Cecilia sure of such complicity in her confessor - for that is what 'mercy' really means to Cecilia - could she bear to tell the truth. Lying is what she does in the face of the judgement of others in order to appear better than she really is and more like Helen than she actually is. But what this means (and it is a serious matter for anyone who would prefer not to be Cecilia) is that lying only becomes an option if you are Cecilia: if, that is, the social rules, for the sake of which you lie, are mere external rules that are breakable on the inside.

That is just what they are not for Helen, on whom judgement is made, sentence passed, already, from within: 'I am content to bear all the blame I so richly deserve.' Judgement comes first of all here: the inner feeling of 'content' is itself tutored by her prior sense of desert. It is this moral authority and discipline deep within Helen - deep enough to stand, as it feels, over and above her - which leaves no room for moral manoeuvre or choice:

'Now I must go ... The sooner I go the better'

'How can you expect any mercy?'

'I do not ... It is serious with me now.'

This is the brevity and the promptness that comes on the back of decision, at the point of conclusion. Helen's first word is also her final word, foreclosing on Cecilia's 'You

need not be in such a hurry'. Cecilia's is a procrastinating thought which it is impossible for Helen to have, just as she cannot but think of Cecilia's playing with her as the equivalent of preventing her: - 'do not play with me, do not stop me'. Helen is protected from various thoughts that are not going to be right, because immediately to do what is right is her one thought:

'[Lady Davenant] will tell me what I ought to do, she will find out some way of settling it all rightly, and if that can but be, I do not care how much I suffer.'

This is brave indeed: if it is easier to be Helen, it is easier only because it is austerity itself which rules her, and being less free than Cecilia means that Helen has to be all the more personally courageous. For Helen has to put what is right before her very self. 'Settling it' takes priority over 'I suffer'. Knowing what she 'ought to do' matters more than what Lady Davenant will think of her personally - Lady Davenant who 'of all people' will be the very last to forgive her. What is truly hard on Helen is that she risks Lady Davenant's thinking less of her just because, in caring more for what she 'ought to do' than for what will become of her, she is carrying through the very principle of right with which Lady Davenant will rebuke her once her confession is made:

'Of what avail, Helen, is your good heart - your good intentions, without the power to abide by them?' (H, p. 218)

Helen is good, utterly against her own good, as though for the sake of good itself. How does a person come to be so tough-mindedly and impersonally virtuous? For what is most remarkable is that this is no simple test of Helen's character: it is not character building, for she already possesses the character to do it if she only now realises and confirms it. Somehow Helen has come by such toughness even before she has seen the thing through.

This is a novel in which character can actually be built from the top downwards: where, that is, the very best that a person might be can determine what, in reality, they become. When Lady Davenant confides to Helen the greater respect and love she has conceived for her daughter since Cecilia's marriage, Helen is 'gratified' by being thus 'allowed to sympathise' with the mother:

Helen felt responsible for the confidence granted to her thus upon credit, and a strong ambition was excited in her mind to justify the high opinion her superior friend had formed of her. She determined to become all that she was believed to be; as the flame of a taper suddenly rises towards what is held over it, her spirit mounted to the point to which her friend pointed. (H, p. 27)

Helen wants, literally, to live up to Lady Davenant's high regard. To be seen to deserve the compliment that Lady Davenant has paid her is, for Helen, to become the kind of person that Lady Davenant both would have her and believes her already to be. To 'justify' another's opinion of

oneself, not as some trivially selfish act of currying favour, but as a serious and primary act of becoming - this is a huge idea, indeed an 'ambition'. For becoming a person is, on this model, a formal process, not an accident of experience. What you become is not dependent on what happens to have happened to you; it is not something arbitrarily shaken down from the random events of an individual life: rather it is something that can be formally achieved, top to bottom, outside-in by reciprocally trusting the judgement of someone worthy who also believes in you. 'She determined to become all that she was believed to be.' These are deeds, not words, Lady Davenant might say.⁴ That belief of Lady Davenant's is far more deed than sentiment; the 'credit' is as much trust as loan, expressing as it does the 'confidence' Lady Davenant 'granted' to Helen. It is a confidence which in a less stratified society would be far less meaningful, because far more easy to bestow. The very strict formality of the relationship, the very fact that Lady Davenant is a 'superior friend' who 'allows' Helen to sympathise as if with an equal, makes this an act of belief so powerful as to create in Helen, reflectively, the very qualities which vindicate it.

That one can become a good person through imitation

4. For so Lady Davenant does say (approvingly) to Helen when the latter comes up with a practical plan for repaying the money she owes (H, p. 220).

of the highest examples of human being is an old and classical idea. 'The ancients had this right,' says Saul Bellow's ageing survivor, Mr Sammler, 'Greatness without models? Inconceivable.' We need models of what to be; only let them be good models, says Sammler, and not the debased role-models of modern imitative anarchy:

Make it the object of imitation to reach and release the high qualities. Make peace therefore with intermediacy and representation. But choose higher representations. Otherwise the individual must be the failure he now sees and knows himself to be.⁵

It takes a Mr Sammler to teach the twentieth century what it really means when Helen says, early in the novel, 'It is so delightful to have something to look up to'. How little like falsely sociable diction, how much like an expression of genuine felicity that 'delightful' becomes when weighed against Sammler's despairing sense of not having something worthy to look up to. He knows how pitiful and forsaken is the project of the good life when one has always to set the thing going sheerly from the inside. It is in Helen a happy thing, a great human good, to have one's standards set from outside and above oneself. A person is only pleased to be good in the first place, says Adam Smith, because to be good pleases others:

Virtue is not said to be amiable, or to be

5. Saul Bellow, Mr Sammler's Planet, first published 1970 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1977), p. 149.

meritorious, because it is the object of its own love, or of its own gratitude; but because it excites those sentiments in other men.⁶

Smith writes with all the social rigour of the eighteenth century in contrast to nineteenth-century laissez-faire individualism.

It is this utterly practical system of reflective esteem which goes on working for Helen's good, even when it seems to be working against her - as, for example, in the following passage. For here is Helen alone with her thoughts after she has agreed to receive the compromising D'Aubigny letters in Cecilia's place and let it be believed that they are her own. Cecilia has won Helen's collusion in this deceit by insisting that the truth would be a fatal shock to Lady Davenant's delicate health:

'What am I going to do? To tell a falsehood! That cannot be right; but in the circumstances - yet this is Cecilia's own way of palliating the very fault that her mother so fears in her - that her mother trusted to me to guard her against; and now, already, even before Lady Davenant has left us, I am going to assist Cecilia in deceiving her husband, and on that very dangerous point - Colonel D'Aubigny.' Lady Davenant's foreboding having already been so far accomplished struck Helen fearfully, and her warning voice in the dead silence of

6. Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, first published 1759, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis, 1982), p. 113. Hereafter cited as TMS.

For the influence of Smith's writings in Maria Edgeworth's life in general and for her 'warm' response to The Theory of Moral Sentiments in particular, see Marilyn Butler's Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford, 1972), p. 150.

that night sounded, and her look was upon her so strongly, that she for an instant hid her head to get rid of her image. (H, p. 280)

We know Helen to be in trouble here, just because this time she has to stop so long to think. 'That cannot be right' is not her last word, it does not stay her. Instead she finds herself in the midst of a Cecilia-like thought - 'but in the circumstances - '. To finish the sentence would be to betray Lady Davenant's trust in the deepest possible sense. For to go on, and actually make Cecilia's excuse her own, would be to let herself be made in Cecilia's image instead of in Lady Davenant's. Helen's internal fight is between images of those two. This is the very midst of a serious crisis for Helen and she knows it: 'I am going to assist Cecilia in deceiving her husband'. Helen is as straight with herself here as she is with Cecilia when she says, 'I must go.' But where that was the language of assured moral duty, this is the language of realisation: it is a horrified realisation of how far she has 'already' failed, 'even before' Lady Davenant has left her. When Helen hides her head it is out of fear of Lady Davenant; but it is not the cowardly fear that a Cecilia would feel. For this is a fear borrowed from Lady Davenant's own: 'that is Cecilia's own way of palliating the fault that her mother so fears in her'. This is not merely a mother's fear for her daughter but a more impersonal moral fear, all the more

intensely felt because it cannot become generalised anxiety, but has to remain utterly specific - 'the very fault'. Lady Davenant's anxiety is the inward result of judgement; and it is what Helen comes to feel so deeply for herself, just because thus deeply has she internalized the judge as well as the fault. 'We can never survey our own sentiments, we can never form any judgement concerning them,' says Adam Smith, 'unless we remove ourselves, as it were from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us':

But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them. Whatever judgement we can form concerning them, accordingly, must always bear some secret reference, either to what are, or to what, upon a certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgement of others. (TMS, p. 110)

That 'secret reference' is what condemns Helen; Lady Davenant's external and explicit judgement has become an internal and implicit habit of mind. And it is an internalized habit which remains at the same time an external and not simply subjective view, for it is a reference to a judgement that remains altogether real and out there: 'Her look was upon her, so strongly that she for an instant hid her head to get rid of the image'. It is because Helen's judgement of herself remains an inner equivalent to external judgement and not its replacement in individualized conscience, that she is protected in a deep

sense even when there is no-one to prevent her from doing wrong. 'Absent or present,' says Maria Edgeworth, 'the guardian influence of a superior friend is one of the greatest blessings on earth' (H, p. 182). The novelist speaks in explicit advocacy here of what Helen really exists to defend - a human and moral system wherein the inner life is socially regulated. Such is the mutually reinforcing nature of this system that for so long as Helen does remain a part of it she is its protector as well as its beneficiary. For the same powerful monitor of thought and feeling which Lady Davenant becomes for Helen here is exactly what Helen had once dared to become for Lady Davenant, in order to help preserve the latter's better self in relation to her troublesome daughter. Lady Davenant recalls:

'I remember when you were about nine years old, timid as you usually were, your coming forward, bold as a little lion, to attack me in Cecilia's defence; I forget the particulars, but I recollect that you said I was unjust, and that I did not know Cecilia, and there you were right; so, to reward you, you shall see that now I do her perfect justice, and that I am as fond of her as your heart could wish.' (H, p. 19)

In that instance (when Helen was nine), the two - teacher and pupil - changed places, a shift in position that seems all the more achieved and recognisable just because their positions are, hierarchically, so settled. But it was really the Lady Davenant part of Helen that was being

turned back upon Lady Davenant herself, as she found her own 'guardian influence' coming to her own aid through Helen: 'You said I was unjust ... and there you were right'.

Burke (a thinker who is emphatically quoted by Lady Davenant herself⁷) says that the deployment of agreed human good, shared among all members of a human society, is what a good society can ensure. 'The legislators who framed the ancient republics,' he says, 'knew that they had to do with men':

They had to do with citizens; and they were obliged to study the effects of those habits which are communicated by the circumstances of civil life. They were sensible that the operation of this second nature on the first produced a new combination; and thence arose many diversities amongst men ... which rendered them as it were so many different species of animals.⁸

That moral goodness is a socially acquired 'second nature', the result of habit and practice, is a key Aristotelian idea which is explicitly endorsed in Helen. 'Strength of mind!' exclaims Helen early in the novel, 'I am afraid I have not any.' But Lady Davenant tells her to acquire it:

7. '[General Clarendon] is a little inclined perhaps to obstinacy,' Lady Davenant tells Helen, as she details 'the virtues and defects' of his character; 'but,' she goes on, 'as Burke says, though obstinacy is certainly a vice, it happens that the whole line of the great and masculine virtues, constancy, fidelity, fortitude, magnanimity are closely allied to this disagreeable quality, of which we have so just an abhorrence.' (H, p. 26) This is Burke honouring Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean.

8. Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, first published 1790, edited by Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1986), p. 299.

'Strength of mind, like strength of body, is improved by exercise' (H, p. 31). It is by repeatedly doing a thing that you become it:

Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it ... we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones.⁹

It is as though habit is its own reminder. Strong once, Helen can be strong again, because, having once done a thing, she knows - more, she believes - that she can do it. In this sense it is indeed easier for Helen to be good: for if like Cecilia, you cannot once be brave, then you have not the memory of having been it to come in aid of your being brave the next time.¹⁰

It is because the right principles are reliably embodied in Helen, through habit, that she can reliably hold the memory of Lady Davenant's teachings for Lady Davenant herself. In the same way, when General Clarendon and Beauclerc have quarreled over the use to which Beauclerc wishes to put his fortune, Helen helps the General to see

9. Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, translated by J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1976), pp. 91-2.

10. The notion is also Wordsworth's. 'So feeling comes in aid/ of feeling ... if but once we have been strong.' The Prelude (1850 version) Book 12, lines 269-71. 'Wordsworth's notion of the way his feelings preserve him in wisdom and sanity,' says James K. Chandler, 'is deeply indebted to Burke's habit-based sentiment. Wordsworthian "nature" typically operates according to Burke's dialectic of second nature and not according to the Rousseauist model of nature to which ... it is most often likened', Wordsworth's Second Nature (London, 1984), p. 74.

that his obstinacy, even in toughly sticking to principles, is more defect than virtue in this instance, because it gets in the way of a right practical solution. 'You would yield ... would you not?' Helen asks the General, 'if you could reasonably, honourably ... without injury to your ward's fortune and character?':

'Surely it is for his good only that you are so resolute?'

'Certainly!' He waited with eyes fixed, bending forward, but with intensity of purpose in his calmness of attention.

'There was something which I heard Mr Beauclerc say, which I think escaped your attention,' said Helen. 'When you spoke of the new house he intended to build for himself, which was to cost so much, he offered to give that up.

'I never heard that offer.'

'I heard him,' said Helen, 'I assure you; it was when you were both walking up and down the room.'

'This may be so, I was angry then,' said the General.

'But you are not angry now,' said Helen.

He smiled, and in truth he desired nothing more than an honourable loophole - a safe way of coming off without injury to his ward - without hurting his own pride, or derogating from the dignity of guardian. (H, p. 104)

By helping the General to get outside the necessarily blind limitations of his angry self, Helen helps uncover what lay behind his anger which his very anger itself obscured. ('"I was angry then" ... "But you are not angry now" ... He smiled.') She re-locates what the feeling stood for, in place of what it was. Helen's intervention produces in General Clarendon that 'propriety' of rational sentiment

which Smith says is the essential precondition of sympathetic 'concord':

To see the emotion [of others] beat time to his own ... [a person must lower] his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten ... the sharpness of its natural tone in order to reduce it to harmony ... with the emotions of those who are about him. (TMS, p. 22)

'My dear Beauclerc,' the General says at the moment of reconciliation, 'you were too hot and I was too cold.' This realignment of sentiment, where feelings are wrought back into their right proportions, discloses the principle in right practice: it allows a withdrawal, an 'honourable loophole' which is as much a recalling of principle as simply a way out or a mere saving of face - though these things too are not negligible if a guardian's authority is to be retained. It is as though the toughest principles have to accommodate compromise in practice if they are to remain practically meaningful, useful and enforceable; and the flexible use of the rules we see here is no danger to their authority since the flexibility is itself dependent upon a strong sense of those rules.

But this proper and safe freedom within the social and moral system starts to give way to a more confused (and more terrifying) freedom when Helen puts herself outside of Lady Davenant's authority. For that is what effectively she begins to do at the moment when, feeling Lady Davenant's

'warning' look on in the dead silence of the night, she asks herself, 'But what can I do? Her own life is at stake!':

No less a motive could move me, but this ought - must - shall decide me. Yet, if Lady Davenant were to know it! - and I, in the last hours I have to pass with her - the last I ever may have with her, shall I deceive her? But it is not deceit, only prudence - necessary prudence; what a physician would order, what even humanity requires. I am satisfied it is quite right, quite, and I will go to sleep that I may be strong, and calm, and do it all well in the morning. After all, I have been too cowardly; frightening myself about nothing; too scrupulous - for what is it I have promised? only to receive the letters as if they were mine. Not to say that they are mine; he will not ask me, Cecilia thinks he will not ask me. But how can she tell? if he should, what can I do? I must then answer that they are mine. Indeed it is the same thing, for I should lead him to believe it as much by my receiving them in silence; it will be telling or acting an absolute falsehood, and can that ever be right? (H, pp. 280-1)

She verbally substitutes prudence for deceit. She mistakenly translates her proper fear for herself into a cowardice which now shames her into doing apologetically what she was fearfully ashamed to catch herself on the verge of doing in 'I am going to assist Cecilia in deceiving her husband'. These are second thoughts masquerading as belatedly improvised principles. Her real first thoughts ('That cannot be right') were right principles; for they were not merely her own thoughts but Lady Davenant's, interiorized now as nature. But it is just because Lady Davenant is both

inside and outside Helen that those second thoughts take place: the judge within is also a sick woman outside and the knowledge of her daughter's failings may kill her. Helen cannot have Lady Davenant in mind as a high and powerful representation of moral duty without at the same time thinking of her as someone who at another level is vulnerably in need of a consideration which is also a human duty. At the very moment that Helen decides that she 'ought - must - shall' commit a falsehood to save her mentor's life, Lady Davenant metaphorically dies for her inside. For the 'absolute' which Lady Davenant stands for in Helen has now become lost: 'it will be telling or acting an absolute falsehood, and can that ever be right?'. The absolute value of truth has been replaced by a more confused and complex human relativism, in which falsehood can even seem to be morally right. This marks the beginning of what I might call the relativism of the nineteenth-century novel. 'Yet ... But ...After all ... But' - the struggle is clear in the sequence of thought.

It is a struggle which Helen resolves now by satisfying the remnants of her own personal conscience in place of an internalized social one. 'Well, be it so,' she thinks to herself when she considers how far she must sink in the General's esteem:

That concerns only myself; and it is for his own sake, too, to save his happiness;

and Cecilia, my dear Cecilia, oh I can bear it, and it will be a pride to me to bear it, for I am grateful; my gratitude shall not be only in words; now, when I am put to the trial, I can do something for my friends. Yes, and I will, let the consequences be what they may.' Yet Beauclerc! that thought was at the bottom of her heart; the fear, the almost certainty, that some way or other - every way in which she could think of it, it would lead to difficulty with Beauclerc. But this fear was mere selfishness, she thought, and to counteract it came all her generous, all her grateful, all her long-cherished, romantic love of sacrifice - a belief that she was capable of self-devotion for the friends she loved; and upon the strength of this idea she fixed at last. (H, p. 281)

Ironically, the strength of mind which enables Helen to say 'I can bear it ... let the consequences be what they may' is the very same strength of mind which earlier made her able to say 'I am content to bear all the suffering I so richly deserve'. For Helen's 'content' was the habituated result of her being pleased to be good in order to please Lady Davenant even in admitting that she had let her down. So now she is content to have General Clarendon think less of her for his own as well as for Cecilia's sake. What is more, Helen is still earnestly applying Lady Davenant's own rules - deeds, not words: 'My gratitude shall not be only in words ... I can do something for my friends'. Helen has all the same right volitions, all the same moral energies; she is even operating within the same moral system. And yet, crucially, now it is a system minus the defining axis of Lady Davenant, so that everything is morally off-centre. The

right things are turning up in the wrong place, and even turning into the wrong things. For the part of Helen that remains unreconciled to deceit is now transposed from a principled sense of right into a more personalized sense of her own emotional weakness:

Yet Beauclerc! ... But this fear was mere selfishness, she thought.

Of what avail is your good heart, your good intentions - Lady Davenant would say to Helen here - if even the fear of selfishness separates you from truth itself? Helen's career in falsehood may begin virtuously enough - in sympathy with others. But when in this novel a person leaves the truth, even for good motives, then goodness and truth cease to be connected. 'Show me a virtue male or female that can long exist without truth,' Lady Davenant says to Helen early in the novel:

Even that emphatically termed the virtue of our sex, on which social happiness rests, society depends, on what is it based? is it not on that single-hearted virtue truth? - and truth on what? on courage of the mind. They who dare to speak the truth will not ever dare to go irretrievably wrong. (H, p. 38)

Helen does go wrong because she allows her own private moral concerns - worry over Lady Davenant's health, consideration for the General's well-being, fear of her own selfishness, fear for Cecilia - to cut across the ethical interrelatedness whereby in a just society goodness and truth, integrity and honour, private morality and social

good are all aspects of one another.¹¹ Truth now looks like 'selfishness'; lying seems to be a moral duty. And when there is no necessary connection between the virtues, there is no necessary ethical distinction any longer between one person and another - between being a Helen and being a Cecilia. So, at least, this novel now begins to demonstrate. For from the moment in Helen that the virtues start to become arbitrarily interwoven and confused, so too do Helen and Cecilia, both in and also between themselves.

Having given the General to believe that the D'Aubigny letters were written by Helen, Cecilia now recounts the explanation she gave to him of how her own painting of Helen came to be in D'Aubigny's hands:

'Oh how happy then it was for me that I could tell the whole truth about that at least! - I answered that I did not do the picture for Colonel D'Aubigny; that it never was given to him; that he stole it from my portfolio, and that we both did what we could to get it back again from him, but could not. And that you even wanted me to tell my mother but of that I was afraid; and Clarendon said, "You were wrong there, my dear Cecilia."

'I was so touched when I heard him call me his dear Cecilia again, and in his own dear voice, that I burst into tears. This was a

11. '[In classical thought] an object of serious thought must be something real, serious thinking is moral truthful thinking, goodness is connected with reality, the supremely good is the supremely real. ... Truthfulness, the search for truth, for a closer connection between thought and reality, demands and effects an exercise of the virtues. ... Thought, goodness and reality are thus seen to be connected', Iris Murdoch, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1993), pp. 398-9.

great relief to me, and I kept saying over and over again that I was wrong - very wrong indeed! and then he kneeled down beside me, and I so felt his tenderness, his confiding love for me - for me, unworthy as I am.' The tears streamed from Lady Cecilia's eyes as she spoke - 'Quite unworthy!'

'No, no, not quite 'unworthy,' said Helen; 'my poor dear Cecilia, what you must have felt!'

'Once,' continued Cecilia - 'once, Helen, as my head was lying on his shoulder, my face hid, I felt so much love, so much remorse, and knowing I had done nothing really bad, I was tempted to whisper all in his ear. I felt I should be so much happier for ever - ever - if I could!' (H, p. 286)

Structures of feeling that belong rightly to Helen, and even to Lady Davenant, have now become distortedly embodied in Cecilia. 'I so felt his tenderness, his confiding love for me - for me, unworthy as I am.' Such undeserved regard from her own husband is what, years earlier, made Lady Davenant feel so deeply her own fault when 'the demon of pride' was within her: 'The sense that I was over rather than under valued made me the more ready to acknowledge and feel my own deficiencies' (H, p. 77). The sense of being 'so much happier for ever - ever' is Helen's achieved feeling after she has confessed to Lady Davenant the fact of her being in debt: 'How much did Helen rejoice that she had had the courage to tell all to her friend. The pain was transient - the confidence permanent' (H, p. 220). Cecilia is beginning to have thoughts and feelings that belong to a permanently truthful ethos, because she is starting to discover the importance of that ethos, twistedly, from within her very

deflections from the truth:

How happy it was ... for me that I could tell the whole truth about that at least.

This was a great relief to me and I kept saying over and over again that I was very wrong - very wrong indeed!

Even some of the truth is used as a means of keeping her secret safe, providing a screen for all her lies. It is as though Cecilia can only find out what it is to be like Helen, by finding that she can lie most 'happily' when her lies are closest to truth. The moral distortion surfaces most clearly in Cecilia's language when she says 'I was tempted to whisper all in his ear'. If in Helen duty to oneself became distorted into fear of selfishness, so equivalently in Cecilia moral goodness itself is only registered as temptation.

Moreover, the right thing feels more and more like the wrong thing to Helen herself, as she finds out what it is to be like Cecilia. The evidence against Cecilia seems to Helen 'irresistably strong' when she first reads the D'Aubigny letters in their printed (and corrupted) form, and tries to separate the genuine passages from the false:

Even in those passages which she knew to be Cecilia's writing, it too plainly appeared that, however playfully, however delicately expressed, there was more of real attachment for Colonel D'Aubigny than Cecilia had ever allowed Helen to believe; and she felt that Cecilia must shrink from General Clarendon's seeing these as her letters, after she had herself assured him that he was her first love. The falsehood was here so indubitable,

so proved, that Helen herself trembled at the thought of Cecilia's acknowledging the plain facts to her husband. The time for it was past. Now that they were in print, published perhaps, how must he feel! (H, p. 358)

Helen is for once actually seeing the hitherto invisible shifts and redrafts of truth by Cecilia. But knowing more of Cecilia's secret only makes Helen the more ready to go along with it. The whole thing is morally back-to-front: for the truth has now become, for the sympathetic, trembling Helen, the enemy that it is for Cecilia. Not having been honest in the first place becomes a reason for having to be more dishonest in the second place. It is not that Helen has lost her sense of what is originally good and just: rather, her very sense of how wrongly Cecilia has acted is warding the right action off. It is just because the falsehood is so undeniable - 'so indubitable, so proved' - that it must, she feels, be denied, and denied because 'the time for [truth] was past'. The adjectival form, 'past', hardens into a noun. Helen's 'moral' sense of time, the sense that there is no time like and, really, no time but the present for doing what is right, has been replaced by a more psychological sense of time, a keenly felt sense that there is a right and a wrong time to be brave. Helen is not here imitating or learning Cecilia's habits of thought and feeling: rather, it is as if she were now being controlled, even possessed by them. This is where having someone else in mind

becomes something other than having a 'guardian influence'. In fact the whole notion of influence begins to change, to become something more psychologically subtle and insidious when Helen and Cecilia change places. For from the moment Helen first colludes in Cecilia's lie, it is as though she lets Cecilia into herself. It really is a form of invasion. For the self now created is a fallen self - a fall into individual, all-too-human evasiveness. Indeed the story of Helen's and Cecilia's changing places with one another seems, I am suggesting, almost to be an allegory of the shift from the formal eighteenth-century to the more confused, relative and psychological nineteenth-century world.

The novel signals the shift it is demonstrating in what follows, where Cecilia's (evasive) language of substitution alerts us to how confusedly fallen she and Helen have become. 'Then - oh, Helen! then I thought I would begin,' says Cecilia after a second temptation to truth:

'I wanted to feel my way, to try whether I could possibly venture upon my own confession. "Consider it this way, Clarendon," I said ... "Suppose that from mere timidity, Helen could not, did not, exactly tell him the whole before marriage - put it off till afterwards - then told him all candidly; do you think, Clarendon, that if you were in Beauclerc's place (I quite stammered when I came to this) - do you think you could pardon, or forgive, or esteem, or love," I intended to end with, but he interrupted me with - "I do not know," very shortly; and added, "I hope this is not what Miss Stanley intends to do?"

'Oh! what did you answer?' cried Helen.

'I said I did not know. My dear Helen, it was the only thing I could say. What would Clarendon have thought, after all my supposes if I had said anything else? he must have seen the truth ... He said, "Cecilia, I desire you will not advise or interfere any farther in this matter. Promise me, Cecilia!". He spoke sternly, and I promised as fast as I could. ... and now, after that, could I go on Helen?' (H, pp. 311-12)

Cecilia really means: 'If you were in Beauclerc's place - and I in Helen's'. Now it is Cecilia trembling for Helen, as Helen trembled for Cecilia: but Cecilia trembles for a Helen who is now her own double. Once Helen exists inside Cecilia as at once her conscience and her alibi, what Helen stands for becomes deflectively distorted. For the truth, in Cecilia, is utterly without authority: it is a merely provisional thing, a matter of good 'intent', of 'feel[ing one's] way' in order to find out how much truth one can bear to tell. It is as though Cecilia becomes a degenerated version of Helen, a Helen who can only go through the moral motions, because she is a Helen split off from a prior sense of moral value. Yet it is the split-off degenerated bits of Helen which now begin to get back inside Helen herself:

'And now, after that, could I go on Helen?'

'No indeed; I do not think you could. My dear Cecilia, I really think you could not,' said Helen, much moved.

(ibid. [my emphasis])

Progressively in Helen, feelings have begun to take over as they did not when Helen was 'content' to be punished:

Now that they were in print, published perhaps, how must he feel.

'My poor dear Cecilia, what you must have felt!'

When Helen and Cecilia begin to become fluid and unformalised combinations of one another and not formally separable and coherent models of good and bad, truth and falsehood, then the neo-Aristotelian logic of being in a just society has been replaced by the anarchic logic of the modern individual.

The 'individual' was born, says Alasdair MacIntyre in After Virtue, out of the loss of faith in a coherent moral order.¹² 'What we [now] possess,' he says, 'are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived':

We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality. (ibid. p. 2)

Helen likewise demonstrates the story of how a world of coherent moral meaning has fallen apart and become a confused memory. It is as though having lost the whole, individuals have become parts - each of them partial carriers of a once intact belief system whose tenets are now

12. 'What I have described in terms of a loss of traditional structure and content was seen ... as the achievement by the self of its proper autonomy. The self had been liberated ... What was then invented was the individual', Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, second edition (London, 1990), pp. 60-61.

randomly and confusedly dispersed among them, till they can neither reconstruct nor return to that belief. This catastrophe, says MacIntyre, is an invisible one in the history of our culture. Yet what is so important about Helen as a novel is that we do seem almost to witness that fall. For there is no clearer example than the following passage, to demonstrate that Helen has now ceased to be subject to a strict socio-ethical order and is at the mercy instead of an inchoate psychological one.

As Helen goes on reading Cecilia's letters, her 'alarm increas[es] to horror':

She saw things which she felt certain Cecilia could never have written; yet truth and falsehood were so mixed up in every paragraph, circumstances which she herself had witnessed so misrepresented, that it was all to her inextricable confusion. The passages which were to be marked could not now depend upon her opinion, her belief; they must rest upon Cecilia's integrity - and how could she depend upon it? The impatience which she had felt for Lady Cecilia's return now faded away, and merged in the more painful thought that, when she did come, the suspense would not end - the doubts would never be satisfied. (H, pp. 358-9)

A Helen who cannot distinguish truth from falsehood, who cannot place things morally, is a Helen who has lost her own place in the system. And to be set free of the system is to be set horribly loose, in lonely limbo. The suspense will not end with Cecilia's return, and its not having ended will go on and on too, through Cecilia's refusal to make an end

in time. To put off doing the right thing is to separate oneself from the right thing - but only to find it hauntingly remaining, on and on, as the thing that you have not done. Deferral only makes the thing more imprisoningly present at another mental level. When external punishment in time has become replaced by the hidden, inward, indefinite punishment of 'painful thought', then Helen has become subject to a narrative process that lies outside the province of eighteenth-century formalism. It is as though, at this moment, the novel is actually making that catastrophic crossing from the ethical to the psychological, by ceasing to be an eighteenth-century novel in which narrative strictness, social and moral propriety, explicit judgement, and finite outcomes are themselves all aspects of one another, and becoming instead the more relative, psychological narrative sequence of the nineteenth century.

Helen turning into Cecilia, I am going to suggest, is really Helen turning into Wives and Daughters. For it is out of that fall that Mrs Gaskell - with Cynthia - really begins. The critical difference between Helen and Wives and Daughters, I shall argue in Section II, now becomes the difference between what happens to Cecilia and what happens, or does not happen, to Cynthia. And it is to the question of which it is better to be - a Cecilia or a Cynthia? - that I now turn, as a sort of shorthand for the world-views I here attempt to describe and contrast.

But the symptomatic loss through Mrs Gaskell of the explicit principles of Helen is a haunting truth throughout this thesis, with consequences in the nineteenth-century's attempt to reaffirm, replace or do without those absolutes.

II From Helen to Wives and Daughters

'Oh, Cynthia,' says Molly after Cynthia has become engaged to Roger Hamley, having already secretly promised herself to another, 'what a great thing it is to be loved by him':

Cynthia blushed, and looked fluttered and pleased.

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

'But you are good, Cynthia,' put in Molly. 'No, I'm not. You're just as much mistaken as he is; and some day I shall go down in your opinions with a run, just like the hall clock the other day when the spring broke.'¹³

Helen's fear of disapproval belonged to that public system of virtue whereby ambition, emulation, love of esteem were the makings, in a good society, of the good individual. But the judgement which Cynthia fears is her own private secret; what Molly must or ought to think of her is what Cynthia is keeping even from Molly herself. For judgement in Cynthia has become detached from an external judge.

13. Mrs Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, first published 1864-6, edited by Angus Easson (Oxford, 1987), p. 460. Hereafter cited as WD.

The embodied social judgement which was mirrored, in Helen, as internalized conscience has become separately internalized in Cynthia as something to be avoided psychologically. She keeps rehearsing the 'some day' when she will be found out, experiencing it over and over at second hand, so that the event, when it happens, will seem like an already accomplished fact. She puts herself on the far side of judgement, in advance of it happening, to put herself on the far side of caring or suffering for it. The 'secret reference' which in Helen is right habit has become pathology in Cynthia. 'I have a fine instinct,' she tells Dr Gibson, late in the novel, 'for reading the thoughts of others when they refer to me' (WD, p. 577).

But Cynthia it is who has learned not to feel deeply what is deeply true. Her very self, her character and her habits, are founded on that avoidance of truth. She needs her practised social diction, literally, to contain her dread. 'I'm afraid he'll expect me to be always as good as he fancies me now.' Cynthia speaks the truth - she is afraid - but the tone with which she speaks it half-disguises the literal truth even so, just as her able manner and attractive carriage help to do: 'Cynthia blushed and looked fluttered and pleased'. It is precisely because Cynthia's tone and manner are so separate from what they nevertheless so thoroughly preside over, that the real truth about Cynthia remains so bafflingly indeterminate. 'Could you?'

she asks, when Molly, ruefully defending Roger against the charge that he is mistaken, says to her, 'I think he'll love you just as much':

'Would you be my friend if - if it turned out ever that I had done very wrong things? Would you remember how very difficult it has sometimes been to me to act rightly?' (she took hold of Molly's hand as she spoke). 'We won't speak of mamma, for your sake as much as mine or hers; but you must see that she is not one to help a girl with much good advice or good - Oh, Molly, you don't know how much I was neglected just at a time when I wanted friends most. Mamma does not know it; it is not in her to know what I might have been if I had only fallen into wise, good hands. But I know it; and what's more' continued she, suddenly ashamed of her unusual exhibition of feeling, 'I try not to care, which I daresay is really the worst of all; but I could worry myself to death if I once took to serious thinking.' (WD, p. 460)

'You must see that she isn't one to help a girl with much good advice or good -' It just is not possible to detach the first-person truth about Cynthia from this third-person view of herself. 'I daresay' is not I dare say; 'I could worry myself to death', moreover, is a deadly accurate cliché - Cynthia dare not risk taking seriously what is seriously wrong with her. What self would be left, she fears, if she were once to break herself down into truly experiencing what she has suffered? But it is none the less for that a cliché that really works in burying the very truth it tells. By the same token, the accomplished, distancing tone - 'I daresay' - comes desperately close, even so, to a giving up of her very self, a kind of hopelessness disguised as carelessness.

It is as though we cannot tell the difference between the true Cynthia and the Cynthia who is hiding (and hiding from) what is most real in her: for the very strategies she uses to keep hold of a self are themselves part of what has (damagingly) happened to her.

Truth, moreover, does not separate out from half-truth where Cynthia is concerned. For her most truthful mitigation is at the same time an excuse she continually makes for herself:

'Somehow I cannot forgive her for her neglect of me as a child, when I would have clung to her. Besides, I hardly ever heard from her when I was at school.' (WD, p. 232)

'She never seemed to care to have me with her ... and I dare say I was at a very awkward age to have me lounging about in the drawing room when callers came.' (ibid. p. 493)

'I am sorry mamma still looks upon me as "an encumbrance", as the advertisements in The Times always call us unfortunate children. But I have been an encumbrance to her all my life.' (ibid. pp. 627-8)

Even if what she says is true, at another level of being she uses its truth. The relativism is really hard on Cynthia - for what almost vindicates her, almost condemns her too. I shall be arguing in this thesis that it is a measure of Mrs Gaskell's tough acceptance of this relativism, that she does not feel bound to step in to distinguish what is to be judged from what is to be extenuated in a person, as George Eliot, in contrast, always did feel bound to do. Thus, for

example in Daniel Deronda, Gwendolen Harleth is forced to recognise her inadequacies by Herr Klesmer:

Only a few hours before ... it seemed but the affair of a year or so for her to become the most approved Juliet of the time; or, if Klesmer encouraged her idea of being a singer, to proceed by more gradual steps to her place in the opera, while she won money and applause by occasional performances. Why not? At home, at school, among acquaintances, she had been used to have her conscious superiority admitted; and she had moved in a society where everything, from low arithmetic to high art, is of the amateur kind politely supposed to fall short of perfection only because gentlemen and ladies are not obliged to do more than they like ... The self-confident visions that had beguiled her were not of a highly exceptional kind; and she had at least shown some rationality in consulting the person who knew the most and had flattered her the least. In asking Klesmer's advice, however, she had rather been borne up by a belief in his latent admiration than bent on knowing anything more unfavourable that might have lain behind his slight objections to her singing; and the truth she had asked for with an expectation that it would be agreeable, had come like a lacerating thong.¹⁴

Gwendolen's egoism is not all her fault ('home', 'school', 'society' have been the wrong social 'influence'), whilst her motivation in asking Klesmer's advice is not purely that of egoistic vanity. But George Eliot does have to separate the 'truth' about Gwendolen from whatever else might be said on her behalf. Moreover George Eliot (via

14. George Eliot, Daniel Deronda, first published 1876, edited by Barbara Hardy (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), pp. 306-7.

Klesmer, in this instance) feels compelled to force the truth about Gwendolen upon Gwendolen. For George Eliot recognises that a Gwendolen, like a Cecilia, would always prefer her own 'agreeable' version of the truth - 'belief in his latent admiration' - to knowing the real truth of what might 'lay behind'. It is as if George Eliot is present as an authority-figure within her novels in lieu of a Lady Davenant, in the tacit loss of novels such as Helen. For as I shall show more fully in Chapter Four of this thesis, George Eliot felt a responsibility to inhabit her novels as an articulating presence in order to preserve the memory of an ethical order within a world which had lost 'coherent social faith'¹⁵. She felt a responsibility to put right, at least at the level of verbal recognition, what she saw going wrong humanly and morally. For George Eliot's need to see Gwendolen corrected and punished arises from that same troubled foreknowledge of what might otherwise become of a person like Gwendolen, which Lady Davenant feels with regard to Cecilia.

"My dear Helen," says Lady Davenant (when, quite early in the novel, Helen exclaims that there is nothing corrupt in Cecilia), 'You see her as she has been - as she is. I see her as she may become - very - frightfully different':

15. See Prelude to Middlemarch, first published 1871-2, edited by W.J. Harvey (Harmondsworth, Middlesex), p. 25.

'I hope in God that I am mistaken. I pray that I may never live to see it.'

'To see what?' cried Helen.

'To see that one little black spot, invisible to you, Helen, the speck of evil in that heart - my daughter's heart - spread and taint, and destroy all that is good. It must be cut out - at any pain it must be cut away; if any part be unsound, the corruption will spread.' (H, p. 266)

In Helen the truth about a person takes absolute priority over the proper excuses a person might make for herself. For this is a world in which how a person got to be what she is, is less important than whether or not she can now be trusted. Lady Davenant blames herself for neglecting Cecilia. But of what use are explanations or excuses if the wrong is already done? What need is there even of excuses if the wrong can, after all, be mended? There is now what there is: it is a given. To go back into the past would not help Cecilia now and would even confuse the issue at Cecilia's expense. Which came first - the neglect or the black spot? There is no getting back to the beginning of this circle: better, as Lady Davenant says, to 'let well alone', to cut one's losses and, as far as possible, start again:

'I have done what I can to remedy [the early neglect], and you have done more perhaps; but I much fear that [it] can never be completely repaired; she is, however, married to a man of sense, and when I go to Russia I shall think with satisfaction that I leave you with her.' (H, p. 79)

There is no question of any personal or guilty compensation here: for, where the mother herself has failed, it is Helen

('you have done more perhaps') and General Clarendon ('she is, however, married to a man of sense') who are making up for her deficiency.

But in Wives and Daughters, there is no equivalent to Lady Davenant or George Eliot to separate past from present necessities on Cynthia's behalf. Indeed, when Cecilia's relation to Lady Davenant gets transposed in Wives and Daughters into Cynthia's relation to Mr Gibson, as the only remaining authority-figure, we find that Cynthia is really too effective at subverting Mr Gibson's authority for her own deep good. 'Please, Mr Gibson, hear my side of the story before you speak so hardly to me,' says Cynthia, after Mr Gibson has upbraided her for encouraging the attentions of Mr Coxe:

'I did not mean to - to flirt. I merely meant to make myself agreeable, - I can't help doing that, - and that goose of a Mr Coxe seems to have fancied I meant to give him encouragement.'

'Do you mean that you were not aware that he was falling in love with you?' Mr Gibson was melting into a readiness to be convinced by that sweet voice, and pleading face.

'Well, I suppose I must speak truly.' Cynthia blushed and smiled - ever so little - but it was a smile, and it hardened Mr Gibson's heart again. (WD, p. 426)

Cynthia cannot resist testing her power 'ever so little' too far (and so reminding Mr Gibson too forcibly that she is her mother's daughter), because she 'can't help' putting Mr Gibson in Mr Coxe's place, a lover where her father should be. Similarly, when Gibson's heart hardens against her, she

puts Roger's heart in its stead:

'I was fond of [your father], and now he is making me quite a coward. You see, Molly,' continued she, a little piteously, 'I've never lived with people with such a high standard of conduct before; and I don't quite know how to behave.'

'You must learn,' said Molly tenderly. 'You'll find Roger quite as strict in his notions of right and wrong.'

'Ah, but he's in love with me!' said Cynthia, with a pretty consciousness of her power. (WD, p. 430)

Cynthia promiscuously wants regard without having to produce what regard is grounded in - the good without pain, price or principle. Hence she casts Mr Gibson in whichever role is to her immediate advantage - now he is her lover, now her doctor, now her friend, now Molly's (and even, at times, her own) father. And the more she insists on his constant regard the more she has to rely on these tactics to get it, because she will not allow him to have the single function in her life - that of (moral) guardian - which would secure his lasting regard, even though at a deep level that is what she wants most of all. 'I love you better than Roger,' she tells Gibson, when, for once, after the Preston scandal has come to light - and only when she feels the game is up and that she has lost him anyway - she does stand before him 'like a chidden child':

'I have often told Molly so. And I would have told you, if I had not expected and hoped to leave you all before long. I could see if the recollection of it all came up before your mind; I could see it in your eyes; I should know it by instinct. ... I

almost hate the idea of Roger judging me by his own standard, which was not made for me, and graciously forgiving me at last.'

'Then I do believe it is right for you to break it off ... Still, take till to-morrow before you act upon your decision,' said Mr Gibson, slowly. 'What faults you have fallen into have been mere girlish faults at first, - leading you into much deceit, I grant.'

'Don't give yourself the trouble to define the shades of blackness,' said Cynthia, bitterly. 'I am not so obtuse but what I know them all better than any one can tell me.' (WD, pp. 577-8)

This is the awful cost, to Cynthia, of not submitting to Gibson's judgement: for the more the external evasion, the more judgement becomes indefinite and psychological - 'I know them all better than anyone can tell me'. In evading her fears she evades her own deepest needs. 'I like to be liked' is what she says in her characteristically second-order socialized tone (WD, p. 427): but she really needs to be loved. It is why she always puts being loved before being good, and so, never becoming good enough to be worthy of love, actually realises her own deepest fear about herself. Cynthia just will not let things happen in the right order. The order she chooses runs thus: (1) 'And I would have told you; (2) if I had not expected and hoped to leave you all before long (3) I could see if the recollection of it all came up before your mind'. The clauses are the wrong way round: for it is her fear of Dr Gibson's judgement (3) which really creates the desperate hope that she will leave the family (2). And the fear and hope that come from the

future actually stop her from having in the present the father who would save her (1) from the future she so fears. If only those sentences were the right way round, going forward with time - judgement first, love second - then Cynthia would be inside a sequence where something would be worked through, something would happen to her. But nothing does happen to Cynthia: she goes on, replacing one lover with another, displacing what she dare not risk experiencing, living her life from the outside so as never really to become a person from the inside. This is what Kierkegaard calls the despairing sickness unto death posing as normality:

[To] be in despair ... does not mean that a person may not continue living a fairly good life, to all appearances be someone ... The biggest danger, that of losing oneself, can pass off in the world as quietly as if it were nothing.¹⁶

This is the implicit Cynthia horror that Mrs Gaskell herself characteristically leaves implicit. Even what does deeply happen to Cynthia is not forced out into a narrative sequence, where the damage could be finally seen to have been done: the biggest event of her life - losing her own real self through evasion of her own real story - 'passes off' as a non-event.

16. Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, first published 1849, translated by Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1989), p. 62. Hereafter cited as SD.

But is it worse or better to be Maria Edgeworth's Cecilia who actually experiences the horror of her back-to-front life? 'I succeeded in every effort at deception,' she tells Helen after she has finally got away with the deceit she has practised on her husband, 'and was cursed by my own success':

'His love for me increased, but it gave me no pleasure: for, Helen, now I am going to tell you an extraordinary turn which my mind took, for which I cannot account - I can hardly believe it - it seems out of human nature - my love for him decreased! - not only because I felt that he would hate me if he discovered my deceit, but because he was lowered in my estimation! ... I no longer looked up to him; his credulous affection had blinded his judgement - he was my dupe! But I cannot tell you how shocked I was at myself when I felt my love for him decrease every time I saw him.

'I thought myself a monster; I had grown used to everything but that - that I could not endure; it was a darkness of the mind - a coldness; it was as if the sun had gone out of the universe; it was more - it was worse - it was as if I was alone in the world.' (H, pp. 418-19)

'His love for me increased ... my love for him decreased ... He was lowered in my estimation ... I felt my love for him decrease every time I saw him.' Even against her very self, this is Cecilia living through the Kierkegaard counter-narrative. 'To arrive at the truth,' he says, 'one has to pass through every negativity.'

It is just as the old story says about breaking a certain magic spell: it won't be broken unless the piece is played right through backwards. (SD, p. 74)

Thus 'backwards' does Cecilia find out what it is to be Helen, recapturing the system interiorly only after she has put herself outside of it: 'I can hardly believe it - it seems out of human nature'. Discovering morality inside-out, psychologically, and discovering it thereby too late is to be, terrifyingly, a nobody in no-man's land: 'It was a darkness of the mind - a coldness; it was as if the sun had gone out of the universe: it was more - it was as if I was alone in the world'. Thus to be broken down to the primary truth about one's self - this, for Kierkegaard, is salvation. But it feels like damnation. Who would not prefer to be Cynthia, getting by, in her unreal way, but evading and surviving even so?

And yet, who would not prefer to live the whole thing 'right through', once, instead of living one's whole life so repetitively close to that limitless horror of herself as Cynthia always is, just because she is so normatively adjusted to it?:

'I am not good, and I never shall be now ... I'm capable of a great jerk, an effort, and then a relaxation - but steady, every-day goodness is beyond me. I must be a moral kangaroo!' (WD, p. 229)

'Don't you see I have grown up outside the pale of duty and "oughts". Love me as I am, sweet one, for I shall never be better.'
(ibid. pp. 232-3)

There is no big, no new language here, commensurate with the existential horror of it all - only Cynthia's customary

(borrowed) tones. The nightmare is not pushed into drama, but undramatically incorporated as what is normal. And as what is normal and hidden it cannot be expiated. The nightmare will go on and on, as Cynthia goes on getting away with it, half-deceiving herself and half-anticipating her own degeneration even so.

It must be worst of all to be Cynthia, just because she has no Lady Davenant to end the suspense for her. And yet what could seem worse than being Cecilia, who has that final judge to face?:

Lady Davenant stood opposite to her; the light was now full upon her face and figure; and her mother saw how it was changed! and looking back at Helen, she said in a low, awful tone, 'I see it; the black spot has spread!' (H, p. 425)

Cecilia cannot be redeemed unless she thinks that her very confession damns her. To choose even redemption at this cost, is a choice almost beyond human making if choice it possibly could be. That to be lost is also to be found is a great Christian idea. Yet no human creature can know in advance that to lose is to gain. The great benefit to Cecilia of the system that operates in Helen is that she does not have to choose: her punishment and her salvation are enforced by the higher authority of Lady Davenant. The great loss which results from Mrs Gaskell's dismantling of that system is that there is no higher authority to preside over the mess that a fallen creature like Cynthia is making

of herself - no-one to see for her where she is going wrong, and no-one to do what is necessary to put it right. Instead the mess goes into a subterranean, private realm where it can only go on getting worse. And Mrs Gaskell seems to go along with that.

'Our prevalent notion,' said Matthew Arnold in Culture and Anarchy, 'is that it is a most happy and important thing for a man merely to be able to do what he likes. ... [We] do not like the trouble ... and the severe constraint of any kind of rule.'¹⁷ From the point of view of the liberal individualism which Arnold is himself opposing here, the rules which operate in Helen do look to be 'severe', illiberal, intolerant. Yet what the respective fates of Cecilia and Cynthia show us is that rules are safer. Without them we are left with the inward anarchy of the Cynthia mode of being and left without any effectual help for it.

Yet to see Wives and Daughters merely as a fallen version of Helen - a mere symptom of nineteenth-century agnosticism of values - is to miss what we gain from Mrs Gaskell's world-view. I shall have more to say of those gains, in the light of this challenge, in Chapter Two. But for the moment I may conclude that it is finally both worse and better that Cynthia should be allowed to eschew what has gone wrong with her. If there is no-one to see the black

17. Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, first published 1869, edited by J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1960), p. 74.

spot as so often there is not in modern life, if there is no possibility of expiation or correction, what good would it do to bring it to light? Better, implies Mrs Gaskell, to leave it be - half-hidden, untouched, an unextraordinary part of life. Cynthia, that is to say, is both an image and a necessary casualty of Mrs Gaskell's large acceptance of human fallenness - an embedded acceptance, I shall be arguing in Chapters Two and Three and finally in the Conclusion, which offers some wider reparation for that fall.

CHAPTER TWO

READING MRS GASKELL'S (SO-CALLED) 'HOMELY PROSE'¹

In this chapter, I turn to a study of the implicit value of Mrs Gaskell's prose, taking the original manuscript of Wives and Daughters as my starting-point. The manuscript (now in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, MSS 877) is Mrs Gaskell's original draft and the copy used for printing the serial edition in the Cornhill Magazine (it is marked-up throughout). Angus Easson points out that for editorial purposes 'the manuscript can only be regarded as a stage in the novel's composition'. However, it is primarily because it is the first stage of composition that the manuscript is of interest in this chapter.² For it is my

1. It is Henry James's warmly admiring but (as I shall show) rather misleading phrase. See Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage, edited by Angus Easson (London, 1991), p. 466. Hereafter cited as Gaskell:CH. (I come back to James's assessment of Mrs Gaskell's achievements as a writer of prose at the close of this chapter, p. 117, below.)

2. I remain mindful, nevertheless, of Angus Easson's cautionary note: 'Since Gaskell accepted a process of rewriting at the printing and proofing stage, undertaken both by herself and by editor and printers, even in the final episode, where she could not have seen the proofs, the practice consistently observed in the Cornhill offices has tacit authorial approval and should be accepted. Caution is needed therefore in going back to the manuscript as a superior authority: changes were deliberately made in proof, for a number of reasons, and were accepted by Gaskell, when not made directly by her', 'A Note on the Text', Wives and Daughters (Oxford, 1987), pp. xxvii - xxix.

purpose to ask what a more preliminary sense of Mrs Gaskell's writing can teach us about how to read her prose - how far the very writing itself, that is, helps to set the rules for reading it, in a form which, unlike the situation depicted in Helen, seems initially to have gone beyond rules or to have left them more loose and defeasible.

1. Second Thoughts: Small Revisions

In the examples from the manuscript which follow it is impossible to distinguish with certainty between immediate second thoughts and corrections which are the result of later revision. The handwriting and slightly greater clarity of the early part of the manuscript (from which these extracts are largely taken) gives the impression that Mrs Gaskell was somewhat less hurried and able to write at a more leisurely pace in the early stages of the novel and biographical evidence seems to bear this out³ - though she was under pressure throughout. Possibly, then, these corrections are the result of Mrs Gaskell's having had time to go back and reflect on her work. But there is rarely any change of pen or of pressure to indicate a later

3. '[In early May 1864] she was keen to begin,' notes Jenny Uglow, 'had perhaps already begun. ... She wrote with deep enjoyment until late June. Then ... her own daughters absorbed her attention again and her novel had to take second place', Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories (London, 1993), p. 562. Hereafter cited as A Habit of Stories.

revision.⁴ Moreover, the internal clues strongly suggest that these corrections are the result of immediate reflection. Thus what we shall be witnessing in what follows is a writer who is working (subtly) very hard indeed.

When Cynthia arrives home from France - soon after her mother's re-marriage, but earlier than her mother has expected (or suggested), Mrs Gibson 'profess[es] herself shocked' at Cynthia's not having given herself time to stock herself with new gowns and useful French patterns:

Molly was hurt for Cynthia at all these speeches; she thought that they implied that the pleasure which her mother felt in seeing her a fortnight sooner after her two years' absence was inferior to that which she should have received from a bundle of silver-paper patterns. But Cynthia took no apparent notice of the frequent recurrence of these small complaints. Indeed, she received much of what her mother said with a kind of complete indifference, that made Mrs Gibson hold her rather in awe; and she was much more communicative to Molly than to her own child.⁵

I give below the manuscript version of this extract⁶:

 4. Where there is such evidence of possible later revision (see for instance pp. 69 and 71, below) I indicate the fact in a footnote.

5. Mrs Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, first published 1864-66, edited by Angus Easson (Oxford, 1987), p. 226. Hereafter cited as WD.

6. I list below the transcription conventions I shall be using throughout this chapter, and also in Chapter Three:

- < > cancellation
- <--->; <-> indecipherably cancelled word/part of word
- < * > possible reading where cancellation obscures
- ^ word/phrase etc. written above
- [] word/phrase etc. written over preceding cancellation
- \ / inserted (usually punctuation) in body of text

Molly was hurt for Cynthia at <all> these 1
 she thought that they 2
 speeches \;/ <which> ^ implied that the 3
 pleasure which her mother felt in seeing her 4
 a fortnight sooner after her two years' 5
 absence was inferior to that which she 6
 should have received from a bundle of 7
 silver-paper patterns. But Cynthia took no 8
 apparent notice of the frequent recurrence 9
 of these small complaints. Indeed, she 10
 received much of what her mother said 11
 a kind of 12
 with ^ complete indifference, that made 13
 Mrs Gibson hold her rather in awe; and she 14
 was much more communicative to Molly than to 15
 her own child. (MS, p. 334) 16

Mrs Gaskell's revisions here are less second thoughts than a careful blurring or shading off of her first thoughts. It is as though in that second instance (line 12) she were taking care to leave the matter more open than her first thought had allowed it to be:

Indeed she received much of what her mother
 a kind of
 said with ^ complete indifference ...

'A kind of' is actually itself enticingly vague, not so much a supplementary addition to the noun phrase as an ambivalent thing in itself - a defence for Cynthia or a bafflement to Molly, or both. It is this reluctance to name things finally and definitively which produces the same kind of revision when Mrs Gaskell describes Mr Gibson's own reaction to Mrs Gibson's ways:

For indeed he had got into that <nervous
 kind of
 state> ^ exaggerated susceptibility with
 regard to his wife's faults, which may be
 best typified by the state of bodily
 irritation that is produced by the constant

recurrence of any particular noise. (MS, p. 606)⁷

It is as though, in such instances, Mrs Gaskell were more nearly getting hold of something which even then is called elusive. She is being more definitive, that is, in being less definite.⁸ These additions seem to be produced by the same habitual self-checking which produces, this time as a first thought, 'small' in relation to 'frequent', as well as 'apparent' in the sentence: 'But Cynthia took no apparent notice of the frequent recurrence of these small complaints'. At such times, Mrs Gaskell inserts what otherwise would be second thoughts first time around:

Cynthia received [Roger's] letters with a kind of carelessness, and read them with a strange kind of indifference, while Molly sat at her feet, so to speak, looking up with eyes as wistful as a dog's waiting for crumbs. (WD, p. 432; MS, p. 607)

It is as if the manuscript revisions are only a more visible sign of a revisionary habit of mind - as if it were were natural for Mrs Gaskell to rewrite even as she writes. That instinctive self-checking seems to be the result,

7. See WD, p. 432. Hereafter where the manuscript version alone is quoted, I shall cite both page references (MS first; Oxford edition, second) next to the quoted text. Alternatively, where the manuscript and Oxford edition agree, I shall cite the Oxford page reference first, the MS reference second - both next to the text.

8. See also the example discussed on p. 111, below:

mode of caressing that
a <caress she> \wedge had come down to her from
her mother (MS p. 498; WD, p. 344)

paradoxically, of an instinctive self-trust. For it is almost invariably from her first thoughts that Mrs Gaskell takes her cue:

Molly was hurt for Cynthia at <all> these speeches \;/ <which> ^ she thought that they implied that the pleasure which her mother felt in seeing her a fortnight sooner after her two years' absence was inferior to that which she should have received from a bundle of silver-paper patterns.⁹

The shading is so fine here that we almost have to see '<which> implied' underneath 'she thought that they implied' in order to recognise how definitive a change the cancellation of the relative pronoun really is: 'which' now seems like an easy-going, even lazy authorial word in comparison to 'thought' which is much more Molly's puzzled effort than Mrs Gaskell's explanation. Whether Molly is right or wrong is one issue. But at the self-same time Mrs Gibson's speeches still might of themselves imply that the pleasure which she feels in seeing Cynthia is inferior to that which she should have received from a bundle of silver-paper patterns; or they might indicate mere thoughtlessness on Mrs Gibson's part; or they might be a mixture of the two. The revision - as with 'a kind of' in the same extract - leaves the matter richly indeterminate.

9. 'all' (line 1), though cancelled in the manuscript, reappears in the Cornhill edition (see above, p. 56) - one of those revisions which we must presume Mrs Gaskell either made herself at the proofing stage or of which she tacitly approved.

Yet Mrs Gaskell is not making the thing complex and uncertain for its own sake. For what is certain in each of these cases is that something is going on; it just is not possible quite to locate what it is. 'A kind of' might mean that Cynthia is not in fact hurt; or that she does not want Molly to know that she is hurt; or that she does not herself want to know how much she is pained - and the truth, probably, lies somewhere in-between. Mrs Gaskell is not merely playing with the indeterminacy, I am saying. (Cynthia's indeterminacy, after all, is what makes her so frightening.) Rather, it seems to be Mrs Gaskell's close reading of life as she views it, which produces in these revisions a density of possible meanings in place of a single or settled one.

We see Mrs Gaskell once again going beyond mere literal precision into greater precision in the two following examples. In the first Molly is feeling slighted and excluded by Roger's greater attentions to Cynthia:

The short conversation
 <It>^ had been very pleasant, and his manner
 had had just the brotherly kindness of old
 times; but it was not quite the manner he
 half
 had to Cynthia; and Molly^ thought she would
 have preferred the latter. (MS, p. 371; WD, 7
 p. 252)

It is that little word 'just' (line 3) which is so painful to Molly: 'his manner had just the brotherly kindness of old times.' Molly's gain is also now her loss: for 'it was not

quite the manner he had to Cynthia'. It is as though Mrs Gaskell had at second thought re-registered the fineness of those first distinctions thus producing the greater ambivalent accuracy of the later one: 'Molly half thought she would have preferred the latter'. 'Just' begets 'not quite' begets 'half'. It is surely this same re-entering of first thoughts, as her own reader, which produces the revision which Mrs Gaskell makes in this next example, where Mr Gibson prepares himself for telling Molly that he has decided to re-marry:

It was the next morning before Mr Gibson 1
 arrived at the Hall, timing his visit as 2
 well as he could so as to have half-an- 3
 hour's private talk with Molly before Mrs 4
 Hamley came down into the drawing-room. 5
 thought 6
 He <knew> that his daughter would require 7
 sympathy after receiving the intelligence he 8
 had to communicate; and he knew there was no 9
 one more fit to give it than Mrs Hamley. 10
 (MS, p. 168; WD, p. 112)

'He knew' (line 7) is not so much cancelled by 'he thought' as hidden now inside it, for Mr Gibson has to hide from that 'knew', from knowing how he is about to hurt his daughter, if he is to go on with this task at all. What he knows inside the mix of uncertainty and fear, is that Mrs Hamley is reliable as a surrogate mother to comfort Molly on her gaining a second mama - 'he knew there was no one more fit'. This is Mrs Gaskell keeping unironic faith with Mr Gibson's half dodging of the thing, just as she does first time around:

He went into the house by a private door,
and made his way into the drawing-room,
however that would
half-expecting \wedge Molly \langle to \rangle \wedge be in \langle the
shade of \rangle the garden. (MS, p. 169; WD, p.
113)

'She had been there,' is Mrs Gaskell's cunning next sentence,
'but it was too hot and dazzling ... and she had come in by
the open window of the drawing room.' There is secret
knowledge - of his daughter's ways and habits - as well as
(unavowed) hope in Mr Gibson's 'half-expecting' that he
might yet put off his task.

In the above examples, as also in the following
instance, these little extra pushes which make half measures
out of whole measures come from a mind toughly immersed
in other minds. 'Cynthia! you do love [Roger] dearly, don't
you?' asks Molly, after Roger has left for Africa. For the
sake of clarity I give both the published and the manuscript
versions together here:

Cynthia winced a little aside from the
penetrating steadiness of those eyes.

'You speak with all the solemnity of an
adjuration, Molly!' said she, laughing a
little at first to cover her nervousness,
and then looking up at Molly. 'Don't you
think I have given a proof of it? But you
know I've often told you I've not the gift
of loving; I said pretty much the same thing
to him.' (WD, pp. 395-6)

Cynthia winced a little aside from the 1
penetrating steadiness of those eyes. 2
'You speak with all the solemnity of an 3
a little at first 4
adjuration, Molly,' said she, laughing \wedge to 5
cover her nervousness, and then looking up 6

Don't you think 7

at Molly. 'Of course I love him' ^ I have 8
 given a proof of it, I think. But you 9
 know I've often told you I've not the gift 10
 of loving (as you*). I (told him) said 11
 pretty much the same thing to him.' (MS, p. 12
 .566)

The clue which suggests that this is an example of Mrs Gaskell re-writing even as she writes, really comes from the sort of telling addition which she makes at the time in line 1: 'Cynthia winced a little aside'.¹⁰ Thus the composed off-hand flatness of 'Of course I love him. I have given a proof of it, I think' becomes the more defensive and deflecting 'Don't you think I have given a proof of it?' as Mrs Gaskell tenaciously re-attunes herself here to Cynthia's displacing habits of mind. Indeed, in the revision of 'I told him' to 'I said pretty much the same thing to him', it is as though Mrs Gaskell were re-discovering Cynthia's 'kind of carelessness', just as, at times, Mrs

10. Compare, too, the insertion, as a first thought, which we saw Mrs Gaskell making here (see above, p. 45):

Cynthia blushed and smiled - ever so little
 - but it was a smile and it hardened Mr
 Gibson's heart. (WD, p. 426; MS, p. 605)

It is a Tolstoyan touch, like that little involuntary smile of Oblonsky's at the beginning of Anna Karenina, when Dolly has discovered his affair with the children's governess: 'Instead of taking offence, denying, making excuses, or even remaining indifferent (anything would have been better than what he did), he involuntarily ('reflex action of the brain,' thought Oblonsky, who was fond of physiology) smiled his usual kindly and therefore silly smile', Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, first published 1877, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude (Oxford, 1991) p. 2.

Gaskell seems to be re-discovering a terrible third-person view as though from inside Cynthia herself:

'I <am> [must be] a moral kangaroo.' (MS, p. 338; WD, p. 229)

Somehow

'I'm not good and I told you so. ^ I cannot forgive her <somehow> for her neglect of me as a child, when I would have clung to her.' (MS, p. 343; WD, p. 232)

How well the careful re-placing of that tonal word - 'somehow' - helps us to see Cynthia's habit of putting second thoughts before first feelings. Similarly, the revision from 'I am a moral kangaroo' to 'I must be a moral kangaroo' puts the sentence more characteristically in limbo, as it were - situated at once inside and outside of Cynthia like those clichés ('I could worry myself to death if I once took to serious thinking') which at once reveal and disguise the truth about her. Yet it was from this impenetrable limbo-world of Cynthia's that we saw Mrs Gaskell move effortlessly to the transparently more limited world of Mrs Gibson in the first extract of this section:

[Cynthia] received much of what her mother
a kind of
said with ^ complete indifference, that made Mrs Gibson hold her rather in awe; and she was much more communicative to Molly than to her own child.

This is Mrs Gaskell moving between minds, across bounds, even within the same sentence. Even though this is the first stage of composition, then, Mrs Gaskell is manifestly doing more than one thing at once - rewriting even as she writes,

holding open several possible thoughts within the same thought ('a kind of'), and in several minds at the same time. Moreover, the apparently casual final move of the extract ('and she was much more communicative to Molly than to her own child') does not merely add a narrative fact. Rather, it points implicitly backwards, adding another layer of meaning to what has gone before: for that Mrs Gibson can talk more easily to Molly is what in part creates the 'hurt' which Molly feels 'for Cynthia' and itself probably adds to Cynthia's 'indifference'. Yet Mrs Gaskell is shifting so fluidly between minds and levels here that the rich complexity of her vision is virtually masked by the very ease of the fluidity itself.

The apparent naturalness with which such shifts occur can be seen from the manuscript version of the following passage, which occurs soon after Mr Gibson has remarried (a step he has taken less for his own sake than to provide Molly with a mother when she has become vulnerable to the attentions of Mr Coxe):

[Mr Gibson] had made up his mind before his marriage to yield in trifles, and be firm in greater things. But the differences of opinion about trifles arose every day, and were perhaps more annoying than if they had related to things of more consequence. Molly knew her father's looks as well as she knew her alphabet; his wife did not; and being an unperceptive person, except when her own interests were dependent upon another person's humour, never found out how he was worried by all the small daily concessions which he made to her will or her whims. (WD, p. 185)

He had made up his mind before his marriage 1
 to yield in trifles, and be firm in greater 2
 differences of opinion about trifles 3
 things. But the ^ <trifles> <trifles> arose 4
 every day, and were perhaps more annoying 5
 than if they had related to things of more 6
 consequence. Molly knew her father's looks 7
 as well as she knew her alphabet; <and - > 8
 his wife did not; and being an unperceptive 9
 person, except when her own interests were 10
 dependent upon another person's humour, 11
 he was worried by 12
 never found out how <worrying were> all the 13
 small daily concessions which he made to her 14
 will or her whims. (MS, p. 272) 15

In a sense it hardly matters whether the revision at line
 12 is an immediate or a later one: for it is as though the
 revision is the result of the syntax having to catch up with
 the mental leap which Mrs Gaskell has already made between
 or across minds. It is the same kind of leap which occurs at
 line 8 - but here Mrs Gaskell chooses not to go on with
 her first thought:

Molly knew her father's looks as well as she
 knew her alphabet; <and - > his wife did
 not; and being an unperceptive person ...

To move seamlessly on (to Mrs Gibson's unwitting
 inadequacies as a wife to her husband) just as she had moved
 on with 'and she was much more communicative to Molly than
 to her own child' - this it seems was always Mrs Gaskell's
 first instinct. But Mrs Gaskell interrupts her own habitual
 fluency here, in order carefully to place two narrative
 facts side by side - minus, significantly, a bridging
 conjunction:

Molly knew her father's looks as well as her alphabet; his wife did not; and being an unperceptive person ...

How quietly and yet how knowingly does Mrs Gaskell register that these two considerations, which are utterly without connection with one another, have nevertheless to live together. And we almost have to imagine Mrs Gaskell stopping here in order to notice with what ease she simply goes on in the sentence which follows:

He never allowed himself to put any regret into shape, even in his own mind; he repeatedly reminded himself of his wife's good qualities, and comforted himself by thinking they should work together better as time rolled on; but he was very angry at a bachelor great-uncle of Mr Coxe's, who, after taking no notice of his red-headed nephew for years, suddenly sent for him, after the old man had partially recovered from a serious attack of illness, and appointed him his heir, on condition that his great-nephew remained with him during the rest of his life. This had happened almost directly after Mr and Mrs Gibson's return from their wedding journey, and once or twice since that time Mr Gibson had found himself wondering why the deuce old Benson could not have made up his mind sooner, and so have rid his house of the unwelcome presence of the young lover. (WD, p. 185)¹¹

To see the absence of a connective, in that earlier example,

11. I give below the only revision made to this extract:

any regret

He never allowed himself to put [^]into shape,
even in his own mind ... (MS, p. 272)

'Any regret' seems to be, in fact, a first thought whose syntactic re-placing in the sentence is immediate and (rhythmically) instinctive.

as a thoughtful omission ('Molly knew her father's looks as well as she knew her alphabet; his wife did not') is now to recognise the connective with which Mrs Gaskell does go on here as something wryly accepting rather than as simply casual as it looks: '[He] comforted himself by thinking they should work together better as time rolled on; but he was very angry at a bachelor great-uncle of Mr Coxe's' ...'. Mrs Gaskell moves fluently on, in this instance, as if being pulled in two utterly contradictory directions - in the same sentence and at the same time - were messily normal. What we are seeing in Mrs Gaskell here - as she now stops, now goes on - are two kinds of tough and cunning ease amidst life's contraries and incompatibles. But it as though she instinctively knows when it is right to go on. For, comically, Mr Gibson has to go on, too, 'thinking they should work together better as time rolled on' whilst knowing 'almost directly' after marrying his wife that he need never have done so.

That those technicalities - knowing when to stop and when to go on - are pieties and that they really matter to Mrs Gaskell is clear from the manuscript version of the episode where Roger comforts Molly after her father has broken the news that he is to re-marry:

At last he spoke - almost as though he was reasoning out the matter with himself.

'It seems as if there might be cases where - setting the question of love entirely on one side - it must be almost a duty to find

someone to be a substitute for the mother ... I can believe,' said he, in a different tone of voice, and looking at Molly afresh, 'that this step may be greatly for your father's happiness - it may relieve him from many cares, and may give him a pleasant companion.' (WD, p. 119)

'It seems as if there might be cases where - 1
 setting the question of love entirely 2
 one side - it must be almost a duty to find 3
 a substitute for the mother ... 4
 someone to be \wedge <--- --- to have 5
 <---> 6
 \wedge responsibility - to be a substitute for 7
 the mother who is -> I can believe,' said 8
 he, in a different tone of voice, and 9
 looking at Molly afresh, 'that this step may 10
 be greatly for your father's happiness - it 11
 may relieve him from many cares and may 12
 pleasant 13
 give him a \wedge companion <who may brighten his 14
 life>.' (MS, p. 178)¹² 15

The first version of Roger's own (checked) first attempt
 (lines 7-8) reads:

'... to be a substitute for the mother who
 is - I can believe,' said he ...'

The tender check which Roger makes for Molly's sake -
 stopping short of saying 'the mother who is [no more]' -
 is also, at some level, for his own sake (since his mother,
 too, is dying). And yet Mrs Gaskell goes back, in her
 revision, to leave the thought which produces the check even
 more implicit:

'... to be a substitute for the mother ... I
 can believe,' said he ...'

12. There seems to be either a change of pen or a change of pressure for the cancellations at lines 5-8, and at lines 8-12 in the extract below (p. 71), which suggests that these are later revisions.

The revision helps us to see that in Mrs Gaskell's prose things are happening in the interstices between the sentences, even as the sentences go on. For go on they must with life, with time, as Roger himself has to do:

Roger did not want to hear [the] reasons for [Molly's] doubting speech. He felt as if he had no right to hear more of Mr Gibson's life, past, present, or to come, than was absolutely necessary for him, in order that he might comfort and help the crying girl, whom he had come upon so unexpectedly. And besides, he wanted to go home, and be with his mother at lunch-time. Yet he could not leave her alone.

'It is right to hope for the best about everybody, and not to expect the worst. This sounds like a truism, but it has comforted me before now, and some day you'll find it useful. One has always to try to think more of others than of oneself, and it is best not to pre-judge people on the bad side. My sermons aren't long, are they? Have they given you an appetite for lunch? Sermons always make me hungry, I know.' (WD, pp. 120-21)

That Roger's real sympathy for Molly's pain is surrounded, nevertheless, by other considerations ('besides ...'), that Roger has to get on with life even so - this is a sense of life's relativism which, I shall argue in Section II of this chapter, lies at the heart of Mrs Gaskell's prose. Moreover, we have a typical instance in this passage of the sheer density of her relativist vision. For Roger's personal family worries exist side by side, not only with his concern for Molly's upset, but with his more formal concern, also, not to offend against family pieties by knowing 'more' of Mr Gibson's affairs than it belongs to him to know - more

than 'is absolutely necessary' to comfort Molly. Roger's delicate consideration here for those finely and tacitly exact human lines which exist within and around families, is a timely reminder (as I now come to the close of this introductory study of small revisions) that Mrs Gaskell's own minute attention to tiny measures and fine degrees is a mode of human attention above all. So indeed the adjustments she makes here (to Roger's words to Molly) seem also to suggest:

This sounds like a truism<. Indeed I dare 1
 say the two things I want you to be 2
 comforted by are only truisms>, but 3
 it has 4
 <they have> comforted me before now, and 5
 it 6
 some day you'll find <them> useful. 7
 One has always to try to 8
 <Here they are*> ^ <T>[t]hink more of others 9
 one it is best not to 10
 than of <your>self <.>[&] ^ <Don't> pre-judge 11
 people on the bad side. (MS, p. 180) 12

The revisions are tonal above all. In substituting for the imperious emphasis of Roger's original advice - 'Think more of others ... Don't prejudge' - something closer to her own habitual implicitness, it is as though Mrs Gaskell were herself, now, with patience and gentleness, adopting 'a different tone of voice and looking at Molly afresh'. Yet she is looking still through Roger's eyes and with loyal, implicit regard for that separate, more selfish desire of his - 'to go home and be with his mother at lunch-time' - which was temporarily submerged at the close of paragraph

one by the decision (emerging in a separate sentence) not to leave Molly alone. That more intimate consideration now tactfully re-surfaces: 'My sermons aren't long, are they? Have they given you an appetite for lunch? Sermons always make me hungry, I know'. Knowing how to leave something behind, how to go on, as the revisions here explicitly show, is as tender a matter for Mrs Gaskell as knowing when not to do so.

'Never, for all the beauty and sensitivity of her previous writing, had Mrs Gaskell been in such total command of her medium, and the gain in fluidity of style ... is enormous.' So writes her biographer, Winifred Gerin, of Mrs Gaskell's achievement in Wives and Daughters.¹³ Indeed, 'fluidity', 'fluency', 'naturalness' are bywords when it comes to critical appraisal of Mrs Gaskell's prose style. 'Naturalness is the essence of Mrs Gaskell's art,' says Enid L. Duthie. 'She expressed herself on paper as fluently as she did in conversation.'¹⁴ It is not that such terms are inappropriate with regard to Mrs Gaskell.¹⁵ Indeed, one

13. Winifred Gerin, Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography (Oxford, 1976), p. 282.

14. Enid L. Duthie, The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell (London, 1980), pp. 177, 201.

15. Though they become so where 'fluency' is synonymous with artlessness, as it is for this critic: The 'chief fault' of Mrs Gaskell's 'basic narrative style,' says Edgar Wright, (a style which, he says, is 'adequate without being remarkable') 'is that fluency is not checked by sufficient control; her style sometimes needed pruning and more care taken over its vocabulary. Mrs Gaskell admits to having "a very runaway kind of mind"; it is reflected in the flow of

instinctively reaches for such terms when reading her prose, and Section II of this chapter will demonstrate not only the applicability but the necessity of such terms in defining the movement and shape of Mrs Gaskell's prose syntax. The problem with such a vocabulary, however, is that it can lead us to overlook those features of Mrs Gaskell's art which, as a result of their very subtlety, are already substantially hidden - the delicate fine tuning, the myriad tiny shifts and adjustments, the tender pieties which, with the aid of the manuscript, we have seen to be going on amidst the apparently seamless fluency of her prose. Indeed it is a part of Mrs Gaskell's very craft that she should attend to the small things which make a big difference - 'a kind of', 'Molly half-thought', 'to be a substitute for the mother ...' - with such apparent casualness that a reader might well miss their significance. For to insist upon the importance of such minute distinctions would be to lose the subtlety of their power. So it is, as I have sought to demonstrate in this section, that we have to read Mrs Gaskell's prose in much the same way as she herself reads life - attending to the slight and seemingly incidental,

 detail and the temptation, too often unresisted, to accept the handiest word or phrase instead of searching for something more fitting', Mrs Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London, 1965), p. 253. 'She could have been more careful,' is how Wright concludes his book (ibid. p. 263). With regard to such criticism of Mrs Gaskell's mode of art, the manuscript revisions I cite throughout this chapter really speak for themselves.

whilst always recognising that the apparent unimportance of these things is inseparably connected to how powerful they are. That must compensate for the loss of the more explicit language of Maria Edgeworth.

II. The Characteristic Syntax

In this section I shall be looking principally at one representative passage from Wives and Daughters (divided into five separate sections), making reference to the manuscript where appropriate and helpful, but concentrating less on isolated revisions and more on the larger movement of the prose, the characteristics of which were becoming clear in the last section. I wish to show how my looking at the manuscript encourages and gives way to the act of close reading itself. For a full transcription of the manuscript version of the passage under discussion (and a copy of the relevant pages from the manuscript) see Appendix I.

Some time after her father's second marriage, Molly finds herself weighed down at heart by the domestic situation at home:

That whole winter long she had felt as if her sun was all shrouded over with grey mist, and could no longer shine brightly for her. She wakened up in the morning with a dull sense of something being wrong; the world was out of joint, and, if she were born to set it right, she did not know how to do it. Blind herself as she would, she could not help perceiving that her father

was not satisfied with the wife he had chosen. For a long time Molly had been surprised at his apparent contentment: sometimes she had been unselfish enough to be glad that he was satisfied; but still more frequently nature would have its way, and she was almost irritated at what she considered his blindness. Something, however, had changed him now: something that had arisen at the time of Cynthia's engagement; he had become nervously sensitive to his wife's failings, and his whole manner had grown dry and sarcastic, not merely to her, but sometimes to Cynthia - and even - but this very rarely, to Molly herself. He was not a man to go into passions or ebullitions of feeling: they would have relieved him, even while degrading him in his own eyes; but he became hard, and occasionally bitter in his speeches and ways. Molly now learnt to long after the vanished blindness in which her father had passed the first year of his marriage; yet there were no outrageous infractions of domestic peace. (WD, pp. 430-31)

I give below the manuscript corrections to this section of the passage¹⁶:

he had become
 ...<his eyes were> nervously sensitive to his wife's failings, and his whole manner had grown dry and sarcastic, not merely to her, but sometimes to Cynthia - and even - but this very rarely, to Molly herself. He was not a man to go into passions or
 they
 ebullitions of feeling \;/ <that> would have relieved him, even while degrading him in his own eyes; but he became hard, and occasionally bitter in his speeches and ways. (MS, p. 605)

What Mrs Gaskell seems to have had in mind in the false start she makes here is a more explicit contrast with

16. Save for the revision in the very first sentence from 'light' to 'sun'. (See Appendix I, p. 331, lines 9-10.)

Gibson's former 'blindness' - something like 'his eyes were opened'.¹⁷ In the immediate revision to 'he had become nervously sensitive to his wife's failings', the change in Mr Gibson is registered as something more gradual and inward, less final or revealed. Mrs Gaskell seems to be deliberately eschewing what would be over-dramatic in a passage which instead is typical of the novel as a whole in not seeking revelation: 'She wakened up in the morning with a dull sense of something being wrong ... Something, however had changed him now: something that had arisen at the time of Cynthia's engagement'. (How careful Mrs Gaskell's very vagueness - 'something ... something ... something' - now seems in the light of that revision.) What is so troubling to Molly is that she cannot get hold of what has gone wrong: she looks for the key, for some answer to what is amiss, but it eludes her. And the elusiveness of any answer is intimately connected with Mrs Gaskell's sense of time. Real, significant change in this novel is never momentous,

17. That this is an immediate revision and not a later revision from 'His eyes were nervously sensitive', I feel certain. Though it is usual for Mrs Gaskell to place an immediate correction next to, rather than above a cancellation, she does not do so consistently. Compare this revision to the passage quoted at page 92, below:

She knew that very often she longed to protest but did not do it, from the desire of sparing her father any discord; and she
 by
 saw <that> his face that he, too, was occasionally aware of certain things that gave him pain ... (MS, p. 546)

for it is inseparable from the slow, onward flow of time with which life, and these sentences themselves, move on. The manuscript gives strong grounds for the intuition that Mrs Gaskell stays with a sense of lived time even as she writes - thus closing the gap between what Gerard Genette calls 'the time of the narrative' and real time itself to its smallest possible difference.¹⁸ For quite apart from the fact that the manuscript shows so little reworking or obvious hesitation, the writing as a whole almost literally does not stop. The manuscript has neither chapter headings, nor, more significantly, chapter divisions, save on two or three occasions, where the divisions seem to be afterthoughts. 'Please, end of chapter' is written at the end of Chapter XXX, for instance, and 'End of December number' at the end of Chapter LIX (though there is a gap left at the end of Chapter II).¹⁹ The form of the manuscript

18. Genette distinguishes between 'story time' (the temporal order of succession and the duration of events in the story) and 'narrative time' (the order of events and the duration of their telling in the narrative). See Narrative Discourse (Oxford, 1980), pp. 33-5. I shall be returning to this distinction, p. 101 below. My point here is that narrative time in Wives and Daughters not only seems to imitate, but is actually grounded in real time itself.

19. The MSS of The Life of Charlotte Bronte (John Rylands Library, Manchester) and of Sylvia's Lovers (Brotherton Special Collections, University of Leeds) have chapter divisions consistently, though not titles. In the case of Sylvia's Lovers, however, chapter divisions are still sometimes inserted - the divisions at Volume 2, Chapter II and Volume 3, Chapter III are clearly afterthoughts. Also, in the final chapters of the manuscript (which Mrs Gaskell 'wrote compulsively', 'all [she] wanted to do was write' (A Habit of Stories, p. 503) paragraph divisions are

must be accounted for partly by the sheer pressure of time Mrs Gaskell was under - the result at once of an inordinately busy life and of the need to meet serial deadlines. But the fact that the manuscript just keeps going suggests, too, a dislike of interruption, as though the underlying movement and tempo of the novel is of primary importance to her.

It is Mrs Gaskell's attachment to lived time which brings the form of this novel so close to her vision of the rhythm of life itself, and which accounts more than anything else for the syntactic habit of addition and of revision. For what exists in time cannot, by definition, stand still. One thought gives way to the next and the next. I mark three movements thus: (1) 'He had become nervously sensitive to his wife's failings, and his whole manner had grown dry and sarcastic, not merely to her, (2) but sometimes to Cynthia - (3) and even - but this very rarely, to Molly herself'. The sentence builds to the shock of that '- and even -' as though accidentally, through simple addition, thus requiring that further revisionary addition - 'but this very rarely ...' - as Mrs Gaskell re-estimates the

 increasingly inserted. (Among Mrs Gaskell's directions to the printers is this one: 'Mrs Gaskell would be very obliged to the printer of Sylvia's Lovers if he would break the line, and begin a fresh one whenever the marks occur //'.) There are no known manuscripts for either North and South or Mary Barton to tell us whether such habits of composition were in fact normal for Mrs Gaskell in her novels.

relative size of those slights against Molly. Compare Dickens's own more emphatic reevaluation of first thoughts here, in Dombey and Son, where Florence, too, is suffering from the estrangement she sees 'widen[ing] ... every day' between her father, who has never returned her love, and Edith, her new mother, who loves only her:

Each day's added knowledge deepened the shade upon her love and hope, roused up the old sorrow that had slumbered for a little time, and made it even heavier to bear than it had been before.

It had been hard - how hard may none but Florence ever know!- to have the natural affection of a true and earnest nature turned to agony; and slight or stern repulse, substituted for the tenderest protection and care. It had been hard to feel in her deep heart what she had felt, and never know the happiness of one touch of response. But it was much more hard to be compelled to doubt either her father or Edith, so affectionate and dear to her, and to think of her love for each of them, by turns, with fear, distrust and wonder.²⁰

'It had been hard ... it had been hard ... But it was much more hard ...'. This is Dickens saving his first thought till last, deliberately holding it back so as to build to the crescendo of the final sentence. Where Mrs Gaskell's prose seems as indiscriminating as time itself - each sentence, like each moment, as significant as the last and as the next - Dickens makes the discrimination syntactically which time itself is insistently making for Florence: 'Each

20. Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, first published 1848, edited by Alan Horsman (Oxford, 1974), p. 579. Hereafter cited as DS.

day's added knowledge deepened the shade upon her love and hope'. Each day, each sentence makes a felt difference here - it is a new leap of pain. What is more, Dickens has the same thought twice over, similarly but also oppositely -

But it was much more hard to be compelled to doubt either her father or Edith, so affectionate and dear to her

and

to think of her love for each of them, by turns, with fear, distrust or wonder.²¹

Dickens stops to reshake his first thought where Mrs Gaskell would already have moved on - as she moves on from Molly ('and even - but this very rarely - to Molly herself') to Mr Gibson ('He was not a man to go into passions or ebullitions of feeling ...').

But what is left behind in Mrs Gaskell is not therefore forgotten. For, after those tiny 'shocks to Molly's sensibilities (which cumulatively do make a difference), 'His eyes were opened' now comes back as 'vanished blindness':

Molly now learnt to long after the vanished blindness in which her father had passed the first year of his marriage; yet there were no outrageous infractions of domestic peace.

Only when Molly comes to 'long after' the domestic equilibrium that went with her father's blindness -

21. Interestingly, the 'each, by turns' of the manuscript version was amended in the first proof to 'each of them', and 'by turns' re-instated in a later proof (see Clarendon edition, reference as above), as though Dickens were seeing, after making the revisionary omission, that the second thought, though similar, is not in fact the same.

blindness that 'almost irritated her' at the time - is she really aware that his blindness is gone at all. Moreover, she experiences this change now not as the fulfilment of a selfish half-wish, but as sudden and painful loss. And 'yet' (Mrs Gaskell goes on with characteristic revisionary ease) 'there were no outrageous infringements of domestic peace'. Molly's pain is re-absorbed, in the forward movement of the sentence, into the measured flow of time in which the change from which she suffers has taken place, without disturbing the even surfaces of life. It is just because the change has happened silently and hiddenly over time (the change in him producing an equivalent but different change in her) that what feels like sudden loss has, she finds, already happened to her, without her noticing it, so that she is still having to re-adjust - 'Molly now learnt to long after the vanished blindness ...'. Not to know what has changed until the change has already happened - this, I suggest, is the temporal-narrative experience of reading Mrs Gaskell's prose.

The paragraph moves on thus:

Some people might say that Mr Gibson 'accepted the inevitable'; he told himself in more homely phrase 'that it was no use crying over spilt milk': and he, from principle, avoided all actual dissensions with his wife, preferring to cut short a discussion by a sarcasm, or by leaving the room. Moreover, Mrs Gibson had a very tolerable temper of her own, and her cat-like nature purred and delighted in smooth ways, and pleasant quietness. She had no

great facility for understanding sarcasm; it is true it disturbed her, but as she was not quick at deciphering any depth of meaning, and felt it to be unpleasant to think about it, she forgot it as soon as possible. Yet she saw she was often in some kind of disfavour with her husband, and it made her uneasy. She resembled Cynthia in this; she liked to be liked; and she wanted to regain the esteem which she did not perceive she had lost for ever. Molly sometimes took her stepmother's part in secret; she felt as if she herself could never have borne her father's hard speeches so patiently; they would have cut her to the heart, and she must either have demanded an explanation, and probed the sore to the bottom, or sate down despairing and miserable. Instead of which Mrs Gibson, after her husband had left the room, on these occasions, would say in a manner more bewildered than hurt:

'I think dear papa seems a little put out today; we must see that he has a dinner that he likes when he comes home. I have often perceived that everything depends on making a man comfortable in his own house.' (WD, p. 431)

'Moreover, Mrs Gibson had a very tolerable temper of her own.' This is an instance of Mrs Gaskell going on where she might have stopped. That the paragraph does not end with Mr Gibson (at 'by leaving the room'), is a sign that the move to Mrs Gibson begins as another of those corrective asides (akin to 'yet there were no outrageous infractions' of domestic peace'). But the initially contingent matter of Mrs Gibson's 'tolerable temper' (tolerable that is to Mr Gibson and to Molly) now becomes the central focus²²:

22. It is a similarly fluid shift of interest which produces this earlier correction from relative to quasi-autonomous clause (see above, p. 75) - as object ('ebullitions of of feeling') turns so easily into subject in Mrs Gaskell's

She had no great facility for understanding sarcasm; it is true it disturbed her, but as she was not quick at deciphering any depth of meaning, and felt it to be to think about it unpleasant \wedge she forgot it \langle all \rangle as soon as often possible. Yet she saw she was \wedge in some kind of disfavour with her husband, and it made her uneasy. (MS, p. 606)

Once again, we find Mrs Gaskell literally in several minds in this paragraph, turning her attention, now here, now there, with equal fidelity and regard. Again, moreover, she does not stop at 'she forgot it \langle all \rangle as soon as possible', because Mrs Gibson cannot herself leave it there, much as she would like to. For all her limitation, for all that limitation of understanding which limits her very suffering, Mrs Gibson has her levels, too. What she is quite content not to notice at one level, she cannot altogether ignore at another: 'Yet she saw she was often in some kind of disfavour'. It is as though this immediate revisionary shift actually begets the later revisions - produces, that is, the

mind:

He was not a man to go into passions or they ebullitions of feeling \;/ \langle that \rangle would have relieved him, even while degrading him in his own eyes ...

And how typical of Mrs Gaskell to use that neutral conjoining phrase - 'even while': the later thought - 'even while degrading him in his own eyes' - is simply added, unexamined, to the first thought, not evaluatively weighed against it. (Compare the more evaluative [and more proleptic] formulation: 'though they would have relieved him they would have degraded him in his own eyes'.)

greater layering of meaning which the corrections give to the preceding sentence, explicitly in the revision from '[she] felt [his sarcasm] to be unpleasant' to '[she] felt it to be unpleasant to think about it', and implicitly in the cancellation of 'all'. But, equally, that typically self-checking insertion 'often' is a sort of self-reminder that Mrs Gibson's discomfort is selfishly bounded (as poor Molly's more generalised unease is not) only by the 'occasions' upon which she herself suffers from what she has caused.

Mrs Gaskell's revisionary habit of mind is a kind of primary proof that to move on with time is not therefore to do merely one thing at a time. Rather it is the opposite. For hers is a mind so busily married to time that it is unworriedly used to thinking more than one thought at once and still carrying on. It was Mrs Oliphant who, out of a sense of her own busy absorbedness, made a distinction between realistic married lives and the Bronte-like intensity of single ones:

It is curious to note how much more keen is the memory, how much more distinct all the personal details of recollection in the minds of those who have kept themselves intact, so to speak, and have never lost their childish individuality. The man, and more especially the woman, who has married, and confused the remembrance of early days with so many recollections more poignant - has a memory of a totally different quality from that of the virginal old age which has never replaced its first impressions with

others more important.²³

It is Mrs Gaskell's married, mature acceptance of relative and constantly changing priorities which makes it as natural for her to re-examine her premises even as she is writing from them as it is for her to shift her centre of gravity and, at the same time, make the huge shift of level which takes place here:

resembled
 She <was like> Cynthia in this; she liked
 to be liked; and she wanted to regain the
 esteem which she did not perceive she had
 lost for ever. <Even> Molly sometimes took
 her stepmother's part in secret; she felt as
 if she herself could never have borne
 hard
 her father's ^ speeches so patiently ...
 (MS, p. 606)

'... and she wanted to regain the esteem which she did not perceive she had lost forever.' 'Which': how innocuous that simple pronoun and habitual joiner, so terrible in this context, initially seems. With apparent seamlessness, the sentence actually slips time and narrative, crosses a threshold at 'which' into a new level of meaning. And yet, like Molly, we hardly notice the shift, until it is past, because the novel gets on as though no such leap and no such irrecoverable loss had taken place. It is as though there is no time, in this novel, to acknowledge these little deaths. And if this seems like the wrong time to say

23. Mrs Oliphant, 'Edward Gibbon', Blackwood's Magazine, vol. 130 (August, 1881), pp. 231-2.

goodbye, it is because there so rarely is a right time - as Molly finds when she comes to leave Hamley Hall, a second time, after she has inadvertently learned the secret of Osborne's marriage:

She had always wished to come into direct contact with a love-story: here she was, and she only found it very uncomfortable; there was a sense of concealment and uncertainty about it all; and her honest straightforward father, her quiet life at Hollingford, which, even with all its drawbacks, was above-board, and where everybody knew what everybody else was doing, seemed secure and pleasant in comparison. Of course she felt great pain at quitting the Hall, and at the mute farewell she had taken of her sleeping and unconscious friend. But leaving Mrs Hamley now was a different thing to what it had been a fortnight ago. Then she was wanted at any moment, and felt herself to be of comfort. Now her very existence seemed forgotten by the poor lady whose body appeared to be living so long after her soul. (WD, pp. 220-21)

The major thing - leaving the home and family which have been her stay during the unhappy changes in her own domestic life - now happens in a minor key, for new and unlooked-for considerations have now entered the frame. It is one of those pulls of life: something else has come along. 'Of course' is almost apologetic - a kind of regret in Molly that she has already, in thought, left Hamley behind. It is a regret which is wonderfully displaced in that turnaround to - 'Now her very existence seemed forgotten by the poor lady...', as though Molly were forgotten by what she herself is leaving behind (and her 'very existence' is

forgotten by one whose own existence is going into a larger oblivion). But it is also Mrs Gaskell's own generic regret which seems to produce the small revision she makes here, after having herself moved on:

... and she wanted to regain the esteem which she did not perceive she had lost for ever. <Even> Molly sometimes took her stepmother's part in secret ...

The cancellation is a tender afterthought, making the full stop last just a little more, leaving a (tiny) gap in time.²⁴ At the same time the revision normalises that huge shift in Molly from sympathy with her father to 'secret' sympathy with her stepmother. The loss of 'even' makes the whole thing more innocent, more authorially unsignalled. For Molly herself does not think 'Even I ...'. It is as though Mrs Gaskell were at second thought realising her own external word from inside Molly, for the word, unspoken, is turned into Molly's incarnate reality. Similarly, the awful futility of Mrs Gibson's efforts to

24. And thus producing an instance of what Douglas Oliver calls the 'retrospective stress' created by the use of pause in a line of poetry. 'Part of our sense of a syllable's stress is cast back on it afterwards, not from anticipation but from the real future (the pause). It is a minute puzzle of space-time that we think we heard, back in the past, a certain stress, but are able to add to our sense of what happened then by later events in the line. That is, the mind mistimes, if you like, a present experience, the pause, by posting the influence back [to what preceded it] and by thinking that the influence took place then', Poetry and Narrative in Performance (London, 1989), p. 35. Just so we seem to notice retrospectively - a sort of realistically delayed shock - 'which she did not perceive she had lost for ever'.

regain her husband's favour is normatively re-incorporated as the passage moves on (so routinely unlinear is the internal logic of this linear prose). It begins to carry an (almost comic) pathos, which is Molly's day-to-day experience of her step-mother's vain endeavours:

And thus [Mrs Gibson] went on, groping about to find the means of reinstating herself in his good graces - really trying, according to her lights, till Molly was often compelled to pity her in spite of herself, and although she saw that her stepmother was the cause of her father's increased astringency of disposition. For indeed he had got into that kind of exaggerated susceptibility with regard to his wife's faults, which may be best typified by the state of bodily irritation that is produced by the constant recurrence of any particular noise; those who are brought within hearing of it, are apt to be always on the watch for the repetition, if they are once made to notice it, and are in an irritable state of nerves. (WD, pp. 431-32)

Mrs Gaskell checks herself here, as though to stay close, once again, to Molly's inward experience:

Molly <came to pity her> was often compelled to pity her in spite of herself, and although she saw <his side*> that her stepmother was the cause of her father's increased astringency of disposition. (MS, p. 606)

Molly's pity is involuntary even as it has become habitual. The sympathy that goes out to the stepmother, just as involuntarily, keeps looping back to the father - 'and although she saw that her stepmother was the cause ...'. The sentence pulls now one way, now another, shifting its centre, for Molly really has no firm centre

anymore.²⁵ And yet how maturely unworried Mrs Gaskell is by this confusion even as she is attached to it. How accepting that 'and, although' seems (as though the very confusion itself were normal).

In contrast again, I suggest, there is Dickens's brilliantly troubled complexity as he now commits himself to the 'turns' of Florence's mind. Like Molly, though more intensely, Florence is a child struggling with the confusion of being torn between a father and a step-mother:

She saw her father cold and obdurate to Edith, as to her; hard, inflexible, unyielding. Could it be, she asked herself with starting tears, that her own dear mother had been made unhappy by such treatment, and had pined away and died? Then she would think how proud and stately Edith was to everyone but her, with what disdain she treated him, how distantly she kept apart from him, and what she had said on the night when she came home; and quickly it would come on Florence, almost as a crime, that she loved one who was set in opposition to her father, and that her father knowing of it, must think of her in his solitary room as the unnatural child who added this wrong to the old fault, so much wept for, of never having won his fatherly affection,

25. Compare the revision cited below (p. 95), where Mrs Gaskell is again concerned to register the involuntary to-fro of Molly's feelings:

Day after day, month after month, year after year, would Molly have to sympathise with her father and <yet> pity her stepmother, feeling acutely for both ...

'Yet' puts one sympathy in simple conflict or opposition to the other, whereas the cancellation puts Molly herself in several minds at the same time, feeling those divided and incompatible sympathies both at once.

from her birth. The next kind word from Edith, the next kind glance, would shake these thoughts again, and make them seem like black ingratitude; for who but she had cheered the drooping heart of Florence, so lonely and so hurt, and been its best of comforters! Thus with her gentle nature yearning to them both, feeling for the misery of both, and whispering doubts of her own duty to both, Florence in her wider and expanded love, and by the side of Edith, endured more, than when she had hoarded up her undivided secret in the mournful house, and her beautiful Mama had never dawned upon it. (DS, p. 580)

Florence keeps turning it all around in her head, trying to make things add up. But the equation keeps coming out differently. First she thinks of her father and Edith separately and oppositely: 'either'

She saw her father cold and obdurate to Edith, as to her; hard, inflexible, unyielding

'or'

she would think how proud and stately Edith was to everyone but her, with what disdain she treated him, how distantly she kept apart from him.

Then they are incompatibly together, one way -

and quickly it would come on Florence, almost as a crime, that she loved one who was set in opposition to her father

then incompatibly related in a different way -

The next kind word from Edith, the next kind glance, would shake these thoughts again, and make them seem like black ingratitude

Because Florence cannot, as it were, marry together the two she loves in herself, they are separated even in their

effect in and on her. But the same elements are constantly 'shake[n]' and reshaken in Florence's mind: the picture keeps changing, kaleidoscopically, producing different configurations and triangles. Florence's pain is that one way of seeing does not displace the last but gets incompatibly 'added' to it (though it is impossible for her to hold them all at once). On top of that 'either/or' confusion is the third confusion of feeling for 'both', as well -

yearning to them both, feeling for the misery of both, and whispering doubts of her own duty to both, Florence ... endured more, than when she had hoarded up her undivided secret in the mournful house ...

The Dickens who must have recognised in Mrs Gaskell a lover of tacit or damaged pieties like himself (publishing her as he did from the beginning of her writing career), was also a man who suffered far more from conflicts than did the woman whose work he so much admired.²⁶ For where Dickens's sentences, at such times, seem to twist and pile up vertically, in painful accretion, halting the narrative

26. John Forster attests to Dickens's 'high admiration for [Mrs Gaskell's] powers', The Life of Charles Dickens, third edition, first published 1872-4, 3 vols (London, 1872-4), II, p. 423. It is often difficult to separate flirtatious flattery from critical praise in the comments Dickens himself made about Mrs Gaskell's work. But, as Jenny Uglow points out, though their relationship became, over the years, increasingly strained 'of over forty stories and articles written by Mrs Gaskell between 1850 and her death, two-thirds were published by Dickens, either in Household Words or its successor All the Year Round', A Habit of Stories, p. 255.

line, Mrs Gaskell ever keeps to the horizontal, adding and adding and knowing that what gets added will not add up - as the following related example may also illustrate.

It is shortly after her father's second marriage that Molly first begins to question herself as to 'how far it was right to leave unnoticed the small domestic failings - the webs, the distortions of truth which ... prevailed in their household':

She knew that very often she longed to protest, but did not do it, from the desire of sparing her father any discord; and she saw by his face that he, too, was occasionally aware of certain things that gave him pain, as showing that his wife's standard of conduct was not as high as he would have liked. It was a wonder to Molly if this silence was right or wrong. With a girl's want of toleration, and want of experience to teach her the force of circumstances, and of temptation, she had often been on the point of telling her stepmother some forcible home truths. But possibly her father's example of silence, and often some piece of kindness on Mrs Gibson's part (for after her way, and when in a good temper, she was very kind to Molly), made her hold her tongue. (WD, p. 380)

Just when Molly thinks she knows what it is right to do - 'she had often been on the point of telling her stepmother some home truths' - life takes another jump, and the moment of truth simply evaporates, the intention less unfulfilled than simply lost. And still there are those typical sideways moves, aslant the narrative (and even the sentence) line. I set out the moves of the final sentence thus, in order to

try to highlight its numerous relativising kinks:

(1) (Connectives)	(2) (Modifications)	(3) (Verbal Phrases)	(4) (Main Verb)
But	possibly	her father's example of silence	
and	often	some piece of kindness on Mrs Gibson's part	
(for	after her way		
and	when in a good temper,	she was very kind to Molly),	made her hold her tongue.

The picture will not stay still even within a single sentence. Nothing remains causally final or separately fixed, even temporarily.

Mrs Gaskell's syntax really proceeds from that wry, but large and achieved submission to life that is, I shall argue in Chapter Four, essentially Tolstoyan. But with Tolstoy, it is as though we can see what it was that needed to be overcome - the original mistake of a false absolutism - in order to arrive at a novelistic vision of the relativism of life. For Olenin it is who, in The Cossacks, would indeed pin life down to a single idea, and fails, comically, again and again:

'What makes me so happy and what did I live for until now?' he asked himself. 'How exacting I have been for my own interests, how I worried and schemed, yet all I gained was shame and sorrow. And now I find I don't need anything to make me happy!' And suddenly it seemed as though a whole new world were revealed to him. 'Now I know what happiness is,' he said to himself. 'Happiness lies in living for other

people.²⁷

'Now I know.'²⁸ But life will not let him leave it there. Just as suddenly he falls in love and the 'new truth' (ibid.) simply vanishes. 'Nothing could have been dearer to me than those convictions ... Well ... Love came along, and now they are no more' (ibid. p. 302). Life goes on, doggedly reasserting itself, eluding Olenin's securing idea of it. So Molly herself is caught out (though the twist is here quietly implicit), when she returns from Hamley Hall to what she has now come to think of as her 'secure and pleasant' life at Hollingford:

Molly's father was not at home when she returned; and there was no one to give her a welcome. (WD, p. 221)

What in The Cossacks is a deep formal irony, is so commonplace a thing in Wives and Daughters²⁹, so ordinarily given, as to be beyond irony. It is not that Mrs Gaskell is blind to these deep ironies: rather it is as though she is so deeply adjusted to them as not to mind them - not mind them anxiously that is. She is less troubled than Tolstoy, perhaps because she did not, as did he, have to overcome an obsessive philosopher within her. And yet as

27. Leo Tolstoy, The Cossacks, first published 1863, translated by Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1960), p. 250.

28. The energetic absoluteness of Olenin's certainty is even more pronounced, in fact, in the original Russian. See Chapter Four, p. 185, below.

29. Literally commonplace: for now there is another and brighter surprise in 'her quiet life at Hollingford' - Cynthia arrives.

the passage moves on we find that Mrs Gaskell does mind these ironies, silently, even so:

So that poor Molly had not passed a cheerful winter, independently of any private sorrows that she might have in her own heart. She did not look well, either: she was gradually falling into low health, rather than bad health. Her heart beat more feebly and slower; the vivifying stimulant of hope - even unacknowledged hope - was gone out of her life. It seemed as if there was not, and never could be in this world, any help for the dumb discordancy between her father and his wife. Day after day, month after month, year after year, would Molly have to sympathise with her father, and pity her stepmother, feeling acutely for both, and certainly more than Mrs Gibson felt for herself. (WD, p. 432)

The almost sly, comic shift - from that 'for both' to 'and certainly more than Mrs Gibson felt for herself' - is one that Dickens could not have made. Mrs Gaskell only seems not to notice how great is the divide she has crossed, or how utterly and finally separated are the human categories that she slips between. But she does notice it, and her silence about it is almost cunning:

Day after day, month after month, year after year, would Molly have to sympathise with her father, and <yet> pity her stepmother,
and
feeling acutely for both<;>[,] ^ certainly more than Mrs Gibson felt for herself. (MS, p. 607)

With the careful insertion of that (usually natural) conjunction - 'and'³⁰ - Mrs Gaskell closes the gap

30. Compare 'and she was much more communicative to Molly than her own child' (p. 57, above).

syntactically that she knows to be humanly unbridgeable. That these are separated worlds, that Molly never will know how far her sympathy is misplaced, any more than Mrs Gibson will ever know how much or little she might deserve it - this is what Mrs Gaskell knows and yet deliberately makes so little of. It is as though the relativism is too intractably given to be pushed into saving irony. Instead Mrs Gaskell pushes it the other way, making it look undramatically like another of those chance sideways-moves. Yet that these microscopic moves never are as accidental as they seem becomes clear as the passage once again moves on:

Molly could not imagine how she had at one time wished for her father's eyes to be opened, and how she could ever have fancied that if they were, he would be able to change things in Mrs Gibson's character. It was all hopeless, and the only attempt at a remedy was to think about it as little as possible. Then Cynthia's ways and manners about Roger gave Molly a great deal of uneasiness. She did not believe that Cynthia cared enough for him; at any rate, not with the sort of love that she herself would have bestowed, if she had been so happy - no, that was not it - if she had been in Cynthia's place. (WD, p. 432)

Time it is that comes to Molly's rescue, randomly throwing up the next new thing, even though it is a new pain - 'Then Cynthia's ways and manners about Roger gave Molly a great deal of uneasiness'. Yet the movement forward is really a movement backwards - or rather it is as though the passage is now picking up the narrative line which it seemed to have long left behind, here, where the passage actually begins:

'Ah, but [Roger's] in love with me!' said Cynthia, with a pretty consciousness of her power. Molly turned away her head, and was silent; it was of no use combating the truth and she tried rather not to feel it - not to feel, poor girl, that she too had a great weight on her heart, into the cause of which she shrank from examining. That whole winter long ... (WD, p. 430)

The entire passage, whose myriad sideway-moves I have put under scrutiny in this section, is in fact itself a sideways move - a digression from the narrative interest in Molly's troubled affections for Roger and her unease about Cynthia's feelings for him with which the passage as a whole begins and ends. We can actually see Mrs Gaskell, in her revisions, opening up the syntax, making it roomy enough to accommodate the immediate shift:

it was of no use combating the truth and
 rather it
 she tried \wedge not to feel \wedge - not to feel, poor
 girl, that she too had a great weight on her
 heart ... (MS, p. 605)

And yet as the passage comes full circle, in the loop to Cynthia, the domestic situation which has (thus tangentially) absorbed the narrative interest is not concluded but simply left hanging - 'the only attempt at a remedy was to think about it as little as possible'. Nothing has changed, save for that lovely little shift in Molly - another twist of life: 'Molly could not imagine how she had at one time wished for her father's eyes to be opened'. The slantwise movement is as inconsequential as it is illogical. Yet that it is a slantwise move is what Mrs

Gaskell herself never forgets - as these careful revisions which occur mid-passage help to show:

So that poor Molly had not passed a cheerful winter, independently of any private that
 ^ sorrows ^ she might have in her own heart. (MS, p. 606)

Whilst Mrs Gaskell is doing one thing, still she is thinking of another. The passage seems just to be going linearly on, and yet all the time it is overlapping with something else. This is Mrs Gaskell's complexity - her wonderfully ordinary many-mindedness. What we have been seeing throughout this section, in fact, is Mrs Gaskell making a virtue of a medium which is essentially indiscriminating by thus exploiting the apparent messiness of prose - moving freely forward but hiddenly between minds and levels at the same time.

This is what we shall find Mrs Gaskell also doing in the two (apparently rather different) passages with which I now close this section. For it is my purpose in what follows to try to take what has been learned from watching Mrs Gaskell write, back into the act of sheerly reading her prose. In the passage which follows, Mr Gibson has now come around to telling Molly of his decision to marry:

'I've been in great perplexity for some time; but at last I've taken a step which will, I hope, make us both happier.'

'You're going to be married again,' said she, helping him out with a quiet, dry voice, and gently drawing her hand out of his.

'Yes. To Mrs Kirkpatrick - you remember her? They call her Clare at the Towers. You recollect how kind she was to you that day you were left there?'

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

Mr Gibson saw that her silence was unnatural, and half-guessed at the cause of it. But he knew that she must have time to reconcile herself to the idea, and still believed that it would be for her eventual happiness. He had, besides, the relief of feeling that the secret was told, the confidence made, which he had been dreading for the last twenty-four hours. He went on recapitulating all the advantages of the marriage; he knew them off by heart now.
(WD, p. 114)

'You're going to be married.' The sentence which Molly says for her father - out of instinctive tenderness for the vulnerability of that 'I hope' as he tries to speak for them 'both' - is also the cruel blow she receives. And the novel is typically unsurprised by the contradictions and ambivalences it reveals:

helping him out with a quiet, dry voice

and gently drawing her hand out of his

What happens along the same line of prose-sentence, happens at two different levels of voice and hand. As the passage moves on, seemingly along the same horizontal line, it reveals these different layers and levels as it goes:

She did not answer. She could not tell what words to use.

In the simple gap between these two sentences, the paragraph crosses from the surface of life to Molly's inner loneliness. There is no connective, no 'because': what would have been narrative information is here brought to life as the event of bewildered silence. As the paragraph goes on, it crosses now a threshold into a new realm of being:

It was as if the piece of solid ground on which she stood had broken from the shore, and she was drifting out to the infinite sea alone.

The paragraph ends (unusually for Mrs Gaskell, with a simile) in what Molly feels to be a different world. And - as Mrs Gaskell does stop here - the pain is not left behind but left to drift endlessly, on and on - 'alone' - like a line-ending in poetry. For Molly, living the moment so intensely inside her own head, the rest of the world - including her father - no longer exists. But her father is there, still, in that near-by next paragraph:

Mr Gibson saw that her silence was unnatural, and half-guessed at the cause of it.

The paragraphs appear simply to follow on, in time - a Molly paragraph, then a Mr Gibson paragraph. Indeed, the passage as a whole seems to be realising the kind of equivalence between the time of the story and the time of the narrative which, says Genette, we would expect to find

in such a 'scene'.³¹ But the paragraphs do not, in fact, merely follow on: in the life they depict they happen simultaneously and in the same space for all the language of the breaking of land. Molly is not alone. For Mr Gibson is living the same moment - with her and yet also apart from her:

But he knew that she must have time to reconcile herself to the idea, and still believed that it would be for her eventual happiness.

What for Molly is a kind of frontier experience, suffered in the immediacy of the moment, belongs for Mr Gibson to a different, more day-by-day order of time. 'She must have time ... and [he] still believed that it would be for her eventual happiness.' His concern for Molly (typically, in

31. 'Scene' is Genette's name for the form of narrative movement in which there is a 'conventional equality' between story time ('the time of the thing told') and narrative time (the time of the 'telling'), Narrative Discourse, p. 94. There rarely is, in fact, an absolute equality between the two in Wives and Daughters as Section III will further illustrate. Yet there always is, as in this passage, a close relationship. Thus in the same way that Genette concludes in his analysis of the temporal structures of A La Recherche du Temps Perdu that the entire narrative text can be regarded as 'scene' since for all Proust's temporal complexity he 'never evades the temporality of the story' (ibid. p. 100), so we might say that Wives and Daughters is also composed of this same single narrative movement throughout (and not of the 'alternation [of] summary/scene' which, says Genette, was 'traditional' prior to Proust, ibid. p. 109). Not only, then, does Mrs Gaskell seem (as I suggested earlier) to borrow the imagined time of the narrative from real time itself; in addition, narrative time and story time are themselves more or less in unison in her prose. Hence, then, the impression of 'felt life' which the reading of her prose appears to give.

this novel) is naturally, unsurprisingly surrounded by his own more selfish concerns:

He had, besides, the relief of feeling that the secret was told

They share the moment, but they cannot share how it feels, partly bounded as they are within themselves. That they are together and apart in time is what the paragraph division implicitly reveals, even as the sentences seem just to go on with time. It is as if Mrs Gaskell uses the fact of her sentences proceeding one after another in time, in order to reveal these different layers and levels of life as sheer inner matters of fact - as though she were wanting quietly to shock us with the recognition of how complexly (but ordinarily) overlapping is a life, lived nonetheless, as it must be, always forwards in time.

Thus gently does she uncover this complexity when, as the new situation becomes a reality for Molly, she struggles to readjust:

Thinking more of others' happiness than of her own was very fine; but did it not mean giving up her very individuality, quenching all the warm love, the keen desires, that made her herself? Yet in this deadness lay her only comfort; or so it seemed. Wandering in such mazes, she hardly knew how the conversation went on; a third was indeed 'trumpery', where there was entire confidence between the two who were company, from which the other was shut out. She was positively unhappy, and her father did not appear to see it; he was absorbed with his new plans and his new wife that was to be. But he did notice it; and was keenly sorry for his little girl; only he thought that

there was a greater chance for the future harmony of the household, if he did not lead Molly to define her present feelings by putting them into words. It was his general plan to repress emotion by not showing the sympathy he felt. Yet, when he had to leave, he took Molly's hand in his, and held it there, in such a different manner to that in which Mrs Kirkpatrick had done; and his voice softened to his child as he bade her good-by, and added the words (most unusual to him), 'God bless you, child!' (WD, p. 138)

'But he did notice it' is not isolated dramatically in a new paragraph, as it might have been in Dickens. Rather, Mr Gibson's silent noticing exists cheek-by-jowl, in the same paragraph, with Molly's silent, lonely pain. For the real matter here, and the richly nebulous event this passage is delicately disclosing, is that the silence which exists between father and daughter here is neither completely mutual - 'She was positively unhappy, and her father did not appear to see it' - nor yet completely separate - 'Yet when he had to leave, he took Molly's hand in his, and held it there, in such a different manner ... and his voice softened to his child as he bade her good-by'. A happening only half-shared is the real happening in this passage. The complexity of its shifts and moves - 'But he did notice it ... only he thought ... Yet, when he had to leave' - exists not for its own sake but in order to register what is so irreducibly and finely complicated in relations of love and family. It is the life-embedded syntax of a writer inhabiting the undramatic space where in families, and in

life as she sees it, everything tacitly happens. Just so does Mrs Gaskell show us how the silent common feeling that is Molly's blessing here, becomes ('Blind herself as she would') her burden, too:

She knew that very often she longed to protest, but did not do it, from the desire of sparing her father any discord; and she saw by his face that he, too, was occasionally aware of certain things that gave him pain, as showing that his wife's standard of conduct was not as high as he would have liked.

What is at once mutual ('too' is a kind of support) is also separate (his 'occasionally' versus her 'very often'). It is as though this deep family syntax is what determines Mrs Gaskell's very sense of a syntactic unit. Indeed, I shall argue in the following section, it is Mrs Gaskell's sense of this implicit family syntax which underlies the relativistic, realist form of the novel as a whole.

But it is a syntax discovered as if from inside life rather than from above or outside of it. And this, above all, is the achievement of Mrs Gaskell's prose vision. So much at home in time as she always is, she can write from amidst the baffling complexity of a life lived in time, without seeking to get on top of it and without even needing abstractly to understand it. What her prose gives to us is perhaps the only thing we have left in the face of all that is unsquareably and intractably difficult in life - an ability to see it, to tolerate it and to hold it in

the immersed form of the realist novel, accepting the real as the finally and irreducibly complex thing that it sheerly is.

III Time and Memory

Towards the close of Section II, I suggested that the apparent successiveness of Mrs Gaskell's prose offers an image or approximation of temporal experience itself. Her sentences move fluently on, down the page whilst moving between co-existing minds and levels, as if in representation of the fact that a life lived in time is densely simultaneous even as it is linear. In this section, by way of underlining this argument, I return to the complex relation between story time and narrative time in Wives and Daughters. Despite the closeness between the two, I shall argue that Mrs Gaskell habitually privileges narrative time over story time so as to write into the present what really belongs to it. For the real matter of the present for Mrs Gaskell, as I shall seek to show, exists not in dramatic events themselves but underneath or around or in the aftermath of events.

I begin with an example which illustrates how Wives and Daughters is more a narrative of time than it is a narrative of event. 'I think it's better for both of us, for me to go away now,' says Mr Gibson to Molly after he has told her of his decision to re-marry. 'We may say things difficult to

forget':

'I will come again tomorrow. Good-bye, Molly.'

For many minutes after he had ridden away - long after the sound of his horse's hoofs on the round stones of the paved lane, beyond the home-meadows, had died away - Molly stood there, shading her eyes, and looking at the empty space of air in which his form had last appeared. (WD, p. 115)

It is another goodbye, another little death, but what is past hangs on, lingeringly - 'For many minutes ... long after the sound of his horse's hoofs ... had died away'.

Narrative time extends (derivatively) beyond story time here in order to pick up what is left over by story - the unpurged residue that remains for Molly after (and because) her father has left her. And that Mrs Gaskell is attending here to the things which are left unfinished by the event itself is underlined by her revision:

Molly stood there, shading her eyes, and
empty
looking at the \wedge space of air in which
his form had last appeared. (MS, p. 173)

With the tiny insertion of 'empty', Mr Gibson is himself put back into that 'space of air' as though the space were yet holding his form, as loss. It is as though the residual aftermath were being held down in that empty space - and held down, though Molly does not know it, for the future. All that has not been said and dealt with in the situation itself for fear of creating future memory - 'We may say things difficult to forget' - is itself hardening into the

stuff that after-memory will be made of. For what we are seeing as Molly looks at that empty space, and perception turns into mentality, is the beginning of memory - the generation, that is, of a future aftermath, wherein what is left unfulfilled by event will come back as the past in the present.

It is this resultant after-residue which is itself picked up in the passage which follows. A little while after his wife's death, whilst daily more estranged from Osborne, the Squire '[comes] home to dinner weary and sore-hearted' (I give the published and manuscript versions together):

It was just six o'clock, and he went hastily into his own little business-room on the ground-floor, and, after washing his hands, came into the drawing-room feeling as if he were very late, but the room was empty. He glanced at the clock over the mantelpiece, as he tried to warm his hands at the fire. (WD, p. 262)

It was just six o'clock, and he went hastily into his own room on the ground-floor, and, after washing his hands came into the feeling as if he were very late, but the room was empty. He drawing room ^ glanc<ing>[ed] at the clock on the mantelpiece as he tried to warm his hands by the fire. (MS, p. 386)

Death - 'but the room was empty' - is written in amidst the busy domestic ritual. But the past does not so much intrude upon the present as dwell inside it. The revision is really produced by Mrs Gaskell's sense of the way in which the present can seem, even physically, to hold the past like a thing almost palpably invisible. The present is so dense

with the ghosts and echoes of the past, just because the present as sheer event - especially the event of death - is too meagre to hold or contain the meanings it generates. The meaning carries on, hangs around and comes back into the present to make the present all the more thick with meaning. So with this novel: time and story simply go on, but the novel gathers meaning from the deposits which are left behind by story in time or left even by the very things which escape story as such. For the presence of the past in the Squire's 'empty' room is caused by a real event of loss as Molly's sense of her father's lingering presence in that 'empty space' is not. Mrs Hamley will not be coming back as Mr Gibson will. His leaving is a hiatus in the middle of continuity and next to the Squire's real loneliness Molly's seems closer to something we might well ignore. By attending to this more nebulous residue Mrs Gaskell is privileging the things that are ordinarily beneath notice, just because they hardly qualify as reality at all. It is as though she were wanting to give status to the implicit and amorphous - or rather to redeem them as the very things which deeply make us. For it is through the intrusion of these under-events amidst event-type sentences that a sense of deeper 'character' is created in this novel.

It is, moreover, in Mrs Gaskell's recovery of the random and seemingly inconsequential that the resonance of

this novel is produced. For whilst the novel goes on throwing up one isolated, inessential detail after another, such details, like Mr Gibson's silent noticing of the unhappiness of his little girl, are in fact laying something down unobtrusively for the future memory of the reader:

[He] was truly sorry for his little girl; only he thought that there was a greater chance for the future harmony of the household if he did not lead Molly to define her present feelings by putting them into words. (WD, p. 138)

Such moments generate, cumulatively, that after-memory, whereby we recall, much later in the novel, a thin detail, the significance of which we had not and could not have realised at the time. For these undramatic details are so little in themselves: they accumulate meaning simply by virtue of the pages going on, and their being received as memory later. For three hundred pages further on, as we have already seen, the restraint which Gibson has put upon Molly has in fact deeply worked for the harmony of the household - resulting in that involuntary sympathy which Molly feels for Mrs Gibson:

Molly sometimes took her stepmother's part in secret ... [and] was often compelled to pity her in spite of herself and although she saw that her stepmother was the cause of her father's increased astringency of disposition. (WD, pp. 431-2)

We do not know exactly when or how Molly's early feelings of exclusion have turned into this complex, bridging sympathy. No more does Molly. Small, isolated details lose

their specificity in this novel, for being thus gradually and cumulatively massed together and worn down, as it were, into the embedded matter that memory and character come out of. Details half-forgotten by the reader later come back to mind, in just the same way that Coxe's love missive to Molly recalls to Mr Gibson's mind the innocent folly of his own youth. 'Sixteen and three quarters! Why she's quite a baby':

'To be sure - poor Jeannie was not so old, and how I did love her!' (Mrs Gibson's name was Mary, so he must have been referring to someone else.) Then his thoughts wandered back to other days, though he still held the open note in his hand. By-and-by his eyes fell upon it again, and his mind came back to bear upon the present time. (WD, pp. 48-9)

The past comes back, not like a Hardy-esque time-bomb, but thus gently, wafting its perfume across the years. The past comes back, moreover, thus inconveniently, cutting across Mr Gibson's would-be firmness of purpose and principle. Just as time's going on in this novel (as we saw in Section II) throws up what is new and unlooked-for and confusing, so the past's coming back into the present unsettles the present in the same sort of way. It is as though what so interested Mrs Gaskell about the present was its sheer density and instability. For it is as if she were formally recreating the present in this novel as what in reality it is - so little in itself for being made up, on the one hand, of the emergent future and, on the other, of the re-

emergent past. So it is that the reader of this novel becomes the kind of involuntary receptor of memory that Mr Gibson is.

To give a further example. 'Do you know what I've been thinking, dear?' says Cynthia to Molly, when her past relation with Preston starts to press uncomfortably close to home. 'I think I've been here long enough, and that I had better go out as a governess':

'Cynthia! What do you mean?' asked Molly, aghast. 'You've been asleep - you've been dreaming. You're over-tired,' continued she, sitting down on the bed, and taking Cynthia's passive hand, and stroking it softly - a mode of caressing that had come down to her from her mother - whether as an hereditary instinct, or as a lingering remembrance of the tender ways of the dead woman, Mr Gibson often wondered within himself when he observed it. (WD, p. 344)

What happens in the past generates future patterns whose meaning relies on memory. And yet the past comes back not as a certain determiner of the present. We know no better than Gibson 'whether' Molly's mode of caress is hereditarily given or a matter of Molly's own involuntary memory. The past is not locked into the present as a sort of final determining arbiter of it: it is not a guarantor of plot or consequence. Rather this novel carries with it the sheer hidden amorphousness of the past, holding it under the narrative, just beneath the level of dramatic interest, until remembered by reader and story at moments like the following, where, one evening after Mrs Hamley's death,

Roger has joined his father in his study to share a pipe with him:

The squire sate and gazed into the embers, still holding his useless pipe-stem. At last he said, in a low voice, as if scarcely aware he had got a listener, - 'I used to write to her when she was away in London, and tell her the home news. But no letter will reach her now! Nothing reaches her!'

Roger started up.

'Where's the tobacco-box, father? Let me fill you another pipe!' and when he had done so, he stooped over his father and stroked his cheek. (WD, p. 276)

An event, understated and undramatic, is made moving and powerful for resonating with an under-event from the past:

When [Roger] caressed his mother, she used laughingly to allude to the fable of the lap-dog and the donkey; so thereafter he left off all personal demonstration of affection. (WD, p. 42)

The love that early went out from Roger to the mother is now coming back to the father who misses the woman. The caress is handed down from the past as implicitly and secretly as Molly's own caressing of Cynthia. Moreover Roger might well be as oblivious of where this mode of loving has come from, where it began, as is Molly perhaps herself. The past does not have to be realised in conscious memory in order to be fulfilled in the free life of the present. Rather it is the very deep implicitness of memory, at so many diverse levels, which is mutually working for father and son in this enriched scene. For the moment of intimacy depends on so

much that has been built slowly, silently, cumulatively - over family time. It is the familiar ritual of pipe-smoking which brings father and son together here. In the same way it is tradition which finally brings them together when, on the evening of Roger's arrival home with the news of Osborne's failure at Cambridge, Roger works hard to cheer up his father:

After dinner, too, the gentlemen lingered long over their dessert, and Molly heard them laughing; and then she saw them loitering about in the twilight out-of-doors; Roger hatless, his hands in his pockets, lounging by his father's side, who was now able to talk in his usual loud and cheerful way, forgetting Osborne. (WD, p. 89)

Roger's gift to his father - 'now able to talk in his usual loud and cheerful way' - is also his own reward - 'lounging by his father's side'. The intimacy remains quietly and easily subordinate - an undertone. It is the syntax of a mutually given, family language - which language, of course, Tolstoy in particular also relished. 'There exists a special capacity that is more or less developed in different circles of society and especially in families, which I call mutual understanding':

The essence of this capacity lies in an agreed sense of proportion and an accepted and identical outlook on things. Two members of the same set or the same family possessing this faculty can always allow an expression of feeling up to a certain point beyond which they both see only empty phrases. Simultaneously both perceive where commendation ends and irony begins, where

enthusiasm ceases and pretence takes its place - all of which may appear quite otherwise to people possessed of a different order of apprehension.³²

'He and I have lost each other's language,' says the Squire of Osborne (WD, p. 365). It is in Roger's restoring to his father of these given, settled boundaries, wherein the Squire can relax and feel at home, that Roger is starting to replace Osborne without intending to. But what is a huge family shift - a key change - is written into a narrative of things going on as usual.

For what would otherwise be key moments are really replaced in this novel by the sheer richness of the past in the present - a richness which is disclosed by the reader's mutually sharing in Mrs Gaskell's own family understanding, picking up the undertones as she herself is doing, and the reader remembering and putting together, as if for himself or herself, the scattered clues. The novel really invites the reader to become a kind of collaborative novelist, helping to create meaningful connections and, what is more, finding them freely. For we cannot be sure that these connections are Mrs Gaskell's own more than the sheer power of the past itself in Wives and Daughters: there is no way of knowing, for example, if Mrs Gaskell intends her reader to see a connection between the 'tender ways' Molly has

32. Leo Tolstoy, Childhood, Boyhood, Youth, first published 1857, translated by Rosemary Edmonds, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1964), p. 263.

inherited from her dead mama, and the affected tenderness of her new mama, at their first meeting after her father's engagement:

Mrs Kirkpatrick was as caressing as could be. She held Molly's hand in hers, as they sate together in the library, after the first salutations were over. She kept stroking it from time to time, and purring out inarticulate sounds of loving satisfaction, as she gazed on the blushing face. (WD, p. 129)

In after-memory of this moment, we realise that the moment might (and only might) have been thick with after-memory for Molly. But the fact that the novel neither demands such remembered connections on the one hand, nor, perhaps, always intends them on the other, makes for reciprocally related axioms of Mrs Gaskell's mode of life-realism. For the fact that the connections are not destined to be made does not mean that they are merely fictitious or even unauthorised. Rather, it is as though the life in this novel abundantly sanctions such creatively arbitrary associations in the same way, and for the same reason, that it tolerates lacunae in the reader's sympathetic understanding. Just as we must 'wonder', like Mr Gibson before his daughter, 'whether' the association was in Mrs Gaskell's mind, so Mrs Gaskell allows for that rich uncertainty in the reader whereby, like Mr Gibson, we simply cannot tell at what level the past might be making meaning in the present.

The past works in the present in such a way in this novel as to remain as finally - and even as happily - indeterminate in its effects, as it remains for Roger here.

'Well, we've had a pleasant evening,' says the Squire at the close of the pipe-smoking scene, as he bids Roger goodnight:

'At least, I have. But perhaps you have not; for I'm but poor company now, I know.'

'I don't know when I've passed a happier evening, father,' said Roger. And he spoke truly, though he did not trouble himself to find out the cause of his happiness. (WD, p. 277)

Roger is not wholly oblivious of the past: but he neither can, nor needs to recognise how much his present happiness depends upon it. The things which work for us do their work silently behind us. So with this novel: it goes on, calling up memories of what has gone before, but it is so hard to 'find' that precise time before, when we go back to look for it. The connections work even as they remain inexplicit and uncertain and perhaps work all the better for not being specifically realised. For it really does seem better that Molly should give, all unconsciously, out of her dead mother's love the love that Cynthia so much needs. Molly does not know exactly what has gone right with her, even while Cynthia does 'know' what has gone wrong with her. 'Oh how good you are Molly,' she says in response to Molly's caress:

'I wonder, if I had been brought up like you, if I should have been as good. But I've been tossed about so.'

'Then, don't go and be tossed about any more,' said Molly, softly.

'Oh, dear! I had better go. But you see no one ever loved me like you ... You ought not to care so much for me; I'm not good enough for you to worry yourself about me. I've given myself up a long time ago as a heartless baggage.' (WD, pp. 344-5)

Cynthia is the kind of story-maker that Mrs Gaskell manifestly is not. For it is Cynthia's habitual connection-making - her putting together, fixedly, the bits of the past in a manner which distorts the present - which seems so fictitious, so unreal and alarmingly mechanical, next to Mrs Gaskell's formal indeterminacy.

The structural amorphousness of the novel, the sheer arbitrariness of its connections is a guarantee of generous authenticity. For Mrs Gaskell could bear to do what Cynthia could not - authentically hold together, in the form of the novel, the very inconsequential formlessness of the real. 'It is Mrs Gaskell's highest praise,' said Henry James, '[to have been] powerful, delicate, humorous, pathetic, dramatic, within the strict limits of homely prose' (Gaskell:CH, p. 466). It has been the contention of this section, as of this chapter, that Mrs Gaskell's achievement was precisely to loosen the 'strict limits' of prose, leaving 'empty spaces' so as to redeem life's ordinary messiness and restore to realist interest the apparently inconsequential and incomplete - the subtle odds and ends of sheer life which spill over time and category.

CHAPTER THREE

MRS GASKELL: A SOCIAL NOVELIST?

I Mary Barton and North and South

In a review of Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage, Charlotte Lennox-Boyd describes Mrs Gaskell's career as a 'repeated pattern of retreat from controversy':

Reading this selection, one can feel the pressure on [Mrs Gaskell] to move from the impassioned polemic of Mary Barton to the measured treatment of social issues in North and South. She responds to criticism with a more even-handed novel, and generates less discussion. ... So overall Gaskell muffled her radical impulses. The furore over indiscretions in The Life of Charlotte Bronte led to first a retraction and then several years silence. The two fine last novels carefully avoid provoking trouble.¹

'If this anthology were continued to the present day,' the review concludes, 'it would show Elizabeth Gaskell's reputation jolting upwards as a regional writer, as a woman writer and as a writer who interests social historians'.² In

1. 'A Muffled Radical', TLS, March 1992.

2. Recent critical attention to Mrs Gaskell bears out this statement. So Joseph Kestner, for instance, in Protest and Reform: The British Social Narrative by Women 1827-67 (Wisconsin, 1985), places Mrs Gaskell in a tradition of female 'social' writers, whilst Rosemarie Bodenheimer in The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction (Cornell, 1988) sees Mrs Gaskell as a writer concerned with the position and role of women in an industrial context. This simultaneous emphasis upon Mrs Gaskell as a 'social' and as 'a woman writer' is also evidenced in Hilary M. Schor's Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the

the present climate such a writer would not have had to make a retreat into the world of Cranford and Wives and Daughters it seems. At any rate, it is the earlier work that is often now stressed as the most important.

In contrast, it is a central contention of this thesis that Mrs Gaskell's realism is a form of language and vision irreducible to categories either of women's studies or of social history. In this chapter, concentrating on the 'industrial' novels themselves, I argue that Mrs Gaskell's reputation as a 'social' or 'regional' novelist seriously distorts her achievement and her vision as a writer. For in leaving behind the social issues of the earlier novels, I argue, Mrs Gaskell was not retreating so much as moving on from them, and moving in fact towards finding a more secure context for her realist vision.

In Mary Barton it may well seem that Mrs Gaskell's truest and deepest impulses were compromised. There is a moment when Mrs Gaskell speaks of John Barton in the depth of trade-depression which is often cited in criticism as evidence of the pressure Mrs Gaskell was already under, consciously or otherwise, to confirm the ideology of her own class. 'He would bear and endure much without complaining,'

Victorian Novel (Oxford, 1992). Schor says of Mary Barton, for instance, that the novel is 'a powerful critique of existing structures of authority in Victorian England' and that its central message is that 'it is specifically the woman writer who has the power to transform [the novel's] readers', p. 14.

she says 'could he also see that his employers were bearing their share':

He is, I say, bewildered and (to use his own word) 'aggravated' to see that all goes on just as usual with the mill-owners. Large houses are still occupied, while spinners' and weavers' cottages stand empty, because the families that once occupied them are obliged to live in rooms or cellars. Carriages still roll along the streets, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, the shops for expensive luxuries still find daily customers, while the workman loiters away his unemployed time in watching these things, and thinking of the pale, uncomplaining wife at home, and the wailing children asking in vain for enough of food, of the sinking health, of the dying life of those near and dear to him. The contrast is too great. Why should he alone suffer from bad times?

I know that this is not really the case; and I know what is the truth in such matters: but what I wish to impress is what the workman feels and thinks. True, that with child-like improvidence, good times will often dissipate his grumbling, and make him forget all prudence and foresight.

But there are earnest men among these people, men who have endured wrongs without complaining, but without ever forgetting or forgiving those whom (they believe) have caused all this woe.

Among these was John Barton. His parents had suffered; his mother had died from absolute want of the necessaries of life.³

'I know that this is not really the case.' The shift of the paragraph looks like an embarrassing retreat into liberal timidity - one of those 'bewildering shifts of voice' that

3. Mrs Gaskell, Mary Barton, first published 1848, edited by Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1986), pp. 59-60. Hereafter cited as MB.

intrude so often, says Stephen Gill in his introduction to the novel, because 'Mrs Gaskell cannot simply empty herself of all her inherited middle-class attitudes, especially since she cannot but see the rightness of some of them'⁴. It is a view re-enforced, if rather less generously, by John Lucas:

"I know what is the truth in such matters". If so one can only remark that Mrs Gaskell keeps it very much to herself. The only knowledge we are given access to is the fact of death (murder?). But as a consciously middle-class liberal Mrs Gaskell can hardly be expected to face up to that knowledge.⁵

This sort of retreat within the early work may seem to presage the more full-blown retreat of the later work, leaving it safe from such mixed tones and political motives. But I want to suggest that such criticism is unfair precisely because the shift in Mary Barton comes, I believe, from a genuine if clumsy and ill-fated attempt on Mrs Gaskell's part to avoid the ideological. An antagonist might argue that the attempt is clumsy and ill-fated precisely because it is impossible (without damage) to ignore ideology. But for better or worse it is not with political ideas themselves that Mrs Gaskell is concerned in this passage. 'What I wish to impress,' she says, 'is what the workman feels and thinks.' She is concerned, rather,

4. MB, Introduction, p. 23.

5. John Lucas, The Literature of Change (Brighton, 1977), pp. 42-3.

with how anterior thoughts, opinions and feelings are humanly held by the workman and, crucially, with how they come into existence and then harden within him. 'What the workman feels and thinks' begins in what the workman sees - in the gap between his own hunger and distress and the exhibition of the bosses' wealth. Ideas are rendered first of all as perceptions before they are accounted feelings, or become truths or prejudices. Mrs Gaskell is wanting to do something more difficult than an ideological writer would seek to do: for she wants to see through ideology itself as it is formed in John Barton's mind to the human beginnings of an idea. '[There are] men who have endured wrongs without complaining, but without ever forgetting or forgiving those who (they believe) have caused all this woe.' In that self-checking insertion - '(they believe)' - Mrs Gaskell is not nervously backing off from the truth as the workman sees it. On the contrary, she is aiming not to betray that truth - at its human point of origin - by turning it back into a crude ideological self-misrepresentation of what the man actually feels. It is Mrs Gaskell's desire to keep the workman, as a man, centrally before us which produces, paradoxically, those shifts of voice, view and level which seem to distance the reader from him. For these shifts occur just where the passage begins to move through John Barton's voice towards an alienated

social polemic - 'The contrast is too great. Why should he alone suffer from bad times?'. Thus, although it is through the sheerly human that Mrs Gaskell wants to mediate in this novel, nonetheless the human keeps turning into the socio-political. And it is because a human often cannot speak justly on his own behalf that she has so often to speak for him in lieu of his own ideology - to mediate, that is, through a more self-conscious, more artificial and secondary language ('I know that this is not really the case') - which language itself then turns into the ideology of middle-class liberalism, even as John Barton's turns into the bitterness of working class perception. The human level which Mrs Gaskell would put first keeps coming out at the secondary social level from which she is even thus trying to rescue it. Mrs Gaskell regrets, even resents, the contingent historical necessity by which social distortions go so far down into individual human being.

The tensions and contradictions of this novel are not primarily caused, I am saying, by tensions within Mrs Gaskell herself. Rather they are the product of the historical phenomenon which was the genesis and subject of this novel. For the human 'estranged from [its] own essence' was, said Marx, the cost to man of the division of labour. 'The very unity of labour is regarded only in terms of division because man's social nature is realised only as

its antithesis, as estrangement'⁶:

Estrangement appears not only in the fact that the means of my life belong to another and that my desire is the inaccessible possession of another, but also in the fact that all things are other than themselves, that my activity is other than itself, and that finally - and this goes for the capitalist too - an inhuman power rules over everything.⁷

Marx's dialectic helps us to understand the very phenomenon of the 'social' novel and its prestige over what might be called the personal novel of the period. For the social cut off from the 'human' - become its very opposite - is itself the product of that division of labour whose very human divisiveness the social novel sought, by exposure, to overcome. 'The more I reflected on [the] unhappy state of things between those so bound to each other by common interests, as the employers and the employed must ever be,' says Mrs Gaskell in her Preface, 'the more anxious I became to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people' (MB, p. 38). In wanting to put the human level before all else whilst seeing that human level possessed, nevertheless, by the social, Mrs Gaskell found herself, in the writing of Mary Barton, in

6. Karl Marx, 'Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy' (1844), Marx: Early Writings, edited by Lucio Colletti (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1977), p. 269. Hereafter cited as Marx:EW.

7. 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' (1844), Marx:EW, p. 366.

exactly the same position that Mrs Hale finds herself in North and South, when she responds to the severe hardship suffered by Boucher and his family as a result of the strike:

It distressed Mrs Hale excessively. It made her restlessly irritable till she could do something. She directed Margaret to pack up a basket in the very drawing-room, to be sent there and then to the family; and was almost angry with her for saying, that it would not signify if it did not go till morning, as she knew Higgins had provided for their immediate wants, and she herself had left money with Bessy. Mrs Hale called her unfeeling for saying this; and never gave herself breathing-time till the basket was sent out of the house. Then she said:

'After all, we may have been doing wrong. It was only the last time Mr Thornton was here that he said, those were no true friends who helped to prolong the struggle by assisting the turn-outs. And this Boucher-man was a turn-out was he not?'

The question was referred to Mr Hale by his wife, when he came upstairs, fresh from giving a lesson to Mr Thornton, which had ended in conversation, as was their wont. Margaret did not care if their gifts had prolonged the strike; she did not think far enough for that, in her present excited state.

Mr Hale listened, and tried to be as calm as a judge; he recalled all that had seemed so clear not half-an-hour before, as it came out of Mr Thornton's lips; and then he made an unsatisfactory compromise. His wife and daughter had not only done quite right in this instance, but he did not see for a moment how they could have done otherwise. Nevertheless, as a general rule, it was very true what Mr Thornton said, that as the strike, if prolonged, must end in the masters' bringing hands from a distance (if, indeed, the final result were not, as it had often been before, the invention of some machine which would diminish the need of hands at all), why, it was clear enough that

the kindest thing was to refuse all help which might bolster them up in their folly. But as to this Boucher, he would go and see him the first thing in the morning, and try to find out what could be done for him.⁸

It is to Boucher, the man in trouble, that Mrs Hale first of all responds, for the human level is so anxious to assume priority in the first paragraph and the sympathy so keen to be accomplished in immediate practical reality, even though the need is for the moment fulfilled: 'It made her restlessly irritable till she could do something. She directed [a basket] to be sent there and then to the family; and was almost angry with [Margaret] for saying that it would not signify ...'.

The translation of the human to the social level happens at second thought, after the first is stalled, in the move to the next paragraph: 'After all we may have been doing wrong'. The first Boucher remains for Mrs Hale more real than Boucher the striker: 'turn-out' is an extraneous category imposed upon the man as he is. But what she instinctively feels to be secondary, might, she fears, in a world bigger than her own immediate one, be in fact primary after all. And it is as the paragraphs successively move into that larger world that Mrs Hale's actions become increasingly cut off from their original intention.

8. Mrs Gaskell, North and South, first published 1854-5, edited by Martin Dodsworth (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981), p. 211. Hereafter cited as NS.

'Margaret did not care if their gifts had prolonged the strike.' It is another temporal word, but in the context, now, of that larger world wherein what was done out of 'immediate' sympathy has become part of a narrative sequence. It is as though the more the narrative goes on, the more it goes into the world of consequences and the more socio-political it becomes. There is now no such thing, in the event, as simply doing the human thing; there seems no way of knowing whether Mrs Hale's first or second consideration is humanly the more important one.

The result is that the social and human levels become confused in the final paragraph, even as Mr Hale tries to balance them. Starting with the male perspective of the social consideration as primary - 'he recalled all that had seemed so clear not half an hour before' - he now in this present finds it becoming secondary: 'but he did not see for a moment how they could have done otherwise'. But his first thought takes precedence once more ('Nevertheless as a general rule'), as after the 'moment' the immediate human level is again lost to social process:

It was very true what Mr Thornton said, that as the strike, if prolonged, must end in the masters' bringing hands from a distance (if, indeed, the final result were not, as it had often been before, the invention of some machine which would diminish the need of hands at all), why, it was clear enough that the kindest thing was to refuse all help which might bolster them up in their folly.

What is the 'kindest thing' in paragraph one has apparently

turned into its antithesis by paragraph four for turning into a cruel long-term prolongation which has lost all essential relation with the human starting-point of the kindness. In just the same way does the craftsman lose control over his product in the market process, and so too does Mrs Gaskell's ventriloquising of John Barton's human distress become the alienated possession of social ideology.

And yet Mr Hale does still try to do the immediately human thing - 'But as to this Boucher he would go and see him first thing in the morning and try to find out what could be done for him' - though he will do it first thing tomorrow at second thought and as a matter of 'unsatisfactory compromise'. It is as though the sheerly human can be reclaimed only thus circuitously and even thus disingenuously - by side-stepping the 'general rule'.

A contemporary reviewer praised North and South precisely for recognising, in its portrayal of 'the gradually acquired ascendancy of Margaret over the radical and infidel weaver, Nicholas Higgins', that it might be only outside of a 'general' response to human suffering that real human good could be done. 'We are constantly made aware,' says the reviewer, 'of [the] dangers arising out of visiting and especially of District Visiting':

Once apportion to a lady a court, street or alley, and it is inevitable that the poor in that district ... come to regard themselves as the inspected, and the lady as the inspector. Disguise it as we may, that

is their view of the matter ... The families visited learn almost imperceptibly to put themselves into order (or perhaps disorder) when the visitor's step is heard or a glimpse of her presence is caught.

'These remarks,' the reviewer goes on, 'do not apply in the same degree to less regulated visiting':

Here a visitor calls, perhaps, on some special errand: a child is ill, or absent from school. A visit of enquiry brings her acquainted with the family; a father is found to be out of work; sometimes he honestly owns, under the influence of gratitude for some kindness shown to the suffering member of the household, that he has been in fault ... Once in a while a visitor may mediate between master and man. So the circle widens and spreads, and who can tell the misery which that one kind woman's call may have averted?'

An efficient system of meeting human need nonetheless leaves the personal and emotional out of account by a necessary compromise in the interests of utility. So Esther discovers, in Bleak House, when she makes her first official visit to the brickmaker's dwelling with the 'Visiting Lady', Mrs Pardiggle:

Ada and I were very uncomfortable. We both felt intrusive and out of place; and we both thought that Mrs Pardiggle would have got on infinitely better, if she had not had such a mechanical way of taking possession of people. The children sulked and stared; the family took no notice of us whatever ... We both felt painfully sensible that between us and these people there was an iron barrier, which could not be removed by our

9. From a review of the anonymous Lectures to Ladies on Practical Subjects (1855), 'Edinburgh Review', January 1856, quoted in Gaskell:CH, pp. 369-70.

new friend. By whom, or how, it could be removed, we did not know; but we knew that.¹⁰

Earnestly as Esther herself desires to transcend the charitable letter of the visit, she cannot do so, for the spirit itself cannot get free of the institutionalising social context. This, I suggest is an image of Mrs Gaskell's problem when she tried to remove that 'iron barrier' directly by taking as her protagonist a working man. 'Round the character of John Barton,' she said, 'all the others formed themselves; he was my hero, the person with whom all my sympathies went, with whom I tried to identify myself.'¹¹ But how far her genuine sympathy becomes trapped by social context in Mary Barton is most evident precisely at those moments when she is seeking to cut through the accidents of social class to a human content that transcends or precedes it. Thus it is when, with regard to basic mortal things, she describes Mrs Wilson's grief at the death of her son. 'We mun get him away from his mother,' says Alice Wilson. 'He cannot die while she's wishing him':

'Wishing him?' said Mary, in a tone of inquiry.

'Ay; dunno ye know what wishing means? There's none can die in the arms of those

10. Charles Dickens, Bleak House, first published, 1853, edited by Norman Page (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), p. 159.

11. Letters of Mrs Gaskell, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966), p. 74. Hereafter cited as Letters:G.

who are, wishing them sore to stay on earth ...

So without circumlocution she went and offered to take the sinking child. But the mother would not let him go, and looking in Alice's face with brimming and imploring eyes, declared in earnest whispers, that she was not wishing him, that she would fain have him released from his suffering. Alice and Mary stood by with eyes fixed on the poor child, whose struggles seemed to increase, till at last his mother said with a choking voice,

'May happen yo'd better take him, Alice; I believe my heart's wishing him a' this while, for I cannot, no, I cannot bring mysel to let my two childer go in one day; I cannot help longing to keep him, and yet he sha'not suffer longer for me.'

She bent down, and fondly, oh! with what passionate fondness, kissed her child, and then gave him up to Alice, who took him with tender care. Nature's struggles were soon exhausted, and he breathed his little life away in peace. (MB, pp. 116-7)

It is as though Mrs Gaskell cannot simply cross the boundary of being between herself and Mrs Wilson, and thus do what we saw in Chapter Two, in Wives and Daughters, become natural for her as a novelist, without more self-consciously crossing the boundaries of class and culture too. (Witness the careful homage paid to the folk-superstition of 'wishing'.) Mrs Gaskell is concerned thus to remain loyal to the cultural particularity of this experience - to speak in Mrs Wilson's language and from within her tradition - because she wishes to preserve the integrity of this working mother's grief, even as she means to bear witness to the common humanity of such as Mrs Wilson. The final paragraph is evidence of the double bind

in which Mrs Gaskell finds herself caught. For Mrs Wilson's authentic human voice is also a small, disadvantaged and conventionally inarticulate one - not powerful enough, Mrs Gaskell fears, to stand as its own (unaided) witness. Hence the abrupt backward step and the shift to a more universalising language and voice: 'She bent down and fondly, oh! with what passionate fondness, kissed her child ... Nature's struggles were soon exhausted, and he breathed his little life away in peace'. Yet the attempt thus to universalize the experience - to lift the suffering of mother and child out of the social conditions which have created it - seems at best contextually sentimental and at worst embarrassingly patronising. So Mrs Gaskell finds herself stranded, like Esther, on the opposite side of a barrier which against will, desire and purpose she is inevitably reaffirming.

'Sympathy - meaning by it fellow feeling,' said William Greg, friend of Mrs Gaskell but hostile critic of Mary Barton, 'can only exist in its fullest extent among persons of the same condition, surrounded by the same circumstances, inured to the same privations - who know that the distress they are called upon to mitigate was their own yesterday, and may be their own again tomorrow':

What is thus true sympathy between the poor, becomes, when transferred to the relation between rich and poor, what is commonly expressed by the word compassion - a

sentiment far feebler and less complete.¹²

So, we might suppose, Mrs Gaskell would have felt reluctantly bound to agree. Certainly, as we have seen, Mary Barton was a casualty of this political institutionalisation of feeling. And thus it is, I suggest, that when Mrs Gaskell returned to the industrial scene in North and South, she tried to recover a relatively undistorted human level more obliquely - by choosing, in Margaret Hale, a protagonist who is less politically locked into the context in which she nevertheless has to operate than was Mrs Gaskell's earlier 'hero', John Barton. The later novel was not a way out of the concerns of Mary Barton¹³, I am saying, but on the contrary, a way back into them. Mrs Gaskell revisits the industrial scene, we might say, in much the same spirit that Mr Hale makes his visit to Boucher - in order, that is, 'to try to find out what could be done', yet doing so now on second thought, apprized of the possible damage and failures which can result from attempting the direct human sympathy which in Mary Barton had seemed to be 'the kindest thing'.

12. From 'The Edinburgh Review', April 1849, quoted in Gaskell:CH, p. 168.

13. As Raymond Williams also suggested. 'Mrs Gaskell's second industrial novel . . . is less interesting because the tension is less. . . . The emphasis of the novel . . . is almost entirely now on attitudes to the working people, rather than on the attempt to reach, imaginatively, their feelings about their lives. . . . Mrs Gaskell works out her reaction to the insupportable situation by going . . . outside it,' Culture and Society (London, 1987), pp. 92-3.

In fact Mrs Gaskell now largely avoids those same failures by turning the very problems and contradictions she experienced in the writing of Mary Barton into her human subject-matter in the later novel. So we saw her doing in the description of the Hales' dilemma over the Bouchers, and so we find her doing again, when Margaret, as unofficial visitor, comforts Mrs Boucher as the body of her dead husband is brought home:

The mother quivered as she lay in Margaret's arms. Margaret heard a noise at the door.

'Open it. Open it quick,' said she to the eldest child. 'It's bolted; make no noise - be very still. Oh, papa, let them go upstairs very softly and carefully, and perhaps she will not hear them. She has fainted - that's all.'

'It's as well for her, poor creature,' said a woman following in the wake of the bearers of the dead. 'But yo're not fit to hold her. Stay, I'll run fetch a pillow, and we'll let her down easy on the floor.'

This helpful neighbour was a great relief to Margaret; she was evidently a stranger to the house, a new-comer in the district, indeed; but she was so kind and thoughtful that Margaret felt she was no longer needed; and that it would be better, perhaps, to set an example of clearing the house, which was filled with idle, if sympathising gazers.

She looked round for Nicholas Higgins. He was not there. So she spoke to the woman who had taken the lead in placing Mrs Boucher on the floor.

'Can you give all these people a hint that they had better leave in quietness? So that when she comes round, she should only find one or two that she knows about her. Papa, will you speak to the men, and get them to go away. She cannot breathe, poor thing, with this crowd about her.' Margaret was kneeling down by Mrs Boucher and bathing her face with vinegar; but in a few minutes

she was surprised at the gush of fresh air. She looked round, and saw a smile pass between her father and the woman.

'What is it?' asked she.

'Only our good friend here,' replied her father, 'hit on a capital expedient for clearing the place.'

'I bid 'em be gone, and each take a child wi' em, and to mind that they were orphans, and their mother a widow. It was who could do most, and the childer are sure of a bellyful today, and of kindness too. Does hoo know how he died?'

'No,' said Margaret; 'I could not tell her at once.'

'Hoo mun be told because of th' Inquest. See! Hoo's coming round; shall you or I do it? or m'appen your father would be best?'

'No; you, you,' said Margaret. (NS, pp. 371-2)

The mutual sympathy which Margaret and the neighbour feel for the widow cannot be equally effective because Margaret simply is not situated, personally or even physically, practically to fulfil it. 'But yo're not fit to hold her.' The scene demonstrates Greg's point, of course. Next to the neighbour's 'true ... fellow feeling', Margaret's sympathy is demonstrably 'far feebler' and to all intents and purposes virtually useless: '[The neighbour] was so kind and thoughtful that Margaret felt she was no longer needed'. Yet just as Margaret seems to accept the limitations imposed upon her by the social context, so Mrs Gaskell seems less caught by the impinging political context, more relaxed within it, for now registering the complexity of its operation and effects - the subtle social collisions and the unexpected fellow feeling. '[Margaret] looked round and saw

a smile pass between her father and the woman.' The Hales and the anonymous stranger do not inhabit completely separated worlds for all their differences. And Mrs Gaskell accepts the double levels here, just as she accepts - along with Margaret and her father - the neighbour's pragmatism in using the onlookers' very kindness as a means of getting rid of them: 'I bid 'em be gone and each take a child wi' em. ... It was who could do most.' The subtle confusion of one thing with another, the mix of tones and levels - this is what, in Chapter Two, we saw Mrs Gaskell's realism to be made of. Yet if Mrs Gaskell is giving notice here of what was to interest her and of what she was to achieve in her later and more mature work, she is at the same time showing us why she had finally to leave the industrial scene behind. For the very subtlety which the neighbour displays - a subtlety which becomes all the richer through the Hales' and the neighbour's shared recognition of it - is at the same time, by its capacity to be and to do something real in the situation, the very thing which alienates and excludes the Hales by making them more aware of their own ineffectualness. "'Hoo mun be told because of th' Inquest ... shall you or I do it? or m'appen your father would be best?" "No; you, you," said Margaret.'

'If your love as love does not call forth love in return,' said Marx, 'if through the vital expression of yourself as a loving person you fail to become a loved

person, then your love is impotent, it is a misfortune.'¹⁴ In a context where real inequality prevents real relationship, all that genuinely deep human sympathy and understanding can usefully do, perhaps, is comprehend - 'No, you, you' - its own impotence. Certainly Mrs Gaskell did not test her human powers in that context again.

*

'The historical process, putting clothes on our backs, shoes on the feet, meat in the mouth,' says Saul Bellow's Herzog, a man of nineteenth-century feelings in a twentieth-century world, 'does infinitely more for us by the indifferent method than anyone does by intention':

And since these good commodities are the gifts of anonymous planning and labor, what intentional goodness can achieve (when the good are amateurs) becomes the question.'¹⁵

It was, sincerely, Mrs Gaskell's question too: the problem of efforts at individual goodness in a world of collective problems and collective solutions. Bellow is surely right to re-urge for the twentieth century concerns that are not the less pressing for seeming, a century or so after the birth of industrial capitalism, to be so. For the very elevation

14. Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', Marx:EW, p. 379.

15. Saul Bellow, Herzog (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), pp. 264-5.

of Mrs Gaskell's early novels over her later ones is a measure of how far we are yet subject to the socio-political pressures which constrained her as a writer and which constrained even so determinedly private a writer as Charlotte Bronte. It is by way of re-appraising how those pressures acted upon a writer like Mrs Gaskell that I turn now to consider their influence upon the work and thought of her contemporary.

Writing to Mrs Gaskell in 1853 of her decision to defer publication of Villette in favour of Ruth, Charlotte Bronte said:

'Villette' has indeed no right to push itself before 'Ruth'. There is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use in the latter, to which the former cannot for an instant pretend; nor can it claim precedence on the ground of surpassing power: I think it much quieter than 'Jane Eyre'.¹⁶

An underprivileged book, for being (autobiographically) personal and for being written by a woman, is here in turn under-privileging itself, as though Charlotte Bronte had internalized this dual political subordination which, as a woman and as a writer, she emphatically stands against in

Jane Eyre:

It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller

16. Mrs Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Bronte, first published 1857, edited by Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1977), p. 492. Hereafter cited as Life.

doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer. ... It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.¹⁷

Charlotte Bronte is fighting here, even as she finds herself allied to a political programme, to put things the right way round - the personal before the political. Few knew better than Charlotte Bronte how far the external conditions of a human life could disable its vital capacities, repressively generating an intense inner life whose primary reality now lay in not having a primary object upon which to fulfil itself and which therefore was doomed to merely secondary compensations. Her whole creative output might be seen as an attempt to give a voice to that 'silent revolt', to give status to the hole at the centre of a life even though some would view the lack merely as a secondary effect of the socio-political structure. External things affect people internally: but merely to explain them externally is to leave that 'vast hiatus of omission' which

17. Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, first published 1847, edited by Q.D. Leavis (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), p. 141.

she found in J.S. Mill's writings on the political subjection of her sex. 'I believe J.S. Mill would make a hard, dry, dismal world of it,' she wrote in 1851 to Mrs Gaskell, in response to an article on the 'Emancipation of Women'¹⁸:

He speaks admirable sense through a great portion of his article - especially when he says, that if there be a natural unfitness in women for men's employment, there is no need to make laws on the subject. ... [His] head is, I dare say, very good, but I feel disposed to scorn his heart. You are right when you say that there is a large margin in human nature over which the logicians have no dominion: glad am I that it is so. (Life, pp. 458-9)

Even though what logic has to say might be factually true, the whole mode of understanding was wrong for Charlotte Bronte. Mill might reply that Charlotte Bronte's is still a victim's vocabulary - favouring, like a stereotyped woman, 'heart' over 'head'. Criticism of the wrong mode can be made out of what is still itself another wrong mode - which, of course, was exactly Mrs Gaskell's problem in Mary Barton. The temptation reactively to cling to a flawed discourse was so great, it seems, that someone such as Charlotte Bronte could only get into the right mode of thinking and feeling by getting into the deeper language of a novel. And Villette, above all of her works, exists to oppose external

18. The article ('Westminster Review') was actually written by Harriet Taylor, though it was edited by Mill (Life, p. 614).

explanations.

'What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us,' says Lucy Snowe in Villette, 'according to the eye with which we are viewed':

Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional perhaps, too strict, limited and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature - adventurous, indocile and audacious. I smiled at them all. If any one knew me it was little Paulina Mary.¹⁹

Lucy's resistance to typecasting is also in part a defence and an evasion. For though she rightly denies ordinary categories, still she is humiliatingly part of one (a loveless spinster) after all. Lucy's habitual concealments and even her collusion in others' misapprehensions of her - 'I smiled at them all' - are strategies inseparable from Bronte's own. For the secrecy which protects Lucy against reduction to a humiliating stereotype is also the test she sets for others - of knowing 'me'. So Charlotte Bronte's novels are themselves a (secret) test for her reader. In the 'best critique which has yet appeared,' she wrote after the publication of Shirley, 'the reviewer in question, follows Currer Bell through every winding, discerns every

19. Charlotte Bronte, Villette, first published 1853, edited by Mark Lilly (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), p. 386. Hereafter cited as V.

point, discriminates every shade, proves himself master of the subject, and lord of the aim':

With that man I would shake hands, if I saw him. I would say, 'You know me, Monsieur; I shall deem it an honour to know you.' I could not say so much of the mass of the London critics. ... That matters little. My own conscience I satisfy first ... What I am, it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out. To all others I wish only to be an obscure, steady-going, private character. (Life, p. 389)

In hiding Villette behind Ruth, and thus apparently putting social politics before personal love, Charlotte Bronte was really doing exactly what she had done in the novel itself and what she habitually did in life - subordinating her own lonely self in a sort of wilful twisting of her real priorities. In Mary Barton Mrs Gaskell found the human level that was primary for her involuntarily turning into what was secondary. For Charlotte Bronte, putting primary things second is a kind of devious strategy on her part, even as it is also a vulnerability born of her very sense of humiliation. Charlotte's greatest strategy of all is really to go along with her vulnerabilities and humiliations and to make out of them a compensatory plan at another level. 'I was not only going to hide a treasure,' says Lucy when she buries Graham Bretton's letter, 'I meant also to bury a grief' (V, p. 380). What is partly a way of burying her need for love is also in part a way of keeping that very need in suspended animation. And it is as though Lucy herself cannot

tell what is strategy from what is involuntary suffering. For the needs which she buries for feeling so primary may after all, she suspects, be merely secondary. 'I felt that I still had friends,' she says, when she takes refuge with the Brettons, after the severe depressive illness she has suffered during her isolation at Madame Beck's:

Friends, not professing vehement attachment, not offering the tender solace of well-matched and congenial relationship; on whom, therefore, but moderate demand of affection was to be made, of whom but moderate expectation formed; but towards whom, my heart softened instinctively and yearned with an importunate gratitude, which I entreated Reason betimes to check. (V, p. 251)

The characteristically inverted syntax - the 'I' emerging only to bury the 'yearning' - comes from a sort of shame of the personal. For even that huge need, she feels, might only be a little person's sense of having nothing in her life. 'Is there nothing more for me in life?' Lucy asks:

No true home - nothing to be dearer to me than myself, and by its paramount preciousness, to draw from me better things than I care to culture for myself only? Nothing, at whose feet I can willingly lay down the whole burden of human egotism, and gloriously take up the nobler charge of labouring and living for others? (V, pp. 450-1)

Lucy wants something more than self-identity. Her sense of the personal, manifestly, is not egocentric. For the idea of the personal - so politically prized by modern feminism - as being rightly fulfilled in the creation of

self-identity is what Charlotte Bronte calls 'egotism'. It was just because the personal as she experienced it felt so small to Charlotte Bronte, not simply in the context of the bigger world, but from inside the very (single) person she herself was, that she had so much ambivalent anxiety about over-privileging what might seem so merely selfish. What she really wanted was a form of the personal now transformed into something other than the selfish.

Mrs Gaskell, by contrast, as a wife and mother had (typically) to accept that even what is most trivially personal will at times be primary, nevertheless. She wrote to a friend in 1850 that she had a great number of 'Me's', 'and that's the plague':

One of my mes is, I do believe, a true Christian - (only people call her socialist and communist), another of my mes is a wife and mother, and highly delighted at the delight of everyone in the house ... Now that's my 'social' self, I suppose. Then again I've another self with a full taste for beauty and convenience whh [sic] is pleased on its own account. How am I to reconcile all these warring members? I try to drown myself (my first self) by saying it's Wm who is to decide on all these things, and his feeling it right ought to be my rule. And so it is - only that does not quite do. (Letters:G, p. 108)

Here is the characteristically busy, immersed syntax of Mrs Gaskell's novels - the connectives moving easily in different directions and becoming, even in their apparent casualness, almost semantic signals of the shifts from one dimension of being to another: 'One of my 'mes' ... another

of my 'mes' ... Then again I've another self ... and ... and ... and ...'. Next to Charlotte Bronte's self-regarding syntax (even where it means to be most self-concealing), Mrs Gaskell's seems wonderfully self-forgetful, without conflict. For '(my first self)' manifestly is not Mrs Gaskell's priority. The parenthetical phrase is a semantic distinction for her correspondent's sake, not a worried inward-looking self-verification. In a busy life where one is beset by so many essentially unequal, or at least unequatable considerations, all randomly claiming priority at the same time, Mrs Gaskell recognises that there is not and cannot be one right self. Indeed, it is just because she characteristically thinks it like humans not to know what is primary and what is secondary that she emphatically does not put politics before love in North and South, nor even, as the following passage demonstrates, love before politics. What matter to her are precisely the life-moments when it is not possible to make clear distinctions or priorities.

During one of the several debates between the Hales and Mr Thornton on the relations between masters and men, Margaret repeats the workman Higgins's thoughts on the matter:

'I have heard some people ... speak as though it were ... to the advantage of the masters to have ignorant workmen - not hedge-lawyers, as Captain Lennox used to call those men in his company who questioned and would know the reason for every order.'

The latter part of her sentence she

addressed rather to her father than to Mr Thornton. Who is Captain Lennox? asked Mr Thornton of himself, with a strange kind of displeasure, that prevented him for the moment from replying to her. ...

'He - that is, my informant - spoke as if the masters would like their hands to be merely tall, large children - living in the present moment - with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience.'

'In short, Miss Hale, it is very evident that your informant found a pretty ready listener to all the slander he chose to utter against the masters,' said Mr Thornton, in an offended tone.

Margaret did not reply. She was displeased at the personal character Mr Thornton affixed to what she had said.

Mr Hale spoke next:

'I must confess that, although I have not become so intimately acquainted with any workmen as Margaret has, I am very much struck by the antagonism between the employer and the employed, on the very surface of things. I even gather this impression from what you yourself have from time to time said.' (NS, pp. 165-6)

Mrs Gaskell quietly alerts us to the sort of shift of level she is engaged by here, when she registers Margaret's own experience of the same: '[Margaret] was displeased at the personal character Mr Thornton affixed to what she had said'. Margaret's displeasure with Thornton for not separating the 'personal', as she sees it, from the political is at one level both sign and symptom of her political naivety. For the 'tone' which Margaret takes to be personal when Thornton replies to her is that of an 'offended' (and 'slander[ed]') master and not simply that of an offended man. Margaret has yet to learn, it seems, the lesson which Mrs Gaskell herself had by now learned fully -

that only to give voice to the thoughts and feelings of the working man is to situate herself on one side of 'the antagonism between the employer and employed' and thus to become Thornton's political as well as his personal adversary. But if Margaret is mistaken at one level she is also right at another, although she is right for the wrong reasons. Thornton's 'offended tone' is indeed produced in part by personal feeling. For it is the result of the sexual jealousy aroused by Margaret's careless mention of Captain Lennox ('Who is Captain Lennox? asked Mr Thornton of himself, with a strange kind of displeasure'). Typically, with Mrs Gaskell, as the sentences go forward, the meaning goes back; typically, too, Mrs Gaskell is interested less by the opposition between the personal and political levels here than she is by the fluid mix, movement and even leakage between them. For if Thornton is in part using the political discourse to work off his emotional resentments when he first speaks, then as the passage goes on, that same discourse now borrows power and conviction from what is going wrong at the personal level:

Mr Thornton paused awhile before he spoke. Margaret had just left the room, and he was vexed at the state of feeling between himself and her. However, the little annoyance, by making him cooler and more thoughtful, gave a greater dignity to what he said.

'My theory is, that my interests are identical with those of my workpeople and vice-versa. ... On some future day - in some millennium - in Utopia, this unity may be

brought into practice - just as I fancy a republic the most perfect form of government.' (NS, p. 166-7)

As his personal upset even gives dignity to the utterance of his theory, Mrs Gaskell is clearly relishing the ways in which the personal and ideological levels are thus subtly affecting one another simply by virtue of their co-presence. Yet she is not ignorant at the same time of their incommensurably separate and serious claims. For whilst there is comedy in that 'little annoyance' - in Thornton's thus belittling the 'feeling' which has involuntarily taken precedence over his intellectual interest in the debate ('Who is Captain Lennox?'), still, that personal level now becomes actually 'little' as Thornton's interest is absorbed by the ideological concerns of a larger world of Milton and of future mankind. Mrs Gaskell regretted that those larger human questions had necessarily become political ones: 'One of my mes is ... a true Christian - (only people call her socialist and communist)'.²⁰ But such passages demonstrate that she had none of Charlotte Bronte's

20. As Jenny Uglow points out, the Gaskells' liberal position in politics was an outcome of their Unitarian faith - a faith which was 'allied to a broad (but not absolute) tolerance of other opinions [and] a progressive vision of history' and which was 'essentially optimistic, trusting in the innate goodness of human nature, warped though actions might become in response to material, emotional or spiritual deprivation', A Habit of Stories, pp. 71-2. (I include a more specific account of the version of Unitarianism to which the Gaskells held in Chapter Five, p. 260, below.)

ambivalent anxiety about the relative size of the personal in relation to the human world which lay beyond it. Rather she recognises and accepts here that it is no more possible precisely to weigh the importance of the public questions being discussed against the importance of what is going on in Thornton's heart, than it would be possible to separate the personal from the political in Thornton's 'offended tone'. The shift in the final paragraph is not for Mrs Gaskell a shift from what is more to what is less important or vice-versa. Rather the interests of the heart which had been foreground ('Who is Captain Lennox?'), now become background. It is an adjustment of focus - the result of Mrs Gaskell's characteristic absorption in the sheer instability of the present.

It is in Mrs Gaskell's tough 'going along' with the temporally real that Mikhail Bakhtin, one feels, might have found the exemplary model of that life-immersed relativism he so prized in the novel as a genre. 'All attempts to overcome the dualism of cognition and life from inside theoretical cognition,' he said, 'are absolutely hopeless.' (Hence the flawed formulations within a secondary language of the head/heart, love/politics debate.) Only literature and especially the novel, Bakhtin believed, could 'transcribe' life without leaving something essential out - 'the singular world in which we create, become aware, perceive, live and die':

Faith in rules, norms, theories, and systems blinds us to the particular person and situation, which is where morality resides. Relativism is no answer ... For relativism, no less than for other theories, life ceases to be a ... 'responsive, risk-taking, open act-in-the-process-of becoming'. ... Indeed if anything, relativism is the worst form of theoretism - worse than ethical and cognitive systematization - because real moral acts do at least take theoretical knowledge into consideration as part of their ethical stance.²¹

Bakhtin helps to offer a crucial distinction between 'theoretic' relativism and the deeper relativism of the novel. Mrs Gaskell's immanent relativism takes its stand from inside life, whereas the political liberalism which that relativism turned into in Mary Barton cannot. For the politically hijacked relativism of Mary Barton can seem to be looking for easy or crude solutions to the problems of division in human relations.²² Yet we shall see in the remainder of this chapter how the deeper relativism which emerges in Mrs Gaskell's later work - and which begins to emerge most demonstrably in North and South in the relationship between Margaret and Thornton - itself proceeds

21. From Mikhail Bakhtin's, 'The Philosophy of the Act', quoted in Rethinking Bakhtin, edited by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, (Illinois, 1989), pp. 8-9. (The indented quotation is actually the authors' summary of Bakhtin's thoughts in 'The Philosophy of the Act' - an early work for which, at the time of writing, there is no published English translation.)

22. Such is the view of Raymond Williams, for instance: 'Mrs Gaskell saw [the hardness of the dominant philosophy of industrialism] as little more than a misunderstanding, which might be patiently broken down', (Culture and Society, p. 93).

from a recognition that at a more primary level in human relations there are no mere 'solutions'.

After Margaret has defended Thornton against the striking mob, Thornton makes a passionate declaration of his feelings for her. 'Your whole manner offends me,' says Margaret:

'How!' exclaimed he. 'Offends you! I am indeed most unfortunate.'

'Yes!' said she, with recovered dignity. 'I do feel offended; and, I think, justly. You seem to fancy that my conduct of yesterday ... was a personal act between you and me ... You seem to have imagined, that I was not merely guided by womanly instinct, but' - and here the passionate tears (kept down for long - struggled with vehemently) came up into her eyes, and choked her voice - 'but that I was prompted by some particular feeling for you - you! Why there was not a man - not a poor desperate man in all that crowd - for whom I had not more sympathy - for whom I should not have done what little I could more heartily.'

'You may speak on, Miss Hale. I am aware of all these misplaced sympathies of yours. I now believe that it was only your innate sense of oppression - (yes; I, though a master, may be oppressed) - that made you act so nobly as you did. I know you despise me; allow me to say, it is because you do not understand me.'

'I do not care to understand,' she replied, taking hold of the table to steady herself; for she thought him cruel - as, indeed, he was - and she was weak with her indignation. (NS, pp. 253-4)

'She thought him cruel - as, indeed, he was - ...'. As his cruelty begets her further cruelty here ('I do not care to understand'), so the same thing happens, vice versa, in this sentence - a little earlier in the same passage:

He threw the hand away with indignation, as he heard her icy tone; for icy it was, though the words came faltering out, as if she knew not where to find them.

Mrs Gaskell toughly accepts the mutual cruelty here because she sees that it is mutually involuntary. Margaret's 'icy tone' is the reaction of 'shock' more than it is that of instinctive aversion to Thornton. For it is the result of her not being prepared, emotionally and sexually, for Thornton's passion and the change of levels. Where in the previous passage - in Thornton's 'offended tone' - we saw what was going on at a sexual level exploding into the ideological debate, here, when Margaret speaks, the sexual level which has become startlingly primary for her at this moment is taking cover behind a secondary political one: 'You seem to have imagined ... that I was prompted by some particular feeling for you - you!' The brutal emphasis of that 'you!' is produced by the sheer pressure of the situation itself. Margaret is having to fall back on a (wounding) language of political antipathy because not being prepared emotionally, she is not prepared either at the level which matters most of all at such times in human relations - the level of speech. She does not know where to find the words. For all her own preferred implicitness, Mrs Gaskell was only too conscious of the need for a more explicit mode at moments of crisis. But as a novelist she was only too conscious also that the very intensity of what

is going on beneath the level of speech, at a time when explicit speech must take priority, might well demand the use of a secondary language of authentication. So she recognises, for instance, when in Mary Barton, Jem Wilson comes to propose to Mary:

It was no use waiting, thought Jem. The subject would never be led to by any talk he could think of in his anxious fluttered state. He had better begin at once.

'Mary! ... Dear Mary! (for how dear you are, I cannot rightly tell you in words). It's no new story I'm going to speak about. You must ha' seen and known it long; for since we were boy and girl, I ha' loved you above father and mother and all ... And now, Mary, I've a home to offer you, and a heart as true as ever man had to love you and cherish you; we shall never be rich folk, I dare say; but if a loving heart, and a strong right arm can shield you from sorrow, or from want, mine shall do it. I cannot speak as I would like; my love won't let itself be put in words. But oh! darling, say you believe me, and that you'll be mine.' (MB, p. 174)

Speaking unequivocally about his feelings is more important to Jem at this moment than speaking more authentically from out of those same feelings. Mrs Gaskell clearly accepts the need for the prepared language which Jem uses here, even as she regrets, with Jem, its necessary distortions - 'How dear you are, I cannot rightly tell you in words ... I cannot speak as I would like; my love won't let itself be put in words ...'. The fault is not Jem's, as this passage goes on to demonstrate, so much as the mode of communication which the occasion itself requires. For Mary, no more than Jem himself, can 'speak as [she] would like':

She could not speak at once; her words would not come.

'Mary, they say silence gives consent; is it so?' he whispered.

Now or never the effort must be made.

'No! it does not with me.' Her voice was calm, although she trembled from head to foot. 'I will always be your friend, Jem, but I can never be your wife.' (ibid. p. 175)

For Mary, as for Margaret, there is too much to say, where only one thing can - and 'must' - be said ('Mary, they say silence gives consent'). More usually in Mrs Gaskell the fact of there being too much to say means that nothing can be said. 'You are unfair and unjust,' Thornton goes on to say to Margaret:

Margaret compressed her lips. She would not speak in answer to such accusations. But, for all that - for all his savage words, he could have thrown himself at her feet, and kissed the hem of her garment. She did not speak; she did not move. The tears of wounded pride fell hot and fast. He waited awhile, longing for her to say something, even a taunt, to which he might reply. But she was silent. (NS, p. 254)

Mrs Gaskell crosses that silence between Margaret and Thornton - from her 'wounded pride' to his hurt 'longing' - knowing that they cannot. She also knows that it is better that they do not even try: '[He] long[ed] for her to say something, even a taunt, to which he might reply'. Were Margaret to try to speak, her 'tears' would produce further 'taunts' (as with 'you - you!'), partly as a defence against the tears but also because her tears are as much as she can authentically 'say' about the emotional

disturbance which is producing them. She would use the wrong words, that is, because there are no right words. These passages are not simply about words failing people. Rather what deeply underwrites them is a recognition of that basic rule of human relations to which Mrs Gaskell's very implicitness bears testimony - the rule, that is to say, that more often than not in human situations there is more going on within and between human beings than can possibly go into a primary mode of speaking or of acting:

[Mary's] voice was calm, although she trembled from head to foot.

For all [Thornton's] savage words, he could have thrown himself at her feet, and kissed the hem of her garment.

Mrs Gaskell earnestly wanted communication and understanding between human beings. But that 'Christian' desire did not prevent her from the Bakhtinian novelistic recognition that there was something basic in the very form of human relations themselves which makes deeply sympathetic communication almost impossibly difficult to achieve directly - and which makes understanding one another one of the hardest things that humans together can actually do. It is no surprise to Mrs Gaskell, then, that Margaret and Thornton are at their most sympathetic when they are least together. 'But Mr Thornton, you have been very kind to my father,' Margaret eventually says, 'changing her whole tone and bearing to a most womanly softness':

'Don't let us go on making each other angry. Pray don't!' He took no notice of her words: he occupied himself in smoothing the nap of his hat with his coat sleeve, for half a minute or so; and then, rejecting her offered hand, and making as if he did not see her grave look of regret, he turned abruptly, and left the room. Margaret caught one glance at his face before he went.

When he was gone, she thought she had seen the gleam of unshed tears in his eyes; and that turned her proud dislike into something different and kinder, if nearly as painful - self-reproach for having caused such mortification to anyone.

'But how could I help it?' asked she of herself. (NS, pp. 254-5)

'When he was gone...' At such moments in North and South it is as if we are seeing Wives and Daughters coming into being, as Mrs Gaskell attends here to the kind of residuum which was to absorb her in the later work. And typically of that work too, so much is left unfinished because there are too many overlapping considerations - between the polar levels of sympathy and antipathy - to be easily or naturally fitted into the situation itself ('"You have been very kind to my father," said she, changing her whole tone and bearing ...'). Yet the 'something different' which Margaret feels is not strictly aftermath - something hanging on from the situation itself - so much as what happens necessarily after (and thus in the paragraph after) Thornton has gone: 'When he was gone she thought she had seen the gleam of unshed tears in his eyes'. It is only when he is no longer present, and so long as he is not, that she can really 'see' him and the pain that she has caused him. From inside

the situation itself, Mrs Gaskell realises, Margaret, and Thornton too, ('making as if he did not see her grave look of regret') are each feeling too much on their own accounts to feel anything for the sake of the other. 'Cruel' together, 'kinder' apart - there is a deeper cruelty in that fact, Mrs Gaskell recognises, that is simply nobody's fault. 'But how could I help it?' Mrs Gaskell cannot help relishing this love-tension that enlivens the conventional language of love.

'It was the finest love story that Mrs Gaskell had yet achieved,' said one critic of North and South, 'strong, honest, without a trace of sentimentality.'²³ It is a rare acknowledgement of the sheer power of the love interest in North and South²⁴. Yet, after all, we should not be embarrassed to call North and South a 'love story', once we accept that the love interest in North and South is not vulnerably personal in the way that it is in Villette.

Mrs Gaskell's novels never were 'personal' in the sense that Charlotte Bronte's novels were - as Mrs Gaskell herself recognised. 'The difference between Miss Bronte and

23. Annette Brown Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Works (London, 1952), p. 142.

24. And it is perhaps significant that it pre-dates the rediscovery of Mrs Gaskell in the late 1950's - by Marxist critics such as Raymond Williams and Arnold Kettle - as a writer of 'social-problem novel[s]'. See Arnold Kettle, 'The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel' in From Dickens to Hardy, (The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 6), edited by Boris Ford, second edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1963), p. 170.

me,' she wrote in 1853, 'is that she puts all her naughtiness into her books, and I put all my goodness':

I am sure she works off a great deal that is morbid into her writing, and out of her life; and my books are so far better than I am that I often feel ashamed of having written them and as if I were a hypocrite. (Letters:G, p. 228)

'Into her writing, and out of her life' is a sort of Romantic expressionism as autobiographical relief, which Mrs Gaskell clearly did not endorse.²⁵ The real 'difference' between Charlotte Bronte and herself, in fact, is that Mrs Gaskell was a writer who could be a writer, it seems, only by going beyond confessionally autobiographical introspection to a vision which (as we shall see more fully in Section II) was 'social' in the deepest sense. It is a vision concerned, that is to say, with the sheer phenomenon of human beings existing by definition both together and apart in the same world and concerned too with the difficulties which beset human relations as a result. So it is that the love interest in North and South stands for more than the sheerly personal in human relations without ever ceasing to be personal love. Rather, it is in this more intense form of human relationship that

25. 'Introspection ... is not a safe training for a novelist', she wrote emphatically to her daughter in 1859, Letters:G, p. 541. ('Set objects not feelings before [your reader] ... think eagerly of your story till you see it in action' is, incidentally, Mrs Gaskell's further advice [ibid. p. 541-2]. The emphasis on the visual and observable seems distinctly Tolstoyan.)

the problems of communication which had troubled Mrs Gaskell from the beginning of her career begin to appear in a more tested form. And next to the near-intractable problems which she perceived to exist at this more intimate human level, the obstacles to communication between the classes must have seemed frustratingly crude to Mrs Gaskell for seeming so merely secondary.

What is more, North and South embodies an implicit recognition (though from a human and not from a political point of view) of the crudeness of her own direct plea for sympathy in Mary Barton. For the events of human sympathy which occur in the later work are not of the kind that can be prescribed. Rather, they happen characteristically in North and South by subtle and involuntary accident - as when, for instance, the dying Mrs Hale asks Mrs Thornton to be a friend to Margaret when she is gone:

'You have a daughter ... My child will be without a mother ... if I die - will you -'

And her filmy wandering eyes fixed themselves with an intensity of wistfulness on Mrs Thornton's face. For a minute, there was no change in its rigidity; it was stern and unmoved; - nay, but that the eyes of the sick woman were growing dim with the slow-gathering tears, she might have seen a dark cloud cross the cold features. And it was no thought of her son, or of her living daughter Fanny, that stirred her heart at last; but a sudden remembrance, suggested by something in the arrangement in the room, - of a little daughter - dead in infancy - long years ago - that, like a sudden sunbeam, melted the icy crust, behind which there was a real tender woman. (NS, p. 306)

Mrs Thornton's tenderness is as unexpected and unsought as is that moment of fellow feeling between the Hales and the Bouchers' neighbour. How typical of Mrs Gaskell that it should be a random and inconvenient memory which cuts across Mrs Thornton's antipathy - personal and social - towards Margaret. It is as if Mrs Gaskell went beyond the apologia of Mary Barton not because she recognised that William Greg was right in believing that true sympathy could not exist between persons who are not the same but, on the contrary, because finally she recognised that he was wrong. For Mrs Gaskell, it seems, genuine sympathy is something that cannot in any circumstance or in any sense be expected, in so far as it is the nature of real sympathy to be taken by surprise - to be deeply involuntary in relation to persons apparently very different. As something thus unpredestined and unprescribed, it comes close to the kind of deep formal answering sympathy which exists between Mrs Thornton's memory of her lost infant and this moment, earlier in the novel, where she awaits her son and the news that he is engaged to Margaret. 'Miss Hale was not so bad':

If she had been a Milton lass, Mrs Thornton would have positively liked her. She was pungent, and had taste, and spirit, and flavour in her. True, she was sadly prejudiced, and very ignorant; but that was to be expected from her southern breeding. A strange sort of mortified comparison of Fanny with her, went on in Mrs Thornton's mind; and for once she spoke harshly to her daughter; abused her roundly. (NS, p. 270)

How difficult it must actually have been for Mrs Gaskell to find herself labelled an ideological writer ('Some call me communist'), when what she prized in her reader by leaving open such connections was precisely the kind of involuntary understanding and recognition whereby Margaret discovers, belatedly, that she 'knows' Mrs Thornton. 'I was surprised to find the old lady falling into the current, and carried away by her daughter's enthusiasm for orange-blossoms and lace,' says Mr Bell as he describes to Margaret the extravagantly sumptuous preparations for Fanny's wedding:

'I thought Mrs Thornton had been made of sterner stuff.'

'She would put on any assumption of feeling to veil her daughter's weakness,' said Margaret in a low voice.

'Perhaps so. You've studied her, have you? She doesn't seem over fond of you Margaret.'

'I know it,' said Margaret. (NS, p. 461)

'In a low voice' (like a novelist). As Section II will further show, the real pattern of Mrs Gaskell's career was a continuous movement onward from the 'impassioned polemic' of Mary Barton towards finding a context in which her own 'low voice' of implicit understanding could untroubledly reside.

II Sylvia's Lovers and Cousin Phillis

I turn now to Mrs Gaskell's later work, much as I suggest she herself did, in order fully to recover the agenda which had become hidden or distorted by a socio-political one. For the more Mrs Gaskell moved away from the prescriptions and partisanship imposed upon her by specific historical conditions, the more she settled into a mode of realism which was in the deepest sense, I shall argue, a faithfully neutral one. 'Realism,' says J.P. Stern, 'is not a content but a condition. ... It is not a genre, nor a Weltanschauung, but rather a disposition of mind and pen.'²⁶

There can be no better example in Mrs Gaskell's work to illustrate that her mode of writing was, in its most achieved form, a mode of being than the following long but definitive passage from Sylvia's Lovers.²⁷ Having married Philip, out of gratitude for his help during the ordeal of her father's arrest and execution, but without really loving him, Sylvia now regularly meets Hester who, unbeknown to

26. J.P. Stern, Realism (London, 1973), pp. 52, 147. Hereafter cited as Realism.

27. In my discussion of this passage, I shall be referring to the original manuscript of Sylvia's Lovers (Brotherton Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, 3 volumes. Hereafter cited as MS,SL.) The manuscript (part of which is still missing - i.e. Vol. 2, pp. 1-10, pp. 167-180 inclusive, and Vol 3, pp. 152ff.) comes from papers associated with Mrs Gaskell's publishers (Smith, Elder and Co.) and is that used by the printers (it is marked-up throughout). For a full transcription and a copy of the manuscript version of the passage, see Appendix II.

Sylvia, has long loved Philip:

Hester was almost surprised at Sylvia's evident liking for her. By slow degrees Hester was learning to love the woman, whose position as Philip's wife she would have envied so keenly had she not been so good and pious. But Sylvia seemed as though she had given Hester her whole affection all at once. Hester could not understand this, while she was touched and melted by the trust it implied. For one thing Sylvia remembered and regretted - her harsh treatment of Hester the rainy, stormy night on which the latter had come to Haytersbank to seek her and her mother, and bring them into Monkshaven to see the imprisoned father and husband. Sylvia had been struck with Hester's patient endurance of her rudeness, a rudeness which she was conscious that she herself should have immediately and vehemently resented. Sylvia did not understand how a totally different character from hers might immediately forgive the anger she could not forget; and because Hester had been so meek at the time, Sylvia, who knew how passing and transitory was her own anger, thought that all was forgotten; while Hester believed that the words, which she herself could not have uttered except under deep provocation, meant much more than they did, and admired and wondered at Sylvia for having so entirely conquered her anger against her.

Again, the two different women were divergently affected by the extreme fondness which Bell had shown towards Hester ever since Sylvia's wedding-day. Sylvia, who had always received more love from others than she knew what to do with, had the most entire faith in her own supremacy in her mother's heart, though at times Hester would do certain things more to the poor old woman's satisfaction. Hester, who had craved for the affection which had been withheld from her, and had from that one circumstance become distrustful of her own power of inspiring regard, while she exaggerated the delight of being beloved, feared lest Sylvia should become jealous of her mother's open display of great attachment and occasional

preference for Hester. But such a thought never entered Sylvia's mind. She was more thankful than she knew how to express towards any one who made her mother happy; as has already been said, the contributing to Bell Robson's pleasures earned Philip more of his wife's smiles than anything else. And Sylvia threw her whole heart into the words and caresses she lavished on Hester whenever poor Mrs Robson spoke of the goodness and kindness of the latter. Hester attributed more virtue to these sweet words and deeds of gratitude than they deserved; they did not imply in Sylvia any victory over evil temptation, as they would have done in Hester.²⁸

The sheer multiplicity and divergence of views in this passage would be almost mind-spinningly intolerable, were it not for the fact that Mrs Gaskell is herself so deeply adjusted to it. It is a passage which clearly demonstrates that the more Mrs Gaskell left behind the secondary problem of communication which troubled her in Mary Barton and North and South the freer she was to re-discover it at a more primary level; and the more finally intractable the problem proves to be, all the more, therefore, can and must she tolerate it. For in sheerly entering these minds she is revealing, quietly and undemonstratively, the impossibility of crossing the human bounds between them in ordinary life:

Hester, who had craved for the affection which had been withheld from her, and had from that one circumstance become distrustful of her own power of inspiring regard, while she exaggerated the delight of being beloved, feared lest Sylvia should

28. Mrs Gaskell, Sylvia's Lovers, first published 1863, edited by Andrew Sanders (Oxford, 1986), pp. 346-7.

become jealous of her mother's open display of great attachment and occasional preference for Hester. But such a thought never entered Sylvia's mind.

These are not simply contrasted points of view - a Hester sentence, then a Sylvia sentence. The sentences are separated at the level of being itself. It just is not possible for Hester to cross the boundary of being, from her own psychological vulnerabilities to Sylvia's simple and secure lack of thought about herself, as easily as Mrs Gaskell moves from one sentence to another. No more can Sylvia make the complex connections which Mrs Gaskell can so easily and implicitly make between Hester's need for love and the distrust of deserving it which that very craving creates.²⁹ This is not a moral failure on the

29. Easily at (immediate) second thought that is:

Hester, who had craved for the affection which had been withheld from her, and had from that one circumstance become own power of inspiring regard distrustful of her_^(self), while she ...
(MS, SL, Vol. III, p. 11)

The evidence to suggest that all of the revisions I cite in this section are immediate ones comes from the revision made at lines 42-3 in the transcription (see Appendix II, p. 336):

Sylvia, who had always had _^ more received from others love _^ than she knew what to do with ...
(ibid.)

There is a clear change of pen or of pressure here (see facsimile, p. 335) indicating a later revision. Hence, perhaps, the syntactical slip.

characters' part, nor even an imaginative one. It is a problem to which there simply is no deep solution, precisely since between people more or less the same - at the level of class and culture, outlook and even belief - there remain irreducible differences. And it is as if, in this passage, Mrs Gaskell goes beyond acceptance of the problem to a recognition that sometimes the problem may be its own solution. For the very failure to understand is here not a regrettable loss but, on the contrary, a mutual gain:

Hester attributed more virtue to these sweet words and deeds of gratitude than they deserved; they did not imply in Sylvia any victory over evil temptation, as they would have done in Hester.

The very mistakes which Hester and Sylvia each make about the other, they make in one another's favour. And Mrs Gaskell is altogether free from any misgiving about these mistakes:

Sylvia seemed as though she had given Hester her whole affection all at once. Hester could not understand this, while she was touched and melted by the trust it implied. For one thing Sylvia remembered and regretted - her harsh treatment of Hester the rainy, stormy night ...

What Hester has taken for trust in Sylvia is not trust, but regret, penitence. Yet the thing hardly feels to Mrs Gaskell like a contradiction at all as, in the shift to Sylvia, the sentence begins not sceptically with 'But,' but easily and seamlessly with 'For'. There is no mere modernist sense of sceptical irony in this for Mrs Gaskell. Indeed, the

manuscript revisions help us to see what is preventing irony here - as with, for instance, the revision Mrs Gaskell makes to the final sentence of paragraph one:

believed

... while Hester <felt> that the words which she herself could not have uttered except under deep provocation, meant much more than they did ... (MS, SL, Vol. III, p. 10)

The substitution of that word of strong trust - 'believed' - for the (relatively) more doubting 'felt' is an instinctive readjustment - proceeding from Mrs Gaskell's recognition that whilst she may be able to see Hester's mistake, Hester herself cannot. We find Mrs Gaskell similarly keeping faith with the more limited vision of her characters in this revision:

... [Hester] feared lest Sylvia should become
<be as> jealous of her mother's open display of great attachment ...
(ibid. p. 11)

'... feared lest Sylvia should be as jealous as she herself should have been' (Mrs Gaskell's first thought I take it) is not innocent enough, as Mrs Gaskell knows. For the revision to 'she feared lest Sylvia should become jealous' puts Hester more (earnestly) in mind of Sylvia than of her own self. For neither Hester nor Sylvia are self-consciously aware that they are each imagining the other to be a version of themselves - and a better version of themselves at that. The beauty of it is that they do so instinctively: 'Hester believed', while Sylvia is 'struck with Hester's patient

endurance of [a] rudeness ... that she herself should have immediately and vehemently resented'. What this passage comes to reveal, simply as a result of Mrs Gaskell's moving toughly between these minds, is that virtue itself here depends upon Sylvia and Hester not seeing their errors as Mrs Gaskell can. What really takes this passage beyond sceptically ironic contrasts is Mrs Gaskell's capacity for sheerly immersing herself in the human situation, and thereby disclosing that through the mutual fallibilities and well-intentioned errors, through the very flaws, imperfections and individual limitations, the human thing as a whole works. Indeed, as Sylvia and Hester each so generously get it so wrong, it is not the contrasts but, across the differences, the likenesses which become so surprisingly apparent. 'While' Sylvia cannot understand how Hester 'might immediately forgive the anger she could not forget', Hester in turn 'wonders' at Sylvia 'for having so entirely conquered her anger against her'. Again, as Sylvia is 'struck with Hester's patience endurance', so too Hester is 'almost surprised at Sylvia's evident liking for her'. When those generic human likenesses start to show themselves, what is going on in this passage begins to look like something other than a happy instance of misunderstanding working; rather it seems to be deeply related to those accidents of sympathy whereby in North and South we saw people who were not the same sharing feelings

which were the same. And Mrs Gaskell's own lack of surprise at the inadvertent good which comes from Sylvia's and Hester's being wrong about one another suggests that for Mrs Gaskell such a happening is simply part of her vision of the way life works. Yet it is a vision discovered (patiently) from below.

'It is only by the habit of representing faithfully all things that we can truly learn what is beautiful and what is not.' So says Ruskin in Modern Painters - a work which Mrs Gaskell singled out as having particular importance for her personally³⁰:

The more a painter accepts nature as he finds it, the more unexpected beauty he discovers in what he at first despised: but once let him arrogate the right of rejection, and he will gradually contract his circle of enjoyment, until what he supposed to be nobleness of selection ends in narrowness of perception.³¹

Ruskin's is a vision of not excluding, of not selecting; it is a vision of a whole in which everything has a right to be included. It is a sheer trusting to the real to reveal its

30. 'One day, as we were travelling in Italy,' wrote Charles Norton in 1857 (friend of both Mrs Gaskell and Ruskin), 'Mrs Gaskell and her daughters and I were talking about the books we would choose if we were shut up in prison or on a desolate island. At last we agreed to choose one book by a living author, and when it came to Mrs Gaskell's turn to tell us what she had chosen she said "Modern Painters"' (quoted in A Habit of Stories, p. 424).

31. John Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. III, first published 1856, Part IV 'Of Many Things', Chapter 3, paragraph 15, in The Works of John Ruskin, edited by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London, 1903-12), V, p. 58. Hereafter cited as WJR.

own connections, its own pattern and unity, not as an aesthetic but as an implicit theology.³² For it was this realist ideal which offered itself, to Ruskin, as a replacement for religious idealism in art:

The whole power, whether of painter or poet, to describe rightly what we call an ideal thing, depends upon it being ... to him, not an ideal, but a real thing. ...

And on account of this reality it is, that the great idealists venture into all kinds of what, to the pseudo-idealists, are "vulgaritys". Nay, venturing is the wrong word; the great men have no choice in the matter; they do not know or care whether the things they describe are vulgarities or not. They saw them; they are the facts of the case. ... And therefore, among the various ready tests of true greatness there is not any more certain than this daring reference to, or use of, mean and little things - mean and little that is, to mean and little minds; but, when used by great men, evidently part of the noble whole which is authoritatively present before them.³³

No wonder Mrs Gaskell found in Ruskin so companionable a spirit. For, manifestly, what replaces in Sylvia's Lovers the problem-solving of Mary Barton is a realist vision precisely analogous to Ruskin's naturalist ideal. It is a rich inclusiveness of vision - an inclusiveness which we see explicitly in the manuscript version of the sentence

32. 'The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world,' he says towards the close of Volume III, 'is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way ... To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion - all in one', Modern Painters, Vol. 3, Part IV, Chapter 16, paragraph 28 in WJR, V, p. 333.

33. Modern Painters, Vol III, Part IV, Chapter 7, paragraphs 5 & 6 in WJR, V, pp. 114-5.

which closes paragraph one:

Sylvia did not understand how a totally different character from hers might immediately forgive the anger she could not forget; and because Hester had been so meek who knew how passing and transitory was her own anger at the time, Sylvia [^] thought that all was believed forgotten, while Hester <felt> that the words which she herself could not have uttered except under deep provocation, meant much more than they did, and admired and wondered at Sylvia for having so entirely conquered her anger against her. (MS, SL, Vol. III, p. 10)

Sylvia and Hester share the same sentence here as easily as, for Mrs Gaskell, they share the same world.³⁴ Yet again there are not just two thoughts here - a Sylvia thought as against a Hester thought. Rather, as Mrs Gaskell with stunning mental agility inhabits these two separated modes of being at the same time, she also keeps adding to the picture as she goes - at first thought ('and ... which ... and') and at second thought ('who knew how passing and transitory was her own anger') - until the sentence begins to teem with added thought. Yet the clauses do not simply follow on - one after another: they happen simultaneously - one on top of the other, layer upon layer, in dense, overlapping profusion. And the implicit signal of this density and inclusiveness of vision - in this sentence and

34. The sentence is actually more seamless in the original than it appears to be in the published version (where a semi-colon replaces the original comma before 'while').

in the passage as a whole - is that little word of temporal simultaneity which is holding the separated worlds of Sylvia and Hester at once together and apart - '... Sylvia thought that all was forgotten, while Hester believed ...'. The signal recurs, here:

Hester ... while she exaggerated the delight of being beloved, feared lest Sylvia should become jealous of her mother's open display of great attachment and occasional preference for Hester.

The love which Hester exaggerates, for very want of it, she, for the same reason and at the same time, also fears. Equally, (as Sylvia seems to have given Hester 'her whole affection all at once') -

Hester could not understand this, while she was touched and melted by the trust it implied.

Even as Hester cannot understand Sylvia's affection, even as she is not fully convinced by it, at another level (though at the same time and along the same line of prose sentence) she responds instinctively and trustingly to that trust of Sylvia's which, nonetheless, is only implied. These facts overlap with one another ('while'), even as they do not fit together, even as they do not fit into anything except themselves.

'All true finish,' said Ruskin (in a chapter which might almost be laying down rules for the writing of Sylvia's Lovers and Wives and Daughters) 'is added fact':

Finish does not exist in smoothing or polishing ... Finish is not, properly speaking, completing the picture as adding to it ... Finish means nothing but consummate and accumulated truth ... for where does Nature pause in her finishing - that finishing which consists not in the smoothing of surface, but the filling of space, and the multiplication of life and thought?³⁵

A Ruskinian sacrifice of predetermined form to sheer richness of content - that, I suggest, is how Mrs Gaskell's mode of realism asks to be characterised. Indeed, it is as though Mrs Gaskell's realist mode is showing us what realism itself quintessentially is. For what J.P. Stern describes variously as 'a bundle of experiences', 'an unabating interest in the shapes and relations of the real world', an unambiguous commitment to '[the] ballast, rubble, detritus [which] weigh down this world'³⁶, is a mode thus resistant to category for being inherently amorphous - an impure mix of modes, levels and categories, a generous and faithful holding together of things confusedly awash and around. It is as if 'realism' is the name we give to what we have no name for as a totality. Thus, what James called disparagingly 'the large, loose baggy monsters'³⁷ of the (Tolstoyan) realist novel, are in fact the formal 'ideal' of

35. Modern Painters, Vol III, Part IV, Chapter 9, paragraphs 7, 15, 18, in WJR, V, pp. 155-6, 164, 166-7.

36. Realism, pp. 55, 171, 135.

37. Henry James, Preface to The Tragic Muse, in The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism, edited by Roger Gard (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), p. 515.

a vision which sheerly accepts the miscellany and formlessness of the real³⁸ or, rather, gives in to it and trusts form to emerge again out of it. For it is as if Mrs Gaskell's very benignity - the much-lauded hallmark of her genius³⁹ - is actually secondary to the hard primary fact of her trust in multiplicity. Thus, though 'while' looks like another of Mrs Gaskell's easy-going, apparently casual connectives, the real message it is giving is that there is not one single thing to be said about this, not one single view to be taken. It is this message which is also deeply implicit in Cousin Phillis.

In the following passage, Phillis has overheard her father's anger at Paul for repeating Holdsworth's idle words of love and thus encouraging Phillis's hopes:

'Father, you must not blame Paul. ... He did tell me, and perhaps it would have been wiser not, dear Paul! But - oh, dear! oh, dear! I am so sick with shame! He told me out of his kind heart, because he saw - that I was so very unhappy at his going away.'

She hung her head, and leant more heavily than before on her supporting hand.

38. As Ruskin, increasingly it seems, could not. For in the move from Modern Painters to Unto this Last, Ruskin went in the opposite direction to Mrs Gaskell, away from a naturalist vision towards a political one, as if, drowning in a sea of details, he were in search of some formal category to hold the multiplicity.

39. For example: '[Mrs Gaskell's] habit of letting facts speak for themselves is her natural and most precious power ... Her powers are perhaps best defined by a negative: she has the ability of not passing judgement or condemning. She simply selects and presents events and characters so that the reader understands them', W.A. Craik, Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel (London, 1975), p. 12.

'I don't understand,' said her father; but he was beginning to understand. Phillis did not answer till he asked her again. I could have struck him now for his cruelty; but then I knew all.

'I loved him, father!' she said at length, raising her eyes to the minister's face.

'Had he ever spoken of love to you? Paul says not!'

'Never.' She let fall her eyes, and drooped more than ever. I almost thought she would fall.

'I could not have believed it,' said he, in a hard voice, yet sighing the moment he had spoken. A dead silence for a moment. 'Paul! I was unjust to you. You deserved blame, but not all that I said.' Then again a silence. I thought I saw Phillis's white lips moving, but it might have been the flickering of the candlelight - a moth had flown in through the casement, and was fluttering round the flame; I might have saved it, but I did not care to do so, my heart was too full of other things. At any rate, no sound was heard for long endless minutes. Then he said, - 'Phillis! did we not make you happy here? Have we not loved you enough?'

She did not seem to understand the drift of this question; she looked up as if bewildered, and her beautiful eyes dilated with a painful, tortured expression. He went on, without noticing the look on her face; he did not see it, I am sure.

'And yet you would have left us, left your home, left your father and your mother, and gone away with this stranger, wandering over the world.'

He suffered, too; there were tones of pain in the voice in which he uttered this reproach. Probably the father and daughter were never so far apart in their lives, so unsympathetic.⁴⁰

I quote at length to show how three different worlds - each

40. Mrs Gaskell, Cousin Phillis, first published 1864, edited by Angus Easson (Oxford, 1991), pp. 346-7. Hereafter cited as CP.

faithfully 'preserv[ed] in their time-bound relative integrity'⁴¹ - are now thus vulnerably in the one world:

'I don't understand,' said her father; but he was beginning to understand. Phillis did not answer till he asked her again. I could have struck him now for his cruelty; but then I knew all.

Nothing could be more unkind or more pitiless to poor Phillis at this moment than her father's insistence that she speak the words ('I loved him, father') which realise her own shame to her; but nothing could be more forgiveable either than Holman's blindness to his daughter's pain as he suffers his own pain, for her, so intensely. 'But then I knew all' stands against a single view or judgement of this.

'Critics who accept with pleasant melancholy,' says a feminist reading of the story, 'that Phillis re-enacts [the] inevitable loss [of innocence], are confirming not a fact of nature but an ideological concept':

They tacitly align themselves with the Victorian ideals of Phillis's father [and] his idea of girlhood as uniquely fragile. ... At the crux of the story, Phillis, for Paul's sake, defies the taboo and confirms her own sexuality to her father. Though 'sick with shame' she 'speaks the necessary words, "'I loved him, father"'.⁴²

Thus to turn the problem into a patriarchal one is to make politically reparable what for Mrs Gaskell is deeply

41. Realism, p. 126.

42. Patsy Stoneman, Elizabeth Gaskell (Brighton, 1987), pp. 161, 166-7.

irremediable, precisely for being 'a fact of nature', a sheer event and a problem of being. The fact of Phillis's sexuality is suddenly and damagingly explosive simply because there is no right time for this sexual change to happen. The situation goes wrong only because it cannot be got right:

He went on, without noticing the look on her face; he did not see it, I am sure.

'And yet you would have left us, left your home, left your father and your mother, and gone away with this stranger, wandering over the world.'

He suffered, too.

Holman's cruelty ('He went on'), like Paul's 'not caring' to save the moth ('my heart was too full of other things'), is inadvertent - the involuntary fallout from the collision and overlap of three separate people. And the unintended harm they each do to one another is also ('He suffered too') the price they each pay for the sheer fact of separated consciousness.

The thing is beyond remedy - a happening beyond blame. The answer, for Mrs Gaskell, is simply to let be. She does not feel the need explicitly to think and to talk her way out of the problem as George Eliot, by contrast, characteristically feels bound to do. In Middlemarch, after Casaubon has learned from Lydgate that he is dying, Dorothea goes to join him in the garden. '[She] might have represented a heaven-sent angel coming with a promise that the short hours remaining should yet be filled with that

faithful love which clings the closer to a comprehended
grief':

His glance in reply to hers was so chill that she felt her timidity increased; yet she turned and passed her hand through his arm.

Mr Casaubon kept his hands behind him and allowed her pliant arm to cling with difficulty against his rigid arm.

There was something horrible to Dorothea in the sensation which this unresponsive hardness inflicted on her. That is a strong word, but not too strong: it is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are for ever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, the earth bears no harvest of sweetness - calling their denial knowledge. You may ask why, in the name of manliness, Mr Casaubon should have behaved in that way. Consider that his was a mind which shrank from pity: have you ever watched in such a mind the effect of a suspicion that what is pressing it as a grief may be really a source of contentment, either actual or future, to the being who already offends by pitying? Besides, he knew little of Dorothea's sensations, and had not reflected that on such an occasion as the present they were comparable in strength to his own sensibilities.⁴³

The complex of mutually reciprocal mistakes which works for the good of Hester and Sylvia is here working for bad. For the failings (of love) which Dorothea and Casaubon each imagine in the other become almost self-fulfilling:

His glance in reply to hers was so chill that she felt her timidity increased;

'yet', the sentence goes on -

43. George Eliot, Middlemarch, first published 1871-2, edited by W.J. Harvey (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981), pp. 462-3. Hereafter cited as M.

she turned and passed her hand through his arm.

This is a vision of complexity - of overlapping levels - barely distinguishable from Mrs Gaskell's own. But George Eliot is demonstrably troubled by the complication she thus sees and registers, as Mrs Gaskell is not. Thus, for instance, a word like 'Besides' in Mrs Gaskell's prose would be a sign of her moving easily on to the next thing, and a signal, too, of her having nothing to say about what is happening for having too much to say from within it. Here, on the contrary - 'Besides, he knew little of Dorothea's sensations and had not reflected' - the word signals another view of the same thing, a going back over the same ground, as George Eliot worries the thing through, argues it out, partly in mitigation of Casaubon, but also to make explicit the problem of being which is simply taken for granted in Cousin Phillis. What, in Mrs Gaskell, is sheerly given, George Eliot pushes into conscious idea, bringing out at the level of principle here - 'It is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are forever wasted' - a vision of least things mattering most which is deeply implicit in Mrs Gaskell, from the small manuscript revisions to the large inclusiveness of her realism. And, as we saw in Chapter Two, Mrs Gaskell tries to remain loyal to the apparent leastness of these 'trivialities' by reproducing the size of that leastness without making it

bigger, so to speak, in the way that George Eliot always feels compelled to do.

Mrs Gaskell is not a lesser George Eliot - a George Eliot who falls short of explicit ideas. Rather the sheer mortal complexity of what happens in Sylvia's Lovers and in Cousin Phillis goes beyond the power of ideas to represent to us their reality. The marvel of Mrs Gaskell's realism is that she recognises how obdurately difficult life is, and yet simply dissolves back into it. Her very immersedness, for not seeking to know life from above, is a form of omniscience which leaves our ordinary (literary) use of the word standing; for this is the completest seeing of life precisely for seeing from below - still baffled by the complexity but almost paradoxically undisturbed by the bafflement. As a writer of experience, Mrs Gaskell is thus undisturbed because unlike George Eliot, who always needs to rescue form, she herself simply finds it - finds it emerging from content, that is, as we saw in the passage from Sylvia's Lovers. Moreover, what the following passage from Cousin Phillis seems to suggest, is that Mrs Gaskell's artistic procedure was as deeply related to a theology as was Ruskin's own. And that is my most crucial point.

After Phillis has been taken ill and is close to death, two of Holman's fellow ministers come to offer spiritual help and to urge Holman to set forth 'an example of resignation':

'We hear on all sides that there are scarce any hopes of your child's recovery; and it may be well to bring you to mind of Abraham; and how he was willing to kill his only child when the Lord commanded. Take example by him, Brother Holman. Let us hear you say, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"'

There was a pause of expectancy. I verily believe the minister tried to feel it; but he could not. Heart of flesh was too strong. Heart of stone he had not.

'I will say it to my God, when He gives me strength, - when the day comes,' he spoke at last.

The other two looked at each other, and shook their heads. I think the reluctance to answer as they wished was not quite unexpected. The minister went on: 'There are hopes yet,' he said, as if to himself. 'God has given me a great heart for hoping, and I will not look forward beyond the hour.' Then turning more to them, and speaking louder, he added: 'Brethren, God will strengthen me when the time comes, when such resignation as you speak of is needed. Till then I cannot feel it; and what I do not feel I will not express; using words as if they were a charm.' (CP, pp. 350-1)

It is here - in that long 'pause of expectancy' - that Holman finally catches up with the dawning realisation which began in the previous passage: "'I don't understand." ... but he was beginning to understand'. There Mrs Gaskell had temporarily to intervene in order to give the right words, as Holman himself could not, to the feeling which lay behind his own cruel words of reproach: 'He suffered, too'. It is only now when he is in time with his own suffering that form can emerge for Holman himself - and come through as a theology which lies deeper than that of the Job's comforters. 'I will not look forward beyond the hour ...

God will strengthen me when the time comes, when such resignation as you speak of is needed. Till then I cannot feel it.' Holman will not be comforted or resigned until Phillis dies, if she dies. For 'there are hopes yet. ... God has given me a great heart for hoping'. The right 'time' for resignation cannot be humanly pre-ordained. It is for God and not for limited humans 'to look beyond the hour'. In refusing to deny, therefore, that his feelings as a father have present authority over his feelings as a Christian, Holman really passes the religious test even in seeming to fail it. For it is the business of humans, in this vision of realism, to begin from where they are, with what is presently 'given'; and the real act of faith is that of trusting to time to bestow what is needed 'when', the right time comes. It is this essentially religious trust, I suggest, which explains Mrs Gaskell's seemingly easy taking for granted of the real, and which lies behind the apparent agnosticism of her own immersion in time in Wives and Daughters.⁴⁴

Yet this is a taking for granted of the real so subtle as to have been itself taken for granted. 'Wives and Daughters,' says Laurence Lerner, in his introduction to the Penguin edition, 'is surely the most neglected novel of its century - the one where the gap is biggest between its

44. I come back to the relationship between Mrs Gaskell's art and her religious belief in Chapter 5, below.

intrinsic excellence and the neglect it has fallen into.'⁴⁵

If so, perhaps George Eliot was right in believing how necessary it was to make explicit the importance of her own vision, by becoming, as it were, the critic within her novels. For Mrs Gaskell's implicitness has been mistaken for the sort of amiable going-along with life which comes from seeing life first time around. What Mrs Gaskell needed, in lieu of being her own critic, was a critic like Ruskin. 'No literature exists of a high class,' he says in 'The Lance of Pallas', 'produced by minds in the pure religious temper':

The reason of this I believe to be, that the right faith of man is not intended to give him repose, but to enable him to do his work. It is not intended that he should look away from the place he lives in now, and cheer himself with thoughts of the place he is to live in next, but that he should look stoutly into this world, in faith that if he does his work thoroughly here, some good to others or himself, with which however he is not at present concerned, will come of it hereafter. And this kind of brave, but not very cheerful or hopeful faith, I perceive to be always rewarded by clear practical success and splendid intellectual powers.⁴⁶

The hard thing is not giving up on life for the sake of something higher. Rather the greater achievement is to go on with it, return to it, keep turning back to it, re-living it

45. Introduction to Wives and Daughters (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), p. 7.

46. John Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. V, first published 1860, Part IX ('Of Ideas of Relation'), Chapter 2, paragraphs 9-10 in WJR, VII, p. 267.

again and again, only knowing more certainly what you do not know. Mrs Gaskell's sense of experience always involved her being unsurprised by life's surprises, taking things the second time round while still remaining alert and without complacency.

If Ruskin had been more at ease with the novel as a form, he might have found in Mrs Gaskell not benignity, but faith - an immanent vision brave and great even for seeming so ordinary.

CHAPTER FOUR

MRS GASKELL AND TOLSTOY

I From The Cossacks to Anna Karenina

To turn, as I do now, from Mrs Gaskell to Tolstoy is as discomfiting as it is needfully salutary. For if Mrs Gaskell's realist vision works acceptingly against any easy reassurance that the deepest human problems can be helped or resolved, her very adjustment to what she recognises to be irreducibly difficult in human life seems to offer itself precisely as an alternative solution. That so much cannot be settled is itself so much a settled fact for Mrs Gaskell that her vision - with the unsurprised equanimity of 'It happens so; life just is this way' - seems to leave nothing more to say. How discomposing it is, then, to turn immediately to The Cossacks and find all that had seemed taken for granted in Mrs Gaskell's universe now undone, shaken up, taken apart in Tolstoy's.

"Happiness - that's what it is"¹, says Olenin when suddenly, alone in the forest, a new world is revealed to him. 'Happiness lies in living for other people':

1. 'Счастье - вот что', Leo Tolstoy, Complete Works, edited by M.B.Hrapchenko, 22 vols. (Moscow, 1978-85), III, p. 227. Hereafter cited as CW.

'And that's evident. The desire for happiness is innate in every human being: therefore it must be intended. Attempts to satisfy it selfishly - by pursuing wealth, fame, material well-being or love - may come to nothing, for circumstances may deny them. It follows, then, that it is these pursuits per se that are wrong: not the craving for happiness. What then are the cravings that can always be satisfied, independently of external circumstances? What are they? Love for others, and self-sacrifice.' He was so pleased and excited at this discovery, which seemed to him a new truth, that he sprang to his feet and began impatiently thinking to whom he could sacrifice himself, whom he could do good to, and love, immediately. 'Since I need nothing for myself,' he kept thinking, 'why not devote my life to others?'

For Olenin, the pressing business of living one's life is a matter of hitting upon the right plan and then 'impatiently' setting about it. First you solve life's secret; then you live. After looking at life through Mrs Gaskell's experienced reading of it, we almost need an Olenin, a young man thus prematurely seeking and finding solutions, forcibly to remind us what it is like to see life first time around in the first person singular. We need an Olenin, too, to show us, thus correctively, how extraordinary is Mrs Gaskell's vision of life precisely for finding the resistance of certain problems to human solution to be so unextraordinarily normal. But the deep, equally normative human need we find embodied in Olenin

2. Leo Tolstoy, The Cossacks, first published 1863, translated by Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1960), pp. 250-1. Hereafter cited as C.

is precisely the need of finding formal solutions and of finding them, what is more, right away, 'immediately'. For it is Tolstoy's 'urgent wondering questioning' - as William James described it - his compelling need to know "'Why?" "Wherefore?" "What for?"'³ that the Tolstoyan protagonist always emphatically stands for. Thus it is that now, all at once, it seems inconceivable that human beings could bear to see life as a problem without solutions. It also seems more like humans ordinarily are, to imagine, as does innocent Olenin, that life is a manageable means to our own ends, susceptible to our designs and ideas of it: 'And that's evident ... therefore ... It follows.' Everything fits! The purpose of a human life seems incorrectably self-evident to a naive mind working at the problem from outside of life.

Yet all the time the novel is quietly enjoying the irony that whilst Olenin is working tidily within a logical sequence, life, indomitably, is working within a quite different order of its own. For though Olenin's reasoning comes to a stop, the paragraph, with silent comic refusal, does not.⁴ 'Everything - the weather and the forest - had suddenly changed':

3. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, first published 1902, edited by Martin E. Marty (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), pp. 152-53.

4. Rosemary Edmonds' translation notwithstanding (C, p. 251). See CW, III, p. 228.

And all at once he was seized with a terrible sense of dread. He began to feel frightened. He remembered the abreks and the murderous deeds he had been told about, and behind every bush imagined an abrek ready to leap out at him, and he would either have to die fighting for his life or prove himself a coward. (C, p. 251)

Character proposes, story disposes. That is the educative shape of this novel. Just when Olenin thinks he's got on top of life, settled the thing once and for all, story steps in to say 'Not so fast! You can't stop there!', obstinately re-absorbing mind and logic within its own time and sequence. Story teaches character, comically insisting, over and again, on working out its own shape from beneath Olenin's stubborn plans.

Moreover, it is because Olenin simply will not learn as quickly as story at times would like him to, that story has to keep repeating itself at the level of event, bringing back the issues which Olenin thinks he has left behind or gone beyond. "'All that about love and self-sacrifice, and Luka, that I've been inventing for myself - it's all nonsense,'" thinks Olenin, 'in a flash', as he falls for Marienka:

'Happiness is the thing. The man who is happy is the man who is right.' And with a vigour which surprised even himself he grabbed the beautiful Marienka and kissed her on the temple and the cheek. (C, p. 275)

'The man who is happy is the man who is right.' 'Wrong,' says life, as story starts again just where Olenin thinks he

has finished. It is as if story in this novel is standing in for Mrs Gaskell's implicit narrator, immersed in time, yet knowing in advance that no single or settled idea about life possibly can, in advance, take account of all that life puts before a person. For story here, manifestly, is sharing Mrs Gaskell's own lack of surprise that life should thus inconveniently throw up the next new thing. Each repeated corrective is nonetheless a new surprise: Olenin's second, third, fourth false start is as innocently blind as the first.

'Only the personality of Olenin,' said Turgenev, writing of The Cossacks in 1863, 'spoils the generally marvellous impression':

To contrast civilisation with fresh primeval nature there was no need to introduce again that tedious, unhealthy figure, always preoccupied with himself. Why does Tolstoy not rid himself of that nightmare?⁵

Why, Turgenev seems to be asking, did Tolstoy not grow up and abandon the self-proccupied, obtrusive, post-adolescent figure? For it looks as if the novella's vision of life as educative, its formal wisdom that we are creatures and not creators after all, ought to have absorbed the restive seeker in Tolstoy himself, and taken him beyond his obsessive need for a philosophy to the kind of untroubled

5. Letter to A.A. Fet (friend, also, of Tolstoy), quoted in Tolstoy: The Critical Heritage, edited by A.V. Knowles (London, 1978), p. 66. Hereafter cited as Tolstoy:CH.

absorption which Mrs Gaskell embodies. We might expect that Tolstoy would have gone on from The Cossacks to write novels in the same spirit of acceptance as Mrs Gaskell. But the troubled seeker keeps coming back, and comes back unapologetically and unashamedly asking the same old questions. For Tolstoy, manifestly, was not ashamed of cliché, of puzzledly looking at the obvious again and again. Thus it is that whilst the translation might hint at times at a certain hubris in Olenin - 'He was so pleased and excited at this discovery' - the Russian emphatically does not:

He was so happy and excited at
 Он так обрадовался и взволновался,
 this discovery which seemed to him a new
 открыв эту, как ему показалось, новую
 truth that he leapt up and impatiently began
 истину, что вскочил и в нетерпении стал
 to look for someone to whom he could
 искать, для кого вы ему
 as soon as possible sacrifice himself, to
 поскорее пожертвовать собой,
 whom he could do good, whom he could love.
 кому бы сделать добро, кого бы любить.
 (CW, III, p. 228)

'He was so happy' (rather than 'pleased') is how the Russian puts it⁶, 'and impatiently began to search for [as against the translation's 'think of'] someone to whom he could sacrifice himself.' What is primary is not mere self-

6. My thanks to Tony Knowles for pointing out to me that 'обрадовался' can also mean 'overjoyed'.

satisfaction but the sheer joy (albeit self-delighting) of having an answer, and the need, above all, to set it to work - as soon as possible! Urgency it is which replaces shame or priggishness in Tolstoy. For prior to the naivety of the idea is the sheer energetic imperative of having an idea to live by. Thus, whilst the message of story in The Cossacks is the impossibility of starting out from a theory of life, the message of character is the impossibility of a human being's ever beginning without one. Tolstoy simply could not have written a novel which did no more than 'contrast civilisation with fresh primeval nature'. For he always needed someone inside the novel embodying his own need for a starting-point in idea, even as he knew those starting-points to be distortedly wrong. It is as if Tolstoy the writer were making use of the necessary mistakes of Tolstoy the man - the man who always remained, incurably and indefatigably, an absolute seeker like Olenin and Levin, despite the novelist. 'It's terribly true,' he wrote in 1857, 'that you must make mistakes boldly, firmly and resolutely, and only then will you get at the truth':

To live an honest life you have to strive hard, get involved, fight, make mistakes, begin something and give it up, begin again and give it up again, struggle endlessly, and suffer loss. As for tranquillity - it's spiritual baseness. That's why the bad side of our soul desires tranquillity, not being aware that its attainment entails the loss of everything in us that is beautiful, not

of this world, but of the world beyond.⁷

Getting involved, making impatient mistakes, risking oneself in the sheer mess and strain of life - here is where the soul is made. No wonder D.H. Lawrence so much admired Tolstoy, however equivocally. And perhaps we need a reader like Lawrence to oppose one such as Turgenev⁸ in appreciating Tolstoy's gift for not being calmly grown-up. For there is in figures such as Olenin an essential 'naiveté' which, in his essay on John Galsworthy, Lawrence prizes:

While a man remains a man, a true human individual, there is at the core of him a certain innocence or naiveté which defies all analysis, and which you cannot bargain with, you can only deal with it, in good faith, from your own corresponding innocence or naiveté. This does not mean that the human being is nothing but naive or innocent. He is Mr Worldly Wiseman also to his own degree. But in his essential core he is naive.⁹

It is as if Tolstoy incarnated and limited himself in a protagonist's character - Olenin, Levin, Pierre - in order not to be 'Mr Worldly Wiseman'. Story might know better in The Cossacks, but Tolstoy himself will not be the older,

7. Tolstoy's Letters, translated and edited by R.F. Christian, 2 vols. (London, 1978), I, p. 110. Hereafter cited as Letters:T.

8. Emphatic admirer though Turgenev remained. 'Eleven years later,' remarks Tony Knowles, 'Turgenev was still convinced that 'The Cossacks' was one of the masterpieces of Russian literature', Tolstoy: CH, p. 65.

9. D.H. Lawrence, 'John Galsworthy', first published 1928, in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, edited by Bruce Steele (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 210-11.

wiser, sardonic voice which says to Olenin at the start of the novel 'you will again make a mess of [it]' when Olenin announces that his 'new life' is about to begin (C, p. 167). For what use is it to say of a person who believes he will get it right this time that he will only get it wrong in a different kind of way, when a person needs belief to go forward at all?

Thus we find Tolstoy living life naively again and again, showing us, through his protagonists, his own wrong starting-points. For, starting out on life with Kitty, Levin, too, has to find out, through a sequence akin to Olenin's own, that his first thoughts on marriage are not the right thoughts:

Levin had been married three months. He was happy, but in quite a different way from what he had expected. At every step he met disillusionments in his old fancies and new and unexpected enchantments. He was happy, but having embarked on family life he saw at every step that it was not at all what he had anticipated. At every step he took he felt as a man would feel who, after admiring the smooth happy motion of a little boat upon the water, had himself got into the boat. He found that besides sitting quietly without rocking he had to keep a lookout, not for a moment forget where he was going, or that there was water under his feet, and that he had to row, although it hurt his unaccustomed hands; in short, that it only looked easy, but to do it, though very delightful, was very difficult.

As a bachelor seeing the married life of others - their petty cares, their disputes, their jealousies - he used mentally to smile contemptuously. In his future married life

he was sure he would have nothing of this kind, and even the external forms of his married life would be quite unlike other people's. And now, behold! his life with his wife had not shaped itself differently, but was all made up of those petty trifles which he had formerly so despised, but which now, against his will, assumed an unusual and incontestable importance.¹⁰

Levin's 'mistake' was to imagine that married life would be something settled, 'smooth', secure. But married life turns out to be not the benign conclusion to his bachelor life he had expected but just the opposite - a new and bewildering beginning. For the form of a loving marriage is not, as he had thought, something given, ready-made - a mode of existence which can take care of itself and which will take care of him: 'He should, he thought, do his work, and rest from it in the joys of love' (AK, p. 478). On the contrary, the form of his new life with Kitty must be made, he finds, as it goes along, in the sheerly necessary effort to keep 'going' and to keep going in disconcerting ignorance of the course or direction which before had seemed so assured. Yet Levin cannot say, Olenin-like, 'Now I know what marriage is'. It is only from inside the boat that Levin can know what being in it is really like. Inside the perplexing reality of his new situation, however, he is just too busy coping as best he can, ill-prepared and

10. Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, first published 1874-76, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude (Oxford, 1991), p. 477. Hereafter cited as AK.

inadequate, to stop to congratulate himself on having hit on the truth.

Now it is Levin who has too much to do, too many thoughts from within life to have only one thought about it. But in place of Mrs Gaskell's easy acceptance of life's ordinary multiplicity, we have Levin's baffled panic in the face of the sheer pressure of so many different and competing considerations ('besides ... or ... and ... although ...') besetting him at the same time. For Levin does not so much grow into the married, immersed mode and syntax of Mrs Gaskell as find it overtaking him and 'shaping itself' around and inside him:

And now, behold! his life with his wife had not shaped itself differently, but was all made up of those petty trifles which he had formerly so despised, but which now, against his will, assumed an unusual and incontestable importance.

'Against his will'. The crucial difference between Levin's shape of thinking in this passage and Olenin's obstinately misshapen mode of thought in The Cossacks is that Levin does not so much change or make his attitudes as half-modify, half-discover them in the very play-off he experiences between what he has anticipated married life 'formerly' ('прежде') to be and what he 'now' ('теперь') discovers it to be in reality (CW, IX, p. 53). 'Now' does not simply cancel 'formerly' in Levin's sequence as 'now' always does reactively replace 'before' in Olenin's, as soon as the old

truths no longer fit life's bill: 'Not for others do I now ('теперь') desire happiness,' says Olenin when he pledges himself to Marienka. 'Before ('прежде') I was dead, now only am I alive' (C, p. 303; CW, III, p. 274). For Levin, by contrast, it is the hurt, resistant, baffled recognition that what he had wanted and what he has got from marriage do not fit together which knocks him off-balance 'at every step':

He was happy, but in quite a different way from what he had expected. At every step he met disillusionments in his old fancies and new and unexpected enchantments. He was happy but having embarked on family life he saw at every step that it was not at all what he had anticipated. At every step ...

Even amidst the business of keeping the thing afloat, Levin cannot simply forget how the boat looked 'formerly' any more than he could help looking on at it before stepping in:

Though he had imagined his ideas about family life to be most exact, he, like all men, had involuntarily pictured it to himself as merely the enjoyment of love - which nothing should be allowed to hinder and from which one should not be distracted by petty cares. (AK, p. 478) [my emphasis]

It is not as though a person can choose to do without first thoughts; he even needs those first thoughts honestly to find out that they are wrong.¹¹ For it is only through

11. 'Since an agent lives his life from where he is,' says Thomas Nagel (in his discussion of 'Subjective and Objective' views), 'even if he manages to achieve an impersonal view of his situation, whatever insights result from this detachment need to be made part of a personal view before they can influence decision and action. The pursuit

Levin's strenuous over-commitment to the wrong ideas that he can be thus chasteningly pulled back by life, in life's own good time, and subdued to its shape and contours. Two steps backward for every one step forward seems to be life's rule, maddeningly slow and painful though the business of growing up in the world must therefore seem to Tolstoy's earnestly impatient protagonist. Yet that there are no short cuts is both bad and good news for Levin. For the 'worthless trifles', the 'petty cares' and 'disputes', which he had formerly dismissed as the disappointment of others' marriages turn out to be, not obstacles to or distractions from his happiness but, on the contrary, the very source of it:

[He] was surprised how she, the poetic, charming Kitty, could, during the very first weeks and even in the first days of married life, think, remember and fuss about table-cloths, furniture, spare-room mattresses, a tray, the cook, the dinner, and so forth. ... He had been pained by it then, and now was repeatedly pained by her petty cares. But he saw that this was necessary to her, and, loving her, though he could not understand what it was all about, and laughed at her worries, he could not help admiring them. (AK, p. 478)

What had seemed to Levin not to fit does fit after all, he finds, by some mysterious operation which life dictates over

of what seems impersonally best may be an important aspect of individual life, but its place in that life must be determined from a personal standpoint, because life is always the life of a particular person, and cannot be lived sub specie aeternitatis', Mortal Questions (Cambridge, 1991), p. 205.

and against his 'exact' ideas of it. Life goes on settling the priorities behind his back when he is not looking. It is the sort of baffling fact of life by which Mrs Gaskell, we recall, remained almost determinedly unsurprised:

<Even> Molly sometimes took her stepmother's part in secret.¹²

Tolstoy, on the other hand, remains truly surprised - 'And now, behold!' ('вдруг' - 'suddenly', CW, IX, p. 53) - even as he seems to know all the answers in advance. For 'If only these things happened logically,' says Olenin at the start of The Cossacks:

But it's all topsy-turvy: things don't happen the way we want them but in some crazy fashion of their own. (C, p. 166)

the wrong way round/inside-out, somehow not
 а то | наизуворот, как-то не
 according to us, but according to itself all
 по-нашему, а по-своему все
 this happens.
 это делается.

(CW, III, p. 152)

It is as if the 'wrong way round' is really the right way round - as if it were life's way to work itself out back-to-front, 'inside-out'. 'What did that show?' asks Levin after his moment of discovery in Book Eight, when he realises that he has continued to live and been happy 'whenever he was not thinking of the meaning of his life'. 'It showed that he had lived well, but thought badly' (AK, p. 791). But even those wrong thoughts, it seems, are

12. WD, p. 431; MS p. 606. (See above, Chapter 2, p. 87.)

themselves a part of the right sequence of life. Yet what Tolstoy could have told Levin beforehand, he has Levin learn instead. It is as if whilst Mrs Gaskell is content simply to know (implicitly) all the answers already, Tolstoy needs the lessons repeated explicitly in character in order really to know them as if for the first time or in order, crucially, to deserve to know them again. For Tolstoy, it seems, always wanted his knowledge brought back to life at the right time and thus truly tested, earned, re-affirmed.

The difference between Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy seems really to lie in a different relation of artist to art. The sheer equanimity with which, in Sylvia's Lovers, Mrs Gaskell sees the irony of Hester's and Sylvia's mistakes, as she knows that they themselves cannot, itself bespeaks an acceptance that in life she herself would be as unknowing and fallible as Sylvia and Hester are. Manifestly what Mrs Gaskell as a writer was unaffected by was what she knew would still affect her as an ordinary person in ordinary life. It is as if being a writer was a separate, wider mode of being for Mrs Gaskell - as if writing, for her, actually belonged to that different non-human realm which is the province of 'story' in The Cossacks. It is difficult otherwise to account for her remarkable capacity to surrender her own self - melting, as it were, into other selves and modes - without that surrender ever appearing to be a sacrifice.

What did being a writer mean to Tolstoy? Tolstoy, by contrast, always needed to bring artist and man close together in his protagonist. Yet how, then, asks Dan Jacobson, does one explain the apparent disjuncture between the man whom 'we know to have been one of the greatest imaginative writers who has ever lived', who thus could imagine otherness with exceptional genius, and the man whom we discover from his letters to have been 'overweeningly self-preoccupied and self-willed'? The letters of the young, dissipated cadet just as much as those of the older moral sage, says Jacobson in Adult Pleasures, 'appear to have been written by some kind of moral simpleton' - a man 'convinced that he is in the right whatever he feels and wants and that all others around him are in the wrong'. Moreover, the 'gonorrhoeal, money-cadging' youth, and the moralist and preacher who strenuously urges chastity, hard work and abstinence upon his own youthful son, show no consciousness of one another¹³: 'Each man appears to be wholly incapable of imagining himself to be other than he is at the very moment of writing'. What was it, then, Jacobson wants to know, that enabled this unfairly egoistic person

13. Even as these opposite modes were partly reactive upon one another. 'I am living like a beast,' the young Tolstoy wrote in his diary in 1850, during a period of particularly virile debauchery. 'In the evening, drew up precepts [in accordance with the laws of religion, stay away from women], then went to the gypsies' (quoted in Henri Troyat, Tolstoy [Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987], p. 97).

who shows no awareness even of the different personalities which exist within his own self, to be the creator of the greatest range of characters and dispositions that the novel, as a genre, has ever known? 'One eventually comes to feel,' Jacobson concludes, 'that the secret of [Tolstoy's] chameleonic power as a novelist has to be found, paradoxically enough, in his very self-absorption':

One insistently feels [there] to be a connection between Tolstoy's capacity to be wholly himself, even remorselessly himself, whatever that self might happen to be at different stages of his career and the capacity of the novelist to fill the consciousness of his characters with a sense of their own autonomy and significance. ... [That] is to say any one of the human possibilities within him was capable of assuming so imperious a sway over his consciousness, at any moment, that it would reach down to his quasi-instinctive, quasi-physical modes of apprehending the world and the people in it.

Moreover, Jacobson goes on, 'the personality which issued from one mode of apprehension would always be inclined to regard another as (at best) unreal and lacking in weight or (at worst) incomprehensible and a source of threat':

Think, for example, how the eternally dissatisfied seekers after truth in his novels regard the smoothies and social puppets they meet; but think also of how he is able to show, with equal dramatic urgency and conviction, from within, the view that these social creatures have of the truth-seekers.¹⁴

14. Dan Jacobson, Adult Pleasures (London, 1988), pp. 68-69. Hereafter cited as AP.

So (to give an illustration of Jacobson's point) Levin likes Katavasov (a fellow-student from his university days) because of his clear and simple outlook on life:

Levin thought Katavasov's clear outlook resulted from the poverty of his nature, and Katavasov thought Levin's inconsequential opinions resulted from a lack of mental discipline; but Katavasov's clarity pleased Levin, and the abundance of Levin's undisciplined thoughts pleased Katavasov, so they liked to meet and argue. (AK, pp. 671-2)

Two separated worlds are here held together in the same world, in the same sentence, with all the equanimity, apparently, of Mrs Gaskell. Yet Jacobson helps us to see that Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy arrive at the same relativist life-vision by completely opposite routes. Where Mrs Gaskell works from her capacity as a novelist to inhabit an impersonal view which goes beyond the scope of any first-person within the life-system, Tolstoy starts from his incapacity as a man ever to get outside a single first-person view. Constitutionally incapable of being more than one thing at any one time or of imagining that that one thing was not literally everything for as long as it lasted, Tolstoy (Jacobson argues) turned his greatest weakness as a man into his greatest strength as an artist. He converted the absolute selves within him into absolute selves without, who are as incapable of understanding one another as were Tolstoy the sensualist and Tolstoy the moralist. So it is that Tolstoyan relativism seems to be more a creation of

novelistic form than of Tolstoy himself. For it is the deployment and arrangement of these absolute selves within the form of the novel which turns Tolstoy's absolutism into relativism and which produces those rich life-situations in which many separated things are going on simultaneously.¹⁵ Tolstoy could not simply change or repent. Rather he stayed with his greatest limitation and mistake and let the relativising form of the novel turn that mistake into a virtue. It is as though by using his mistakes inside his novels, he was putting wrong things into a right place that began to make them right or at least clear.

The sexual and religious conflict within Tolstoy's person is not merely conveniently split up into opposing characters in Tolstoy's work. For 'inside him, too,' as Jacobson points out, 'were those characters, of whom there

15. Gary Saul Moreson make a similar point in his (Bakhtinian) discussion of Tolstoy's 'absolute language' - those 'absolute statements' which 'although [they are] part of the work ... are part neither of the story nor of its narration ... and which claim literal, not literary, truth'. (Moreson cites as an example the 'proverbial' beginning of Anna Karenina: 'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'.) 'In the midst of a novel, which insofar as it is a novel renders all of its language conditional, Tolstoy attempts to make statements that are completely non-novelistic. ... [Thus] Tolstoy's absolute statements are involved in ... [a] self-contradiction. ... What dialogizes Tolstoy's absolutes is not the surrounding language of the particular novel but the genre of the novel as a whole. ... For in the final analysis there is no way to speak completely noncontextually in a novel', Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace' (Stanford, 1987), pp. 16-17, 19-20. Hereafter cited as Hidden in Plain View.

are many in his novels, who are painfully aware that they have irreducible elements of some of the others in their makeup' (AP, p. 69). So, for example, truth-seeker Olenin finds that it is 'utterly beyond his powers to give the cut direct' to the 'extremely unpleasant' socialite Beletsky and finds himself 'against his will ... being friendly with [him], promising to go along to him and giving an invitation to drop in to see him' (C, pp. 264-5). So Nicholas Rostov in War and Peace despises Prince Andrew because he 'cannot bear' to see in men 'the expression of a higher spiritual life': yet he feels 'with surprise that of all the men he knew there was none he would so much like to have as a friend as that very adjutant whom he so hated.'¹⁶ Levin, too, experiences the same kind of involuntary identification when he tells Oblonsky that it is 'quite incomprehensible' to him that a man might love his wife and yet be infatuated with another woman - 'just as incomprehensible as if I, eating my fill here, went into a baker's shop and stole a roll':

Here Levin recollecting his own sins and the inner struggle he had lived through added unexpectedly, 'However, maybe you are right. It may very well be. But I don't know, I really don't know.' (AK, pp. 40-42)

'You wish all the facts of life to be consistent,' Oblonsky

16. Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, first published 1868-9, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, edited by Henry Gifford (Oxford, 1991), pp. 254, 1019.

amusedly says, 'but they never are' (ibid.). So Levin unhappily discovers. For whilst he thinks of himself as one quite definite person, he finds, confusingly, that there are people within him who have no connection with the man he imagines and fully believes himself to be. Manifestly, putting his own warring selves into a novel was not for Tolstoy a means of tolerantly mediating them. On the contrary, he keeps finding as a novelist exactly the problem which unsettled him as a man. Indeed when Olenin or Rostov or Levin discover that what they turn out to do and to be is not 'consistent' with the exact ideas they have formed of themselves, they experience precisely the baffled recognition which triggered the novelist in Tolstoy. This is mystery still in the novel, not therapy.

It is as if the great Tolstoyan novel is the outcome of a need in Tolstoy to be the unapologetic maximum of himself - absolute to it - whilst also needing that 'surplus'¹⁷ outside of himself which story or novel

17. The term is one which Bakhtin uses in relation to Tolstoy, though I use it here in opposition to Bakhtin's view that Tolstoy is 'monolithically monologic' in relation to character. The 'field of vision of the author' in Tolstoy's works, Bakhtin claims, 'is located outside' character and 'enjoys an enormous and fundamental "surplus" in comparison with the fields of vision of the characters', Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Manchester, 1984), p. 70, 72. On the contrary since, as I have argued, Tolstoy is each of his characters, the field of vision of character and author are always well-nigh one. Thus the 'surplus' I refer to here is that generic surplus which Gary Saul Morson is referring to (in a reading of Tolstoy which

or other resisting and attracting characters constituted. To be and see himself - that is the capacity which novel-writing gave to a man like Tolstoy, even as the gap between what he believed he was ('right' in whatever he thought and felt) and the innocently comic God's fool he actually saw in his protagonist must have added to his own baffled sense of disjuncture. For as Tolstoy looks on at himself in Olenin and Levin, he, like Jacobson, himself wants to know what is the relation between what a person thinks and what he is, between what he believes 'from within' and what he turns out to do and to be in the test of continuous living? Tolstoy asks of himself, then, precisely the question which Levin puzzledly asks of Sviyazhsky - the bureaucrat who thinks like a liberal yet lives like a conservative. What is 'the connection between this man's life and his thoughts'?:

Had Levin not possessed the faculty of giving the best interpretation to people's characters, Sviyazhsky's character would have presented no difficulty or problem to him; he would only have called him a fool or a good-for-nothing, and everything would have been clear. But he could not call him a fool, because Sviyazhsky was not only very intelligent but also a very well-educated man, who carried his education with extreme modesty. There was no subject with which he

partially corrects Bakhtin's own) when he speaks of the 'surrounding' context or 'perspective' which any novel, by virtue of being a novel, confers. (See footnote 15, p. 203 above and Hidden in Plain View, p. 17.) I come back to the shortcomings of Bakhtin's reading of Tolstoy in Chapter 5, below.

was not acquainted, but he only exhibited his knowledge when forced to do so. Still less could Levin call him a good-for-nothing, because Sviyazhsky was certainly an honest, kind-hearted, and clever man, always joyfully and actively engaged on work highly prized by all around, and certainly a man who could never consciously do anything bad.

Levin tried but could not understand him, and regarded him and his life as animated riddles. (AK, pp. 326-7)

'Has it not by this time ceased to be remarkable - is it not rather what we expect in men, that they should have numerous strands of experience lying side by side and never compare them with each other?' (M, p. 634). So says George Eliot in Middlemarch, conscientiously seeing from outside her characters and on their behalf what they cannot see for themselves, and here presiding over the human contradictoriness she witnesses with all the equanimity of Mrs Gaskell. Indeed, so much does Mrs Gaskell herself 'expect' contradiction of this kind that she never feels the need to remark upon it. But how can a man like Sviyazhsky bear the (ignorant?) disjuncture in himself? How can he tolerate the contradiction of thinking one thing and doing another? So asks Tolstoy from within the naive wonder of his protagonist. Tolstoy might see that there are other (easier or wiser) ways of explaining a man like Sviyazhsky: he could have dismissed him as a hypocrite or wondered, conversely, at how he could have borne the attempt to overcome the convenient contradiction in himself. But Tolstoy doggedly refuses to see more than does his slow, obstinate, innocent

creature, or to be anything in his novels that he could not be in life. For defiantly or innocently, Tolstoy does not 'expect' people to say one thing and do another. He does not expect to find contradiction and inconsistency¹⁸ - any more than Olenin expects each 'truth' to be proved wrong or any more than Levin expects marriage to be other than he has imagined it to be. Tolerantly to explain or accept as a novelist what he could not accept as a man would have seemed to Tolstoy like a form of dishonesty, of cheating life of its very life. Tolstoy simply could not have allowed himself, that is, Mrs Gaskell's apparently non-human relation to art. Thus it is that Tolstoy brings back the troubled seeker and doggedly stays with him.

The troubled innocent is what Isaiah Berlin calls the hedgehog in Tolstoy - the part of him that wishes only to know 'one big thing', as opposed to the novelist-fox who is content to know 'many things'¹⁹. But I am arguing that Tolstoy was a fox, seeing many things, only because he was a hedgehog, looking for one big thing. He could not understand the existence of other things. What is it, he wanted to know, that connects all these 'strands'? What is it that holds all of this together? Instead of regretting

18. 'I still wait,' he wrote despairingly in 1885, 'for something to save me from the jarring discord between my life and my consciousness', Letters:T, II, p. 383.

19. See 'The Hedgehog and the Fox' in Isaiah Berlin, Russian Thinkers, edited by Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979).

the truth-seeker in Tolstoy, then, we should marvel at the fact that, for all his need for answers, he did not cheat. Rather, he went on, with undiminished earnestness, asking as a novelist the questions he needed answered as a man, and making the novel react against him as well as with him. That is the Tolstoyan dynamic.

II Anna versus Levin

Turning specifically now to Anna Karenina herself, it is my chief concern in this section to make explicit the form of thinking and being which Tolstoy offers to us in Anna in frightening counterpoint to Levin. For in Anna, as we shall see, Tolstoy characteristically put himself into the reverse side of - the diametric opposite to - Levin. Again such related contrasts constitute the Tolstoyan dynamic.

There can be no more disturbing contrast to the slow, corrective sequence of a Levin, finding himself at every step deeper and deeper inside the perplexing reality of his new life with Kitty, than Anna's sudden reincarnation when she begins her new life with Vronsky. For having left Karenin and taken up with Vronsky abroad, Anna finds that she is 'unpardonably' happy:

The memory of her husband's grief did not poison her happiness. On the one hand this memory was too terrible to dwell upon, and on the other hand her husband's misfortune had meant for her too great a joy for

repentance to be possible. The recollection of all that had happened to her since her illness; her reconciliation with her husband, the rupture, the news of Vronsky's wound, his reappearance in her husband's house, the preparations for divorce, the parting from her home and son - all now seemed a delirious dream from which she had wakened abroad and alone with Vronsky. The memory of the evil done to her husband aroused in her a feeling akin to repulsion, such as a man might feel who when in danger of drowning had shaken off another who clung to him. That other was drowned; of course it was wrong, but it had been the only way of escape and it was better not to recall such terrible details.

One comforting reflection about her conduct had come to her in the first moment of the rupture, and when she now remembered the past she also recalled that reflection. 'I was the inevitable cause of unhappiness to him,' she thought, 'but I don't wish to profit by his calamity. I too am suffering and must suffer: I am losing what I most cherished - my good name and my son. I have done wrong, and therefore do not ask for happiness and do not want a divorce. I must go on suffering from the degradation and by the separation from my son.' But sincerely as Anna desired to suffer, she was not suffering. She was not conscious of degradation. With the tact they both possessed, and by avoiding Russian ladies abroad, the two never placed themselves in a false position and always met people who pretended to understand their mutual relations much better than they themselves understood them. The parting from her son, whom she loved, did not trouble her at first either. The little girl, his child, was so sweet, and Anna had grown so attached to her since she was the only child left to her, that she rarely thought of her son. (AK, pp. 461-2)

It is crucial to a sense of the shape of Anna's thinking in this passage, and the contrast it presents to Levin's own, that the two thoughts which are combined in the

translation - 'On the one hand this memory was too terrible to dwell upon, and on the other hand her husband's misfortune had meant for her too great a joy for repentance to be possible' - are actually separated in the Russian:

This recollection, on the one
 Воспоминание это, с одной
 hand, was too terrible to think
 стороны, было слишком ужасно, чтобы думать
 of. On the other hand [the] unhappiness
 о нем. С другой стороны, несчастье
 of her husband gave her too great happiness
 ее мужа дало ей слишком большое счастье,
 to repent.

чтобы раскаиваться. | (CW, IX, p. 35.)

Anna is maintaining a separation of these two thoughts in evasion of their actual conjunction. It is precisely because the 'terrible' memory of her husband's 'unhappiness' and her 'great happiness'²⁰ with Vronsky are all too incompatibly related that their connection is literally unthinkable for Anna. Yet separating, one from another, the painfully contradictory emotions which muddledly constitute his experience of marriage is just what Levin, of course, emphatically could not do:

... to do it, though very delightful, was very difficult.

Baffled and hurt, he is happy too! A person did not make sense of it, Levin bewilderedly finds; one just kept going.

20. 'счастье' ('happiness') is directly contrasted with 'несчастье' ('unhappiness') in the original Russian, where the translation gives 'misfortune' for 'несчастье'.

And you keep going if you are Levin, incorporating life's snags until, 'Behold!' life makes sense of itself and what Levin has taken to be the wrong conjunctions - ideal love and unideal 'trifles' - turn out in a loving marriage to be the right conjunctions after all. In Levin's baffledly, immersed syntax Tolstoy presents the picture of a dogged mind, inside life, struggling to understand the connection between what is inside and what is outside of him, even as he finds what surrounds him turning into what he is.

In Anna's more distortedly self-determined syntax, by contrast, Tolstoy presents a mind deliberately not making the right connections and a mind, moreover, looking to life as a distraction from itself. For even as Anna separates those two thoughts ('[it] was too terrible to think of ... [it] gave her too great happiness to repent') both the 'terrible' of sentence one and the 'great happiness' of sentence two point, almost madly, to the same reaction - not thinking, not repenting, but going on instead with the immediacy of her life as she now finds it. So it is that the shape of these sentences is an index to the shape of life and being which we find unfolding as the passage goes on. For here is a person living her life 'inside-out, the wrong way round' in a way directly contrary to Levin's own because it can never lead back to a repentance or a re-ordering: 'The memory of the evil done to her husband aroused in her a feeling akin to repulsion, such

as a man might feel who when in danger of drowning had shaken off another who clung to him. That other was drowned'.

Where there was Karenin, now there is Vronsky. Yet the more Anna looks upon her past as 'a delirious dream' and identifies her real self with the external determinants of her new life (where lover has replaced husband, daughter has replaced son), all the more violently must she displace the guilt which these very substitutions inevitably create: 'Anna had grown so attached to [the little girl] since she was the only child left to her, that she rarely thought of her son'. The more her displaced guilt re-asserts itself as a troubling thought ('of course it was wrong') all the more insistent does her escape into externality necessarily become. Moreover her external life generates its own reactive falsehoods: 'the two never placed themselves in a false position and always met people who pretended to understand their mutual relations'. The more falsely Anna plays herself on the inside, all the more does she need her false social existence misshapenly to constitute a substitutive form of self. On and on, round and round, in a desperately vicious circle, Anna is living her life thus distortedly from the inside-out and back again, until where there was Anna, there is increasingly only Anna's alter-ego now making use of her very guilt as a form of moral

support! -

'I too am suffering and must suffer: I am losing what I most cherished - my good name and my son.' But sincerely as Anna desired to suffer, she was not suffering.

'What [she] says is in a sense true, only not in the way [she] understands it.' So Kierkegaard would say of Anna - for so he does say of the person living 'merely in the category of the immediate ... knowing himself only in externals':

He is turned around and what he says must be understood backwards; he stands there pointing to something that is not despair, explaining that he is in despair, and yet, sure enough, the despair is going on behind him unawares. It is as though someone were standing with his back turned to the Town Hall and Court House, pointed straight ahead and said: 'There are the Town Hall and Court House'. The man is right, they are there - when he turns around.²¹

Alongside the benignly corrective back-to-front sequence of a stumbling Levin, Tolstoy is placing, in Anna, his version of the disastrous Kierkegaardian sequence wherein a person becomes what he or she chooses to do, through evasion of what he or she really is.²² Yet Anna always is shadowily aware of the disaster she is creating behind her back. For in her 'sincere' desire to suffer, there is an indistinct

21. Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, first published 1849, translated by Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1989), pp. 81-4.

22. 'Kierkegaard has the most important qualities of a writer - sincerity, warmth and seriousness,' wrote Tolstoy in 1891. 'What [he] think[s] and say[s], [he] think[s] and say[s] seriously', Letters:I, II, p. 483.

intuition of the trouble she is storing up for herself.

It is a like presentiment of 'calamity' which Gwendolen Harleth - Anna's 'closest literary cousin' as she has been called²³ - involuntarily experiences when she decides to marry Grandcourt despite what she knows of his past. Indeed, the following passage helps us to see why, for F.R. Leavis, Gwendolen Harleth was George Eliot's most Tolstoyan creation.²⁴ Yet here we find George Eliot's similar protagonist at a moment of pause in her story - alone and at night:

She could not go backward now: she liked a great deal of what lay before her: and there was nothing for her to like if she went back. But her resolution was dogged by the shadow of that previous resolve which had at first come as the undoubting movement of her whole being. While she lay on her pillow with wide-open eyes, 'looking on darkness which the blind do see', she was appalled by the idea that she was going to do what she had once started away from with repugnance. It was new to her that a question of right or wrong in her conduct should rouse her terror; she had known no compunction that atoning caresses and presents could not lay to rest. But here had come a moment when something like a new consciousness was

23. Dorothea Barret, Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines (London, 1989), p 155.

24. 'The extraordinary reality of Anna Karenina ... comes from an intense moral interest in human nature that provides the light and courage for a profound psychological analysis. This analysis is rendered in art ... by means that are like those used by George Eliot in Gwendolen Harleth [Leavis' title for the 'good half' of Daniel Deronda, wherein George Eliot's art, he says, is 'at its maturest'] ... Of George Eliot it can in turn be said,' Leavis concludes, 'that her best work has a Tolstoyan depth and reality', The Great Tradition (London, 1973), pp. 124-6.

awaked. She seemed on the edge of adopting deliberately, as a notion for all the rest of her life, what she had rashly said in her bitterness ... - that it did not signify what she did: she had only to amuse herself as best she could. That lawlessness, that casting away of all care for justification, suddenly frightened her: it came to her with the shadowy array of possible calamity behind it - calamity which had ceased to be a mere name for her; and all the infiltrated influences of disregarded religious teaching, as well as the deeper impression of something awful and inexorable enveloping her, seemed to concentrate themselves in the vague conception of avenging powers.²⁵

One must, says Tolstoy, make mistakes: but the message embodied in Anna and in Gwendolen is that one must make those mistakes honestly. For when a person begins by 'casting away' her own real starting-point in belief, she finds what she does believe in her heart of hearts turning, 'avengingly', into her greatest enemy. The story of her life then inevitably turns into the Kierkegaardian one of avoidance of her own real story, as Anna's second life is no more than an evasion of her first. So too Gwendolen's, as she fears, will be the sheerest selling of herself to the story which she allows to overtake her life ab extra. Yet Gwendolen does experience her fear momentarily at first-hand. For Gwendolen's syntax shows a terrible catching-up into realisation which is absent from Anna's summaries ('That other was drowned'): 'she was appalled that

25. George Eliot, Daniel Deronda, first published 1876, edited by Barbara Hardy (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), pp. 355-6. Hereafter cited as DD.

she was going to do what she had once started away from with repugnance'. In the very midst of Gwendolen's attempt to get ahead of her own thinking - 'she could not go backward now' - she is both pulled back by 'the shadow of that previous resolve' and forced to see it coming towards her in nemesis from the future - as 'the shadowy array of possible calamity behind'.²⁶ For once, Gwendolen finds herself horribly in step with the distortions of her back-to-front life.

We see Anna similarly alone with her thoughts and afraid, on the morning following her confession to Karenin of her affair with Vronsky (and thus just before her second life has begun). But here we see a person not catching up with herself, like Gwendolen: rather, Anna is still desperately trying to outrun her own thinking and situation, going (literally at times) out of her mind:

'Oh, my God! My God!' she kept repeating, but neither the word God nor my had any meaning for her. The thought of seeking comfort in religion, though she had never doubted the truth of the religion in which she had been brought up, was as foreign to her as asking Karenin for help would have been. She knew that she could find no help in religion unless she was prepared to give up that which alone gave a meaning to her life. She was not only disturbed, but was beginning to be afraid of a new mental condition such as she had never before experienced. She felt as if everything was

26. These differences between Gwendolen and Anna - both in the mode of their thinking and in their respective fates (for the future Gwendolen fears for herself is not in fact fulfilled) are discussed further in Section III, below, with regard to the differences between George Eliot and Tolstoy.

relation to desire, but in displaced evasion of fear. Fear of answering the question 'What exactly do I desire?' wards off the only thing which could get Anna out of this mess - a decision. In lieu of a decision she can only go round and round in this terrible circle (for circle it visibly is in the Russian - 'she did not know ... she did not know') or seize upon evasive ignorance or pseudo-solutions.

"Serezha? what of Serezha?" Anna asks, 'reviving suddenly as for the first time that morning she remembered the existence of her son':

The thought of her son at once took Anna out of the hopeless condition she had been in. She remembered that partly sincere but greatly exaggerated role of a mother living for her son which she had assumed during the last five years; and felt with joy that in the position in which she found herself she had still one stay, independent of her relations with her husband and Vronsky. That stay was her son. Whatever position she might accept she could not give up her son.

Let her husband disgrace her, let Vronsky grow cold toward her and continue to live his own independent life (again she thought of him with bitterness and reproach) she could not give up her son. (AK, pp. 288-9)

'The thought of her son at once took Anna out [K3] of the hopeless condition she had been in [B]' (CW, VIII, p. 319).

This is the syntax of a mind which habitually substitutes what is without for what is within. Yet Anna's attempt to ground her inner chaos thus externally only adds to her internal incoherence - no more demonstrably than in that final sentence. 'Let her husband disgrace her, let

Vronsky grow cold towards her ... ': the attempt thus to subordinate her situation with Vronsky together with her situation with Karenin (as if the two could be thus compatible!) is as distorted a mental experiment as the attempt to separate her role as mother from her role as Vronsky's lover: '[She] felt with joy that in the position in which she found herself she had still one stay, independent of her relations with her husband and Vronsky'. It is just because the two roles are not 'independent' but on the contrary incompatibly joined together in Anna (so long as she is both mistress and mother), that the emotional situation with Vronsky interferes so powerfully in that bracketted clause²⁷ - '(again she thought of him with bitterness and reproach)'. .

We find the same thing happening in a different way

27. I use the term 'bracketted' here, rather than 'parenthetical' since, as John Lennard points out in his study of the poetic uses of parentheses, certain instances of the latter can be as readily marked by the dash or by the comma as by 'lunulae' - Lennard's preferred term for '"round brackets"'. (An example, of course, is the sentence quoted above, p. 211: 'In short to do it, though very delightful, was very difficult'.) It is in part the violence of the syntactic interruption which demands the use of lunulae in this instance. Yet the use of lunulae rather than, say, the dash in such a sentence - so Lennard's thesis suggests - is a sort of typographical symptom of the kind of interference which the marks thus register. For it is a function 'specific and unique' to lunulae, says Lennard, to record 'states' or 'passages' which 'differ ontologically from the texts in which they are enclosed .. while simultaneously epistemologically signalling these states to the reader', John Lennard, But I Digress: The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse (Oxford, 1991), pp. 1, 126, 192.

at the moment when, prior to Anna's confession, Vronsky tries to persuade her to tell Karenin all:

'What then, run away? ... Yes, run away, and for me to live as your mistress,' she said maliciously.

'Anna,' he murmured with reproachful tenderness.

'Yes,' she continued. 'Become your mistress and ruin my ... everything.'

She was again going to say 'son' but could not utter the word. (AK, p. 189)

Where in the former instance the situation with the lover was nesting uneasily inside the thought of the son, here it is the thought of the son which is nesting inside the situation with the lover. The thoughts which, for sheer sanity's sake - for the sake of a single vision - Anna cannot bear to have, have her instead. So it is that in her very efforts to work free of the double vision produced by fear and desire, Anna only creates for herself another form of it (son and lover). Moreover, what this passage of the novel is so crucial for implicitly demonstrating, is that Anna must go on repetitively suffering from these sequences, so long as she goes on asking the right questions at the wrong level of herself. "'What can I decide alone?'" Anna asks herself after an interval of terrible superficial distraction:

'What do I know? What do I want? (Чего я хочу?) That I am in love?' And she felt again a schism in her soul, and again was frightened by the feeling; so she seized the first pretext for action that occurred to her to divert her thoughts from herself. 'I must see Alexis ... He alone can tell me

what to do.' (AK, p. 293; CW, VIII, p. 324)

'"What do you want? What do you want?"' ('Чтого . ж . ты хочешь?'), CW, XII, p. 101) is the question which the 'inner voice' more authentically asks of the dying Ivan Ilych.²⁸ Anna's question to herself ought to be, in the Tolstoyan universe, one of the first questions of the human soul. And no one knew better than Tolstoy how terrifying those first questions could be. 'My question,' he says in A Confession, 'the one that brought me to the point of suicide, the question without which life is impossible, was a most simple one that lies in the soul of every person. It is this: ... why do I live? Why do I wish for anything or do anything?' Moreover Tolstoy knew well enough the despair of looking for the answers to those primary questions in the wrong place: 'I wanted to find out why I lived and therefore studied everything that exists outside of me. ... All [my] arguments went round in a vicious circle, like a wheel without a

28. That most terrifyingly explicit example of the consequences of a life now realised as having been lived the 'wrong way round':

'It is as if I had been going downhill while I imagined I was going up. And that's really what it was. I was going up in public opinion, but to the same extent life was ebbing away from me. And now it's all over and there's only death.'

Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych, first published 1886, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, in Tolstoy's Short Fiction, edited by Michael R. Katz (New York, 1991), p. 161.

carriage'²⁹. This is the Tolstoyan imaginative dynamic: the moving of mistakes into better places, the distortion of right questions in wrong forms, the whole movement of life across the range of sameness and difference.

What would happen to a person then, Tolstoy wants to know in Anna Karenina, who eschews those first questions altogether - who puts people where her own decisions about herself and her life should be?:

The thought of seeking comfort in religion ... was as foreign to her as asking Karenin for help would have been. She knew that she could find no help in religion unless she was prepared to give up that which alone gave a meaning to her life [Vronsky].

'What can I decide alone? ... I must see Alexis ... He alone can tell me what to do.'

It is jettisoned thinking which, in Anna, Tolstoy is setting against the urgent religious questioning of a Levin. And Anna must go round in vicious circles and go helplessly on ('like a wheel without a carriage') with the narrative of her own life, one lover replacing another in a new love affair, because she refuses to embody the deep, normative Levin-like need to know 'What is my life? What am I?'³⁰. It is because she avoids taking control of her own story, that

29. Leo Tolstoy, A Confession, first published 1879, translated by Jane Kentish (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), pp. 34-5, 54-5.

30. 'For every thinking man,' wrote Tolstoy in 1875, 'all three [of Kant's] questions ['What can I know?', 'What ought I to do?', 'What may I hope for?'], Critique of Pure Reason are inseparably joined into one - 'what is my life, what am I?', Letters:T, I, p. 283.

is to say, that she finds her story taking control of her.

In his article on 'George Eliot's Art', writing of the way in which George Eliot 'exhibits her characters to us in the making', James Sully says:

I have observed that the distinction between the characters and plot of a novel is only a rough distinction. This remark applies with special force to George Eliot's stories. These appear in a remarkable degree, when regarded from one point of view as the outcome of her characters, from another point of view as the formation of these characters.³¹

That 'rough distinction' applies with special force to the Tolstoyan story also, especially as we see it in Levin. For whilst Anna tries to jettison her character into her story, story to Levin is inextricably both the formation and outcome of character in his sequence, as life shapes itself through the interplay of his self and his situation. 'Another disenchantment and new enchantment,' Levin finds, is afforded by matrimonial quarrels - especially the first one:

Then it was he first clearly understood what he did not realise when leading her out of church after the wedding: that she was not only very close to him but that he could not

31. James Sully, 'George Eliot's Art', Mind Vol. 6 (1881), (378-394), pp. 384-5. Henry James said, similarly, that a distinction between 'character' and 'incident' is 'artificial'. 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?', 'The Art of Fiction', first published, 1884, in The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism, edited by Roger Gard (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), pp. 196-7. Hereafter cited as The Critical Muse.

now tell where she ended and he began. He understood this by a tormenting sensation of cleavage which he experienced at that moment. For an instant he was offended, but immediately knew he could not be offended with her because she was himself. For a moment he felt like a man who, receiving a blow from behind, angrily and revengefully turns round to find his assailant and realizes that he has accidentally knocked himself, that there is no one to be angry with and that he must endure and try to still the pain. (AK, pp. 479-80)

Marrying Kitty is not something I did, Levin finds, but something I am. There is not myself and Kitty (separately): rather one plus one has become two together. Paradoxically, Levin 'understands' this primary union 'by a tormenting sensation of cleavage' ('раздвоения' - literally 'division into two', CW, IX, p. 55) because it is only when he makes the mistake of trying to separate himself from Kitty that he realises that Kitty is in another way - himself. Where Anna's split and double vision was a 'mental' and quasi-physical result of her avoiding coming face to face with something primary or central within her, Levin's sense of division seems more meta-physical, by contrast - a deep, inward recognition that the very undertow of his existence is not in himself now, but between himself and his wife. Levin is here having to catch up with his own story in the very midst of living it, and in the midst of his wonder at what is happening to him. For that he cannot 'now tell where she ended and he began' is the mystery which life and the very shape of this prose is

insisting upon:

(a) For an instant he was
offended

(b) but immediately knew that
he could not be offended
with her because she was
himself

The structure of this sentence is repeated three further
times as the passage moves on:

(a) His natural feelings prompted him
to justify himself and prove that
she was in the wrong;

(b) but to prove her in the
wrong would mean irritating
her still more, and widening
the breach which was the
cause of all the trouble

(a) One impulse, an habitual one,
drew him to shift the blame
from himself and lay it upon her;

(b) but another, and more powerful
one, drew him to smooth over
the breach as quickly as
possible and not allow it to
widen.

(a) To remain under so unjust
an accusation was painful,

(b) but to justify himself and
hurt her would be still
worse.

The (a) clauses on the left come from Levin's still central,
still first sense, in many ways, of his own separate
identity. But the (b) clauses swing back three times to
invalidate those first impulses, saying to Levin 'This is
marriage - no longer being single'. Yet Levin cannot
get to (b) without first starting from (a). The repeated
message of Levin's sequence is that a person has to know

where he or she starts from - 'what is my life? what am I?' - in order really to know what constitutes the ground of his or her life. 'What have I discovered?' Levin asks himself in Book Eight. 'I have discovered nothing. I have only perceived what it is that I know' (AK, p. 790). It is as if Levin's (happy) development as a human being is the result of story and character happening together, in final equilibrium, in his sequence. Levin both makes himself and finds himself.

In Anna's sequence, by contrast, story takes over. For what we see in passages such as the following is not what Sully calls a character 'in the making' - not even a person, so much as a reactive pattern of behaviour, causing her undoing. Late in the novel, when their relations are increasingly under strain, Vronsky makes one of his (increasingly more frequent) trips away, leaving Anna alone in the country. 'Having considered that the scenes which took place between them every time he went away could only tend to estrange them instead of binding them closer, [Anna] resolved to make every possible effort to bear the separation calmly':

But the cold, stern look on his face when he came to tell her he was going offended her, and even before he had gone her composure was upset.

Later on, meditating in solitude on that look - which expressed his right to freedom - she, as usual, came only to a consciousness of her own humiliation. 'He

has the right to go when and where he pleases. Not only to go away, but to leave me. He has every right and I have none at all. But, knowing this, he ought not to do it! But really what has he done? ... He has looked at me coldly and severely. Of course it is indefinable, intangible, but it was not so formerly, and that look means much,' she thought. 'That look shows that he is beginning to grow cold.'

Though she was convinced that this was the case, she could not do anything, could not in any way change her relation to him. Just as heretofore, she could hold him only by means of her love and attractiveness; and just as heretofore, only by occupations by day and morphia by night could she stifle the terrible thought of what would happen if he ceased to love her. (AK, p. 661)

(a) 'Knowing this, he ought not to do it. (b) But really what has he done?' As in Levin's sequence, Anna's first 'impulse' is 'to shift the blame' from herself and lay it upon Vronsky; her second is 'to smooth over the breach as quickly as possible and not allow it to widen'. Yet in Anna's case the second impulse does not cancel the first. For the impulse to forgive emerges not from any sense of her primary union with Vronsky but from the absence of any such deep and real connection - from Anna's fear, in fact, 'of what would happen' if the breach were to widen. And that fear - her very need that he should 'love' her - in turn recreates blame: 'but it was not so formerly, and that look means much. ... That look shows that he is beginning to grow cold'. Anna goes from (a) to (b) and back again and does so, what is more, not in relation to Vronsky himself but via the inner memory of his 'cold stern look'. Blame and

love are moving in their own sequence, increasingly separated from their object and from the reality of their holder's situation. Where Levin finds himself at the mercy of a benign sequence of time - pushed by life from (a) to (b) - Anna finds herself instead at the mercy of an unstoppably ruinous sequence of inner emotion: 'she could not do anything, could not in any way change her relation to him'. 'Our mind,' says Spinoza (writing of the emotions) 'is necessarily active so far as it has adequate ideas ... necessarily passive so far as it has inadequate ideas':

An emotion which is a passion is a confused idea. ... The better we know or understand an emotion ... the more it is in our power, and the less the mind suffers from it. ... That mind suffers most ... which chiefly consists of inadequate ideas, so that it is characterised rather by what it suffers than by what it does.³²

It is as if one has to be a Levin, beginning actively to understand one's own life, in order properly to lead it. Otherwise one becomes like Anna - a person who suffers rather than acts, passively caught as she is within a life which is (destructively) leading her and which she can only further cause to do so. 'Just as heretofore, she could hold him only by means of her love and attractiveness; and just as heretofore, only by occupations by day and morphia

32. Benedictus de Spinoza, Ethics, first published 1677, translated by George Eliot, edited by Thomas Deegan (Salzburg, 1981), pp. 93, 219-20, 229. Tolstoy numbered Spinoza among the 'true' philosophers whose 'genuine ... task', with Kant, was 'to explain the meaning of life', Letters:T, p. 284.

by night could she stifle the terrible thought of what would happen if he ceased to love her.' What is so disconcerting about Anna's story is that there is so little to understand, after all. For Anna's problem in the first place is that she is not satisfied with her life. Her dissatisfaction is real enough. But it is not the mortal, involuntary, large and unspecific dissatisfaction of a Levin; it is the rather ordinary and, by comparison, even banal dissatisfaction of a woman who is unhappily married. The disastrous effects we have seen in her in this section seem out of all proportion to their terrible but simple cause.

Perhaps, more than anything, it is this awful disproportion between what she does to herself and what is basically wrong with her situation which makes Anna's story finally more horrifying than 'tragic'. For Anna's story is not that of a tragic heroine³³; nor is it that of a woman broken by a conventional social code³⁴. It is the story of a

33. As has been suggested most recently by Andrew Wachtel: 'Anna's death is clearly that of a classical tragic heroine. ... In the early part of the novel, she faces the love/duty conflict typical of neoclassical tragedy. ... Once the choice is made her tragic fate is sealed. ... Faced with a situation caused by her tragic flaw and from which there is no escape, she commits suicide', 'Death and Resurrection in Anna Karenina' in In the Shade of the Giant: Essays on Tolstoy, edited by Hugh Maclean (California, 1989), p. 107.

34. As D.H. Lawrence famously complained, arguing against a view of Anna as tragic, and accusing Tolstoy of punishing her gratuitously: 'What was there in [her] position that was necessarily tragic?' he asks. '[She] was not at war with God, only with society', 'Study of Thomas Hardy', first published 1936, in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, p. 30.

lost soul. Anna is the creation of a man who wanted to 'know', above all, what it was that separated the saved from the damned, the connection and contrast between the two being as vital as either. And in Anna Karenina he both discovers and demonstrates that if there were (apparently) easier ways of living this human life than Levin's own, there was no better way. Anna is the damned, Levin the saved.

III England's Tolstoy - George Eliot? or Mrs Gaskell?

I have established the greater spiritual urgency in Tolstoy in contrast with Mrs Gaskell. In Chapter One I showed, by contrast with Maria Edgeworth, Mrs Gaskell's shedding of a different but analogous strain. I have in this chapter begun to suggest that the strain - be it moral or religious, in relation to conscious questions of the meaning of life - is taken up in England in the work of George Eliot. In this section and in the early part of Chapter Five, she will be the third term necessary for a consideration of the relation of Tolstoy to Mrs Gaskell and its consequences in terms of the balance of considerations in Victorian literature.

Anna, Gwendolen and Cynthia make the same mistake - of avoiding what is wrong in their lives and in themselves. Yet clearly the spectacle of another human creature thus going wrong, even by trying to avoid wrong, mattered to and

affected differently the authors who respectively presided over it. Thus, broadly, the question I shall be asking in what follows is what was it like to be Tolstoy, George Eliot, and Mrs Gaskell thinking and writing about the kind of human mess which Anna, Gwendolen and Cynthia each embody?³⁵ For manifestly for George Eliot and for Tolstoy the mess could not simply be left or written-off as Cynthia's mess is finally left by Mrs Gaskell. I am arguing that Tolstoy and George Eliot had somehow to pick up their own equivalent to what Mrs Gaskell discarded when she re-wrote Maria Edgeworth's account of the punishment of Cecilia.

Here is Mrs Gaskell's act of discarding. Late in the novel, Cynthia discovers that Roger Hamley, having learned of Cynthia's engagement to Mr Henderson, has left the house in despair. 'Gone. Oh, what a relief,' she says to Molly. 'Was he very terrible?':

'Oh, Cynthia, it was such pain to see him, he suffered so!'

'I don't like people of deep feelings,' said Cynthia, pouting. 'They don't suit me. Why could not he let me go without this

35. I refer here to the real (rather than 'implied' or fictionally constructed) author to whom I take it Wayne C. Booth is himself referring when he says 'Though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear. ... Unless the author contents himself with simply retelling The Three Bears or the story of Oedipus in the precise form in which they exist in popular accounts - and even so there must be some choice of which popular form to tell - his very choice of what he tells will betray him to the reader', The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1966), p. 20.

fuss. I'm not worth his caring for!'

'You have the happy gift of making people love you. Remember Mr Preston, - he too would not give up hope.'

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

'Do you really like him enough to marry him?' asked Molly earnestly. 'Do think, Cynthia. It won't do to go on throwing your lovers off; you give pain that I am sure you do not mean to do, - that you cannot understand.'

'Perhaps I can't. I'm not offended. I never set up for what I am not, and I know I'm not constant. I have told Mr Henderson so -' She stopped, blushing and smiling at the recollection.

'You have! and what did he say?'

'That he liked me just as I was; so you see he's fairly warned.' (WD, pp. 633-4)

'It won't do,' says decent, troubled Molly, 'to go on throwing your lovers off'. But the real trouble with Cynthia is that it does 'do'. She throws off her lovers with impunity because her love affairs - the entanglement with Preston, the engagement to Roger and now to Henderson - are events which happen not to Cynthia but to others. It is others who take love seriously, others who have 'deep feelings' and others who suffer therefore for Cynthia's evasion of her own deepest fears - 'I'm not worth his caring for!' Too deeply afraid that she is unworthy of love even deeply to feel that lack of worth, Cynthia has lovers in place of - and really in unacknowledged despair of - fulfilling her own real need to be loved, without the

trappings of sexual attention. Cynthia goes on dispersing herself and her chaos among other people - the 'bad' to Preston, the 'good' to Roger - risking their lives and feelings whilst she herself gets away with it. For nothing happens to Cynthia: she remains - literally - untouched by her own wrongdoing. Nothing is consummated in Cynthia's story. First to last the flirt, the prissy tease, 'pouting ... blushing and smiling', she is sexually exploitative whilst remaining - distortedly and even somehow indecently - safely intact and virginal. Cynthia Kirkpatrick simply becomes 'Mrs Henderson': pre-consummation turns into post-consummation without Cynthia's ever being broken, that is, upon an intervening narrative.

Mrs Gaskell, it seems, can simply - or terrifyingly - let Cynthia off, spare her at one level as George Eliot cannot spare Gwendolen. In contrast, George Eliot has to demolish the would-be-unscathed Cynthia in Gwendolen Harleth - has to smash the 'fierceness of maidenhood' in Gwendolen which allows her to remain (promiscuously) a world unto herself. 'With all her imaginative delight in being adored', she 'objected, with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to' (DD, pp. 101-2). The evasive strategies of a Cynthia will not 'do' for George Eliot. Thus Gwendolen Harleth cannot become Mrs Grandcourt without at the same time putting herself at the mercy of a narrative-sequence wherein her egoistic evasions must find her out in

time. 'I must go on,' she says to Deronda, terribly, when in the wretchedness she is suffering as a result of her marriage, and more and more afraid of her own hatred of her husband, she turns to Deronda for help:

'I must go on - I can alter nothing - it is no use. ... But if I go on, I shall get worse. ... You think, perhaps, that I don't mind. But I do mind. I am afraid of everything. I am afraid of getting wicked. Tell me what I can do.' (DD, p. 672)

Gwendolen's nightmare is that something (bad) will happen to her: she 'shall get worse'. Yet Gwendolen must get worse precisely if, for George Eliot, she is to get better. George Eliot, that is to say, locks Gwendolen into a punishing sequence in time for Gwendolen's own sake - out of the same anxious human impulse which compels Klesmer to tear into Gwendolen's egoism ('like a lacerating thong') and hold up to her the spectacle of her own 'glaring insignificance'. 'You will hardly achieve more than mediocrity,' he says to her finally:

Certainly Klesmer seemed cruel, but his feeling was the reverse of cruel. Our speech even when we are most single-minded can never take its line absolutely from one impulse; but Klesmer's was as far as possible directed by compassion for poor Gwendolen's ignorant eagerness to enter on a course of which he saw all the miserable details with a definiteness which he could not if he would have conveyed to her mind. (DD, pp. 301, 303, 307)

It is as if what Gwendolen cannot or will not do for herself, others - Klesmer, Deronda, even George Eliot - have

to do for her instead. It is because George Eliot from outside and above can 'see' what Gwendolen is doing to herself, as Gwendolen in her limitation and ignorance cannot and will not, that George Eliot feels conscience-bound to intervene, because what she sees as jettisoned by Gwendolen truly belongs to Gwendolen in her self.

Tolstoy's relation to Anna seems to lie somewhere between George Eliot's need to be cruel in order to be kind and Mrs Gaskell's capacity for simply leaving Cynthia's mess be. Clearly for Tolstoy, what has gone wrong with Anna cannot remain hidden, buried within character, doing its damage unseen. Anna's mess is forced out - pushed into story - even as it thereby overwhelms and finally destroys her. 'Understand,' she says to Dolly, late in the novel, 'that I love equally, I think, and both more than myself - two beings: Serezha and Alexis':

'I love those two beings only and the one excludes the other! I cannot unite them, yet that is the one thing I desire. And if I can't have that, nothing matters - nothing, nothing! It will end somehow, therefore I can't - I don't like speaking about it.'
(AK, p. 636)

The mess must 'end' for Tolstoy. If the wrong could not be put right, it had at least to be concluded. Tolstoy could no more leave Anna than George Eliot could leave Gwendolen to the Cynthia nightmare - which only makes it the more baffling and remarkable that Mrs Gaskell could leave Cynthia to drift incoherently on, the very indeterminacy which is

her nemesis composedly masquerading as normality ('the juste milieu - I'm that myself'). Yet where George Eliot has to force Gwendolen to accept her mess as her own precisely in order to avoid a worse end, what happens to Anna appears less forced and thus more final by comparison. For it is as if Anna's fate is decided inside the narration - without an explicit narrator. Indeed what Anna's story seems to show is that the mess itself insists on going on and on exacting its own punishment and price: 'I cannot unite them, yet that is the one thing I desire. And if I can't have that, nothing matters - nothing, nothing!' It is the narrative which smashes Anna, more than it is Tolstoy. For the punishment which George Eliot feels a responsibility to visit upon Gwendolen through the intervention of persons trying to prevent disaster is itself, it seems, a law of process for Tolstoy ('Vengeance is mine; I will repay')³⁶.

Yet if terribly Tolstoy could leave Anna be, at one level, he clearly shared with George Eliot a need to set the right story in opposition to the wrong one - to put Levin next to Anna, even as George Eliot puts Deronda next to Gwendolen. In Wives and Daughters, by contrast, there is no Levin, no Deronda - nothing vigorously offered as an alternative to Cynthia's distortedness. Mrs Gaskell stands

36. 'I firmly believe,' Tolstoy emphatically wrote in a letter of 1907, 'that people are punished, not for their sins but by their sins', Letters:T, II, p. 667.

extraordinarily apart in this sense - namely that she can bear to oversee the wrong thing without emphatically setting the right thing beside it. Thus Marilyn Butler is surely overlooking something deep in Mrs Gaskell - and something itself perhaps unique - when, in her comparison of Wives and Daughters with Helen, she complains that no 'intensity of analysis is applied to the relationship between Cynthia and Molly'. Butler is quite right to point out that the contrast between Helen and Cecilia 'loses most of its original tension and complexity' when transposed to the contrast between Molly and Cynthia. Yet she goes on to argue (rather curiously) that the absence of such tension in Wives and Daughters is the result of Mrs Gaskell's 'characteristic fault' of didacticism:

Just as Maria Edgeworth originally groups her characters according to whether they tell the truth or lie, so too does Mrs Gaskell. ... Yet as Mrs Gaskell proceeds we must perceive, surely, that her attitude to her didactic theme is the more rigid. In this fictional universe, the heroes and heroines do not tell lies; the liars, even when beautiful and charming, have no depth of feeling. ... In her attitude to her central characters and to the moral themes they exemplify, Mrs Gaskell's own position remains static.³⁷

In Mrs Gaskell's 'fictional universe' things are indeed, it seems, morally settled. But this is no crude didacticism on

37. Marilyn Butler, 'The Uniqueness of Cynthia Kirkpatrick: Elizabeth Gaskell's Wives and Daughters and Maria Edgeworth's Helen', *Review of English Studies, New Series*, Vol. XXIII, (Oxford, 1972), 278-90, (pp. 285-87).

Mrs Gaskell's part. On the contrary it is a part of her astonishing calm that she can recognise and allow that good and bad do thus separatedly co-exist, randomly, side by side, without necessary connection for good or ill. Molly's earnest good-heartedness - 'It won't do' - simply makes no difference and that, for Mrs Gaskell, is just the ordinary way of things. The mental and moral shrug is not facile, however. It comes from Mrs Gaskell's realistic acceptance of the kind of moral incoherence we are left with in a fallen, secular world - an acceptance which George Eliot, by contrast, manifestly could not bear to share. For in George Eliot's universe good must be brought into relation with bad, and the good must, thereby, make a difference.

So it is, therefore, that Deronda becomes for Gwendolen 'a monitor - the strongest of all monitors' (DD, p. 503):

'You say I am ignorant. But what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?'

'This good,' said Deronda, promptly, with a touch of indignant severity, which he was inclined to encourage as his own safeguard; 'life would be worth more to you: some real knowledge would give you an interest in the world beyond the small drama of your personal desires. It is the curse of your life - forgive me - of so many lives, that all passion is spent in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it. Is there any single occupation of mind that you care about with passionate delight or even independent interest?'

Deronda paused, but Gwendolen, looking startled and thrilled as by an electric

shock, said nothing, and he went on more insistently -

'I take what you said of music for a small example - it answers for all larger things - you will not cultivate it for the sake of a private joy in it. What sort of earth or heaven would hold any spiritual wealth in it for souls pauperised by inaction? If one firmament has no stimulus for our attention and awe, I don't see how four would have it. We should stamp every possible world with the flatness of our own inanity - which is necessarily impious, without faith or fellowship. The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities.'

'I will try. I will think,' says Gwendolen, at length:

They both stood silent for a minute, as if some third presence had arrested them, - for Deronda, too, was under that sense of pressure which is apt to come when our own winged words seem to be hovering around us.
(DD, pp. 507-8)

'Our speech even when we are most single-minded can never take its line absolutely from one impulse.' Thus it is that Deronda's promptness and severity are crucial in safeguarding his primary impulse - of remaining the preserver and monitor of Gwendolen's better self - against his own and Gwendolen's sexual feelings. Deronda's right volitions and feelings might so easily here become confused with (what would be contextually) the wrong thing. Indeed, his right feelings almost do become thus compromised when Deronda's spiritual passion acts upon Gwendolen - 'startled and thrilled as by an electric shock' - as a sexual one. It is at such moments that we see George Eliot wanting to

bring back (via *Deronda* here) something equivalent to what Lady Davenant stood for in Helen - wanting to wrest, that is, from the confusion and relativism of secular realism some personalized form of absolute, impersonal 'good' - yet showing us at the same time how difficult the project is in unpropitious circumstances. For in a society which has lost formal belief, where virtue is without a divine guarantor, 'good' must make its way as best it can, struggle for a place amidst the besetting considerations and difficulties of the ordinary human realm and ordinary human relationships wherein it might so easily fail or lose its way. The big and urgent human task then becomes the effort of finding a spiritual 'home' within the small, mundane human round, which 'struggle' *Deronda* here speaks for: 'I take what you said of music for a small example - it answers for all larger things'. This is a world in which small must 'answer for' large, wherein we have to recognise spiritual heroism precisely in so small an act as *Deronda's* going on 'more insistently'³⁸ even amidst the sexual pressure which is powerfully and mutually felt in that 'third presence'. 'Deronda, too, was under that sense of pressure which is apt to come when our own winged words seem to be hovering around us.' Yet it is George Eliot herself who makes a 'third' here, of course, summoned as she characteristically

38. One of those 'acts called trivialities', M. p. 462. (See above pp. 178-9.)

is by what lies around or between people. For it is as though George Eliot exists in lieu of God within her novels in order to give tangible reality and articulate 'presence' to feelings which often cannot be acknowledged (without damage) by humans themselves, yet which paradoxically belong to them and which seem to call for articulation in others if those to whom they belong deny them. A believer such as Mrs Gaskell would not have felt such pressure to replace a divinity.

We can gain a clearer sense of what was at stake for George Eliot in the relationship between Gwendolen and Deronda by comparing it with the single meeting, brief and comic, which takes place, late in Anna Karenina, between Levin and Anna - an encounter which matters finally not at all, precisely because it is merely sexual:

She glanced at Levin. And her smile and glance told him that she was speaking for him alone, valuing his opinion and knowing in advance that they would understand one another. ... He listened and talked, and all the time thought of her, of her inner life, trying to guess her feelings. And he, who had formerly judged her so severely, now by some strange process of reasoning justified her and at the same time pitied her and feared that Vronsky did not fully understand her. (AK, pp. 693-5)

Everything that Levin might have stood for in relation to Anna - judgement perhaps, or honesty, or plain goodness and simplicity - is simply swept aside by Levin's benignly comic susceptibility to Anna's shrewd and subtle winning of

him. Levin is, as Kitty accusingly puts it, 'bewitched' by Anna (AK, p. 697) - yet momentarily and inconsequentially. The sexual intensity they share and enjoy is a frisson, no more, which simply evaporates with the moment, and matters not the least to either of them beyond its duration. It is as if Tolstoy were seeing and accepting that the only form of understanding possible between an Anna and a Levin would have to be (harmlessly enough) this sexual one, because at every other level of being they simply are, to use John Bayley's words, 'different order[s] of creation'³⁹. A Levin and an Anna are just not able, that is, to make a deep difference to one another. Yet this is not the disaster for Tolstoy that it surely would have been for George Eliot, and would not have been for Mrs Gaskell. Rather, the essential separateness of Anna and Levin seems actually to have been the point for Tolstoy. 'I am proud of the architecture,' he wrote of Anna Karenina:

The arches have been constructed in such a way that it is impossible to see where the keystone is and that is what I was striving for most of all. The structural link is not the plot or the relationships (friendships) between the characters, but an inner link ... the very thing that made the work important for me. (Letters:T, I, p. 311)

The contrast between Anna and Levin is left thus to speak for itself, implicitly, in form. It is enough for Tolstoy

39. John Bayley, Tolstoy and the Novel (London, 1966), p. 202.

that they should balance one another without meeting. Where George Eliot, we feel, must have interfered - must, that is, have brought something of what Levin represents to bear upon Anna - Tolstoy is here applying Mrs Gaskell's own acceptance and tolerance to the sheer fact of good and bad, right and wrong thus (separately) existing side by side. The capacity thus contentedly to witness the phenomenon of different worlds thrown together in the one world points to a far deeper connection between Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy.

James accuses Tolstoy of a want of what he calls artistic 'method' - of 'premeditated' principles of composition.⁴⁰ Significantly, whilst James praises Mrs Gaskell's 'gentle skill', 'delicacy of ... handwork' and 'lightness of touch' in Wives and Daughters ('the details are as good as perfect' he says), he finds a 'want of judgement' where the larger form of the novel is concerned: 'As the tale progresses, the author loses herself in its current very much as ... she causes the reader to do' (Gaskell:CH, pp. 463-4). But I have argued that in both novels the freedom from absolute bookishly tight interrelations is the form rather than a lack of form. If the Tolstoyan 'loose and baggy monster' finds its English equivalent in Wives and Daughters⁴¹, it is because Mrs

40. Preface to The Tragic Muse, in The Critical Muse, p. 515.

41. Barbara Hardy, taking her cue in part from Henry James and comparing the form of Anna Karenina with that of

Gaskell and Tolstoy, for all the immense differences between them, both possess, deep and incorrigibly within them, a belief that it is only from inside a version of life, immersed in its content, that one can discover or intuit life's form.⁴² The extra plus we have with Tolstoy is that he makes this vision explicit - not from outside the life-system, like George Eliot, but from within it, by embodying it in one of his characters: 'Life itself has given me the answer,' says Levin in Book Eight of Anna Karenina (AK, p. 791). Yet we see the truth of this vision thus explicitly, of course, because Tolstoy himself needed to. If 'going along with life', the Mrs Gaskell way, was in fact the right way, then Tolstoy had to know that it was so: he needed the sanction, that is, of some kind of formal recognition and the safety, as it were, of formal belief.

Middlemarch, gives an account of Tolstoyan form which suggests that we need indeed look no further than Mrs Gaskell for England's Tolstoy: 'Nothing hangs by a thread in Anna Karenina. ... The dense vivid population, the slow drift of time, the unimportance of plot and moral crisis all combine to make this novel a much larger and looser form than Middlemarch. These features [the sheer density and detail and waste] may also help to explain why a novel by Tolstoy is for some people difficult to read and for many difficult to remember. There is not the clear diagrammatic pattern of decisive incident ... to create concentrated tension, or to act as a useful, if reductive, pattern in memory', The Appropriate Form (London, 1964), pp. 187-94.

42. Writing to one of his sons when the latter has decided to marry (and once again urging upon another what he never could have accepted for himself), Tolstoy says 'My advice to you is not to arrange a definite form of life. ... Try to live better without thinking of a form ... This form will take shape of its own accord', Letters:T, II, p. 538.

That need formally to know or explain, which will be the subject of Chapter Five, brings us in turn back to George Eliot. For in Book Eight of Anna Karenina Tolstoy goes beyond the immersedness of a Mrs Gaskell to seek, through Levin as character, the kind of meaning within the real which George Eliot, as narrator, also sought to rescue. Thus, in turning to the religious-seeker in Tolstoy in the next chapter, I shall necessarily be concentrating less on the similarities and more on the differences between Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy. But I need both of them, together with George Eliot still, yet increasingly together with Thomas Hardy also, to orientate and point to the implicit significance of the choices of configuration and shape in the form of the writings.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON LIFE'S VERGE

I War and Peace: Beyond Life and Within Life

Riding home with Ivan, his coachman, after his moment of vision and clarity in the forest, Levin looks forward eagerly to the change his new religious certainty will bring about in his life and in himself:

It seemed to him that his relations with everyone would now be changed. 'There will be no disputes; with Kitty never any quarrels again; ... I shall be amiable and kind; and with the servants, with Ivan, everything will be different.'

Tightly holding in the good horse, who snorted impatiently and pulled at the reins, Levin kept turning to glance at Ivan, who sat beside him not knowing what to do with his unoccupied hands and continually pushing down his shirt as the wind blew it out. Levin tried to think of some pretext for beginning a conversation with him. He wanted to say that it was a pity Ivan had pulled the saddle-girth so tight, but that would have sounded like a reproof, and Levin desired an amicable conversation. But he could think of nothing else to say.

'Bear to the right, sir, there's a stump there,' said the coachman, taking hold of the rein.

'Please leave it alone and don't teach me!' said Levin, annoyed at the coachman's interference. Just as it always did, interference vexed him, and he immediately felt how wrong had been his conclusion that his spiritual condition could at once alter his manner when confronted with reality. (AK, pp. 794-5)

Life has given Levin the answer; but life, in this novel,

also is what goes on, and goes on 'just' the same, as obstinately untransformed as is Levin himself. 'Just as it always did, interference vexed him.' His new faith brings about no dramatic or miraculous change: it makes both as much and as little difference to Levin the character as it probably made to Tolstoy the man.¹ 'Like Lawrence,' says Barbara Hardy at the close of her discussion of Anna Karenina, '[Tolstoy] does not take the novel beyond the stage he has reached in actual experience.'² There is no final peace, no settlement: life remains inconclusively difficult. Yet the novel ends not, like Women in Love, on the brink of despair but on the note of deeply comic acceptance which is the *donnée* of this passage. Tolstoy, I shall want to say, was too much like Mrs Gaskell finally to be Lawrence, and yet too much like George Eliot³ finally to be Mrs Gaskell. The formulation is not meant to

1. Aylmer Maude, in his biography of Tolstoy, quotes the words of an acquaintance 'who watched [Tolstoy] just at the time when he was striving after simplicity and ... deliberate[ly] breaking away from former habits': 'The Count could be extremely amiable when he liked; but if he happened to meet a stupid man, it was all up! He would rise from his seat and simply go away without even saying goodbye, just as if he were frightened or disgusted', The Life of Tolstoy: Later Years, third edition (London, 1911), pp. 174-5.

2. Barbara Hardy, The Appropriate Form (London, 1964), p. 211.

3. And too much like Lawrence finally to be George Eliot - as W.J. Harvey (commenting on Leavis's comparison of George Eliot and Tolstoy) suggests: 'One cannot imagine George Eliot encompassing either Levin's simple joy at being alive and in love or the complex intensities of Anna Karenina's passion', The Art of George Eliot, (London, 1961), p. 197.

be merely tricky. Rather I wish to continue to suggest, as in Chapter Four, that reading Tolstoy is precisely the same as turning around inside a combination of different minds and modes of thinking and being essential to a consideration of later nineteenth and early twentieth-century novel writing in England. For Tolstoy is not either George Eliot or Mrs Gaskell just because he is both modes. On the one hand, he is the restless seeker after truth, struggling to free from the sheer mass and detail of life some rescuing thought or meaning with all the seriousness of George Eliot, to save his sanity and his life⁴. And yet, on the other hand, Tolstoy is as wryly subdued and accepting as Mrs Gaskell when the absolute becomes absorbed amidst the mundane contingencies of ordinary life. This doubleness is not just our problem with Tolstoy, moreover: it is - in the character of Levin - Tolstoy's own problem with himself:

In this way he lived, not knowing or seeing any possibility of knowing what he was or why he lived in the world, and he suffered so much from the ignorance that he was afraid he might commit suicide, while at the same time he was firmly cutting his own particular definite path through life. (AK, p. 785)

4. So Tolstoy explains in A Confession, though even his near-madness seems so typically manic, a sort of comic panic and exasperation: 'I was like a man in a wood who is lost, and terrified by this rushes around hoping to find his way out, knowing that with each step he is getting more lost, and yet unable to stop rushing about', A Confession, first published 1879, translated by Jane Kentish (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987) p. 30.

'While at the same time ...'⁵ It is as if Tolstoy is ontologically committed to modes of being which are as distinct as they are incompatible and yet which do exist incompatibly together in time. He is at once at home in the world yet always in need of something that goes beyond what this world can fulfil.

Book Eight of Anna Karenina only makes more explicit a tension and strain which always existed in Tolstoy and which is perhaps at its most emphatic in War and Peace. For it is as if, there in the earlier novel, Tolstoy splits himself between the character of Pierre Bezukhov on the one hand - another dogged life-immersed figure, like Olenin and Levin - and the character of Prince Andrew, on the other, whose happiest moments here on earth occur, as in the passage which follows, when he is least connected to it.

After his fatal wounding in the battle of Borodino, Prince Andrew sees at the ambulance station the man who has rivalled his love for Natasha, and prevented his intended marriage to her:

'My God! What is this? Why is he here?' said Prince Andrew to himself.

In the miserable, sobbing, enfeebled man whose leg had just been amputated he recognized Anatole Kuragin. Men were supporting him in their arms and offering him a glass of water, but his trembling, swollen lips could not grasp its rim. Anatole was sobbing painfully. 'Yes, it is he! Yes, that man is somehow closely and

5. 'и вместе с тем', CW, IX, p. 390.

painfully connected with me,' thought Prince Andrew, not yet clearly grasping what he saw before him. 'What is the connexion of that man with my childhood and my life?' he asked himself, without finding an answer. And suddenly a new unexpected memory from [the] realm of pure and loving childhood presented itself to him. He remembered Natasha as he had seen her for the first time at the ball of 1810, with her slender neck and arms, and with a frightened happy face ready for rapture, and love and tenderness for her, stronger and more vivid than ever, awoke in his soul. He now remembered the connexion that existed between himself and this man who was dimly gazing at him through tears that filled his swollen eyes. He remembered everything and ecstatic pity and love for that man overflowed his happy heart.

Prince Andrew could no longer restrain himself, and wept tender loving tears for his fellow men, for himself, and for his own and their errors.

'Compassion, love of our brothers, for those who love us and for those who hate us, love of our enemies; yes, that love which God preached on earth and which Princess Mary taught me and I did not understand - that is what made me sorry to part with life, that is what remained for me had I lived. But now it is too late. I know it!'⁶

Only here at the point of near-death does Prince Andrew achieve the new relation to his world and to others which Levin had earnestly looked for. This is no mere formal act of forgiveness. On the contrary, Prince Andrew simply does not see in Kuragin the man who was responsible for ruining his own chance of happiness. Rather his tears are the result of a recognition - unexpected, involuntary, yet deeply and

6. Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, first published 1868-9, translated by Louise and Alymer Maude, edited by Henry Gifford (Oxford, 1991), p. 872. Hereafter cited as WP.

surprisingly familiar for being 'remembered' as intrinsic to his own real self - that between this other human creature and himself the likenesses are greater than the differences, even as they are opposed to one another in life. 'Weeping [one of the most striking peculiarities of human nature],' said Schopenhauer, whose influence upon Tolstoy was at its greatest when he was writing War and Peace⁷, 'is by no means a direct expression of pain. ... We pass from the felt pain, even when it is physical, to a mere idea of it, and then find our own state so deserving of sympathy that we are firmly convinced that if another were the sufferer, we would be full of sympathy and love to relieve him.' He goes on:

But now we ourselves are the object of our own sympathy; with the most benevolent disposition we are ourselves in need of help; we feel that we suffer more than we could see another suffer; and in this very complex frame of mind, in which the directly felt suffering only comes to perception by a doubly circuitous route, imagined as the

7. Tolstoy wrote to A.A. Fet in 1869 (a friend and fellow-admirer of Schopenhauer, who later translated The World as Will and Idea) of his 'constant raptures over Schopenhauer' and 'a whole series of spiritual delights ... never experienced before'. 'At present I'm certain,' he said, 'that Schopenhauer is the most brilliant of men', Letters:T, p. 311. As John Bayley points out, Tolstoy clearly has Schopenhauer's thinking particularly in mind when writing of Prince Andrew's death. 'Where death is concerned, Tolstoy in War and Peace was under the spell of Schopenhauer. Life is a sleep and death an awakening.' 'In Andrew,' he goes so far as to say, 'Tolstoy has deliberately created the man who fits [the Schopenhauerean] conception of death', Tolstoy and the Novel (London, 1966), p. 81-2.

suffering of another, sympathised with as such, and then suddenly perceived again as directly our own, - in this complex frame of mind, I say, Nature relieves itself through that remarkable physical conflict. Weeping is accordingly sympathy with our own selves, or sympathy directed back on its source.⁸

What Schopenhauer describes as 'sympathy with our own selves' is not quite self-pity, if the self it releases to do the pitying is not the same as the self which is pitied like any other creature. Yet this Schopenhauerean sympathy does still seem more cynically egoistic than that which produces Prince Andrew's 'loving tears for his fellow men, for himself and for his own and their errors'. For it is at this moment of revelatory memory of his essential 'connexion' to Natasha, to Kuragin and to every human creature, that Andrew simply forgets who he himself physically is: Prince Andrew, disillusioned soldier, cynical government official, rejected lover. Like death, the experience momentarily destroys the self as such. If only it were not 'too late', he thinks: if only he could now go back into life as this better, unmediated man.

But even were he able to return to life, Prince Andrew would be no better than he is earlier in the novel, when he has lost the new sense of meaning intensely revealed to him after his wounding at Austerlitz, and found instead only a

8. Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, first published 1818, translated by R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 3 vols. (London 1891), I, p. 486.

a sort of cynical calm in living, as he says, 'for myself alone'. He listens to Pierre's enthusiastic rapture over the religious teachings of the Brotherhood:

'We must live, we must love, and we must believe that we live not only to-day on this scrap of earth but have lived and shall live for ever, there, in the Whole,' said Pierre, and he pointed to the sky.

Prince Andrew stood leaning on the railing of the raft listening to Pierre, and he gazed with his eyes fixed on the red reflection of the sun gleaming on the blue waters. There was perfect stillness. Pierre became silent. The raft had long since stopped, and only the waves of the current beat softly against it below. Prince Andrew felt as if the sound of the waves kept up a refrain to Pierre's words, whispering:

'It is true, believe it.'

He sighed, and glanced with a radiant, childlike, tender look at Pierre's face, flushed and rapturous, but yet shy before his superior friend.

'Yes, if only it were so!' said Prince Andrew. 'However, it is time to get on,' he added, and stepping off the raft he looked up at the sky to which Pierre had pointed, and for the first time since Austerlitz saw that high everlasting sky he had seen while lying on that battlefield; and something that had long been slumbering, something that was best within him, suddenly awoke, joyful and youthful, in his soul. It vanished as soon as he returned to the customary conditions of his life, but he knew that this feeling which he did not know how to develop, existed within him. His meeting with Pierre formed an epoch in Prince Andrew's life. Though outwardly he continued to live in the same old way, inwardly he began a new life. (WP, pp. 411-12)

'However, it is time to get on ...' It looks like fear - fear, that is, of losing his 'old' relation to his life and to himself, fear of 'believing' in something which would be

dangerously disturbing to the attitude he has fixed upon as a means of surviving his own continuing daily existence. Yet Prince Andrew is no Anna, holding on for sheer life to the very mode of life - secondary and unreal - which is destroying her. Rather the problem is that what is 'best' in Prince Andrew, that which he most really is, and even knows himself to be, is that which he least 'knows how' to translate into the narrower reality of his mortal life. His real self 'slumber[s]' or is forgotten within the context of ordinary existence as involuntarily as it was 'remembered' in the dramatically extraordinary conditions of approaching death. Prince Andrew's whole story, in fact, is an involuntary repetition of the sequence which emerges in this passage - a movement back and forth between revelation and its withdrawal.

Prince Andrew seems really to represent something different and perhaps even deeper than the Kierkegaardian sickness and loss of self - deeper, that is, because perhaps more simply normal, a fact of life. For the forgetting, as William James helps us see, may be unavoidable and not merely Prince Andrew's or anybody's fault. For that to which we most intimately belong, says James, is that with which the 'dimension' of our ordinary life may have no essential connection:

The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and

merely 'understandable' world. Name it the mystical region, or the supernatural region, whichever you choose. So far as our ideal impulses originate in this region (and most of them do originate in it, for we find them possessing us in a way for which we cannot articulately account), we belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong.⁹

It is as if the necessary transition to incarnation in the external visible world necessarily involves us in losing touch with who we deeply are. Perhaps only formal religion can prevent the entire natural loss, as Pierre's Christian truths remind Prince Andrew of the region wherein his real self resides. Yet that the truth should thus come and go - as revelatory memory, that is, rather than as character continually embodied - was, for Tolstoy, a troubling and baffling paradox. So it is that Prince Andrew represents what was a critical human question for his creator. For if there is something inside human beings, more real than anything else, which even so cannot be realised within the limits of a human life, then how real or properly settled can this human life finally be? Prince Andrew is a crucial figure for this present chapter and for this thesis because in precariously incarnating that part of Tolstoy which felt compelled to look for life's meaning beyond this life's

9. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, first published 1902 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), pp. 515-16. Hereafter cited as VRE.

bounds, he stands for that part of Tolstoy which altogether goes beyond the realist vision which Mrs Gaskell embodies.

Writing to Fet, in 1876, Tolstoy said:

Those few real people I have been close to in life, in spite of a healthy attitude to life, always stand on its very verge and see life clearly just because they look now at Nirvana, the illimitable, the unknown, and now at Sansara, and that view of Nirvana strengthens their vision. (Letters:T, p. 298)

For Tolstoy, manifestly, this world was neither all nor sufficient. Yet that this world and no other was Mrs Gaskell's business is a fact so deeply implicit in her realist mode - her vision is so absorbed, that is, into itself - that in order to illustrate the contrast with Tolstoy as emphatically as possible I turn here from the novels to a form wherein we can have an early and clear view of Mrs Gaskell's starting-point.

The following extracts come from a poem, written by Mrs Gaskell in collaboration with her husband¹⁰, which concerns precisely this matter of having in one's mind the idea of something more transcendently primary than the life one is presently living. The poem tells the tale of Mary, a woman, now grown old, who has devoted her life to caring for those among whom she lives, yet whose 'one dear thought' is of the home she left as a young girl:

10. And consciously Wordsworthian, as Jenny Uglow points out: 'The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads has been read, learnt and thoroughly digested', A Habit of Stories, p. 102.

She thought the time might come, ere yet the bowl
 Were broken at the fountain, when her soul
 Might listen to its yearnings, unreprieved
 By thought of failure to the cause she loved;
 When she might leave the close and noisy street,
 And once again her childhood's home might greet. ...
 Day and Waking have their dreams, O Sleep,
 When Hope and Memory their fond watches keep;
 And such o'er Mary held supremest sway,
 When kindly labours task'd her hands all day.
 Employ'd her hands, her thoughts roam'd far and free,
 Till sense call'd down to calm reality.
 A few short weeks, and then, unbound the chains
 Which held her to another's woes or pains,
 Farewell to dusky streets and shrouded skies,
 Her treasur'd home should bless her yearning eyes,
 And fair as in the days of childish glee
 Each grassy nook and wooded haunt should be.¹¹

There exists, in Mary's thoughts, a place better than this
 one with its present duties and demands, a place which seems
 to her to be primary. Yet the dreams of that place allow
 her to keep going in this life and to get on with its
 apparently secondary concerns: 'A few short weeks, and then,
 unbound the chains ... Farewell to dusky streets and
 shrouded skies'. In fact, however, Mary never returns to
 that better place in retirement:

Yet ever as one sorrow pass'd away,
 Another call'd the tender one to stay,
 And where so late she shared the bright glad mirth
 The phantom Grief sat cowering at the hearth.
 So days and weeks pass'd on, and grew to years,
 Unwept by Mary, save for others' tears.

It is not elsewhere, after all, in some better place that

11. Elizabeth and William Gaskell, 'Sketches among the
 Poor', Blackwood's Magazine, Jan 7, 1837. Originally
 intended as the first of a series about ordinary life in
 Manchester, this published poem was in fact, Mrs Gaskell
 tells us, 'the only one', Letters:G, p. 33.

Mary's real life is fulfilled but precisely here, in this life with its arduous, everyday duties and struggles. The loss of her dream goes by 'unwept' (and unregretted in that typically casual connective - 'So days and weeks pass'd on, and grew to years'). For the concerns which Mary has taken to be secondary turn out to have been primary after all - always were, in fact, her first thought, for all that she experienced them as her second in her need for some ulterior backing to her life: 'She thought the time might come ... when her soul/Might listen to its yearnings, unreproved/By thought of failure to the cause she loved'. Yet there is no mere irony for Mrs Gaskell in Mary's thus subordinating the consideration which constitutes the real purpose of her life. On the contrary - precisely because the so-called secondary is what matters most of all to Mrs Gaskell herself - she can even see the practical virtue of Mary's putting first things second. 'The practical needs ... of religion [are] sufficiently met,' says William James, 'by the belief that beyond each man ... there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals':

Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step. ... For practical life at any rate, the chance of salvation is enough. (VRE, pp. 525-6)

It is a sentiment, as this poem demonstrates, which would have given no trouble to Mrs Gaskell. Yet the difference between William James's religious pragmatism and Mr.3

Gaskell's own is that her commitment to this 'practical life' precisely constituted her religious belief. Her faith, as Jenny Uglow explains, was practical in the deepest sense - 'a way of thinking and an attitude to life as much as a set of beliefs'. Those beliefs themselves, moreover, constituted a practical theology:

[As Unitarians the Gaskells rejected] such mystical doctrines as the Trinity and the divinity of Christ ... and refused to accept the notion of original sin or the doctrine of atonement: Jesus was revered as a teacher and example, not a vehicle of grace.

Thus, Uglow goes on:

It was against social evil, not original sin or the works of the devil that the Gaskells took their stand. If such evil was humanly created, it must, they felt, be open to human remedy through practical measures and through the power of the word to awaken conscience and modify behaviour. (A Habit of Stories, pp. 5, 73.)

Mrs Gaskell's religious faith was 'so integral to her life,' as Uglow rightly points out, 'that she rarely writes about it' (ibid. p. 451). For faith, for Mrs Gaskell, was a matter of doing and of being before it was a matter of formal belief. It was prior ontologically, that is, existing at that deep, implicit level where form really begins for Mrs Gaskell, as we saw with Holman in Cousin Phillis. Yet it is a level so deep perhaps that, as with Mary, it may not need to be explicitly realised. Mrs Gaskell's implicitness as a writer might have been the result in part of her limitations as a formal thinker: yet it is as if she had no

need to push into explicit metaphysics what, in herself, she so sheerly was.

We may need George Eliot to do for Mrs Gaskell what she could hardly do for herself - explicitly see and understand, that is, what an idea thus shaken down into ordinary being really constitutes. 'The Vicar of St. Botolph's,' says George Eliot of Mr Farebrother, in Middlemarch, 'had certainly escaped the slightest tincture of the Pharisee':

By dint of admitting to himself that he was too much as other men were, he had become remarkably unlike them in this - that he could excuse others for thinking slightly of him, and could judge impartially of their conduct even when it told against him. (M, p. 217)

So Mrs Gaskell, too. If you can thus be the thing itself, you do not need - and at any rate you may not be able - also to know it: this is what Tolstoy himself - in the body, as it were, of Pierre - so well understood.

During his imprisonment in Moscow, under conditions of severe hardship and deprivation, Pierre, 'without thinking about it' now achieves 'the tranquillity and ease of mind he had formerly striven in vain to reach':

Here and now for the first time he fully appreciated the enjoyment of eating when he wanted to eat, drinking when he wanted to drink, sleeping when he wanted to sleep, of warmth when he was cold, of talking to a fellow-man when he wished to talk and to hear a human voice. The satisfaction of one's needs - good food, cleanliness, and freedom - now that he was deprived of all

this, seemed to Pierre to constitute perfect happiness; and the choice of occupation, that is, of his way of life - now that that choice was so restricted - seemed to him such an easy matter that he forgot that a superfluity of the comforts of life destroys all joy in satisfying one's needs, while great freedom in the choice of occupation - such freedom as his wealth, his education, and his social position had given him in his own life - is just what makes the choice of occupation insolubly difficult, and destroys the desire and possibility of having an occupation.

All Pierre's day-dreams now turned on the time when he would be free. Yet subsequently, and for the rest of his life, he thought and spoke with enthusiasm of that month of captivity, of those irrecoverable, strong, joyful sensations, and chiefly of the complete peace of mind and inner freedom which he only experienced during those weeks. (WP, pp. 1082-3)

In releasing Pierre from 'the superfluity [which] destroys all joy in satisfying one's needs', Pierre's month of captivity is the happiest time of his life. Yet time's narrative dictates in this passage that it is only when Pierre no longer has what seems to be the right thing that he recognises and appreciates it. 'The satisfaction of one's needs - good food, cleanliness, and freedom - now that he was deprived of all this, seemed to Pierre to constitute perfect happiness.' Just so it is only when life again becomes a matter of seemingly impossible choice that Pierre appreciates the freedom from the sheer burden of liberty itself which his time of captivity had given to him: 'subsequently, and for the rest of his life, he thought and spoke with enthusiasm of ... the complete peace of mind and

inner freedom which he only experienced during those weeks'. The sequence is one to madden this Tolstoyan protagonist above any other. For into the character of Pierre, Tolstoy put that part of himself which strenuously yearned to be physically committed to a situation wherein the old, urgent questions - 'Why? What for?' (more obsessive in Pierre than even in Olenin and Levin) - would simply cease to be. This was the Tolstoy who was just too impatient to wait for fulfilment in some other or better life. He wanted spiritual satisfaction here and now, in this life and in this body even as he knew his own immersion in time and body to be so much the source of the problem.¹² For the message of this passage seems to be that calm and peace of mind inevitably go away just because they cannot be physically sustained. Indeed, what Pierre incarnates here is another version of the problem of being which we saw Prince Andrew represented - a problem which troubles Dan Jacobson, here in relation to another Russian writer (Andrey Sinyavsky), in Adult Pleasures.

'Our consciousness,' says Jacobson 'fills up all the space available to it with whatever materials are to hand':

It cannot do otherwise. If circumstances proffer [us] peace, comfort, the ordinary

12. Tolstoy 'does not forget,' as John Bayley says, 'that most human beings are incapable of feeling one thing for long' and that 'the difficulty of coming to any conclusions about life is that the body does not remain in the same state for long enough', Tolstoy and the Novel pp. 227-8.

chances of domestic existence, then [we] will make [our] world of these. [So too] if fate ... plunges us suddenly into a wholly different context, into a war, a natural catastrophe, a prison.

Jacobson goes on (quoting Sinyavsky now):

What is so disconcerting is not so much this other reality in itself, as the mere possibility of its being so near that you only have to make one step to cross over into a new existence just as self-contained and valid as the previous one; and thus find the thought of the plurality of worlds confirmed with a terrifying suddenness.¹³

The potential capacity for the same person to incorporate opposing modes of existence and expression which are equally 'self-contained and valid' and which cannot therefore be incorporated into one another - that is the paradox which Prince Andrew and Pierre both embody and suffer from. For as with Prince Andrew, Pierre can only alternate between these separated worlds and thus cannot translate the truths which seem permanent in one reality, from that reality into another. The way of overcoming this alternation might seem to be, in Pierre's case, to try to remember, across the physical bounds represented by the paragraph division - to remember, that is, what captivity is like when one is free and what freedom is like when one is captive. But that is just what Pierre cannot do: 'He forgot that ... great freedom in the choice of occupation ... is just what makes the choice of occupation insolubly difficult'. Memory

13. Dan Jacobson, Adult Pleasures (London, 1988), pp. 83-4.

cannot, it seems, be relied upon completely to cure the maddening to-and-fro. Perhaps need, or whatever it is that makes for primary satisfaction in an individual human life, just happens and cannot be remembered as such, save through restless frustration afterwards.

Yet one can imagine that such restlessness may have appeared to Mrs Gaskell adolescently or Romantically perverse. To her more practical mind, that is, it might have seemed that it is merely Pierre's inability to stay with the boringness of freedom which reactively produces the need for the extraordinary, and that then this need for the extraordinary in turn creates the feeling of boredom with ordinary life. For Thomas Hardy, on the other hand - and it is the concerns of this other nineteenth-century thinker that Tolstoy also here combines - Pierre's situation would have been yet another bitter confirmation of the ill-adaptation in human beings of the desire for action, and the ability to act, which for Hardy constituted one of life's cruel ironies. Here, that is, Hardy would have seen just one more instance of that 'ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods,' as he puts it in The Mayor of Casterbridge, 'which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of zest for doing'¹⁴.

I thus turn the same thought around inside two very

14. Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, first published 1886, edited by Martin Seymour-Smith (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), p. 395.

different authorial minds not gratuitously but in imitation of what Tolstoy himself is doing immediately prior to the passage quoted above:

[Pierre] now often remembered his conversation with Prince Andrew and quite agreed with him, though he understood Prince Andrew's thoughts somewhat differently. Prince Andrew had thought and said that happiness could only be negative, but had said it with a shade of bitterness and irony as though he was really saying that all desire for positive happiness is implanted in us merely to torment us and never to be satisfied. But Pierre believed it without any mental reservation. (WP, p. 1082)

The thought which Prince Andrew hides his best self behind - as an attitude, that is, in lieu of acceptance - is something which Pierre quasi-physically seizes and accepts with the animus and energy of his whole being ('без всякой задней мысли' - translated here as 'without any mental reservation' means literally 'without any back or behind thought'¹⁵). Pierre is having Prince Andrew's own thought altogether differently. The difference - crucially and emphatically - is not one of mere contrast in point of view. Rather Tolstoy is explicitly demonstrating here how the same thought differently held or embodied - put into Hardy-esque ironic mode we might say, in Prince Andrew - becomes as different from itself as is irony from

15. Usually translated as 'without any ulterior motive'. (See CW, VII, p. 106.) My thanks to Tony Knowles for pointing out that the expression (a Gallicism from 'arrière pensée') can also mean, roughly, 'without thinking about it'.

acceptance.

'The idea for him,' said Bakhtin, writing, ironically enough, of Dostoevsky in specific contrast to Tolstoy, 'was either a touchstone for testing the man in man, or a form for revealing it':

There are no ideas, no thoughts, no positions which belong to no-one, which exist "in themselves". ... The "truth" [can only be] the truth of the hero's own consciousness. It cannot be neutral ... In the mouth of another person, a word or a definition identical in content would take on another meaning and tone, and would no longer be the truth.¹⁶

Bakhtin is describing here a relation to the idea which I believe to be emphatically if not peculiarly Tolstoyan.¹⁷ For if, as I have suggested in this chapter, Tolstoy seems to combine within himself everything which was of interest to or represented by the writers of the English Victorian period, that remarkable fact is itself only a by-product of something more remarkable still - the capacity, that is, to pass the same idea and the same human content through a seemingly inexhaustible variety of modes or 'tones'. For what is the story of Prince Andrew or the story of Pierre if not the same human story repeating itself, at one moment in Hardy-esque ironic mode, at another - so clearly in the passage which follows - in Tolstoyan comically immersed

16. Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (Manchester, 1984) pp. 31, 55-6.

17. And giving his own signature to what is in fact a Tolstoyan thought (see below, p. 272).

mode.

Disillusioned with Freemasonry (and philanthropy, and heroism, and romantic love) Pierre lapses, on the rebound, into a life of chaotic dissipation - turning 'from gossip to carousals and women; from carousals back to gossip reading and wine' - only to find, in the intervals of sobriety, that 'all the old questions appeared as insoluble and terrible as ever':

Sometimes he remembered how he had heard that soldiers in war when entrenched under the enemy's fire, if they have nothing to do, try hard to find some occupation the more easily to bear the danger. To Pierre all men seemed like those soldiers, seeking refuge from life: some in ambition, some in cards, some in framing laws, some in women, some in toys, some in horses, some in politics, some in sport, some in wine, and some in governmental affairs. 'Nothing is trivial, and nothing is important, it's all the same - only to save oneself from it as best one can,' thought Pierre. 'Only not to see it, that dreadful it!' (WP, pp. 574-5)

Pierre turns to drink for just the same reason that Prince Andrew turns to war or love or politics - in order to try to get rid of what he can neither get free of nor find adequately realised in self or life. Pierre's problem - what to do with 'it', with this thing called a human life - is, as Pierre himself recognises, just everybody's problem. It is 'all the same'. 'The more one dips in [to the soul, the mind, the character of a person],' Tolstoy wrote to a friend in 1892, 'the more one finds what is common and familiar to all' (Letters:T, II, p. 492).

Yet the sheerly earnest desperation with which Pierre goes on turning his 'best' self out to the wrong thing, in baffled innocence of where his own good might really lie, makes Pierre's turning to drink emphatically not the same as Jude Fawley's doing likewise here - when having recognised the travesty of his marriage to Arabella he tries, and fails, to drown himself in the ice:

It was curious, he thought. What was he reserved for? He supposed he was not a sufficiently dignified person for suicide. Peaceful death abhorred him as a subject, and would not take him.

What could he do of a lower kind than self-extermination; what was there less noble, more in keeping with his present degraded position? He could get drunk. Of course that was it; he had forgotten. Drinking was the regular, stereotyped resource of the despairing worthless.¹⁸

Getting drunk for Jude is not a last 'refuge from life' so much as a way of proving to himself that he has given up on the Romantic search for meaning within existence. Since life refuses to live up to his own needs as a human individual, Jude vengefully lives down, in bitter self-mockery, to the indifference of a meaningless universe: 'He could get drunk. Of course that was it'. Hardy never forgave the world for thus witlessly cutting the individual down to size. Yet Tolstoy knew that it is no more than a

18. Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, first published 1896, edited by C.H. Sisson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), pp. 116-7.

'minute difference'¹⁹, something as small and intangible as a 'shade' of thought or a 'tone' of being, which fashions out of the same Romantic need a Prince Andrew or a Hardy on the one hand, and a Pierre or a Tolstoy on the other. So it is therefore that Tolstoy answers for us the question which this section has posed. If he could see the impossibility of complete satisfaction in human life on earth - if he could see something basic in the very form of life itself which meant that life's problems could not be resolved, but must keep on coming back²⁰ - why was it that Tolstoy did not become the bitterly disappointed man that Hardy manifestly was by the time of his last novel? The answer seems to be that Tolstoy possessed a fine degree of extra acceptance - sufficient to turn Hardy's despair at life's refusal to make sense in any humanly meaningful way, into a

19. The phrase comes from John Henry Newman, who also speaks of 'tones of thought' when he describes the difficulty of 'representing the outline and character, the hues and shades, in which any intellectual view really exists in the mind ... or of sufficiently marking those minute differences which attach to the same general state of mind ... as found in this or that individual respectively', 'Implicit and Explicit Reasoning', University Sermons, first published 1871, edited by D.M. McKinnon and J.D. Holmes (London, 1970), p. 267.

20. So fiction repeats life in this respect, says J. Hillis Miller: 'Both human life and works of literature ... take the form of a virtually endless series of similar episodes. ... Each of these may take a different form and reinscribe the pattern differently, though each will be, if it is a valid member of the series, a version of this particular pattern. ... The repetitions one behind the other in past and in future make it impossible to solve or resolve the story once and for all', Fiction and Repetition (Oxford, 1982), pp. 174-5.

conviction in Tolstoy that the search for meaning was itself nonetheless the human task. Two brief paragraphs are finally sufficient to show why Tolstoy was not Hardy:

Though he was a happy and healthy family man, Levin was several times so near to suicide that he hid a cord he had lest he should hang himself, and he feared to carry a gun lest he should shoot himself.

But he did not hang or shoot himself and went on living. (AK, p. 783)

In the end Tolstoy, this giant of a man, just did what Levin did and what most of us anyway do. More strenuously than most, he kept trying out versions of the same unsatisfactory life, repeating the same mistakes, encountering the same irresolvable problems in his characters and in himself.

The example of Hardy returns me full circle to the conclusion I reached at the close of Chapter Four. Tolstoy, that is to say, in his dogged capacity for handing himself over to life's own form whilst holding together the multiplicity of modes within it, seems to come closer to the realist vision and mode of Mrs Gaskell than to that of any other nineteenth-century English novelist. Yet at the very point where the respective visions of Mrs Gaskell and of Tolstoy seem most nearly to coincide, we come upon the minute difference in their modes of perceiving that multiplicity which makes all the difference between them. For it is a small step, after all, which turns Mrs Gaskell's accepting vision of life as irreducibly various, into the baffled recognition in Tolstoy that that very variety is

built upon essential similarity. For not only did Tolstoy see different people exhibiting the same needs and the same plurality within. He also recognised that the simultaneous existence of so many different thoughts and people in the same world was only a function of the novelist's imaginative incarnation in minutely different modes, which shows everybody to be different in the same kind of way. The mystery for Tolstoy was not the fact of difference itself, so much as the fact that difference and sameness were not two simply opposite things.

We see this truth when Bakhtin's perception of the relative truth of the idea is put 'in the mouth' of the Tolstoyan protagonist. After vehemently urging his own ideas at a meeting of the Petersburg brothers, Pierre finds that parties are formed, 'some accusing ... others supporting him':

At that meeting he was struck for the first time by the endless variety of men's minds, which prevents a truth from ever presenting itself identically to two persons. Even those members who seemed to be on his side understood him in their own way, with limitations and alterations he could not agree to, as what he always wanted most was to convey his thought to others just as he himself understood it. (WP, p. 463)

'The possibility of everyone thinking, feeling and seeing things each from his own point of view ... this legitimate peculiarity of each individual' which both 'excites' and 'irritates' Pierre (WP, p. 1184), was a source of wonder and exasperation to Tolstoy also. For what Tolstoy himself

'always wanted most' was to believe that the truth 'as he himself understood it' was the truth. But says the protagonist of an early short story, 'if only [man] understood that every thought is both true and false':

False by one-sidedness resulting from man's inability to embrace the whole of truth and true as an expression of one fact of human endeavour.²¹

The truth might show different sides of itself in different mortal incarnations. A person could only be one of those incarnations at a time; only a novel could embody many of them together. This did not lead Tolstoy simply to celebrate the power of the novel; it led him as more a religious than an aesthetic man²² to produce characters inside his novels who were baffled by what the novels alone could do as a whole. For at one moment the whole world seems to be inside a character's head; at the next the character is once again no more than a part of that world. The fox in Tolstoy could trace, but the hedgehog never quite understand, the

21. The Nekhlyudov of 'Lucerne', first published 1857, in Leo Tolstoy, Nine Stories, translated by Aylmer Maude (Oxford, 1954), p. 249.

22. 'Art,' Tolstoy wrote emphatically in What is Art?, 'is not ... a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy .. it is not the production of pleasing objects; and, above all, it is not pleasure. ... Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through ... Artistic activity aim[s] at transmitting the highest feelings to which humanity has attained - those flowing from religious perception', What is Art?, first published 1898, translated by Aylmer Maude (Oxford, 1969), pp. 123, 149.

movements across the realms of being - both between different people and across different levels of existence in the same person.

Tolstoy would never give up on the hedgehog, the desire for a religious unity independent of art. When his brother Nicholas is dying, Levin looks on in admiring consternation at the ease with which Kitty knows exactly what to do whilst he himself waits about in horror, 'not knowing what to do next':

He could not help knowing that he was more intelligent than his wife and Agatha Mikhaylovna; he could not help knowing that when he thought about death he thought with all the powers of his soul. He knew too that many great and virile minds, whose thoughts on that subject he had read, had pondered it, and yet did not know a hundredth part of what his wife and Agatha Mikhaylovna knew on the subject. ... Both knew with certainty what Life was and what Death was, and though they would have been quite unable not only to answer but even to understand the questions which confronted Levin, neither doubted the importance of these phenomena, and they both had exactly the same outlook upon them - an outlook shared not only by them but by millions of others. (AK, p. 494)

Here I am, thinks Levin at his brother's death-bed, just 'one among millions' of others who see the same thing each in their own and different way. Moreover, whilst I seem to have thought harder about Life and Death than most, it turns out that I know no more about these matters than anyone else, and less than the practical woman here, when I cross from the metaphysical realm of my inner life to the sheer

reality of my brother's sick-room.²³ It is this same paradox which is put into tragic mode in Prince Andrew when he first hears Natasha sing and experiences 'a sudden, vivid sense of the terrible contrast between something vast and illimitable within him, and that limited and material something that he, and even she, was' (WP, p. 495). That contrast was all the more metaphysically mystifying to Tolstoy himself - the man who (in Henry James' phrase) could hold 'all human life' within him²⁴, and yet had also like Levin to recognize that he was just one tiny, living part of it. How can I see it all and still be in it?²⁵

Mrs Gaskell, by contrast, seems simply to have taken these mysteries in her stride. The novelist who could hold within herself thought of the Many, could also go back to her more restricted physical role in ordinary life, accepting - like a superior, more experienced version of Kitty, here at the close of Anna Karenina - that she herself was just one of them:

23. Tolstoy's failures (and positive evasions) when his own brother, Nicholas, was dying are well-documented in Henri Troyat's Tolstoy (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), pp. 275-281.

24. Henry James, 'Ivan Turgenev', first published 1896, in The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism, edited by Roger Gard (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1987), p. 317.

25. Thomas Nagel puts the question this way: 'How can I be a particular person? ... How can I, who am thinking about the entire, centerless universe be anything so specific as this: this measly, gratuitous creature existing in a tiny morsel of space-time, with a definite and by no means universal mental and physical organisation? How can I be anything so small and concrete and specific?', The View From Nowhere (Oxford, 1989), pp. 60-61.

[Kitty] knew what was tormenting her husband. It was his want of faith. Although had she been asked whether she thought that if he did not believe in the future life he would perish, she would have had to acknowledge that he would, yet his lack of faith did not make her unhappy; and she, who accepted the doctrine that salvation was impossible for an unbeliever, while loving her husband's soul more than anything in the world, smiled when she thought of his disbelief ... 'Well, he is an unbeliever! Better let him be that.' (AK, pp. 778-9)

Levin has his way, thinks Kitty; I have mine. Is this calm acceptance of difference a limitation or an achievement? Are we to value Tolstoy's lack of such calm the more, or the less, in the light of Mrs Gaskell's novelistic acceptance? I shall be returning to these questions in the conclusion of this thesis. What is certain, meanwhile, is that Mrs Gaskell's species of calm left her increasingly free to dissolve her thinking into life's density and complexity in her later work, whereas Tolstoy's increasingly troubled vision pushed him further and further in the opposite direction, as we shall see in Section Two with regard to Tolstoy's final novel.

II Resurrection

At the opening of Resurrection, Nekhlyudov is brought face to face in the magistrates' court with the woman - now a prostitute and convict - whom he seduced and abandoned as a youth. Remembering how he had once loved her, 'with a good, pure love' and remembering himself 'as he had then

been', Nekhlyudov is forced to recognise in the ruin he has done to Maslova, the wretch he has also made of himself. (I quote at length here in order to register the full force of the internal volte-face experienced by the protagonist):

The difference between what he had been then and what he now was, was enormous: just as great, if not greater, than the difference between Katusha in church that night, and the prostitute who had been carousing with the merchant and whom they had condemned this morning. Then he was free and fearless, and innumerable possibilities lay ready to open before him; now he felt himself caught in the meshes of a stupid, empty, valueless, frivolous life, out of which he saw no means of extricating himself even if he wished to, which he hardly did. He remembered how proud he was at one time of his straightforwardness, how he had made a rule of always speaking the truth, and really had been truthful; and how he was now sunk deep in lies, the most dreadful of lies - lies considered as truth by all who surrounded him. And, as far as he could see, there was no way out of these lies. He had sunk in the mire, got used to it, wallowed in it.

How was he to break off his relations with Mary Vasilyevna and her husband in such a way as to be able to look him and his children in the eyes? How disentangle himself from Missy? How escape the contradiction of his recognition that holding land was unjust and his retention of the land inherited from his mother? How atone for his sin against Katusha? This last, at any rate, could not be left as it was. He could not abandon a woman he had loved, and satisfy himself by paying money to an advocate to save her from hard labour in Siberia. She had not even deserved hard labour. Atone for a fault by paying money? Had he not then, when he gave her the money, thought he was atoning for his fault?

And he clearly recalled to mind that moment when, having stopped her in the passage, he thrust the money into her apron-bib and ran away. 'Oh, that money!' he thought, with the same horror and disgust he

had then felt. 'Oh, dear! oh, dear! how disgusting,' he cried out aloud, as he had done then. 'Only a scoundrel, a knave, could do such a thing. And I - I am that knave, that scoundrel!' he went on aloud. 'But is it possible?' - he stopped and stood still - 'is it possible that I am really a scoundrel? - Well, who but I?' he answered himself.²⁶

The Nekhlyudov of paragraph one is a man who sees himself - a liar and a hypocrite - and is apparently forced to tolerate what he sees: 'He had sunk in the mire, got used to it, wallowed in it'. It is as if so long as Nekhlyudov can thus steadily see himself - from behind the protective attitude of cynical resignation and as if in the third-person - he can yet bear to be himself.

The Nekhlyudov of paragraph three, however, is a man who must suffer the external facts of himself as internal, first-person reality: 'Only a scoundrel, a knave, could do such a thing. And I - I am that knave, that scoundrel!'. The words Nekhlyudov speaks - and speaks aloud, the more emphatically to expel and externalise his guilt - all the more emphatically come back at him, as his self-judgement catches him pre-egoistically, beneath the safeguard of flattering self-conception. 'This man whom I behold, this liar, this hypocrite is - myself, none other, "who but I?"'.²⁶

Here is the Tolstoyan equivalent, then, of that moment

26. Leo Tolstoy, Resurrection, first published 1899, translated by Louise Maude (Oxford, 1994), pp. 110-111.

of ego collapse - the smash coming thus terribly, outside-
 in - which Michael Henchard experiences in The Mayor of
 Casterbridge when the furmity-woman reveals the truth of
 his past in the magistrates' court (where Henchard of
 course is himself the judge):

Everybody looked at Henchard. His face
 seemed strange, and in tint as if it had
 been powdered over with ashes. 'We don't
 want to hear your life and adventures,' said
 the second magistrate sharply, filling the
 pause which followed. 'You've been asked if
 you've anything to say bearing on the case.'

'That bears on the case. It proves that
 he's no better than I, and has no right to
 sit there in judgement upon me.'

'Tis a concocted story,' said the clerk.
 'So hold your tongue!'

'No - 'tis true.' The words came from
 Henchard. 'Tis as true as the light,' he
 said slowly. 'And upon my soul it does prove
 that I'm no better than she! And to keep out
 of any temptation to treat her hard for
 revenge, I'll leave her to you.'²⁷

"No - 'tis true." Henchard's words may constitute public
 confession, but they proceed from profound self-recognition.
 For in the same way that Nekhlyudov is forced literally to
 see the consequences of his crime when faced with Maslova in
 court, so the furmity-woman confronts Henchard with a
 visible memory of his disgrace whose own message is 'Tis
 true ... true as the light'. When Henchard speaks those
 words then, he does so as a man not simply owning up, but
 owning deep within himself the truth of his past, the

27. Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, first published
 1886, edited by Martin Seymour-Smith, (Harmondsworth,
 Middlesex, 1988), p. 275. Hereafter cited as MC.

memory of himself. Yet at the very moment of owning his real character and story he is also separating himself from the latter-day manifestations of that story - from Henchard as Mayor of Casterbridge, hypocrite and liar - to be, at this moment, Henchard 'true'. But it is Henchard's tragedy that he cannot repent and survive. He cannot stop and begin again, he can only go back and go down. For Henchard has no form of being apart from the wreck he has made of himself and his life. He has to live on in that wreck and see the wreckage through:

Small as the police-court incident had been in itself, it formed the edge or turn in the incline of Henchard's fortunes. On that day - almost at that minute - he passed the ridge of prosperity and honour, and began to descend rapidly on the other side. It was strange how soon he sank in esteem. Socially he had received a startling fillip downwards; and, having already lost commercial buoyancy from rash transactions, the velocity of his descent in both aspects became accelerated every hour. (MC, p. 291)

The moment when Henchard's past life comes back to punish him in the present is thus explicitly, in Hardy's novel, the beginning of the end. It is as if memory here were the secular equivalent of a God's eye view. After the moment of memory, the momentum 'downwards' in the novel's second half is proportional to Henchard's initial energy.

In Resurrection, on the contrary, the equivalent moment is, quite literally, the beginning of the second beginning - the start of the 'incline', the upturn. The

formal contrast with Hardy's novel, in making more manifest the different shape which Tolstoy chose to give to the same human story, makes clear too the different interest the story held for Tolstoy. For the fallen man who in Hardy's version falls the more, becomes in Resurrection the Christian mortal given a second chance, charged not with fulfilling his tragic destiny but now with the burden, duty and opportunity of reformulating it. Nekhlyudov's first duty, moreover, is to do what in Hardy's novel (bitterly enough) is the impossible. He has to begin again, that is, from within the same body, the same life, and begin again, what is more, without any 'downward fillip' of public disgrace objectively to aid reconstitution. He has to stay within a world which wholly sanctions his error: '[He was] sunk deep in lies, the most dreadful of lies - lies considered as truth by all who surrounded him'. How then does a person, this novel asks as its first big question, separate himself from his mistakes? How does he cease to identify with a mode of life and being which seems to have become the only life and being he feels he has?

How was he to break off his relations with Mary Vasilyevna and her husband in such a way as to be able to look him and his children in the eyes? How disentangle himself from Missy? How escape the contradiction of his recognition that holding land was unjust and his retention of the land inherited from his mother?

'How? ... How? ... How?' This is the dominant, urgent

question of Resurrection. Yet it is a question which does not replace so much as logically succeed the 'Why? What for?' of the earlier novels. For in Resurrection Tolstoy was not turning his back on the concerns of the earlier works, as critical opinion of the novel since its publication has suggested. 'The creator of Anna Karenina and the teeming life of War and Peace,' said a contemporary reviewer, '[has] dedicate[d] himself to another task nobler in his eyes':

[The earlier man] has in great part disappeared before the visionary and the gently stubborn reformer, the publisher of peace in a world of strife.²⁸

On the contrary, I shall be arguing in this section that

28. Unsigned review, 'Bookman', April 1900, Tolstoy:CH, p. 410. This view of Resurrection as marking a departure from the earlier works has been variously echoed in later twentieth-century criticism of the novel. 'If we set Resurrection to one side,' says George Steiner, 'it is clear that religious themes ... occupy a minor place in Tolstoyan fiction. ... By virtue of their comprehensiveness and vitality ... both War and Peace and Anna Karenina are images of the empiric world and chronicles of men's temporal work and days. ... In Resurrection [the thought of God] burns with intolerable brightness', Tolstoy or Dostoevsky (London, 1959), pp. 246-7. (Steiner does question, however, whether there is a 'decisive break' between the 'creator of War and Peace and the Christian ascetic of Resurrection'. 'Tolstoy's biography,' he says, 'and the record he has left us of his spiritual life bear out the impression of an underlying unity', *ibid.* pp. 247-8.) John Bayley also regrets what he sees to be the new direction of the later work. 'The unique and grand attraction of Tolstoy's writing,' says John Bayley, 'is the morning freshness of a morning already and irrevocably in the past. When he attempts to look forward, to be provisional - as in Resurrection - he is unconvincing', Tolstoy and the Novel, pp. 34-5. I return to the criticisms of Bayley and Steiner below, p. 296.

the Tolstoy of Resurrection was not departing from the concerns of War and Peace and Anna Karenina but in this, his final novel, returning to those concerns in order, as we shall see, specifically to respond to them. It is as if this were Tolstoy's own final second chance. For in asking at this juncture 'How does a person get free of the wrong story?' Tolstoy is re-embodiment and re-solving the problem which it was Anna Karenina's part to represent. Anna's story it is, after all, which in the early stages of the novel shadows Nekhlyudov's story as the wrong alternative, the story that might have been and might yet be. For even here, asking 'How?', Nekhlyudov is asking the right question in the wrong way, merely rhetorically, that is, as an anticipatory excuse for giving up before he has begun. So with Anna it is always the thought of the future which forestalls decision-making in the present - as when, for example, Vronsky urged her to tell Karenin everything. 'Very well; suppose I do so!' she says. 'Do you know what the result will be? I will tell you it all in advance':

'He will tell me clearly and precisely in his official manner that he cannot let me go, but will take what measures he can to prevent a scandal. And he will do what he says, quietly and accurately. This is what will happen. He is not a man, but a machine, and a cruel machine when angry.' (AK, pp. 188-9)

Anna's question is not 'Is this the right thing to do?' but 'What will happen should I choose to do this?'. Her fear of

future consequences, by preventing a settled decision, only leaves her more at the mercy of what happens to happen, making the present thought of the future all the more frightening as a result. It is this same vicious circle which Nekhlyudov began to create for himself when he first saw Maslova in court, and 'tried to consider it all as a chance incident, which would pass without affecting his manner of life':

'What a surprising coincidence that after all these years, during which I never saw her, this case should have come up today when I am on the jury, and that it is in the prisoner's dock I see her again! And how will it end? Oh, if they would only get on quicker!' (R, p. 85)

The external 'chance' which Nekhlyudov hopes will be on his side turns immediately against him: 'And how will it end? Oh, if only they would get on quicker'. Crucially, Nekhlyudov begins to turn his story the right way only when he stops trying to anticipate and thinks in the here and now:

How atone for his sin against Katusha? This last, at any rate, could not be left as it was.

It is here, where Nekhlyudov makes a decision without worrying about the consequences to himself, that he begins to separate himself from the wrong (Anna-like) sequence and lock himself instead into that sequence which he finds sanctioned at the close of the novel when he reads from the Sermon on the Mount. 'Take therefore no thought for the

morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof' (Matt. 6. 34.). Yet Nekhlyudov can only thus finally know the difference between the right and wrong sequence after he has himself seen the right sequence through. 'Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness,' the Gospel says to him on the final page of the novel, 'and all these things shall be added unto you':

'[But] we imagine ourselves to be masters of our lives, and think that life is given us for enjoyment. ... We seek for "these things" and have evidently failed to obtain them.' (R, p. 483)

A moral 'spokesman', is how Troyat, Tolstoy's biographer, describes Nekhlyudov - a character 'mechanically' put through the motions of a story in order to deliver the religious message of Tolstoyanism:

[The moral crisis] arrives on command, more, it would seem, at the author's will than as the consequence of the psychological impulses of his spokesman; and once it has begun, it proceeds with mechanical regularity.²⁹

But Nekhlyudov is no mere theological instrument; on the contrary, he is another of God's creatures who, quite as much as Levin, must follow the contours of his own story in order to earn the confirmation that formal religion finally provides. But in this novel the right form of life cannot be

29. Henri Troyat, Tolstoy (London, 1987), pp. 758-9.

left benignly to 'shape itself' around Nekhlyudov, since as part of his fall it no longer comes naturally, with the grain. It is Nekhlyudov, rather, who must shape it - and shape it consciously, deliberately, even mechanically if that is what it takes. The great realist power of this novel, in fact - and it is this which Troyat fails to appreciate - is its capacity to register with all the stamina and honesty of the earlier Tolstoy, the sheer human difficulty of 'firmly cutting a particular definite path through life' (AK, p.758) when that path goes not, like Levin's, with life and time but altogether against them.

Quite late in the novel, Nekhlyudov, is a man who has already come regeneratively far. He has emphatically pledged himself to atone to Maslova, 'even by marriage' if necessary (R, p. 140); and his sacrifice is all the more religiously authentic since, far from being (romantically) her rescuer, it is he who must follow her to hard labour in Siberia. Yet the same man, who has been capable of the highest religious heroism is now, on the very eve of his departure to Siberia, tempted back into his old life by the charms of a society beauty, Mariette:

While he was thinking of Maslova, the Senate's decision, his decision in any case to follow her, and his renunciation of his land - suddenly Mariette's face appeared with her sigh and glance as she said: 'When shall I see you again?' and her smile was so vivid that he smiled back as though he saw her. 'Shall I be doing right in going to Siberia? And have I done right in giving up

my wealth?' he asked himself.

And the answers to these questions on this Petersburg night, on which the light streamed into the window from under the blind, were quite indefinite. All seemed confused. He recalled his former state of mind, and the former sequence of his thoughts, but they no longer had their former force or validity.

'And supposing I have invented all this, and am unable to live it through - supposing I repent of having acted rightly,' he thought; and, unable to answer, he was seized with such anguish and despair as he had long not felt, and fell into a heavy sleep, such as he had formerly slept after a heavy loss at cards. (R, p. 315)

It is the old syndrome. Life breaks in and Nekhlyudov's certainty disappears. The 'answers' which before were endorsed at the primary level of being can now be recalled only secondarily in empty verbalisation of a 'former sequence of thought'. But it is despair and not subdued acceptance which now underwrites this loss. 'Supposing I have invented all of this, and am unable to live it through - supposing I repent of acting rightly?' At the root of Nekhlyudov's despair is that great Tolstoyan paradox of having the right thoughts and volitions still inside and at the mercy of the same incontrovertibly sexual body: 'Mariette's face appeared with her sigh and glance as she said: "When shall I see you again?" and her smile was so vivid that he smiled back as though he saw her'. It is here, where the body insists upon its own primacy, that Tolstoy might have found the second opportunity fail again, as Hardy does in what is avowedly his own novel of second chance.

In his preface to Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Hardy says:

This novel [is] one wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins after an event in her experience which has usually been treated as fatal to her part of protagonist, or at least as the virtual ending of her enterprises and hopes.³⁰

But the 'great campaign' of Tess's second life is defeated, at the critical moments when she might have told Clare of her past, by the very life-energies within her which made that campaign possible. 'I will tell you,' she promises to Clare, 'tell you my experiences - all about myself - all! ... tomorrow - next week'. But, Hardy goes on to say, in a new paragraph:

In reality, she was drifting into acquiescence. Every see-saw of her breath, every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with nature in revolt against her scrupulousness. (TD, p. 241)

Tess drifts into that tragic sequence where not telling sooner means telling 'too late' because she cannot help doing so - cannot help it biologically, that is. 'Her instinct of self-preservation,' Hardy tells us, 'was stronger than her candour'. At the very ground of Tess's being, Hardy insists in this novel, is that sheerly physical 'recuperative obstinacy'³¹, as he terms it, which needs no

30. Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, first published 1891, edited by David Skilton (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979), p. 37. Hereafter cited as TD.

31. TD, pp. 253, 314, 466.

permission. Hardy is perhaps at his most Tolstoyan in knowing all about the body, for no one knew better than Tolstoy the sheer difficulty of getting out of its primary reality or of holding onto conviction from within it. Yet this is the difficulty which Resurrection determinedly seeks to resolve. For what use were metaphysical answers to the questions 'Why? What for?' if in the return to life one must always be returned to oneself physically within it? Yet how did one get above that maddening sequence in Pierre and Prince Andrew, wherein the right thing, momentarily revealed, goes away?

Tolstoy's answer in Resurrection is quite specific. Waking the following morning, Nekhlyudov 'feels as if he had been guilty of some iniquity the day before':

He could not remember having done anything wrong, he had committed no evil act. But he had had evil thoughts. He had thought that all his present resolutions, to marry Katusha and to give up his land, were unachievable dreams; that he should be unable to bear it, that it was artificial, unnatural, and that he would have to go on living as he had lived before.

He had committed no evil action, but, what was far worse than an evil action, he had entertained evil thoughts, whence evil actions proceed. (R, pp. 315-6)

Nekhlyudov does not lapse back. He sees the second chance succeed because he resists giving in to the 'thought' that it must and will fail. Resistance to the wrong thought within him, crucial as it is at this point in his story, was all the more crucial at the earlier moment when his

resolution seemed most 'artificial' and 'unnatural' - when he first acted upon his decision to atone to Maslova. For then, on the point of pledging himself to a woman he neither loves nor desires, in the very teeth of his own aversion and in the face of Maslova's own declared wish that he would simply give her some money and leave, how easy, how natural it would have been to listen to the wrong 'voice' within him:

'This woman is dead,' Nekhlyudov thought, looking at the once sweet face, now defiled and puffy and lit by an evil glitter in the black, squinting eyes, which were now glancing at the hand in which he held the note, now following the inspector's movements; and for a moment he hesitated. The tempter that had been speaking to him in the night again raised his voice, trying to lead him out of the realm of his inner life into the realm of his outer life, away from the question of what he should do, to the question of what the consequences would be and what would be practical.

'You can do nothing with this woman,' said the voice; 'you will only tie a stone round your neck, which will drown you, and prevent you from being useful to others. Is it not better to give her all the money you have here, say goodbye, and finish with her for ever?' whispered the voice.

And yet he felt now, at this very moment, something most important was taking place in his soul - that his inner life was, as it were, wavering in the balance, so that the slightest effort would sink it to one side or the other. And he made this effort by calling to his assistance that God whose presence he had felt in his soul the day before, and that God responded instantly. He resolved to tell her everything now - at once.

'Katusha, I have come to ask you to forgive me.' (R, p. 162)

There are three distinct 'voices' here, in fact. Firstly, there is the voice of the 'tempter' (virtually the devil) trying to lead Nekhlyudov 'out of the realm of his inner life into the realm of his outer life'. Secondly there is the voice which speaks to Maslova - '"Katusha, I have come to ask you to forgive me"'. Thirdly there is the voice which determines Nekhlyudov thus to speak out: 'He made this effort by calling to his assistance that God whose presence he had felt in his soul the day before, and that God responded instantly'. This third voice is not itself God's voice but, as D.H. Lawrence would say, that 'voice' which is heard, as he puts it in Fantasia of the Unconscious³², when 'the whole self speaks':

When I say to myself: 'I am wrong,' knowing with sudden insight that I am wrong, then this is the whole self speaking, the Holy Ghost. It is no piece of mental inference. It is not just the soul sending forth a flash. It is my whole being speaking in one voice ... This voice of my being I may never deny.'³³

It was this 'voice' which Nekhlyudov did try to deny when he spoke 'aloud' at the first moment of recognising his guilt. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! how disgusting ... Only a scoundrel, a knave could do such a thing." Speaking out in that instance was Nekhlyudov's way of getting rid of the insight

32. A work which contains some of Lawrence's most vehement criticisms of Tolstoy (see below, p. 294).

33. D.H. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, first published 1922 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1977), pp. 133. Hereafter cited as Fantasia.

'"I am wrong"' and thus of throwing out, literally, the voice of his inner life. It is this 'inner voice' which the lawyer Ivan Ilych, of course, eschews to the very last:

'Then what do you want now? To live? Live how? Live as you lived in the law courts when the usher proclaimed "The judge is coming!" The judge is coming, the judge!' he repeated to himself. 'Here he is, the judge. But I'm not guilty!' he exclaimed angrily. 'What is it for?' ... But however much he pondered, he found no answer. And whenever the thought occurred to him, as it often did, that it all resulted from his not having lived as he ought to have done, he recalled at once the correctness of his whole life and dismissed so strange an idea.³⁴

The story of Nekhlyudov's second life might be seen above all as a response to the story of Ivan Ilych's death. For what was the good of finding out at the end of a life that one had not lived as one ought to have done? Why would a person not know the truth before the end - in time to set his life to rights? In Resurrection the inner voice is not left to the last moment. Yet the inner voice comes through at crucial moments in Nekhlyudov's story only as a result of his 'effort' to resist the voice of his 'outer life'. 'Have you not tried before to perfect yourself and become better, and nothing has come of it?' asks 'the voice of the tempter within' on the night before his declaration to Maslova:

34. Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych, first published 1886, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, in Tolstoy's Short Fiction, edited by Michael R. Katz (New York, 1991), pp. 161-2.

'What is the use of trying any more?' Are you the only one? - all are alike, such is life,' whispered the voice. But the free spiritual being, which alone is true, alone powerful, alone eternal, had already awakened in Nekhlyudov, and he could not but believe in it. Enormous though the distance was between what he wished to be and what he was, nothing appeared insurmountable to the newly awakened spiritual being.

'At any cost I will break this lie that binds me; will tell everybody the truth and act the truth,' he said resolutely, aloud.
(R, p. 112)

When Nekhlyudov speaks 'aloud' in this instance - as when he speaks out to Maslova ('He resolved to tell her everything now - at once') - it is the inner voice which is emphatically shedding the outer voice this time. Moreover, the great test for Nekhlyudov at such moments is to resist accepting a merely social version of the essential human sameness which Pierre baffledly recognises in War and Peace. 'It's all the same' is here put into the devil's social tones as temptation - 'All are alike'. Nekhlyudov's whole story in fact is that of a man eschewing the pressures of the outer life and suppressing the common-sensical considerations it urges in order to get clear to what it is that he wants to be' ('тем, чем хотел быть'³⁵) - as soul, that is, and not merely as self. And Nekhlyudov's story demonstrates again and again that it is only (literally) when he stops listening to others that he can

35. CW, XIII, p. 108. Compare 'Что ж ты хочешь?' ('What do you want?'), The Death of Ivan Ilych, CW, XII, p. 101.

hear himself. 'All this terrible change had come about,' Nekhlyudov realises after the first shock of seeing Maslova again, 'because he had ceased to believe himself and had taken to believing others':

This he had done because it was too difficult to live believing one's self: believing one's self, one had to decide every question, not in favour of one's animal I, which is always seeking for easy gratification, but in almost every case against it. Believing others there was nothing to decide; everything had been decided already, and always in favour of the animal I and against the spiritual. Nor was this all. Believing in his own self, he was always exposing himself to the censure of those around him; believing others, he had their approval. (R, p. 53)

The only 'real guide,' Lawrence emphatically agreed, is that of one's 'own soul's conscience' (Fantasia, p.134). Yet Lawrence would have heard in such a passage the voice of the Tolstoy whom he berates at the close of Fantasia for saying '"No" to the passion' at the end of Anna Karenina and at the end of his life 'and [drawing] into the dreary issue of a false conclusion':

His books were better than his life. ... Better Anna Karenina and Vronsky a thousand times ... than Tolstoy and Tolstoy-ism and that beastly peasant blouse the old man wore. Better passion and death than [a false or faked purpose]. (Fantasia, pp. 194-5)

A premature closing of accounts is what Tolstoy's later life and work seemed to Lawrence - a retreat from the wisdom of the novel into the formulaic '"isms"' of an explicit theology.

Certainly Resurrection, more explicitly than any other of Tolstoy's novels, bears witness to his need for a formal theology. Yet the urgent priority of Resurrection is not belief in 'a creed, or an idea or a tradition' or in any of the 'false' guides which Lawrence despised (Fantasia, p. 134). On the contrary the pre-eminent need which Tolstoy embodied in his protagonist in Resurrection - unequivocally and unmistakably - was that of 'believing in his own self'. "'How does one believe oneself?'" is Nekhlyudov's urgent question to the old man he encounters on the ferry towards the close of the book.³⁶ Thus it is that Resurrection bears witness first and foremost to a need in Tolstoy which was identical to the one which Lawrence himself experienced in his later works - 'the absolute need' as he puts it in Fantasia to 'find what the heart really believes in after all ... what the heart really wants'. For 'it isn't our business,' he says, 'to live anybody's life or to die anybody's death except our own':

But to be still and ignore the false fine frenzy of the seething world. To turn away, now, each one into the stillness and solitude of his own soul ... To retreat to the very centre, and there to be filled with a new strange stability. (Fantasia, pp. 10, 145-6)

It is as Tolstoy's own 'retreat to the very centre' that Resurrection deserves to be read. And one cannot help

36. 'Как же себе верить?', CW, XIII, p. 431. (See R, p. 456.)

wishing that Lawrence himself - the writer who most of all wanted to get beyond Hardy's dead end - had read it as such.³⁷ For Lawrence, more than any other reader or critic of Tolstoy perhaps, might have appreciated and even valued the losses and sacrifices such a retreat necessarily involved. Indeed, Tolstoy could find what his own heart believed only by 'turning away' from the outer life - only by eschewing, that is, his own 'unique' capacity for 'being the great world he writes about' which, says John Bayley, 'makes him more lifegiving than any other novelist'. In 'forsaking worldliness' in Resurrection, says Bayley, Tolstoy forsook his own gift.³⁸ So he did; and so he had to do. But this was not simply the 'teacher and prophet in him [doing] violence to the artist' as George Steiner asserts. Nor were the 'comprehensiveness and vitality' of the earlier works 'sacrificed to the urgencies of rhetoric'.³⁹ Rather, they were sacrificed for the sake of the 'inner voice'. For it was only by strictly narrowing himself to his protagonist's field of vision - by seeing through this narrative sequence like a horse in blinkers - that Tolstoy could prevent himself from being distracted by his own gift for life. Thus it is that Tolstoy had actually to avoid

37. He did not, of course. 'The papery lips of Resurrection whisper: "Alas! I would have been a novel. But Leo spoiled me', D.H. Lawrence, 'The Novel', first published 1925 in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, p. 187.

38. See Tolstoy and the Novel, pp. 32, 250, 260.

39. Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, pp. 92, 246.

writing the novel which he had expressed a desire to write in 1889 and which Steiner (rather curiously) supposes Resurrection to be⁴⁰:

'I sometimes want to write and, can you imagine, it's usually a novel actually - a broad, free one like Anna Karenina which could include without any strain everything that seemed comprehensible to me, from a new, unusual and useful angle.' (Letters:T, p. 442)

'Broad and free' Resurrection is not. A truly great novel it surely would have been could Tolstoy have depicted the outer life together with Nekhlyudov's resistance to it. But just how difficult such a project would have been perhaps only Mrs Gaskell, in her own most socio-religious novel - itself a story of fall and redemption - can help us to appreciate. For it is in Ruth that we can see what might have happened to Nekhlyudov's resolutions from within the usual density of the English nineteenth-century novel.

Mr Benson and his sister, having taken Ruth into their care, must now decide what it is best to do for Ruth and her unborn illegitimate child. 'It will require some time, and much Christian love, to find out the best way,' says Mr Benson as he tries to win his sister away from her moral aversion to Ruth's 'sin' and towards Christian forgiveness. 'The way I think it would be right to act in would be this':

40. Since he describes the novel as having the 'nakedness of a tract': see Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, pp. 92, 284.

'She has incurred a responsibility - that we both acknowledge. She is about to become a mother, and have the direction and guidance of a little tender life. ... I can imagine that if the present occasion be taken rightly, and used well, all that is good in her may be raised to a height unmeasured but by God; while all that is evil and dark may, by His blessing, fade and disappear in the pure light of her child's presence. Oh, Father! listen to my prayer, that her redemption may date from this time. Help us to speak to her in the loving spirit of thy Holy Son!'

The tears were full in his eyes; he almost trembled in his earnestness. He was faint with the strong power of his conviction, and with his inability to move his sister. But she was shaken. She sat very still for a quarter of an hour or more, while he leaned back, exhausted by his own feelings.

'The poor child!' said she, at length - 'the poor, poor child! what it will have to struggle through and endure! Do you remember Thomas Wilkins, and the way he threw the registry of his birth and baptism back in your face? Why, he would not have the situation; he went to sea and was drowned, rather than present the record of his shame.'

'I do remember it all. It has often haunted me. She must strengthen her child to look to God, rather than to man's opinion. It will be the discipline, the penance, she has incurred. She must teach it to be (humanly speaking) self-dependent.'

'But after all,' said Miss Benson (for she had known and esteemed poor Thomas Wilkins, and had mourned over his untimely death, and the recollection thereof softened her) - 'after all, it might be concealed. The very child need never know its illegitimacy.'

'How?' asked her brother.

'Why - we know so little about her yet; but in that letter, it said she had no friends; - now, could she not go into quite a fresh place, and be passed off as a widow?'

Ah, tempter! unconscious tempter! Here was a way of avoiding the trials for the poor

little unborn child, of which Mr Benson had never thought. It was the decision - the pivot, on which the fate of years moved; and he turned it the wrong way. But it was not for his own sake. For himself, he was brave enough to tell the truth; for the little helpless baby, about to enter a cruel, biting world, he was tempted to evade the difficulty.⁴¹

'If a person does not do what is right the very second he knows it is the right thing to do - then ... the knowing becomes more and more obscured,' says Kierkegaard. 'For, alas! the good must be done immediately, directly it is known.'⁴² It was manifestly this proper immediacy (acting 'at once') which, at the critical moment, saved Nekhlyudov as surely as delay almost damned him, letting in those secondary, common-sensical considerations which threaten to become primary: 'For a moment he hesitated ... You can do nothing with this woman ... you will only tie a stone round your neck'. Time too, it seems, is the Bensons' enemy; for it is in that lengthy silence - 'She sat very still for a quarter of an hour or more, while he leaned back, exhausted by his own feelings' - that the problem seems actually to begin. It is here that Mr Benson's words move his sister 'the wrong way', to a human compassion for the child's situation which dictates that the suffering be

41. Mrs Gaskell, Ruth, first published 1853, edited by Alan Shelston (Oxford, 1991), pp. 120-22.

42. Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto to Death, first published 1849, translated by Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1989), p. 126.

removed rather than religiously 'used'. Yet it is not merely time which is the problem so much as the fact that the couple share that silence separately and yet still together. For were Mr Benson alone, there would be some of that 'time' for the silent working out of necessary plans through principle rather than reaction: 'It will require some time, and much Christian love, to find out the best way'. Alone, that is, Mr Benson might have seen the right sequence through. But, not alone, his sister being there, the human and religious modes have to be lived out together:

He was faint with the strong power of his conviction, and with his inability to move his sister.

The human level, though second, is not actually secondary here for being simultaneous; and it is all too easy, Mrs Gaskell recognises, for the human level to take precedence from this point onwards. For it comes as no surprise to Mrs Gaskell that humans together, immersed in the reality of their own human relationship, with its shared memory of mutual compassion ('Do you remember Thomas Wilkins' ... 'I do remember it all') should find it so difficult to make a decision for another human being on purely religious grounds. So it is that the drift away from the right principle gathers momentum from the very humanness of the brother's and sister's own relationship - something which is not seen as temptation and is thus all the more so - and it

is really this which makes them go the way of compromise. It is all the harder, moreover, for Mr Benson to resist this temptation since he is acting not for his own sake but for that of a child. 'For himself he was brave enough to tell the truth; for the little helpless baby, about to enter a cruel, biting world, he was tempted to evade the difficulty.' It is not simply the case that compromise is understandable in this scenario and vision. The message of this passage is tougher than that and the problem it represents far deeper. For it is as if for Mrs Gaskell such failure of principle was an inevitable condition of living in a world among others. That a principle, embodied, is more likely than not to be compromised by those who mean to represent it, seems to be one of those facts of life which is already settled for her. And that is why, I suppose, Mrs Gaskell was not generally interested, explicitly at least, in failure of principle of this kind. It is what is left over from the dispersal of principle - the complex and refractory matter which results - that interests her most, since, for Mrs Gaskell, that is where the real actually begins. It is, moreover, where nineteenth-century realism itself begins, turning the 'pivot' the 'wrong way', we might say, towards the dispersed and relative, where Maria Edgeworth's Helen would have turned it a different way. At the moment in Resurrection when Nekhlyudov puts 'the question of what he should do'

before 'the question of what the consequences would be and what would be practical' it is as if Tolstoy were turning the pivot back again, taking the nineteenth-century novel back into the realm of the ethical. But where in Helen the individual was reformed socially, in a version of a moral society, the very operation of ethics takes Nekhlyudov outside of society and actually beyond the realm of the ethical itself.

Witnessing the brutal treatment of the prisoners bound for Siberia at the hands of the various agents of officialdom, Nekhlyudov realises that in order for such 'crimes' to continue 'it is only necessary that these people should be governors, inspectors, policemen' who are fully convinced that their role as government servants allows them to treat men as 'things' rather than as fellow human beings⁴³:

'It all lies in the fact that men think there are circumstances when one may deal with human beings without love. But there are no such circumstances. We may deal with things without love ... but we cannot deal with men without it ... If one deals

43. "'All these people," thinks Nekhlyudov, "are for the greater part kind people, cruel only because they serve"' (R, p. 382). 'What is true of man's [alienated] relationship to his labour,' says Marx, 'is also true of his relationship to other men. ... Estranged labour estranges man ... from himself ... from his life activity ... from his human essence .. . Because of this it also estranges man from his species. It turns his species-life into a means for his individual life', 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', in Marx:EW, pp. 328-30.

carelessly with [men] one will injure them and will oneself be injured. ... Just as you can only eat without injuring yourself when you are hungry, so you can only usefully and without injury deal with men when you love. Only let yourself deal with a man without love ... and there are no limits to the suffering you will bring on yourself, as all my life proves. Yes, yes, it is so,' thought Nekhlyudov; 'it is true; yes, it is true.' (R, pp. 381-83)

'Am I mad,' Nekhlyudov asks himself repeatedly, 'that I see what others do not, or are they mad who do these things I see?' (R, pp. 447, 478). 'Humanly speaking, he is insane,' Kierkegaard would say [my emphasis] 'and cannot make himself understood to anyone':

The paradox that keeps [the man of faith] at the extremity and which he cannot make clear to anyone else ... is that he puts himself as the single individual in an absolute relation to the absolute. ... On the one hand it contains the expression of extreme egoism (doing this ... deed for his own sake) and on the other the expression of the most absolute devotion (doing it for God's sake). ... Faith is this paradox, and the single individual is quite unable to make himself intelligible to anyone.⁴⁴

Nekhlyudov's new life may begin (where Henchard's own life begins to end) - in the realm of the ethical. But from the moment Nekhlyudov resolves at any cost to 'tell the truth, and act the truth', he oversteps the ethical altogether and goes beyond it into the 'absolute'. Every decision he makes in this novel, in fact - including the lonely

44. Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, first published 1843, translated by Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), pp. 90, 99, 103. Hereafter cited as FT.

decision to make amends to a woman he has wronged - is 'an act of purely personal virtue' (FT, p. 88). What he does, he does for God's sake.

Hence, then, Nekhlyudov's acceptance of the scenario with which the novel concludes. For when Simonson, a fellow-convict, offers to marry Maslova in Nekhlyudov's place, Nekhlyudov's final redemptive act suddenly becomes unnecessary. Yet this has not the irony merely for Nekhlyudov which Bidy's marrying Jo has for Pip, for instance, at the close of Great Expectations - Dickens's own novel about second chances and making amends (and perhaps his most Hardy-esque work):

The purpose was, that I would go to Bidy, that I would show her how humbled and repentant I came back ... Then, I would say to her, ... 'Dear Bidy, if you can tell me that you will go through the world with me, you will surely make it a better world for me, and me a better man for it, and I will try hard to make it a better world for you.'

Such was my purpose.⁴⁵

At the equivalent moment in Resurrection when, with the news of Maslova's pardon, Nekhlyudov's own journey of redemption might be completed and the circle closed, the completion itself simply ceases to matter:

All that Nekhlyudov could have hoped for Katusha, and for himself also, had happened. It was true that her new position brought new complications with it. ... Now there was

45. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, first published 1860-61, edited by Angus Calder (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981), pp. 481-2.

nothing to prevent their living together; and Nekhlyudov had not prepared himself for that. And besides, what of her relations with Simonson? What was the meaning of her words yesterday? And, if she consented to a union with Simonson, would it be good or bad? He could not unravel all these questions and gave up thinking about them. 'It will all clear itself up later on,' he thought. 'I must not think about it now, but must convey the glad news to her as soon as possible, and set her free. ... When the time comes I shall see.' (R, pp. 463-5)

What replaces irony at the close of Resurrection is faith. For here Nekhlyudov has arrived at that deeply religious trusting to time to decide the outcome which was Holman's achievement in Cousin Phillis, and which Mrs Gaskell herself implicitly embodies. Once again, it is as if we see Tolstoy and Mrs Gaskell arriving at the same place from different starting-points. For the whole message of Resurrection runs directly counter to that acceptance of a fallen human world which we have seen Mrs Gaskell to represent. If Nekhlyudov can now leave his life to 'shape itself' it is only because he is himself reshaped from within. Reconstitution is the price of salvation for Nekhlyudov no more nor less than it was for Maria Edgeworth's Cecilia. That is why Resurrection peculiarly belongs at the close of a thesis which began with Helen. For in Resurrection - Tolstoy's Crime and Punishment, we might say - the system of judgement and penalty which Mrs Gaskell banished in Wives and Daughters with regard to Cynthia, now

returns in relation to Tolstoy's last protagonist⁴⁶, and returns now in religious fulfilment of a pressing human need. For Nekhlyudov is a man who wants to be punished far more than he also wants to get away with his crime. Yet what his story demonstrates is that in order to recapture, in a fallen world, a system wherein one must be lost in order to be found, a human being must do what is, humanly speaking, 'impossible' - he must, in Kierkegaard's words, 'close his eyes and hurl himself trustingly into the absurd' (FT, p. 63). For Nekhlyudov's determination to be what he 'wants' to be - absolute to his decision, regardless of circumstance or consequence - is 'absurd', anarchic. It makes no sense from any human point of view but that of 'the single individual' since only the doing of it proves its possibility: "'Is it only this? ... [Can it] be so simple?'" Nekhlyudov asks himself when he reads from the Gospels at the close of the novel: 'And the inner voice of his whole being said, "'Yes, this is all"' (R, 480-1).

What Nekhlyudov's whole life 'proves' (and what the passage from Ruth, in its own way, equally demonstrates) is that seeing through the consequences of that 'absolute relation' is what the individual only and alone can do:

He who walks the narrow path of faith no one can advise, no one understand ... [The man of faith] is always absolute isolation ... He is the individual, absolutely nothing but

46. His last within the form of the novel, at least.

the individual, without connections and complications. (FT, pp. 95, 107-8)

That a person can walk that 'narrow path of faith' only from the very verge of life - or at the end of a life, where the 'connections' and 'complications' are fewer - is what Resurrection, as a novel, seems also to show. For only when he was clear of the responsibilities and sheer density of mid-life, it seems, was Tolstoy free to jettison the outer life and narrow down to what concerned himself alone, as a writer and as a man. Tolstoy himself made no distinction: 'You think that I am one thing and my writing is another,' he wrote to his wife in 1885. 'But my writing is the whole of me. ... All my works ... have been nothing more or less than my life' (Letters:T, II, p. 399). If the inner voice was not left to the last moment, it was left to Tolstoy's final novel. Resurrection was Tolstoy's last effort at getting through to those 'simple'⁴⁷, absolute truths which in the earlier works had come and gone. So it is that Resurrection stands testimony not to 'the last weakness of a great man'⁴⁸, as Lawrence says. In War and Peace and Anna Karenina, time and again, Tolstoy brought reality to bear upon his protagonist in rueful acceptance

47. 'просто': the word is used a lot.

48. That of wanting 'the absolute', wanting 'to be absolute'. 'No man can be absolute ... absolutely good or absolutely right, nor absolutely loveable ... nor absolutely loving. Even Jesus ... was only relatively good and relatively right', D.H. Lawrence, 'The Novel', in Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, p. 187.

that life will not be used as a resolution to a mental problem or as a means of satisfying a metaphysical need. More vigorously and indefatigably than anyone else, Tolstoy had paid what was due to life. Who can blame the great man if in this, his last great work - and with equally dogged resistance to the outer life now - he saw his duty more to himself?

CONCLUSION

TOLSTOY OR MRS GASKELL?

In the introductory chapter to Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, George Steiner says:

A reader may regard [Tolstoy and Dostoevsky] as the two principle masters of fiction ... he may find in their novels the most inclusive and searching portrayal of life. But press him closely and he will choose between them. If he tells you which he prefers and why, you will, I think have penetrated into his own nature. The choice between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky foreshadows what existentialists would call un engagement; it commits the imagination to one or the other of two radically opposed interpretations of man's fate ... Tolstoy and Dostoevsky exemplify 'an insoluble controversy, in which two sets of assumptions, two fundamental conceptions of existence, confront each other'.¹

Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy, I am forced to conclude at the close of this thesis, present us with just such a choice as Steiner here describes. I say forced, not only because, as I shall be arguing, this is not a choice one would want to have to make, but also because it is not a choice one might expect to have to make. For a reader might well assume that

1. George Steiner, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky (London, 1959), pp. 10-11. In the final sentence of this extract Steiner is quoting from N.A. Berdiaev, L'Esprit de Dostoievski, translated by A. Nerville (Paris, 1946).

Mrs Gaskell, on the one hand, and Tolstoy, on the other, would offer complementary rather than alternative visions. By offering the completest understanding of life now in one case immersed in the midst of life, now in the other struggling even from within for transcendence beyond it, Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy ought, we feel, to give us the best of both worlds. Yet to inhabit now one world or authorial mind, now the other, as increasingly I have been attempting to do in this thesis, is to meet again and again with the paradox which was one of the subjects of Chapter Five: the paradox of moving between two views which seem to be each the other side of the other, like war and peace, sickness and health - opposites which are yet reciprocally meaningful. Mrs Gaskell and Tolstoy offer and represent two close and yet finally different modes and visions, such that the truths which seem incontrovertible from within one mode or mind cannot be sustained when we cross from that mind to the other.

We do, then, have to choose. And in order finally to demonstrate as clearly as possible the terms of that choice I turn to two shorter works - Tolstoy's The Kreutzer Sonata and Mrs Gaskell's Cranford. These works are particularly suited to my purpose not only because these parable-like novellas present us with a more distilled version of the respective visions of these writers, but also because both works - one explicitly, the other implicitly -

characteristically embody a recognition that what can be seen from outside of life is not the same as what can be seen from within it.

Having been driven by jealousy brutally to kill his wife, Pozdnyshev is now forced to understand his own story from the outside. Describing the increasingly hostile relations between himself and his wife, Pozdnyshev recalls their first quarrel:

'I call it a quarrel, but it wasn't really a quarrel, only the disclosure of the abyss that existed between us. Amorousness was exhausted by the satisfaction of sensuality and we were left confronting one another in our true relation: that is, as two egotists quite alien to each other who wished to get as much pleasure as possible each from the other. ... I didn't understand that this cold and hostile relation was our normal state, I didn't understand it because at first this hostile attitude was soon concealed from us by a renewal of redistilled sensuality, that is by love-making. I thought we had quarrelled and made up again, and that it wouldn't recur. But ... again we ceased to need one another, and another quarrel occurred. ... Then a third and a fourth followed and I realized that it was not accidental; it was bound to happen and would happen, and I was horrified at the prospect before me. ... In the depths of my soul I felt from the first weeks that I was lost ... but like everybody else I didn't wish to acknowledge this to myself (I should not have acknowledged it even now except for the end that followed) and I concealed it not only from others but from myself as well. Now I'm astonished that I failed to see my real position.'²

2. Leo Tolstoy, The Kreutzer Sonata, first published 1889, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, in Tolstoy's Short Fiction, edited by Michael R. Katz (New York, 1991), pp. 193-4. Hereafter cited as KS.

The reconciliations between husband and wife are not real reconciliations any more than their quarrels are 'really' quarrels. For the couple 'make up' only to save themselves from not being made up. Their love-making is no more than a reactive symptom of their fear of being confronted day-to-day with the reality of the abyss which separates them. 'One must of course finish it somehow,' Pozdnyshev later says, 'and life goes on in the old way' (KS, p. 210). Yet each time they seek to close over the abyss, the more frighteningly it confronts them in the aftermath of satiety, and all the more must they try to conceal it from themselves. Moreover, the more habitual it becomes for them merely to 'finish' hostilities in lieu of resolving them, the less can they see that the very solution they seize upon is itself the cause of the problem: 'We didn't understand that this love and animosity were one and the same animal feeling, only at opposite poles' (KS, p. 203-5). What this couple generate between them, in fact, is another 'horrifying' version of that reactive pattern of behaviour which we saw taking over in Anna and which likewise is apparently out of this couple's own control: 'I realised that it was not accidental; it was bound to happen and would happen'. The longer the bad is left to go on, all the more must it go on, until, like Anna, husband and wife are caught in a horribly self-perpetuating and mutually destructive sequence of emotion. 'I am telling you how I

killed my wife,' Pozdnyshev insists:

'They asked me at the trial with what and how I killed my wife. They thought I killed her with a knife on the 5th of October. It was not then that I killed her, but much earlier.' (KS, p. 195)

'Now I'm astonished,' he says, 'that I failed to see my real position.' Yet the repeated message of this novella is that it is only from outside of his own story that Pozdnyshev can understand it.

Pozdnyshev goes on:

'To live like that would have been awful had we understood our position: but we neither understood nor saw it. Both salvation and punishment for man lie in the fact that if he lives in the wrong way he can befuddle himself so as not to see the misery of his position. ... Thus we lived in a perpetual fog, not seeing the condition we were in. And if what did happen had not happened, I should have gone on living like that to old age and should have thought, when dying, that I had led a good life. I should not have realized the abyss of misery and the horrible falsehood in which I wallowed.'
(KS, pp. 204)

Pozdnyshev could not recognise the truth about his life and still bear to go on with it. Yet sheerly by virtue of going on with it, he would be incapable of seeing the truth about it. For he could not get out of the reality of the merely contingent but apparently necessary mode of life which overtook him as a result of his avoiding the truth of his condition. Like Anna, Pozdnyshev was caught in a terrible vicious circle - condemned to perpetuate a situation whose complex horror was out of all proportion to its cause, and

damned all the more because the befuddling mess of his existence masqueraded as 'salvation'. And like Anna also, therefore, Pozdnyshev has literally and violently to end his own story in order to be free of it: 'Only after such torments as I've endured ... have I understood wherein the root of the matter lies - understood what ought to be, and therefore seen all the horror of what is' (KS, p 181). It is that 'ought to be' that Tolstoy fights for, to the very verge of the inhuman.

The Kreutzer Sonata is the extreme case. Tolstoy himself said (in 1891), 'There was something nasty about The Kreutzer Sonata. Any mention of it is terribly offensive to me' (Letters:T, II, p. 478). Indeed Pozdnyshev's cry of 'Everything reversed ... everything reversed ... terrible, terrible, terrible' (KS, p. 181) has all the anguished bitterness of the dying Jude's 'It's too late, too late for me'³. Yet if The Kreutzer Sonata was indeed Tolstoy's most Hardy-esque work, Tolstoy's own 'full look at the worst'⁴, it was not, of course, his final work, as Jude the Obscure was Hardy's final novel. The vision of this novella (as Tolstoy himself recognised) needed correction, and found such

3. Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, first published 1896, edited by C.H. Sisson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), p. 480.

4. 'Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst', Thomas Hardy, 'In Tenebris II' (1895-6) in The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, edited by James Gibson (London, 1976), p. 168.

correction by being put into more affirmative mode both in Resurrection and, as we shall see, in the later parables. For The Kreutzer Sonata explains why those later works need to push so doggedly against the grain of life. They do so out of the terrible recognition which is arrived at in Podnyshev's story that to go with life's grain is inevitably to be 'lost'. 'What's so surprising,' says Pozdnyshev, 'is that nobody wants to see what's so clear and evident [and] very simple' (KS, p. 195). The danger is that of losing one's way in a merely formal, fraudulent complexity which human beings involuntarily mistake for the given facts of life ('it was bound to happen and would happen') and which prevents them from seeing through the befogging multiplicity to the 'simple'⁵, saving truth.

Yet one has only to try to hold this thought when faced with the reading of life which follows, to experience the full force of the insoluble clash of visions with which Tolstoy and Mrs Gaskell present us.

5. The word, as in Resurrection, is 'npocto', CW, XII, p. 151. (See above, p. 307). And Nekhlyudov's own greatest moments occur when, like the dispersal of a cloud, the apparently insoluble complications of his life suddenly resolve themselves. Recalling how formerly he had become 'tangled up' when trying to make decisions 'because there were so many considerations connected with each problem' he now puts the same problems to himself and is surprised how 'simple' they are. 'Everything was simple now because he was not thinking of what would be the result for himself ... but only of what he ought to do' (R, pp. 246-7). As John Bayley rightly points out Nekhlyudov's 'power to simplify' is repeatedly associated with the white night over Petersburg, Tolstoy and the Novel, p. 257.

A mother writes to her son (her favourite child) who, after being severely punished for a foolish prank by his father, has run away from home. After much desperate searching for the child, the letter is a last resort and a last hope, directed (fruitlessly as it turns out) to the home of Peter's schoolfellow:

'MY DEAREST PETER,

You did not think we should be so sorry as we are, I know, or you would never have gone away. You are too good. Your father sits and sighs till my heart aches to hear him. He cannot hold up his head for grief; and yet he only did what he thought was right. Perhaps he has been too severe, and perhaps I have not been kind enough; but God knows how we love you, my dear only boy.'⁶

The tender, poignant emphasis of that 'I know' in the first sentence is this mother's heart-gift to her son as she sees, for his sake, that the pain he has caused her was unintended. Yet the loving mother is at the same time a loving wife, feeling with her husband - 'you did not think we should be so sorry as we are' - and also for him: 'your father sits and sighs until my heart aches to hear him'. The deeper poignancy here is that the woman cannot see that her tender generosity is at her own expense, any more than the husband can help paining his wife the more as he suffers so intensely for her sake: 'He cannot hold

6. Mrs Gaskell, Cranford, first published 1851-53, edited by Peter Keating (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1988), p. 100. Hereafter cited as Cranford.

up his head for grief'. 'And yet', the sentence goes on - as if we were heading for some saving thought or some way out of this situation in which (as in Cousin Phillis) everyone is innocently hurting themselves and everyone else - 'and yet he only did what he thought was right'. But the extra thought, so typically with Mrs Gaskell, does not lead out of the difficulty but back into the thick of it, adding to that very thickness. For the prose here remains undemonstratively loyal to the fact that there is no way of seeing through the thick complexity of this situation to some single, 'simple' solution. For the harm cannot be separated from the love whence it comes. No more can husband and wife separate themselves from one another: 'Perhaps he ... and perhaps I ... but God knows how we love you.' 'The root of the matter' lies as hidden within this prose as, for Mrs Gaskell, it must remain hiddenly embedded in the texture of life itself. For whilst this marital or family syntax is deeply the problem, it is also deeply its own solution, tacitly generating yet tacitly holding together this rich life matter which lies too deep for formal explanation or dramatic resolution. And it is just because it is not possible to think, say or do anything about this situation that Mrs Gaskell's answer here is sheerly to immerse herself in its reality.

What Mrs Gaskell offers to us at such times is a reading of life so steeped in itself as to bear quietly

magnificent testimony to her own acceptance of limitation in the face of life's intractable mysteries. So quiet is her own testimony, in fact, that only Tolstoy's intolerance of those mysteries can begin to show us how great an achievement Mrs Gaskell's apparently easy acceptance of them really is. Yet that very ease - 'and yet he only did what he thought was right' - can make Tolstoy's inability to accept limitation as the human situation seem itself like a limitation, a sort of un-grown-up perversity or stubbornness.

Yet consider what happens to such an interpretation of dissatisfaction when we move back from Mrs Gaskell's life-vision to the great religious problem which is Tolstoy's. 'But why live?' Pozdnyshev asks. 'If life has no aim, if life is given for life's sake, there's no reason for living' (KS, p. 191). The question now becomes not how did Tolstoy fail to get beyond his need for some all-resolving simplicity, but how could any mortal bear to do without it?

What makes it so difficult, in fact, to choose between Mrs Gaskell's immanent vision on the one hand, and Tolstoy's quasi-transcendent vision on the other, is that they both seem to offer something that human nature cannot do without. For to forego the terrifying and sometimes cruel Tolstoyan push for explicit solutions which we find in The Kreutzer Sonata, is to be left with a vision of a fallen

relative world in which badness must go irremediably on. Cynthia, that is to say, is the price we pay for choosing Mrs Gaskell. Yet, on the other hand, one cannot resolve the situation depicted in the letter to Peter without sacrificing what is most to be valued within it. For these creatures cannot help their own trouble only because they are 'too good' to see that their very goodness is in part the cause of it. Of course the father has been too rigid, the son too reactive, the mother perhaps too weak. But to insist on explicitness, and on spelling out such faults in bitter isolation, is to forego the vision of goodness going on, implicitly and involuntarily, which Mrs Gaskell gives to us in Cranford, and gives to us most movingly in the example of Miss Matty. For there can be no more powerful counter to the scorching vision of human fallenness we find in Pozdnyshév's story, than the sheerly simple goodness which we find lovingly protected by the surrounding comedy of Cranford.

For example: Miss Matty has been invited to dine at the home of Mr Holbrook, the man who 'had offered' to her in her youth and whom she was forced to reject. She now eats dinner, then, with the man who might have been her husband, in 'the place which might have been her home':

When the ducks and green peas came, we looked at each other in dismay; we had only two-pronged, black-handled forks. It is true, the steel was as bright as silver; but what were we to do? Miss Matty

picked up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs, much as Aminé ate her grains of rice after her previous feast with the Ghoul. Miss Pole sighed over her delicate young peas as she left them on one side of her plate untasted; for they would drop between the prongs. I looked at my host: the peas were going wholesale into his capacious mouth, shovelled up by his large round-ended knife. I saw, I imitated, I survived! My friends, in spite of my precedent, could not muster up courage enough to do an ungenteel thing; and, if Mr Holbrook had not been so heartily hungry, he would probably have seen that the good peas went away almost untouched. (Cranford, pp. 69, 72, 74-5)

Mrs Gaskell plays up the comedy here in order tactfully to play down the innocently sexual matter within it. For whilst Miss Pole - her own hunger notwithstanding - is all genteel resistance to the fulsome manliness of that 'capacious mouth', Miss Matty, 'picking up her peas, one by one, on the point of her prongs', mutely and delicately makes return to her former lover of the sacred offering he had once made to her. That the tribute is not noticed by the person for whose sake it is made, is truly sad. Yet it is just because Miss Matty's small, unintended goodness must always risk going unnoticed that we prize it all the more. Miss Matty, in fact, is the counter-embodiment of the paradox which Pozdnyshév represents. For could Miss Matty see the value of her simple generosity, then it would cease to be the poignantly valuable thing that it is. 'There was no use telling her,' says the narrator - when she finds Miss Matty adding an extra almond-comfit to every ounce she sells 'by

"way of make-weight" as she called it' - 'that the fifth comfit weighed a quarter of an ounce, and made every sale into a loss to her pocket' (Cranford, pp. 204-5). There is no use either, Mrs Gaskell knows, in trying to explain the paradox that she quietly signals here - namely, that were Miss Matty to know or to care for what she loses by her goodness, a better sense of 'loss' would not be our gain. Miss Matty's sad, simple deeds are not wasted because the very sadness of them is their gift - a sadness that does one vicarious good in the world. 'We all love Miss Matty,' is the last sentence of Cranford 'and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us' (Cranford, p. 218). It is a Christian ending to Mrs Gaskell's version of a Tolstoyan peasant tale.

Yet this vision of the happy power of goodness can seem so merely sentimental and unearned if we mistake Cranford for a reading of life first time around, as it were. Thus it is that once again we seem to need Tolstoy - that great first-time around man - to show us how to value a work like Cranford, through the example, now, of one of his own peasant tales, Master and Man. Lost in a snowstorm with his peasant worker Nikita, Vasily Andreevich has left the peasant to die in a desperate attempt to save himself. Having gone literally round in circles in an effort to find the road, he comes back to the same spot where Nikita is freezing to death:

'Give what you owe to me to my lad, or to my wife, no matter.'

'Why, are you really frozen?' asked Vasily Andreevich.

'I feel it's my death. Forgive me for Christ's sake ...' said Nikita in a tearful voice ...

Vasily Andreevich stood silent and motionless for half a minute. Then suddenly, with the same resolution with which he used to shake hands when making a good purchase, he took a step back and began raking the snow off Nikita and out of the sleigh. Having done this he hurriedly undid his girdle, opened out his fur coat, and having pushed Nikita down lay down on top of him, covering him not only with his fur coat but with the whole of his body, which glowed with warmth. ... At first and for a long time Nikita lay motionless, then he sighed deeply and moved.

'There, and you say you're dying. Lie still and get warm, that's our way...' began Vasily Andreevich.

But to his great surprise he could say no more, for tears came to his eyes and his lower jaw began to quiver rapidly. He stopped speaking and only gulped down the risings in his throat. 'Seems I was badly frightened and have gone quite weak,' he thought. But his weakness was not only not unpleasant, but gave him a peculiar joy such as he had never felt before.

'That's our way,' he said to himself, experiencing a strange and solemn tenderness.⁷

Here then is where the corrosive vision of The Kreutzer Sonata finds correction - 'everything reversed ... everything reversed', yet reversed by virtue now of the sheer power of human goodness at just one step. Goodness and

7. Leo Tolstoy, Master and Man, first published 1895, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude in Tolstoy's Short Fiction, edited by Michael R. Katz (New York, 1991), p. 266. Hereafter cited as MM.

badness, this passage demonstrates, are not two entirely different things but closer to two versions of the same life-force: 'Then suddenly, with the same resolution⁸ with which he used to shake hands when making a good purchase, he took a step back and began raking the snow off Nikita'. Vasily Andreevich's greatest deed, his highest lyrical act, is no more than a redirection of the volition which has produced his most fallen deeds. How one thing becomes another, becomes different or stays separate - that has always been Tolstoy's bafflement. 'But his weakness was not only not unpleasant, but gave him a peculiar joy such as he had never felt before.'⁹ This characteristic syntax of emergence¹⁰, such that what is felt begins to move beyond the preconception of 'weakness', is a clue to why we need the example of Tolstoy in relation to Cranford. For what we see in this passage - as Vasily Andreevich is first surprised by the simplicity of his peasant into a naivety of his own, and then overwhelmed by the power of his own simple goodness - is the coming into being, involuntarily and back-to-front, of the vision which is more straightforwardly given in Mrs Gaskell's tale. 'A good man

8. 'с той же решительностью', CW, XII, p. 337. ('же' is in fact a particle expressing identity, not merely likeness or similarity.)

9. 'Но слабость эта его не только не была ему неприятна', CW, XII, p. 337.

10. Characteristic, that is, from the very first. Compare 'The wrong way round/inside out, somehow not according to us but according to itself all this happens', The Cossacks, CW, III, p. 152. (See above, p. 198.)

out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things'¹¹ - that is the deeply Christian message and mystery which finds expression in Master and Man and which lies behind the apparently comfortable comedy of Cranford. Yet by showing us the power of such goodness as Miss Matty represents from the fallen side as it were, the long way round, and as if for the first time, Tolstoy is showing us what Cranford does not - the process, that is, by which one would arrive in a fallen world at the deeply religious belief in goodness going on which Mrs Gaskell gives to us implicitly in Cranford.

Yet by not giving us the process, Mrs Gaskell herself risked seeing the power of her message go unnoticed. And one has only to survey some of the recent readings of Mrs Gaskell to realise how great that risk was. For to try to get a handle on a work like Cranford by seeing it as a radical challenge to patriarchal assumptions about women's proper sphere¹², or as a means of fictively compensating for the author's experience of rejection and abandonment as a child¹³, is not only to miss the point of Mrs Gaskell's implicitness as a writer. It is an act of bad faith. For Mrs Gaskell asks us to see and wonder with her at how the

11. Matthew 12.35.

12. As Robin B. Colby sees it in 'Some Appointed Work To Do': Women and Vocation in the Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell (London, 1995).

13. See Felicia Bonaparte, The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester: The Life of Mrs Gaskell's Demon (London, 1992).

tender genorosities and the poignant accommodations we find going on within Cranford offer themselves to us as sacred things. She cannot lift them out into larger celebration without losing the very thing which makes them sacred - the fact that they do go on, involuntarily and incidentally, amidst the tiny, ordinary business of living. Nor can she in all faithfulness seek to explain what is not given to be understood but given as a 'treasure of the heart'. All she can do is rely upon her reader to see what goes beyond her power rightly to tell further. Mrs Gaskell's work is a great test of reading and, indeed, the very act of reading her involves 'un engagement', a commitment to a form of belief. For by keeping us inside life and insisting that it is more important to be in life than to try to get outside or above it, Mrs Gaskell asks us to accept with her the huge mortal mystery that we are, after all, simply creatures.

We owe the great creaturely talent of Mrs Gaskell - this vision that is big enough not to claim to be big - to Mrs Gaskell's implicit 'experience'. The word is Mrs Oliphant's who, when comparing herself to Charlotte Bronte, said: 'I don't suppose my powers are equal to hers - my work to myself looks perfectly pale and colourless beside hers - but yet I have had far more experience ... I think'¹⁴. Finally to think of the choice between Tolstoy and

14. Mrs Oliphant, The Autobiography, first published 1899, edited by Mrs Harry Coghill (Chicago, 1988), p. 67.

Mrs Gaskell as a version, writ large, of the choice between Charlotte Bronte and Mrs Oliphant, is, for this reader at any rate, to make that choice a somewhat easier one. For Mrs Gaskell's experienced reading of life simply cannot give us, it is true, the power of those great redeeming moments in Tolstoy where we see the absolute best that a human creature can be in the thick of the worst and which we cannot but feel the better for being near. So when Vasily Andreevich wakes at dawn to find that he himself is dying:

He understood that this was death, and was not at all disturbed ... He remembered that Nikita was lying under him and that he had got warm and was alive, and it seemed to him that he was Nikita and Nikita was he, and that his life was not in himself but in Nikita. ... Nikita is alive, so I too am alive!' he said to himself, triumphantly.
(MM, p. 268)

Yet Master and Man cannot, it seems, resolve that further Tolstoyan paradox - namely, that these great, enlarging moments cannot be had in life, save at its limits. Tolstoy's great, eternal truths - truths that one would not wish to do without - are truths, nonetheless, 'with which one cannot live'¹⁵. Moreover, whilst it is a 'great' religious thing, as Kierkegaard says, to stand on life's verge and seek to 'grasp the eternal', it is a 'greater' thing 'to stick to the temporal'¹⁶, to keep returning to life in acceptance of

15. So Steiner concludes - though of Dostoevsky and not Tolstoy: see Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, p. 345.

16. Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, first published 1843, translated by Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), p. 52.

finitude. It is on the basis of that 'greater' achievement that, pushed to choose, I do finally choose if not Mrs Gaskell then at least the vision of life she represents. And I choose her experienced vision all the more willingly because Mrs Gaskell does not appear to value it for herself or to see the great life-affirming gift that it constitutes. 'Life is for life's sake,' says Mrs Gaskell's vision, so sheerly and acceptingly as to seem to take us beyond the Tolstoyan need for 'reasons'. Yet whilst I choose Mrs Gaskell's greatness because she can be a guide for life in a fallen, relative world, I do so in full and awed recognition, with William James, that Tolstoy's own greatness was that he could not be a guide to ordinary acceptance. No one holds together as painfully as Tolstoy the need for absolutism and relativism almost at once. As James says: 'Though not many of us can imitate Tolstoy, not having enough, perhaps, of the aboriginal human marrow in our bones, most of us may at least feel as if it might be better for us if we could'¹⁷.

17. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, first published 1902, edited by Martin E. Marty (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), p. 186.

APPENDIX I

I include below a facsimile (i) and typed transcription (ii) of the passage from the manuscript of Wives and Daughters which forms the basis of Chapter Two, Section II, 'The Charactersitic Syntax'.

605

... of her face. Molly turned away her head, and
 ... it was of, ... combatting the ... and she
 ... not to feel, - not to feel, poor girl, that she too had a great
 ... on her heart, into the cause of which she shrank from
 ... that whole winter long she had felt as if her
 ... all shrouded over with grey mist, and could no longer
 ... brightly for her. She rubbed up in the morning with
 ... dull sense of something being wrong - the world was not
 ... as if she were born to set it right, she did not know
 ... to do it. Blindness; as the world she could not help
 ... knowing that her father was not satisfied with the wife he
 ... had chosen. For a long time Molly had been surprised at
 ... his apparent contentment; sometimes she had been unable
 ... to be glad that he was satisfied; but still more
 ... frequently nature would have its way, and she was
 ... irritated at what she considered his blindness. Something
 ... had changed since now; something that had
 ... at the time of Cynthia's engagement; ^{he had become} his eyes were
 ... truly sensitive to his wife's feelings, and his whole man-
 ... had gone dry and sarcastic not merely to her, - but often
 ... to Cynthia, - and even - but this very rarely, to Molly
 ... herself. He was not a man to go into peevishness, or
 ... feelings; ^{that} would have relieved him, even while degrading
 ... in his own eyes; but he became hard, and occasionally
 ... in his speeches and weeps. Molly now learnt to
 ... after the vanished blindness in which her father had
 ... lived the first year of his marriage; yet there were
 ... yellow infractions of domestic peace. Some people
 ... say that Mr. Gibson "accepted the inevitable; he
 ... himself in more homely phrase "that it was no use
 ... spilt milk," - and he, from principle, avoided
 ... actual ^{disensions} ~~disensions~~ with his wife, but short
 ... disunion by a sarcasm, or by leaving the room.
 ... now Mr. Gibson had a very tolerable temper of her
 ... and her cat-like nature pleased and delighted in
 ... with weeps, and pleasant quietness. She had no great
 ... ability for ... it is true it is ...

seemed as if there was help, and never could be in their
 mid. Day after day, month after month, year after
 year would Nedley have to sympathize with her father and
 to pity her step-mother, - feeling acutely for both, and
 more than Miss Gibson felt for herself. Gladly would
 he have been the best at one time, but for her
 that were to be opened, and how she could ever have
 had that if they were, he would be able to change their
 ill-temper character. It was all hope; and the only
 remedy at a remedy was to think about it as little
 possible. These Cythia's ways and manners about her
 for Nedley a great deal of uneasiness. She did not
 like that Cythia could except for him; at any rate
 it would be the sort of love that she herself would have
 returned if she had been so happy, - no! that was not it,
 she had been in Cythia's place. She felt as if she should
 have been to have both hands held out, full and true,
 and of precious confidence bestowed on her. Yet Cythia
 would his letters with a kind of carelessness, and read
 them with a strange indifference, while Nedley sat at her
 feet, to speak, looking up with eyes as wishful as a dog's
 waiting for crumbs, and such chance beneficence.
 He tried to be patient on these occasions, - but at last he

must ask
 "What is he Cythia? What does he say?" "No, this is..."
 Cythia had put down the letter on the table by her, and
 a little from time to time as she conversed with
 her compliments it continued.
 "No - oh I did not look exactly, - somewhere in Abigail's
 name - I can't read the word, and it does not
 make signify for it would give me no idea."
 "Well?" asked greedily Nedley -
 "Now. He has had a slight touch of fever he says, but
 all over now, and he hopes he is getting accustomed
 to it - and who looks care of him; he would want money
 and so far from home. Oh Cythia!"
 "I don't fancy he had any serious, for - follow."
 "I don't expect missing and hospital and doctors in

dissensions 49

avoided all actual <quarrels> with his wife, 50
preferring to cut short discussion by a 51
sarcasm, or by leaving the room. Moreover 52
Mrs Gibson had a very tolerable temper of 53
her own, and her cat-like nature purred 54
and delighted in smooth ways, and pleasant 55
quietness. She had no great facility for 56
understanding sarcasm; it is true it 57
disturbed her, but as she was not quick at 58
deciphering any depth of meaning, and felt 59
to think about it as 60
it to be unpleasant \wedge she forgot it <all> 61
often 62
soon as possible. Yet she saw she was \wedge in 63
some kind of disfavour with her 64
husband, and it made her uneasy. She 65
resembled 66
<was like> Cynthia in this; she liked to be 67
liked; and she wanted to regain the esteem 68
which she did not perceive she had lost for 69
ever. <Even> Molly sometimes took her 70
stepmother's part in secret; she felt as if 71
she herself could never have borne her 72
hard 73
father's \wedge speeches so patiently; they would 74
have cut her to the heart, and she must 75
either have demanded an explanation, and 76
probed the sore to the bottom, or sate down 77
despairing and miserable. Instead of which 78
Mrs Gibson after her husband had left the 79
on these occasions 80
room, \wedge would say in a manner more 81
bewildered than <pained*> hurt: 82
'I think dear papa seems a little put out 83
today; we must see that he has a dinner that 84
I have often perceived that 85
he likes when he comes home. \wedge Everything 86
depends on making a man comfortable in his 87
own <home>[house].' 88
And thus she went on, groping about to 89
find the means of re-instating herself in 90
his good graces, - really trying according 91
to her lights, till Molly <came to pity her> 92
was often compelled to pity her in spite of 93
herself, and although she saw <his side*> 94
that her stepmother was the cause of her 95
father's increased astringency of 96
disposition. For, indeed, he had got into 97
kind of 98
that <nervous state> <ne> \wedge exaggerated 99

susceptibility with regard <-> to his wife's 100
 faults, which may be best typified by the 101
 state of bodily irritation <which> that is 102
 produced by the constant recurrence of 103
 any particular noise; those who 104
 brought within 105
 are <in> ^ hearing of it, are apt to be 106
 always on the watch for the repetition, if 107
 they are once made to notice it, and are in 108
 an irritable state of nerves. 109
 So that <-> poor Molly had not passed a 110
 cheerful winter, independently of any 111
 private that 112
 ^ sorrows ^ she might have in her own 113
 heart. She did not look well, either: she 114
 gradually 115
 was ^ falling into <a> low <state> health; 116
 rather than bad health. Her heart beat more 117
 stimulant 118
 feebly and slower; the vivifying <tonic> of 119
 hope - even unacknowledged hope - was gone 120
 out of her life. It seemed as if there was 121
 not, and never could be in this world, any 123
 dumb 124
 help for the ^ <-> discordancy between her 125
 father and his wife. Day after day, month 126
 after month, year after year, would Molly 127
 have to sympathise with her father, and 128
 <yet> pity her stepmother, - feeling 129
 and 130
 acutely for both; ^ certainly more than Mrs 131
 Gibson felt for herself. Molly could not 132
 imagine how she had at one time wished for 133
 her father's eyes to be opened, and how she 134
 could ever have fancied that if they were, 135
 he would be able to change things in Mrs 136
 Gibson's character. It was all hopeless, and 137
 the only attempt at a remedy was to think 138
 about it as little as possible. 139

11

~~Another~~ ~~well~~ ~~well~~ Again the two different
 women were divergently affected by the ^{experience} ~~fact~~
 which Bell had shown towards Hester ever since
 Sylvia's wedding day. Sylvia, who had always had
 more ^{love} ^{than she knew what to do with}, had the
 most entire faith in her own supremacy in her
 mother's heart, though at times Hester could do cer-
 tain things more to the poor old woman's satisfac-
 tion. Hester, who had craved for the affection which
 had been withheld from her, ^{had} ^{from that}
 one circumstance become distrustful of herself, while
 she exaggerated the delight of being beloved, ^{feared}
 lest Sylvia should ^{become} jealous of her mother's
 open display of great attachment, and occasional
 preference for Hester. But such a thought never
 entered Sylvia's mind. She was more thankful than
 she knew how to express towards any one who rendered
 her mother happy; as it has been already said, she
 contributed to Bell Hobson's pleasures ^{more} ^{than} ^{anything} ^{else}.
 And Sylvia threw her whole heart into the words and
 carols she lavished on Hester whenever poor old Hobson
 spoke of the goodness and goodness of the latter.
 Hester attributed more virtues to these sweet words and
 deeds of patience than they deserved; they did
 not supply ^{in Sylvia} any victory of our evil temptations; as
 they would have done in Hester.

that one circumstance become distrustful 50
 own power of inspiring regard 51
 of her \wedge self, while she exaggerated the 52
 delight of being beloved, feared lest Sylvia 53
 become 54
 should \langle be as \rangle jealous of her mother's open 55
 display of great attachment, and occasional 56
 preference for Hester. But such a thought 57
 never entered Sylvia's mind. She was more 58
 thankful than she knew how to express 59
 towards anyone who rendered her mother 60
 happy; as \langle it \rangle has already been said, the 61
 contributing to Bell Robinson's pleasures 62
 earned Philip more of his wife's smiles than 63
 anything else. And Sylvia threw her whole 64
 heart into the words and caresses she 65
 lavished on Hester whenever poor Mrs Robson 66
 spoke of the goodness and kindness of the 67
 latter. Hester attributed more virtue to 68
 these sweet words and deeds of 69
 gratitude than they deserved; they did not 70
 in Sylvia 71
 imply \wedge any victory \langle of \rangle over evil 72
 temptation, as they would have done in 73
 Hester.

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