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AN 'UNOBTRUSIVE ART':
ELIZABETH GASKELL'S USE OF PLACE
IN *RUTH, NORTH AND SOUTH*, AND
WIVES AND DAUGHTERS.

THESIS

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VIVIAN JEANETTE EVE

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PREFACE.

My interest in Elizabeth Gaskell began when I was teaching at Arundel School in Harare, Zimbabwe, and was appointed House Mistress of 'Gaskell House'. I enjoyed Barbara Brill's delightful account of our patron novelist's life for children, but felt that the novels themselves were probably rather dull. Later, at Rhodes University, I read *North and South* and realized how mistaken that view had been. As I read more of Gaskell's work, I became increasingly fascinated by its rich variety, and determined to make a study of the role of 'place' which seemed vital to her fiction. Because both my initial as well as deeper readings of her work showed that how this was achieved was not obvious, I have chosen a phrase from Wendy Craik, an 'unobtrusive art' (39), as my title; she is not alone in using the epithet 'unobtrusive' to describe Gaskell's methods.

For this thesis I have been privileged to have two inspiring supervisors. I thank Mr David Bunyan for much fruitful discussion during the early stages of research and planning, and for his continued interest, and Dr Wendy Jacobson for wise advice so cheerfully and unstintingly offered during the long process of writing-up; her scholarly attention to detail has been invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for her professional help as well as for a caring friendship. The Rhodes University English Department has provided a most pleasant atmosphere in which

to work, and I thank Professor Malvern van Wyk Smith and all the members of the Department for encouragement and friendship; I am especially grateful to those of them, and to my son Robin, who assisted me to tame the computers which have processed and re-processed my words; any typographical errors are my own. The splendid combination of warmth and efficiency of the staff of the Rhodes University Library has helped to make research a pleasure; I thank especially Mrs Lalage Gough and Mrs Sue van der Riet, as well as Mr Errol Kleynhans who assisted with the illustrations. I also appreciate the help afforded to me in Cambridge, during my husband's sabbatical leave in 1987, by Robinson College and the Cambridge University Library, and that of Mrs Joan Leach of the Gaskell Society who introduced me to some of the localities which provided material for the novels. My Bibliography and Notes record my gratitude to many others from whom I have learned about Elizabeth Gaskell and related subjects. I thank Mrs Dimmie Randell for help with executing my diagrams. Friends and family have been wonderfully supportive, and the loving encouragement of my husband, Desmond, has sustained me through thick and thin. An appreciation of Elizabeth Gaskell's Unitarianism has not dimmed my own faith in God as Trinity, and to Him, finally, I offer thanks for the joy of discovery and the strength of perseverance, and for leading me among such skilled and kind people.

J. E.

NOTE ON THE TEXTS USED

The Knutsford edition of Mrs Gaskell's works was not available to me for sustained research although I read the Prefaces and shorter fiction in it during a visit to Cambridge. I have used the Oxford University Press World's Classics edition (1985) for *Ruth*; it is based on the first edition, published in three volumes by Chapman and Hall in January 1853. For *North and South* I have used the Penguin English Library edition (1970) based on the second edition, published in two volumes by Chapman and Hall in 1855, with some emendations based on the *Household Words* and other texts. I have also used the Penguin English Library edition (1969), for *Wives and Daughters*, which is based on the text of the Cornhill Magazine serialization (August 1864 to January 1866). [Discussions of the new Oxford University Press edition in 'The Gaskell Society Newsletter' Nos 5 and 6, question this claim].

REFERENCES and ABBREVIATIONS

In accordance with *The MLA Style Manual* (1985) I have used parenthetical referencing for quotations. Longer notes are placed at the end of the text, and details of works cited are in the Select Bibliography. Abbreviations have been kept to a minimum:

NS *North and South*.

WD *Wives and Daughters*.

GL *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*. (Chapple and Pollard).

SYNOPSIS

The purpose of this study is to show how Elizabeth Gaskell creates a sense of place and why place is important in her novels. Gaskell's life and works indicate an interest in place and an ability to recreate it, but, although most critics mention her descriptive powers, few examine how a sense of place is achieved. Indeed, setting as a tool of analysis has received critical attention only fairly recently. Here the term 'place' has been chosen because it embraces the social, physical, and personal aspects of setting as well as the objects with which spaces are furnished, and for the purpose of discussing its significance a model of the novel has been devised which shows the interrelationships of character, action, setting, language, and ideas, as well as the influence of context (Introduction). Gaskell creates a sense of place in many unobtrusive ways, but particularly important are point of view, windows as vantage points, the connection of place with memory, and similarities in perception between scenes in the novels and fashions in painting (Chapter One). An analysis of *Ruth* illustrates the interrelationship of character and place. Ruth's journey mirrors her spiritual development, and character is often revealed through response to environment or the displacement of emotions onto it, while place is also used to signify innocence and to emphasize the plea for understanding of the unmarried mother and her child (Chapter Two). Places in *North and South* represent important aspects of newly industrialized

Britain, and are significant to the novel's vision of a coherent society; an examination of how apparently irreconcilable communities are shown to be mutually dependent underlines the importance of place to the novel's ideas (Chapter Three). *Wives and Daughters* has a complicated plot based on a number of parallel, interlocking stories each centred on a home in the neighbourhood of Hollingford. How event, story, and plot are connected to these places shows their relationship with action (Chapter Four). Thus is an appreciation of Gaskell's literary achievement enhanced, and place shown to be a significant element in her novels.

INTRODUCTION

'Placed, Ready to Your Imagination'

The purpose of this study is to show that an appreciation of Elizabeth Gaskell's literary achievement is enhanced by an understanding of how she conveys a sense of place, and why place is important in her novels. *Ruth*, *North and South*, and *Wives and Daughters* have been chosen to illustrate this proposition. Attention is given to techniques used in depicting place, and interrelationships between place and other elements are explored, concentrating on character in *Ruth*, moral vision in *North and South*, and action in *Wives and Daughters*.

It was perhaps prophetic in its indication of the importance place was to play in Gaskell's work that the title of the volume in which her first published piece of writing appeared should have been *Visits to Remarkable Places*.¹ Her account of a day spent at Clopton House near Stratford-upon-Avon during her school-days provides early indications of a life-long interest in places, and an ability to create pictures which enable others to share her often acute sensory perceptions.

'We passed,' she recounts, 'through desolate, half-cultivated fields, till we came within sight of the house - a large, heavy, compact, square brick building, of that deep, dead red almost approaching to purple'. Economical attention is paid here to size, shape, and colour, and the

subsequent passage focuses on just the details which will best assist visualization: 'The flowers were tangled with nettles; and it was only as we approached the house that we saw the single yellow rose and the Austrian briar trained into something like order round the deep-set diamond-paned windows' (57). Details noticed on her tour of the house reveal an observant eye, a gift for evoking atmosphere, and an economy with words which help create that immediacy which is one of the hallmarks of style in the mature novels and stories. Evident, too, is a fascination with character and story: Charlotte Clopton's burial alive is recounted with relish, and there are speculations about the fates of the 'once inhabitants' of a now deserted nursery, as well as interesting snippets of Clopton family history. In embryonic form, the blending of character, action, and setting so essential to fiction, may be discerned.

Visits to 'remarkable places' also characterized Elizabeth Gaskell's life. Taken as a motherless baby from London to Cheshire, she became a welcome member of the family in many a home, primarily in Aunt Lumb's heath-side house in Knutsford, but also in those of other Holland relations: her grandfather's farm at Sandlebridge, Uncle Peter's house in the village, the Samuel Hollands' slate-quarrying establishment in Portmadoc, Wales, or the fashionable abode of the Swinton Hollands in London. Relations with a step-mother seem to have meant a distressing atmosphere in Chelsea, but there too she was at home on occasional visits, and there was affection for her

father and only brother, John. Schooldays at Stratford-upon-Avon were followed by protracted visits to London, Newcastle, and Edinburgh, after which marriage introduced her to new scenes in Manchester where she lived for nearly thirty years, moving house three times, and becoming familiar, through social and charitable activities, with many aspects of the 'shock city'.² She frequently escaped to more pleasant climes, visiting friends and family, or taking holidays in various parts of Britain and Europe.

A lively response to place finds expression time and again in letters. She feels it important that correspondents should share her environment: 'I am sitting writing' she tells her daughters, 'in such a pretty dining room, looking into a garden with a rockery, and a greenhouse, & all sorts of pretty plants, arbutus, and evergreens' (GL 18); 'So here we all are, placed, ready to your imagination,' she writes to her American friend, Charles Eliot Norton, in a letter which opens with precise comments on the time of day, and the position and occupation of each member of the family (GL 384). Even more formal letters, such as one thanking Lord Hatherton for encouraging a visit to Oxford, may picture town or countryside: 'the beech-leaves lay golden brown on the broad pathway; the leaves on the elms were quite still, except when one yellower than the rest came floating softly down. The Colleges were marked out clearly against the blue sky, and beautiful broad shadows made the lighter portions of the buildings stand out clear in the sunshine' (GL 380). Awareness of

the senses permeated her life as it does her books, and situation is always important: 'What sort of rooms have you? Grand proper rooms, I dare say, as dull as dust, with no amusing warming-pans, nor crockery, nor spurs, nor dresser, as Selina and we had at the Lakes; our dear charming farm-kitchen at Skelwith was worth a dozen respectable properly-furnished rooms' (GL 49). And, overflowing as her letters are with anecdotes and comments about people, there can yet be irritation when visitors threaten to interfere with a holiday delight in the countryside: 'I wish they weren't coming. - I like to range about ad libitum, & sit out looking at views &c; not talking sense by the yard' (GL 163).

It is no wonder, with this love of places and gift for remembering and describing them, that fictional characters, like real ones, have to be 'placed, ready to your imagination'. The preface to *Mary Barton* confesses that setting is a primary consideration:

Living in Manchester, but with a deep relish and fond admiration for the country, my first thought was to find a frame-work for my story in some rural scene; and I had already made a little progress in a tale, the period of which was more than a century ago, and the place on the borders of Yorkshire, when I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided. (Ward I: lxxiii)

'Relish for the countryside' does not prevent a graphic embodiment of Manchester, nor is there any limitation to the 'frame-works' of the varied stories which follow, apart from a preference for the locality of which she has first-hand knowledge.

Environment is regarded as important partly because of the influence it exerts on character, as is made clear in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*:

For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë, it appears to me more necessary in her case than in most others, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed. (60)

It is not only society which is of concern, for the opening chapter of the biography is devoted to descriptions of geographical and architectural features of the region, village, and house which nurtured the Brontë genius. The implication that no story or character may be understood without a knowledge of place in its physical as well as social dimension extends to fiction.

This is an attitude shared by many contemporaries, nor is Gaskell unique as a good delineator of setting: Dickens, Eliot, the Brontës, and, a little later, Hardy, are all remarkable in this aspect of their art. Detailed comparisons with other authors are not attempted here, but mention is made of similarities and differences in the use of place where this is appropriate.

Elizabeth Gaskell published six major novels, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and about thirty short fictional and non-fictional works. It is common to associate her with Knutsford and Manchester, but she is by no means a purely regional novelist, for a wide variety of places provide locations for stories and articles: industrial cities, provincial towns and villages, farms, seaside resorts and fishing ports, moors and mountains, and homes from the stately to the labourer's hut or the cotton weaver's slum dwelling. As well as locations in England, Wales, and Scotland, stories are set in France, Germany, and Belgium, and one, 'Lois the Witch', in America. This variety, coupled with the sense of place inevitably created in whatever she writes, wherever it is set, has led to this inquiry into how place is made vivid, and how it contributes to meaning.

Most critics notice Gaskell's descriptive powers, though few have looked into this aspect of her art in much depth. A.W. Ward hardly comments on setting other than to identify some of the places from which material was derived. He even claims that:

Descriptions of nature as such were not specially in Mrs Gaskell's way, though she was alive to the romantic beauty of the Welsh mountains and valleys which she so lovingly describes in 'Ruth', as well as to the picturesque charm of country life and setting, shown forth in some unforgettable scenes in 'Cousin Phillis', and

passages of 'A Dark Night's Work', and other pieces. (II: xiii)

He does notice occasions when her work is 'animated by the poetic touch which makes the difference between the picture and the photograph', but does not expand on this (III: xxv).

Mrs Ellis Chadwick seems more interested in the 'photograph' than the 'picture' when she concentrates on the connections between places known to the author and those in the stories. Fascinating as such identifications are, Knutsford is not Cranford (or Hollingford), Abermouth is not Silverdale, nor Tatton Park Cumnor Towers despite coincidence of historical and geographical detail: they are imaginative, artistic creations, real only in the unreal world of fiction. Miss Meta Gaskell is recorded as saying:

'We would name the very few *places* which can be identified as having been described; but we want to make a dead set against the tendency to identify *characters* in my mother's books with so-called "originals". The way in which, in spite of our reiterated assurances, Knutsford claims to be the original of "Cranford" and pretends to recognise the originals of all the characters in it, has annoyed us more than I can say. It seems to belittle her genius and imagination.'

It is, surely, equally belittling to her genius and imagination to attempt too close an identification of real with fictional places however much they may have been endowed with associations by the novels. It may be

impossible not to think of Ruth at Abermouth if one gazes across the sands at Silverdale, or of Molly if one visits Tatton Park and sees the 'long glittering range of greenhouses and hothouses' or the 'great wide-spreading cedar-tree upon a burst of lawn' (*WD* ch.2); it may be difficult to remember that the fictional Mr Benson never was minister of the Unitarian chapel in Knutsford, and that Ruth's grave will not be found under a sycamore tree in the church-yard; recognition of a source may be enlightening, but materials from life are transmuted into art for reasons beyond mere reproduction, and the real can never fully explain its literary counterpart:

A novelist's verisimilitude of place or painterly interest in place may support ancillary studies of the variety of raw materials that go into the novel, but cannot figure much in the critical appraisal of the role of place as a formal element in the art of fiction. (Lutwack 23)

J.G. Sharps says of the relationship between the real and the fictional: 'Mrs Gaskell sought to observe what she had invented, and what she had invented owed much to prior observations'. Personal observation gives credence, as his study of the 'treatment of places intimately known' to Gaskell shows (11). He notes instances of detailed observation, and poetic picturing, but by the nature of his investigation, there is a tendency to focus more on comparisons between the real and the fictional than on what it is in the presentation of the invented which renders the

works artistic.

Arthur Pollard, J.A.V. Chapple, and Edgar Wright, who pioneered the renewal of interest in Gaskell in the 1960's, draw attention to an ability to recreate the seen world. Pollard notices her descriptive powers and comments that 'her preference for the world she sees helps to give her novels their vivid sense of actuality' (254). Wright contends that the 'handling of character and setting is the creative impulse behind all Gaskell's work' (149), yet says little about how setting is handled.

Enid Duthie discusses portrayals of country and town, and acknowledges that description, although difficult to abstract from narration, is essential to Gaskell's art:

Her country people, farmers, squires or labourers, and her fisherfolk are seen in their native countryside and would not usually be at home in any other. It follows that the countryside itself is an integral part of her work. The reader comes to know it as well as he knows the people in it. This knowledge is made possible by the descriptions which are part of the fabric of her narration, but so unobtrusively are they introduced that one hardly realises, except in retrospect, how essential a part they play in her art. (24)

And, unlike Annette Hopkins who argues that it is when 'the spirit of Knutsford is present' that Gaskell's writing is

at its best (13), Duthie shows how 'her unerring powers of observation and description were never of more service to her than here [the industrial scene], where she was dealing not with a milieu she loved but one naturally uncongenial and so all the more oppressively, obtrusively present to her sensitive vision' (66).

W.A. Craik devotes part of her discussion of each novel to penetrating observations about setting, and the attention she, like Duthie, draws to the unobtrusive nature of Gaskell's art highlights the difficulty of establishing how the sense of place is conveyed:

Elizabeth Gaskell is a master of detail. Her wise use of it in the whole world she creates is extraordinarily vivid and precise. It extends to her means as well as her material - to dialogue, and all the varieties of her settings of scenes, in natural scenery, weather, and sense-impressions. Through such detail and its juxtapositions and accumulations, she shapes the larger sections of her work, and builds up her climaxes. Her structure is thus cumulative rather than episodic. There are rarely any sharp breaks, or dramatic changes of scene or mood. It is hard to say where scenes or events begin or end.... Such structuring accounts in large measure for the difficulty of demonstrating Elizabeth Gaskell's unobtrusive art; it is even harder to catch her in the act of greatness than

it is Jane Austen: we feel the consequences, but cannot promptly pick out the components. (38-39) Picking out the setting components to demonstrate something of the 'unobtrusive art' has been essential to this thesis.

Most other critics who write full-length studies choose an aspect of the works: Coral Lansbury 'social crisis', Aina Rubenius 'the woman question', or Patsy Stoneman 'the interaction of class and gender'. Though none can escape setting in relation to her theme, this is not their brief.

In wider terms, setting is an aspect of the novel's structure which has not always been given the serious consideration it deserves. Recently, however, increasing recognition has been given to place as a valid tool of analysis.⁴

Eudora Welty was one of the first to draw attention to the importance of this dimension, contending that place has a good deal to do with the 'goodness' of a novel and that fiction 'depends for its life on place' (59). 'Establishing a chink-proof world of appearance,' she argues, 'is not only the first responsibility of the writer; it is the primary step in the technique of every sort of fiction: lyric and romantic, of course; the "realistic" it goes without saying; and other sorts as well' (65).

D.S. Bland traces the development of landscape description from localization, through social placing and

the romantic tendency to use it to create atmosphere and reflect emotion, to its use for symbolic purposes, in a somewhat over-simplified historical codification. His main contribution is in underlining relevance:

But everywhere the primary requirement is that of relevance, and next to relevance, refusal to rig the description. When these essentials have been observed, the descriptive passages take their place in the texture of the novel, and cannot be detached and enjoyed for their own sake, nor wished away from the novel without damaging its fabric. (331)

This does not recognize that the realization of place may be achieved by means other than 'descriptive passages'. Also emphasizing relevance, Elizabeth Bowen contends that 'the novelist must control his infatuation with his own visual power. *No* non-contributory image, must be the rule. Contributory to what? To the mood of the "now," the mood that either projects or reflects action' (229). Other studies go beyond the element of mood. Austin Warren argues that 'romantic description aims at establishing and maintaining a mood' while 'naturalistic description is a seeming documentation, offered in the interest of illusion', and he describes other purposes: metonymic or metaphoric; 'the expression of a human will', reflecting character or mood; or 'a massive determinant - environment viewed as physical or social causation' (229).

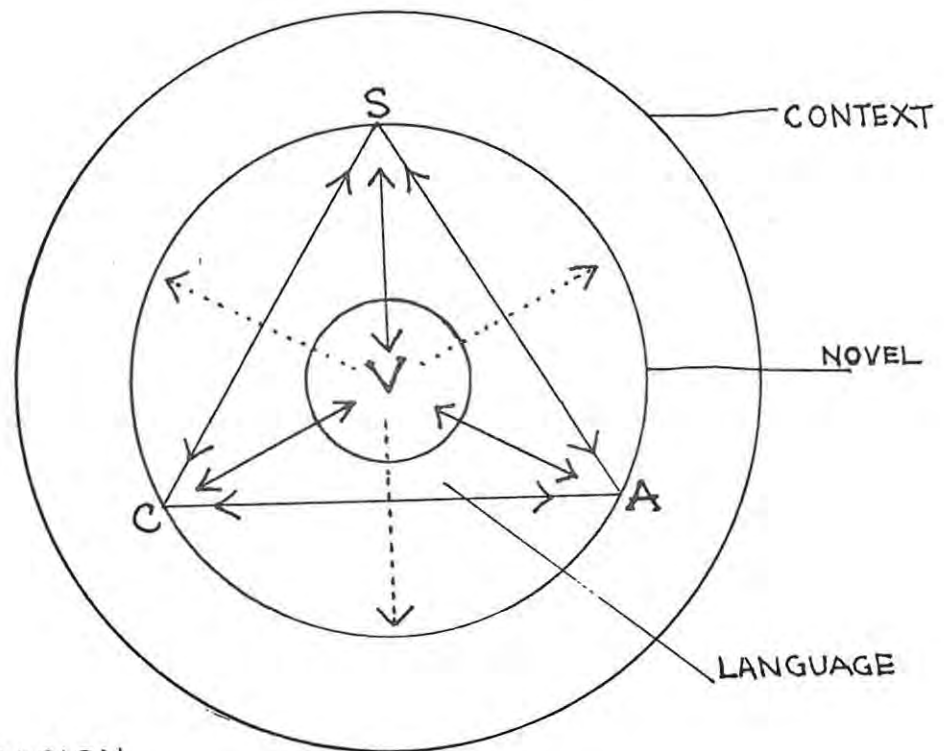
A different emphasis is given by Michael Irwin who

examines the descriptive skills of nineteenth-century novelists with the intention of providing 'an additional critical tool'. 'The student is trained to consider characterisation, symbolism, structure, tone, and so on, but is rarely asked to analyse the means by which an author has involved him sensually, as well as intellectually, in a novel' (vii - viii). Irwin's concern is with technique and the sensual, but he constantly notices that material 'insensibly and inevitably becomes part of the *meaning* of the story' (7), and his conclusion indicates how important a study of the role of place may be:

The typical Victorian novel requires you to look for significance in terms of a slowly emerging pattern of relationships between an immense variety of elements, some important, some trivial, some the product of the intellect, some of imaginative instinct. It says more because it contains more. The author may fall short of his conscious purpose, but he may also exceed it. In showing how he looks at the world about him he is likely to betray limitations and prejudices - who would not? But he also projects a view of life.
(157)

The most comprehensive consideration of the topic published in recent years is Leonard Lutwack's *The Role of Place in Literature* (1984). He stresses the importance of exploring ways in which place is used. It gets into

literature, he maintains, as 'idea and form', that is as attitudes about places and classes of places, and as material for the forms used 'to render events, characters, and themes.' He feels that a theory of the formal use of place is lacking, and provides one by examining its properties and uses in literature. Lutwack's work came to my notice after the major part of this thesis had been developed and written, but it corroborates much in my own perception of the formal use of place in the kind of novel Gaskell writes. For the purpose of discussing this, a model of the novel was devised which is best explained by means of the diagram on the following page.



V VISION .
 S SETTING .
 A ACTION .
 C CHARACTER .

Outer circle: the novel's personal and historical context.

Middle circle: the novel itself.

Shaded part: language.

Points of the triangle: action, character, and setting.

Sectors of the circle: relevance of those elements.

Inner circle: the novelist's ideas or vision.

Arrows: interconnections of the various elements.

Before discussing reasons for focusing on place, some clarification of this model, and its application to the discussions which follow, is necessary. A novel is surrounded and animated by the accumulated experience of its time and its creator. Consideration is, therefore, given to *context*: to historical, social, and economic conditions, religious, artistic, and literary climate, and the fortunes, personality, and beliefs of the author, where these throw light on the significance of place in a particular novel. Everything has to be conveyed through the medium of *language*, represented by the shading of the circle which is the novel itself. A detailed linguistic analysis of the text is not attempted, but attention is given to prose style in discussions of how literary place is created. A distinction is made between the 'achieved world of appearance' (Welty 57), and the use made of place in terms of interrelationships with other elements, which is why the points of the triangle represent the *presented world*, or the raw materials, and the arrowed lines *interconnections*; everything ought to be integrated into the meaning, but, in examining the role of place, I have found it necessary to ask what we are being invited to imagine, as well as why it is important, and so the presented world as well as its connection with other elements is given attention. *The idea or ideas* (the inner circle), expressed by the work are not always easy to discern, and opinions may vary about what an author intends, but this is the heart of the novel, dictating the

choice of character, action, and setting, all of which, in turn, express its ideas. This element may also be termed *vision*, for Gaskell, like many other novelists, aims to share a distinct moral vision through the illustrative medium of fiction, and this is discussed in Chapter Three in relation to *North and South*. Thus, with or without authorial comment, what is done, by whom, where and when becomes 'what is said'. The term '*action*' has been chosen for the 'what is done'; it includes story, event, and plot, and is discussed in Chapter Four in relation to *Wives and Daughters*. 'By whom' is *character*, and is discussed in Chapter Two in relation to *Ruth*. *Setting* is both 'when' (time), and 'where' (place). The middle circle represents the 'what is said', the *whole*, the novel itself. The significance of a literary work may change with history, with different viewpoints or responses, but it is what its creator makes it, a complex artifice, which sometimes seems to have its own personality. To comprehend a novel's full meaning is perhaps impossible, but that it does have meaning and can be understood in part, largely by an analysis of its parts, is the faith on which this study rests. What is meant by 'place' needs further elucidation.

Place has physical properties: it is a world of the senses and includes objects, sounds, fragrances, textures, and even flavours. It may also have social dimensions and represent aspects of a society. Place may be symbolic, or it may have personal implications through its associations

with the life of an individual. It cannot be divorced from time for its physical nature may be affected by the season or the time of day, its social nature by history, its personal aspect by the experiences of a character. There is also a sense in which place is the space dimension of the time-space world in which we live, and some writers, for this reason, prefer the term 'space'.⁵ Here 'space' is used only where the enveloping context of a particular place such as a house or a part of the countryside is important. Attention is given principally to the physical aspects, but social and temporal dimensions are also considered where appropriate. Inevitably, too, symbolic functions operate on a number of levels. In brief, place is where characters act and interact within spaces shared with a variety of objects and sensations, often further interacting with that non-personal world.

In a novel it is neither possible nor desirable to represent every detail as it would be perceived in life. It is the novelist's task to select what is relevant to the immediate scene or the whole work, and to stimulate the imagination towards perceiving such features. Discovering how visualization is effected and for what purpose is the twofold interrelated object of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

'A Fancy of My Own': Some Ways of Visualizing Place

I told the story according to a fancy of my own;
to really SEE the scenes I tried to describe,
(and they WERE as real as my own life at the
time) and then to tell them as nearly as I could,
as if I were speaking to a friend over a fire on
a winter's night and describing real occurrences.
(GL 48)

This was not, in fact, a fancy of her own, but one Gaskell shared with, among others, Dickens, Trollope, and Eliot. 'Nineteenth-century fiction,' as Irwin shows, 'is full of attempts to make the reader *see* what is taking place' (2). How this habit of visualizing assists the reader to see 'the scenes I tried to describe', including their physical setting, is given attention in chapters dealing with the individual novels. Treated separately here, however, are four aspects of technique: point of view; the use of windows; place and memory; and some similarities in observation between picturing in the novels and fashions in painting.

'The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view - the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story' (251). Percy Lubbock's argument seems a good place from which to embark, because

'the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to his story' is also the question of the relation in which he stands to the physical context of that story. Except in *Cranford*, and in *Cousin Phillis* and some of the other shorter fiction, Gaskell's stories are told by a third-person narrator, who adopts various stances in relation to place.

Her narrator seldom views a scene from a completely detached position, and the extended set-piece descriptive passages, extractable from the story, which often go with this kind of detachment, are rare, particularly in later works. In the three novels under discussion, there are a few occasions when such a mode is used, as in the opening description in *Ruth* of the Assize-town, which is viewed from beyond the time and space dimensions of the main story, and in the more delicate picture of the Dissenting Chapel in Chapter Fourteen. Elsewhere in *Ruth* this detached view is used occasionally where the narrator temporarily steps aside to convey a passage of time, and in *North and South* only for narrative links, where these objective descriptions of the environment are usually brief, and the point of view soon melts into that of a character. In *Wives and Daughters*, a distanced narrator occasionally sketches social and historical background, but detachment is rare.

In dialogue, by contrast, we receive directly from a character, a viewpoint often used to advantage as an apparently incidental means of picturing. The following

conversation from *Ruth* illustrates the wiles of Bellingham and the naïveté of Ruth, but also gives details about Milham Grange:

'I can quite fancy that charming home at Milham you told me about last Sunday. I can almost fancy Mrs Mason's workroom; and that, surely, is a proof either of the strength of my imagination, or of your powers of description.'

Ruth smiled. 'It is, indeed, sir. Our workroom must be so different to anything you ever saw. I think you must have passed through Milham often on your way to Lowford.'

'Then you don't think it is any stretch of fancy to have so clear an idea as I have of Milham Grange? On the left hand of the road, is it, Ruth?'

'Yes, sir, just over the bridge, and up the hill where the elm-trees meet overhead and make a green shade; and then comes the dear old Grange, that I shall never see again.' (42; ch.3)

In *North and South*, Helstone is similarly seen in prospect when Margaret describes it to Lennox in London: '"There is the church and a few houses near it on the green - cottages, rather - with roses growing all over them"' (42; ch.1). In another conversation Thornton's mill is made immediate by the remarks of Mr Hale, Mrs Thornton, and Fanny, whose personalities are, at the same time,

highlighted by their different reactions to its proximity:

'Don't you find such close neighbourhood to the mill rather unpleasant at times?'

She drew herself up:

'Never. I am not become so fine as to desire to forget the source of my son's wealth and power. Besides, there is not such another factory in Milton. One room alone is two hundred and twenty square yards.'

'I meant that the smoke and the noise - the constant going out and coming in of the work-people might be annoying!'

'I agree with you, Mr Hale!' said Fanny. 'There is a continual smell of steam, and oily machinery - and the noise is perfectly deafening.'

'I have heard noise that was called music far more deafening. The engine-room is at the street-end of the factory; we hardly hear it, except in summer weather, when all the windows are open; and as for the continual murmur of the work-people, it disturbs me no more than the humming of a hive of bees.' (214; ch.20)

Other features of Milton-Northern and of the South are introduced through dialogue, and, in *Wives and Daughters*, too, details of place are woven into many a conversation, with the even greater skill of Gaskell's mature style, here, in an unusual way :

'Molly! we're coming to the rabbit-holes; it's

not safe to go at such a pace. Stop.' And as she drew rein he rode up alongside of her.

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

'Oh, I am so glad to be here! It is so pleasant riding here in the open, free, fresh air, crushing out such a good smell from the dewy grass. Papa! are you there? I can't see you.'

(58; ch.2)

Because it is dark, it is not through the eyes that this locality is perceived, but through the senses of smell and touch; 'picturing' need not be purely visual.

More often, the narrative stance is somewhere between the outsider and the directly involved observer, for Gaskell's major descriptive mode is what Percy Lubbock calls 'oblique narration':

The seeing eye is with somebody in the book, but its vision is reinforced; the picture contains more, becomes richer and fuller, because it is the author's as well as his creature's, both at once. Nobody notices, but in fact there are now two brains behind that eye; and one of them is the author's, who adopts and shares the *position* of his creature, and at the same time supplements his wit. If you analyse the picture that is now presented, you find that it is not all the work of the personage whose vision the author has

adopted. There are touches in it that go beyond any sensation of his, and indicate that some one else is looking over his shoulder - seeing things from the same angle, but seeing more, bringing another mind to bear upon the scene. It is an easy and natural extension of the personage's power of observation. The impression of the scene may be deepened as much as need be; it is not confined to the scope of one mind, and yet there is no blurring of the focus by a double point of view. And thus what I have called the sound of the narrator's voice (it is impossible to avoid this mixture of metaphors) is less insistent in oblique narration, even while it seems to be following the very same argument that it would in direct, because another voice is speedily mixed and blended with it. (258-9)

This is similar to Henry James's 'central consciousness', but, although Gaskell's novels usually figure a main consciousness, the narrator may 'look over the shoulder' of other characters, moving unobtrusively from one to the other. There is, at the same time, an interweaving of narrative with descriptive detail so that the combined perspective involves sensual experience, thought or emotion, and action.

An analysis of Molly's first visit to Cumnor Towers reveals some of the complexities and advantages of this method as it applies to the creation of a sense of place.

The account begins with her anxious wait for the Towers carriage, and is followed by the drive through Hollingford to the lodge gates: 'And now they were in the Park; and now they were within sight of the Towers, and silence fell upon the carriage-full of ladies, only broken by one faint remark from Mrs Goodenough's niece, a stranger to the town, as they drew up before the double semi-circle flight of steps which led to the door of the mansion'. Narrator and reader seem to be 'bowling along' in the carriage with the ladies; only one detail of the Towers' architecture is chosen for observation: the flight of steps, which Mrs Goodenough's niece reminds everyone is called a '"perron"'. After the '"hush"' which greets her precocious remark, the point of view shifts to Molly: 'It was very awful, as Molly thought, and she half wished herself at home again' (44-45; ch.2). Later, Molly's observation is supplemented by that of the narrator:

Green velvet lawns, bathed in sunshine, stretched away on every side into the finely wooded park; if there were divisions and ha-has between the soft sunny sweeps of grass, and the dark gloom of the forest-trees beyond, Molly did not see them; and the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm to her. Near the house there were walls and fences but they were covered with climbing roses, and rare honeysuckles and other creepers just

bursting into bloom. There were flower-beds, too, scarlet, crimson, blue, orange; masses of blossom lying on the greensward. (45; ch.2)

We see the features of the garden which Molly sees, but our vision is enriched by the more mature privileged observation of the narrator who tells us about the hahas which Molly does not notice, that the honeysuckles are rare, or that what to the young girl is 'inextricable charm', is a 'melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness'.

Presently, leaving the ladies exclaiming over the wonders of the hothouse, where Molly feels faint, we follow her 'out of its heated atmosphere':

She felt better in the fresh air; and unobserved, and at liberty, went from one lovely spot to another, now in the open park, now in some shut-in flower-garden, where the song of the birds, and the drip of the central fountain, were the only sounds, and the tree-tops made an enclosing circle in the blue June sky; she went along without more thought as to her whereabouts than a butterfly has, as it skims from flower to flower.... The hot sun told upon her head, and it began to ache. She saw a great wide-spreading cedar-tree upon a burst of lawn towards which she was advancing, and the black repose beneath its branches lured her thither. There was a rustic seat in the shadow, and weary Molly sat down

there, and presently fell asleep. (46; ch.2)

Features like the enclosing circle made by the tree tops in the sky, or the shady area beneath the cedar where Molly falls asleep, enhance the picture; open and enclosed areas are contrasted; the hot sun and the 'black repose' in the shadow of the tree, the song of the birds, and the drip of the fountain are part of Molly's consciousness, as are her weariness and aching head. A sense of the garden is intensified as we learn about her actions and what she sees and hears and feels; the image of her aimless wanderings as a butterfly skimming from flower to flower is appropriate and, although not part of her perception, adds to the setting which is clearly drawn, but not separated from other narrative elements. It feels like Molly's account, yet the narrator is always present.

In many stylistically similar passages full pictures of settings are built up in the course of the narration. There are also innumerable incidental remarks in this oblique mode, which sharpen that sense almost imperceptibly, a difficult method to illustrate because of its scattered nature and cumulative effect. In the examples which follow, whatever contributes to an awareness of place is italicized.

Thurston Benson is trying to explain to Faith his reason for summoning her so urgently to Wales:

Now came the difficulty, and oh! for a seraph's tongue, and a seraph's powers of representation!

but there was no seraph at hand, *only the soft running waters singing a quiet tune*, and predisposing Miss Benson to listen with a soothed spirit to any tale, not immediately involving her brother's welfare, which had been the cause of her seeing *that lovely vale*. (*Ruth* 111; ch.11)

Elizabeth Bradshaw faints:

The next minute the tired girl lay swooning *on the grass*. It was an outlet for Jemima's fierce energy. With a strength she had never again, and never had known before, she lifted up her fainting sister, and, bidding Mary run and clear the way, she carried her in *through the open garden-door, up the wide old-fashioned stairs*, and laid her *on the bed in her own room, where the breeze from the window came softly and pleasantly through the green shade of the vine-leaves and jessamine*. (*Ruth* 246; ch.21)

Often these incidental remarks are 'stage directions'. Mr Bradshaw visits Mr Benson late at night: 'And he *walked straight into the study*. Mr Benson followed, and *shut the door*. Mr Bradshaw was standing by the table, *fumbling in his pocket*' (*Ruth* 402; ch.30). One is aware of the position of each character in relation to other characters or objects: '*Resting his hand upon the house-table*, Nicholas Higgins *stood in the midst of the floor*' (*NS* 280; ch.28), or 'Mrs Gibson *took a seat by the fire in the dining-room*, and patiently waited for the

auspicious moment when Mr Gibson, having satisfied his healthy appetite, *turned from the table, and took his place by her side.* She *got up*, and with unaccustomed attention *moved the wine and glasses* so that he could help himself *without moving from the chair*' (WD 425; ch.35).

Increasing confidence in oblique narration allows the narrator to move closer to her characters, while the authorial voice becomes less intrusive. In *Ruth*, Gaskell's personal intrusion is sometimes disturbing:

He led the way into a large, bow-windowed room, which looked gloomy enough that afternoon, but which I have seen bright and buoyant with youth and hope within, and sunny lights creeping down the purple mountain slope, and stealing over the green, soft meadows, till they reached the little garden, full of roses and lavender bushes, lying close under the window. I have seen - but I shall see no more. (63; ch.5)

On the occasion of Leonard's birth, the comment: 'That time resembled a beautiful August evening, such as I have seen' makes one equally uncomfortable (164; ch.16). Fortunately, this stance, like the habit of intrusive moralizing, is not found in later novels.

The direct addresses to the reader in many nineteenth-century novels are almost entirely absent. Charlotte Brontë frequently apostrophizes the reader in *Jane Eyre*, sometimes specifically to evoke place: 'A new

chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room....' (ch. 11). George Eliot does likewise in *Adam Bede*: 'Yes, the house must be inhabited, and we will see by whom; for imagination is a licensed trespasser: it has no fear of dogs, but may climb over walls and peep in at windows with impunity. Put your face to one of the glass panes in the right-hand window: what do you see?' (ch.6). Elizabeth Gaskell's technique, also skilful, is different: her 'licensed trespasser' does not tell us where to stand; we are expected to stand or move, as the narrator does, with someone in the story.

Oblique narration allows for an entering-into literary spaces in the most natural way. Observation may be from a moving or a fixed viewpoint, distanced, or in close focus. We are taken into Milton-Northern in a cab from which Margaret and her father gain their first impressions of the town; we walk along its streets with Margaret, enter the Hales' drawing-room with Thornton, and his mother's with Margaret, or we travel with her and Mr Bell from London to Helstone by train, viewing the countryside from its windows. We stroll through the Leasowes with Bellingham and Ruth, or trudge with her across the sands of Abermouth, everywhere feeling encompassed by her surroundings, and in *Wives and Daughters* many of the places are experienced through Mr Gibson's rides along country lanes and Molly's visits to neighbouring homes.

Sometimes we are invited to observe the novel's world from the fixed position of one of its characters: in the Crampton drawing-room Mr Thornton watches Margaret pouring tea, and notices the furnishings of the room (120; ch.10); in Harley Street Mr Lennox observes Margaret and Edith, thinking it 'a pretty sight to see the two cousins so busy in their little arrangements about the table' (45; ch.1); from her place at the dining-table in Hamley Hall Molly observes the layout of the room (100; ch.6); or Ruth examines her surroundings from a pew in the Abermouth church (279; ch.23). An important role is played by the upstairs window as fixed vantage point, and it seems pertinent to say something here about the significance of window-scenes, and to compare Gaskell's use of windows with that of some other novelists of the day.

Windows may provide a kind of grandstand seat from which events are observed. Jane Eyre watches the arrival of Mr Brocklehurst from the nursery window-seat at Gateshead (ch.4), Dorothea, in *Middlemarch*, watches Mr Featherstone's funeral from an upper window of the manor house (ch. 34), and, in Gaskell's novels, similar use is made of the window: Molly gazes after the departing Roger; Mr Benson observes Ruth's humiliation in her encounter with the child in Llan-dhu; or Margaret watches the riot at Marlborough Mills; such scenes often include topography as well as action.

Windows may be symbols of imprisonment, but seldom do they imply the kind of imprisonment of women in the drawing-room which David Cecil had in mind when he wrote this assessment of Mrs Gaskell's viewpoint:

Confined to the drawing-room, it is the people and things in the drawing-room that she sees most completely. But she sees other things as well. After all, the drawing-room had windows; and, looking up from her needlework, she could cast her eyes between the chintz curtains on the garden outside; and beyond the garden on the houses of the village, and the gardens of those houses, gay with hollyhocks and Michaelmas daisies; and the women standing at the doors of the houses, and the children playing in the gardens; and the wild moorland rising steep at the back of all.... Of course, looking at nature as she did, through the glass windows of the Vicarage, her view of it is rather a superficial one. (225-226)

This is a decidedly mistaken picture of the author's life of active social involvement; nor do her heroines peep timidly through the glass of a Victorian drawing-room window without moving outside, and a sense of female imprisonment is rare. There is, however, a striking example of this use of the window in *Ruth*, where, with her face pressed to the window-pane, the young apprentice longs to recapture the days of childhood, thinking the cold white world outside

preferable to the confinement of the work-room.¹ Her imprisonment in Mrs Mason's dressmaking establishment is similar to that of Jane Eyre gazing out of the window of the inhospitable Reed household, 'the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day' (ch.1), and to Dorothea's in her boudoir from which she looks out 'on the still, white enclosure which made her visible world' (ch. 28). In each the cold world outside echoes the coldness of the heroine's life, and the gazing through glass her confining circumstances.

If only rarely symbols of imprisonment, windows are never used as barriers between one kind of life and another like those in *Wuthering Heights*, where, as Dorothy Van Ghent suggests: 'The windowpane is the medium, treacherously transparent, separating the "inside" from the "outside," the "human" from the alien and terrible "other"' (197), nor do they have an alienating function in that the outside belongs to the exile, the one excluded from the respectable or welcoming inside, as when Jane Eyre looks yearningly in through the window of Moor House, or David Copperfield peers apprehensively into Betsey Trotwood's parlour, not knowing whether he will be welcome.

The principal characteristic of Elizabeth Gaskell's windows is that they open outwards, reflecting her own openness to life and to sense impressions, which is often transposed onto her heroines. Heathside, where the young Elizabeth lived with Aunt Lumb, is full of windows from

which she must often have looked towards the town of Knutsford or across the open heath, and there is an openness about her home in dismal Manchester of which Charlotte Brontë writes: "She lives in a large, cheerful, airy house, quite out of Manchester smoke; a garden surrounds it, and, as in this hot weather the windows were kept open, a whispering of leaves and a perfume of flowers always pervaded the rooms" (Hopkins 115, Letter to Mr Smith dated 1 July 1851). Letters, too, show evidence of a delight in open windows and their outlook. 'I wish I could paint my present situation to you. Fancy me sitting in an old fashioned parlour, "doors & windows opened wide", with casement window opening into a sunny court all filled with flowers which scent the air with their fragrance - in the very depth of the country - 5 miles from the least approach to a town - the song of birds, the hum of insects the lowing of cattle the only sounds - and such pretty fields & woods all round' (GL 4). 'Last night' she remarks in another letter, 'we threw open the windows, and smelt the scent of the sweet-briar, and the wall-flowers; and heard the nightingales singing away so deliciously' (GL 47). Those who gaze from the windows of her novels usually respond likewise to the nature they observe, and open windows allow the scents, sights, and sounds from outside to enter inside spaces, while sometimes what is seen preludes an encounter with the outer world, pictured from a window before a character moves into it.

Chapple notices, in *North and South*, a series of

views through windows, which become 'prospects of the mind' (469); indeed, windows are, quite often, metaphorical windows to the inner-self, the concrete images seen from them evoking a meditation on an abstract idea. This is discussed more fully in Chapter Two, for, in *Ruth*, such gazings on the outside world often lead to personal epiphanies. In *Wives and Daughters* there are occasions when contemplation of an outside scene is associated with inner conflict; after Roger's proposal to Cynthia, for instance, Molly finds a measure of consolation in looking out at the peaceful 'landscape she had known and loved from childhood' (418; ch.34), but it is in *North and South* that this use of window-views finds its best artistic expression.

In Margaret Hale's observation of the Helstone church-tower from her bed-room window what she sees stimulates thoughts on the abstract theme of doubt:

She looked out upon the dark-grey lines of the church tower, square and straight in the centre of the view, cutting against the deep blue transparent depths beyond, into which she gazed, and felt that she might gaze for ever, seeing at every moment some farther distance, and yet no sign of God! It seemed to her at the moment, as if the earth was more utterly desolate than if girt in by an iron dome, behind which there might be the ineffaceable peace and glory of the

Almighty: those never-ending depths of space, in their still serenity, were more mocking to her than any material bounds could be - shutting in the cries of earth's sufferers, which now might ascend into that infinite splendour of vastness and be lost - lost for ever, before they reached His throne. (76-77; ch.5)

How haunting the simple images of the church tower and the sky become in the context of Margaret's doubt and disorientation occasioned by the recent disclosure of her father's apostasy! The tower of the church he is abandoning is positioned 'square and straight in the centre of the view', its solidity contrasted with the 'transparent depths beyond'; the one is dark-grey, the other deep blue. Without elaboration these two features provide stimulus for Margaret's meditation on isolation from God, which she pictures in terms of the unreachable distance of the sky. On another occasion, as she views her old home from the inn window and sighs 'over the old picturesqueness, the old gloom, and the grassy wayside of former days' (482; ch.46), Margaret muses on the great question of earthly mutability and the steadfastness of God. In London her contemplation of the night sky, as she sits in her old attic nursery, leads her 'to stand face to face at last with her sin' and to pray for 'strength to speak and act the truth for evermore' (502-503; ch.48).

A similar sense of resolve motivates one of George Eliot's most striking window-scenes. Dorothea has spent a

night of anguish, after seeing Rosamund in Ladislaw's arms. "What should I do - how should I act now, this very day if I could clutch my own pain, and compel it to silence, and think of those three!":

It had taken long for her to come to that question, and there was light piercing into the room. She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving - perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (ch. 80)

If these scenes are designed, primarily, as windows to the inner life, it is through the outer world that access is gained, and, so, simultaneously, that world is pictured.

Margaret's church-tower meditation is in the present moment of the novel; sometimes a character's retrospective thoughts become the perspective from which place can be

viewed by the inner eye. It is a common experience that a smell, a word, a sound may vividly evoke a place, while places may often evoke memories. Eric Newton, writing of the difficulty of disentangling visual description from visual symbolism in painting, puts it like this:

What we *see* has gathered round itself so vast an accumulation of meanings and associations that we can no longer think of the visible world as a mere accumulation of colour and form. Our knowledge of the world of phenomena is a great storehouse of memories, each with its own complex accompaniment of associations. Not the shapes and colours of the cloud, the tree, the mountain range, or the gesture of the human being are the core of our visual experience, but the meanings that our memories weave into them. And the artist's task is to make those meanings clear.

(215)

A novel also acquires its own 'storehouse of memories' and 'accumulation of meanings and associations', and these memories may reinforce setting. Ruth remembers 'that terrible day in the schoolroom' (390; ch.29), Margaret sees Mr Bell's college rooms and associates them 'ever after most fondly in her memory with the idea of her father, and his one cherished and faithful friend' (501; ch.48), Molly recollects 'the day at the Towers' or 'wondered many a time about the secret she had so unwittingly become possessed of that last day in the Hall library' (362; ch.29).

For painter or novelist 'what he sees is conditioned by the ways in which he has been taught to view the world, the current field of interest, and the preoccupations of his time' (Watson 195-196); sometimes Gaskell's perception of place shows the influence of artistic fashions, notably those connected with landscape, with some aspects of Pre-Raphaelite practice, and with domestic anecdote in genre painting. 'I wish I could paint my present situation to you' (GL 4), is the cry of someone with strong visual perceptions, and the pen and ink drawing of Haworth, providing the frontispiece to *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, indicates some talent in the visual arts [see p 48]. Art Exhibitions and private viewings are mentioned in letters, and comments indicate a blending of delight in the Old Masters with interest in contemporary painters.

Some landscapes in the novels may have been influenced by the eighteenth-century fashion of contemplating 'a landscape' as if it were a picture, finding pleasing views or prospects which subscribed to fixed ideas of harmonious composition derived from the landscape painters, Poussin, Salvator Rosa, and Claude. Gardens were 'landscaped' to imitate what was thought to be most pleasing in nature, and a habit grew of seeing landscape in specified terms. The later cult of the picturesque also required the deliberate looking at views as pictures, although its aesthetic demands were for a

wilder kind of scenery and the inclusion, if possible, of a ruined castle or derelict building.

As John Barrell explains Claude's method, a high viewpoint is chosen, and the painting arranged in a series of parallel planes, the objects in it designed to lead the eye into the picture, and towards the horizon. In the foreground, to the side, is a 'coulisse', a group of buildings or trees which frame the landscape beyond [see p 49]. Barrell compares Claude's compositional techniques with those employed by James Thomson in 'The Seasons':²

It is clear, I think, that the attitude to landscape Claude and Thomson share - that, for example, it must keep its distance, and the features within it be kept in subjection to our sense of the general composition - is part of a very different attitude to nature from, say, Ruskin's, who, a century later, advised whoever wanted to look at, or to paint a landscape to lie down and start with the blades of grass in front of his face. (24)

There are occasions, to be discussed later, when Gaskell uses something closer to the Ruskin mode of observation, but scenes like the one from *Ruth* quoted below, lay more stress on general composition than on specific detail.

Dawn's indeterminate light is shed on the landscape Ruth contemplates from a window in the inn in Wales where she has kept vigil all night outside her lover's sick-room:

The garden lay close under the house; a bright spot enough by day; for in that soil, whatever was planted grew and blossomed in spite of neglect. The white roses glimmered out in the dusk all the night through; the red were lost in shadow. Between the low boundary of the garden and the hills swept one or two green meadows; Ruth looked into the grey darkness till she traced each separate wave of outline. Then she heard a little restless bird chirp out its wakefulness from a nest in the ivy round the walls of the house. But the mother-bird spread her soft feathers, and hushed it into silence. Presently, however, many little birds began to scent the coming dawn, and rustled among the leaves, and chirruped loud and clear. Just above the horizon, too, the mist became a silvery grey cloud hanging on the edge of the world; presently it turned shimmering white; and then, in an instant, it flushed into rose, and the mountain tops sprang into heaven, and bathed in the presence of the shadow of God. (83-84; ch.7)

This is a suggestive passage with strong undertones, but considered at surface level, it is a remarkable example of landscaping skill. In the foreground is the garden; in the middle-distance, divided from the foreground by the garden's low boundary, meadows; on a more distant plane,

mountain-tops emerging from mist; and beyond all, the sky. From a fixed position, like that of a painter at his easel, the picture is carefully composed, the eye being guided from foreground to distant view, and back again. Voluntarily bound to a fixed point in space, the observer is not, however, bound to a fixed point in time as a painter must be, so the movement of light is marked over a period of time as the mist is transmuted from grey through white to rose. Only with the approaching sunrise do the shades of grey and white turn to rose, but because the narrator can transcend time she can tell us of daylight colours like the red of roses and the green of meadows, which it would be beyond the powers of a painter to convey simultaneously with the picture of dawn.

In this scene from *Wives and Daughters*, Molly looks out on the Hamley grounds, her vantage point not quite as fixed as Ruth's:

First of all, she went to the window to see what was to be seen. A flower-garden right below; a meadow of ripe grass just beyond, changing colour in long sweeps, as the soft wind blew over it; great old forest-trees a little on one side; and, beyond them again, to be seen only by standing very close to the side of the window-sill, or by putting her head out, if the window was open, the silver shimmer of a mere, about a quarter of a mile off. On the opposite side to the trees and the mere, the look-out was bounded by the old

walls and high-peaked roofs of the extensive farm-buildings. The deliciousness of the early summer silence was only broken by the song of birds, and the nearer hum of bees. (95; ch.6)

She is looking at a typically landscaped garden, but the skill of composition is the novelist's. Foreground and distance are delineated, and the buildings on one side and trees on the other are like the 'coulisse', while the play of light is there as the wind blows over the meadow of ripe grass. While a painting can present a direct visual image, it can only suggest movement or texture, a portrayal of the other senses being beyond its scope: in literary art all the senses can be evoked though none directly transmitted. Both these scenes include sound: the song of birds and hum of bees heard by Molly, or the rustling and chirruping of birds heard by Ruth. Later, Molly looks out of the same window, 'snuffing up the night odours of the honeysuckle. The soft velvet darkness hid everything that was at any distance from her; although she was as conscious of their presence as if she had seen them' (102; ch.6). Scents, too, can be wafted through a window, and even the sense of touch can be evoked, as in the 'soft feathers' of the ~~the~~ mother bird in the first passage, or the 'velvet darkness' of the second. Gaskell's painterly views do not inhibit the natural advantages of word picturing.

The three planes of landscape are consciously drawn in 'The Sexton's Hero':

The fore-ground was the grey-stone wall of the vicarage garden; rich in the colouring made by innumerable lichens, ferns, ivy of most tender green and most delicate tracery, and the vivid scarlet of the crane's bill, which found a home in every nook and crevice - and at the summit of that old wall flaunted some unpruned tendrils of the vine, and long flower-laden branches of the climbing rose-tree, trained against the inner side. *Beyond*, lay meadow green and mountain grey, and the blue dazzle of Morecombe Bay, as it sparkled between us and the more *distant view*.

(Ward I: 490 - emphasis added)

This passage also illustrates a characteristic attention to colour and detail reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelites who aimed at a sharp focus in the rendering of the natural objects which filled the spaces around their figures. Gaskell met the three founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Millais, Holman Hunt, and Rossetti, and admired their work, as she did the writings of John Ruskin whose precepts about 'truth to nature' they tried to follow.³ The reverence for minutiae in their realistic backgrounds revealed in paintings like 'The Hireling Shepherd' and 'Ophelia' [see p 50], is sometimes paralleled in Gaskell's novels: Margaret's 'eye caught on a bee entering a deep-belled flower' (78; ch.5), and Ruth remembers 'the exact motion of a bright green beetle busily meandering among the wild thyme near her' (94; ch.8); Molly

notices that the Hamley's garden is 'brilliant with autumnal flowers and glittering dew-drops on the gossamer webs that stretched from scarlet to blue, and thence to purple and yellow petals' (202; ch.14), and that 'the beautiful fine articulations of branches and boughs and delicate twigs were all intertwined in leafless distinctness against the sky' (245; ch.18); 'among the last year's brown ruins, heaped together by the wind in the hedgerows, [Ruth] found the fresh green crinkled leaves and pale star-like flowers of the primroses. Here and there a golden celandine made brilliant the sides of the little brook' (40; ch.3). The novelist and the Pre-Raphaelites reflect Ruskin's dictums so admired at the time.

There is also a general sense in which a novel may be compared to a painting, for both may choose to depict characters and scenes as social comments. In *North and South*, for instance, the choosing of representative figures from the range of social groupings of the 1850's, and the creation of physical environments against which they can be viewed and judged, is similar to Ford Madox Brown's painting 'Work' which belongs to the same decade [see p 49]. The background is an exact location in Hampstead, and each of the figures represents an aspect of the subject, work. Gaskell and Brown, through different media, picture representative subjects in a realistic contemporary setting.

The Pre-Raphaelites share many of the concerns of

genre painting, a persistent interest in British art from the Eighteenth Century, which, by the mid-Nineteenth Century, was finding its most popular subjects in every-day scenes from contemporary life. Figures, gestures, and grouping were carefully delineated, and backgrounds made realistic.⁴ An echo of this mode of perception is found in static pictures like Mr Benson's mental image of his household in the kitchen: 'Sally sat as mistress in the chimney-corner, knitting by fire-light, and Miss Benson and Ruth, with the candle between them, stitched away at their work; while Leonard strewed the ample dresser with his slate and books' (381; ch.29). A similar family grouping in *Wives and Daughters* shows the domesticity of the aristocratic Cumnors, each member of the family characteristically occupied, each item of setting carefully chosen to provide a realistic environment:

On one of these November evenings they were all assembled in Lady Cumnor's room. She was lying - all draped in white and covered up with an Indian shawl - on a sofa near the fire. Lady Harriet sate on the rug, close before the wood-fire, picking up fallen embers with a pair of dwarf tongs, and piling them on the red and odorous heap in the centre of the hearth. Lady Cuxhaven, notable from girlhood, was using the blind man's holiday to net fruit-nets for the walls at Cuxhaven Park. Lady Cumnor's woman was trying to see to pour out tea by the light of one small

wax-candle in the background (for Lady Cumnor could not bear much light to her weakened eyes); and the great leafless branches of the trees outside the house kept sweeping against the windows, moved by the wind that was gathering. (577; ch.49)

The opening of *North and South* shows Edith, Margaret, and the Shaw family in a series of genre-like glimpses: Edith in white muslin curled up asleep 'on a crimson damask sofa in a back drawing-room' (35); Margaret, in black silk, displaying her cousin's Indian shawls with 'their soft feel and their brilliant colours' as she stands under a chandelier, her figure 'in the unusual garb of a princess' reflected in the 'mirror over the chimney-piece' (39); and the tea-making observed by Henry Lennox, Edith struggling childishly with the 'great kitchen tea-kettle' and Margaret finding the 'quickly-adjusted spirit-lamp ... the most efficacious contrivance' (45). These pictures are interspersed with flashbacks to Margaret's past, snatches of conversation in the present, and commentary on character, and all have significance, so that there is none of the tedious stasis which picturing for its own sake might produce.

Gaskell's account of her method quoted at the beginning of this chapter, 'to really SEE the scenes I tried to describe', which 'WERE as real as my own life at

the time', is echoed ten years later: 'If you but think eagerly of your story till *you see it in action*, words, good simple strong words, will come' (GL 420). 'Realism' may be an ambiguous term in that an exact replication of life in words is impossible, but Gaskell's aim is to create fiction which mirrors the real. Her habit of visualizing helps to make this possible, and gives to her style the 'naturalness' Duthie regards as the essence of her art (201). Vocabulary is seldom ornate, and figurative language is used sparingly; strength lies in the naturalness of the direct image, particularly in establishing the ambience for her stories. The appropriateness of this style will be further illuminated in discussions of the relevance of place in individual novels.



'Old Church and Parsonage' by E.C. Gaskell
Frontispiece in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*



Claude Lorraine. 'Moses Saved from the Bulrushes'
Madrid, Prado



Ford Madox Brown. 'Work'
Manchester City Art Galleries



William Holman Hunt. 'The Hireling Shepherd' (1851)
Manchester City Art Galleries



John Everett Millais. 'Ophelia' (1851-2)
Tate Gallery

CHAPTER TWO

'Evidences of Character in Inanimate Things': Character and Place in *Ruth*

'I knew that I had realized all my people to myself so vividly that parting with them was like parting with friends' (GL 71). Realism of character is as much an aim as realism of place and action, and, although the ideal is not always met, the liveliness and variety of people in major and minor roles is an undeniable strength in Gaskell's works, showing skill in delineation as well as a recurring insistence on the value of the individual.

Some stories have their genesis in the plight of known individuals: 'the circumstances are different, but the character and some of the speeches, are exactly a poor man I know', Gaskell says of John Barton (GL 48), and Ruth's prototype is a young girl, Pasley, visited in prison in Manchester¹, but characters are transformed for purposes of fiction, and realized through a variety of literary techniques, including the use of place.

Mention has already been made of place as a social determiner, influencing and moulding character [see p 5]. Ruth's dilemma arises, in part, from the unnatural confinement of a country girl in the stifling atmosphere of Fordham, Mrs Hale's dissatisfaction with Helstone and Milton arises out of her upbringing in snobbishly genteel surroundings, while Bessy Higgins's illness is the result of fluff inhaled in poorly-ventilated carding-rooms. The

Fordham introduction to *Ruth* which discusses the contribution to the formation of character of the 'chains of daily domestic habit' (2; ch.1), seems to strengthen this view, but there is not as much emphasis on the deterministic aspect of the character-place relationship as one might expect: Gaskell believes in the freedom and strength of individuals, assisted by a spiritual power beyond themselves, to make choices which alter attitudes to their environment, or raise them above it.

A more usual use of place depicts characters as belonging in one setting rather than another. Henry Lennox is a London man, ill at ease in Helstone, Osborne Hamley is more at home in the drawing-room than the paddock, and Mrs Gibson more herself with frivolous ornament than in a school-room or a country lane. More importantly, the surroundings in which people are placed reflect or contrast with their personalities. It has become a commonplace of criticism to search for symbolic significance in almost every item of setting. With later novelists such symbolism can be deliberate; in Gaskell's case it is probably unintentional when features of the environment symbolize hidden emotions or intimate experiences which cannot be openly discussed. Such symbolism is fairly widely used in *Ruth*, but is a rarer mode in later work, as is the correlation of mood with environment. Occasionally place is used metonymically, furnishings and persons becoming synonymous like the heavy-handed Mr Bradshaw and his

cumbersome furniture, or the quaintly-upright Sally and her spotless kitchen, but more often furnishings simply indicate taste, interests, or social status.

Response to place, and an attitude to objects, also reveal a great deal about a person: 'Molly employed herself busily in tying up carnations, and Cynthia gathered flowers in her careless, graceful way.... "I hope you notice the difference in our occupations, Mr Hamley. Molly, you see, devotes herself to the useful, and I to the ornamental"' (*WD* 369; ch.29). Mrs Hale arranges 'biscuits and marmalade, and what not ... in formal order on the sideboard' as dessert, but Mr Hale fancies pears from the garden, and proposes eating them there, where Margaret makes a plate for them out of a beet-root leaf (*NS* 59; ch.3). Characters are not only seen in appropriate surroundings, but such surroundings are seen through their eyes, aiding our mental image of both observer and the observed.

The interrelationship of place and character is, then, expressed in many ways, and it is integral to all Gaskell's work. The detailed examination of this feature of *Ruth*, which is the subject of this chapter, shows its importance more specifically.

Thurstan Benson's defence of Ruth, the woman, might well have been Elizabeth Gaskell's defence of *Ruth*, the novel: '"I take my stand with Christ against the world."' (351; ch.27). When she chose to make an unmarried mother

the heroine, Gaskell was taking her stand on the side of Christ, who refused to condemn the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11), against mid-Victorian morality, with its condemnation of so-called fallen women. A break with literary and social convention, it 'was and remains a notable attempt for any man or woman at the time to have made' (Gérin 141).

Speaking again through Mr Benson, the author says:

'Is it not time to change some of our ways of thinking and acting? I declare before God, that if I believe in any one human truth, it is this - that to every woman, who, like Ruth, has sinned, should be given a chance of self-redemption - and that such a chance should be given in no supercilious or contemptuous manner, but in the spirit of the holy Christ.' (351; ch.27)

In *Ruth* such a chance is given. It is the story of Ruth's fall and redemption, and the redemption of the judgemental Mr Bradshaw who changes because of Ruth's example. It was Gaskell's intention that her readers should do likewise. Amid the barrage of unfavourable comment which greeted the publication of *Ruth*, this much satisfaction was expressed when a little understanding was shown: 'I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk and discuss the subject a little more than they did.' (GL 153).

Unfavourable reactions, although extremely painful,

had in some measure been anticipated: "An unfit subject for fiction" is *the* thing to say about it; I knew all \this/ before; but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind out about it; only how I shrink with more pain than I can tell you from what people are saying, though I wd do every jot of it over again to-morrow' (GL 148). Some, like Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, recognized the author's courage and purity of motive:

I love and honour your books - especially 'Ruth' which is noble as well as beautiful, which contains truths purifying and purely put, yet treats of a subject scarcely ever boldly treated of except when taken up by unclean hands - I am grateful to you as a woman for having so treated such a subject. (Waller 42)

It is a tribute to Elizabeth Gaskell's courage as a woman, and to her sensitivity and skill as a writer, that she handles her controversial and, to some, decidedly improper subject, so well that *Ruth* not only spoke to the readers of her own day, but has lived on as a work of art, immature and flawed in some respects, but certainly worthy of attention.

Some important reasons for its success can be demonstrated through an examination of the significance of place in the novel. What reader can fail to remember the Welsh mountains, the Bensons' home in Eccleston, the sands at Abermouth? In these, and many other scenes, a marvellously seen, heard, and sometimes even smelt world is

created, which gives credence to the story, and is integral to the novel's purposes, mainly as a means of characterization, especially of Ruth herself. Dealing with a subject which she feels 'cannot be put into words' (44; ch.30), Gaskell tends to externalize Ruth's emotional experiences by displacing them onto her environment.² It is a way of circumventing some of the taboos of her age, but the significance of place goes further, and the interwoven pattern of place and character is the most striking feature of the novel's design.

That design is the conventional one of the journey which is both physical and spiritual. Ruth, like Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, Thomas Hardy's Tess, or George Eliot's Hetty Sorrell moves from place to place, her changing environment reflecting and moulding her responses to circumstances as the journey charts the progress of her spirit. Jane Eyre's journey is 'a kind of mythical progress from one significantly named place to another' (Gilbert and Gubar 342). Tess moves through settings apparently indifferent to her fate yet each reflecting something of her psychological state or her dilemma in society. Hetty's 'journey in hope' which becomes a 'journey in despair' is a bitter learning experience with tragic consequences, in which the places through which she travels from hospitable Loamshire to the jail of the harshly-named Stoniton, are also significant (*Adam Bede* chs. 36 and 37). Each of the places through which Ruth

journeys is considered here in relation to her character and spiritual discoveries.

Fordham: a bird in a cage.

The novel opens in Fordham, introduced by a lengthy description of architectural features which reveal changes in its social structure over a hundred years. The picture is an easily visualized guide to the town's history, but its purpose is unclear despite this comment:

The traditions of those bygone times, even to the smallest social particular, enable one to understand more clearly the circumstances which contributed to the formation of character. The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes - when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities. Therefore it is well to know what were the chains of daily domestic habit which were the natural leading-strings of our forefathers before they learnt to go alone.

(2; ch.1)

There is some truth in Edgar Wright's assertion that 'the introduction promises far more than the novel performs. *Ruth* does deal with the defiance of convention, but there

is little or no attempt made in it to portray the links with the past, while the descriptive passages amplifying the theory turn out to have little function other than as a rather grandiose preliminary to the setting of the milliners' workroom in which we first see Ruth' (86). It is also true that the novel performs more than its slightly inept introduction promises. It is probably embarrassment that makes the author state her aim indirectly, and leave some of the introductory promises unfulfilled, but that she chooses to state it by setting Ruth against the exterior world is an indication of a method used with increasing skill. Gaskell appeals to the visual imagination to encourage gradual perception of moral truths, and the strengths of *Ruth* lie largely in those parts where the reader is encouraged to see rather than being shown.³

If the description of Fordham is partly irrelevant, the highlighting of Ruth in the colours shining through stained glass, like Madeleine in Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes', is an appropriate image of the innocence to be stressed, and faltering ceases when we see Ruth in her immediate surroundings.⁴ In the Dressmakers' room 'Ruth Hilton sprang to the large old window, and pressed against it as a bird presses against the bars of its cage' (4; ch.1). This image of imprisonment is reinforced by the description of the larch in the snow-covered scene outside: 'Poor old larch! the time had been when it had stood in a pleasant lawn, with the tender grass creeping caressingly

up to its very trunk; but now the lawn was divided into yards and squalid back premises, and the larch was pent up and girded about with flag-stones' (5; ch.1). Ruth's own 'pent up' situation is symbolized at the same time as a sympathetic response to nature is revealed. The scene beyond the window evokes wonder and a desire for freedom: she longs to 'sally forth and enjoy the glory' of the natural world. Her companion shivers at the thought of going out on such a night, whereas Ruth recalls that '"at home I have many a time run up the lane all the way to the mill, just to see the icicles hang on the great wheel, and when I was once out, I could hardly find in my heart to come in, even to mother, sitting by the fire; - even to mother"' (5; ch.1). The lane and mill indicate that Ruth is a country girl, the mother sitting by the fire that she is separated from a secure and cheerful home. Nearly 30 pages elapse before there is direct description of her character or information about the mother. By then we have formed our own idea of Ruth and been given hints about her home background by seeing her response to Fordham.

The idea of someone whose natural environment is the country is reinforced in the dressmakers' room, where 'Ruth's place was the coldest and darkest in the room, although she liked it the best; she had instinctively chosen it for the sake of the wall opposite to her, on which was a remnant of the beauty of the old drawing-room' (6; ch.1). If Ruth cannot be where she belongs, she can enjoy a mural of 'the most lovely wreaths of flowers,

profuse and luxuriant beyond description, and so real-looking, that you could almost fancy you smelt their fragrance, and heard the south wind go softly rustling in and out among the crimson roses - the branches of purple and white lilac - the floating golden-tressed laburnum boughs' (6; ch.1). These painted flowers conjure up 'visions of other sister-flowers that grew, and blossomed, and withered away in her early home' (7; ch.1). Words, painting, and nature become a synthesized experience, and character is indirectly portrayed through the decorative panels. Later the girls troop off 'up the wide, dark staircase', and Ruth, on her bed, sobs out, '"Oh! how shall I get through five years of these terrible nights! in that close room! and in that oppressive stillness! which lets every sound of the thread be heard as it goes eternally backwards and forwards"' (8; ch.1). Nostalgia is intensified by the contrast of the beautiful decorative panel and 'that close room' and 'oppressive stillness', which further emphasize her unwilling enclosure.

Through the work-place we see that homesickness, a feeling of confinement, and a sensitive response to nature are important characteristics of Ruth. A further characteristic has been suggested by snow, 'white lilies, sacred to the virgin', winter aconite, and panels of 'pale sea-green, picked out with white and gold.' White and green convey purity, and are often associated with Ruth. In this opening chapter, too, the first of many images of

the sky suggests security in what is eternal: 'And over all these changes from grandeur to squalor, bent down the purple heavens with their unchanging splendour!' (5; ch.1). It is a hint of something which is to be important in the development of Ruth's outlook.

When the scene moves to the Shire Hall, Ruth and her companions are 'awed by the old magnificence of the vast apartment', and an air of mystery is created by dim lighting and the 'goblin-like' sound of the musicians' voices in their 'dark recess', where they prepare for the evening's entertainment while candles are 'carried about in an uncertain wavering manner, reminding Ruth of the flickering zigzag motion of the will-o'-the-wisp' (13; ch.2). This speaks of youthful romanticism as well as of something precarious in her situation, but the author's own romanticism runs away with her in over-elaborate descriptions of the ball-room which contribute little to the novel's purpose, something which occasionally mars the earlier writings. This picture, however, in which sense impressions merge in a kaleidoscope of colour, sound, fragrance, and movement, shows descriptive skill and purpose:

Floating away to that bounding music, now far away, like garlands of fairies, now near, and showing as lovely women, with every ornament of graceful dress, the *élite* of the county danced on, little caring whose eyes gazed and were dazzled. Outside all was cold, and colourless,

and uniform, one coating of snow over all. But inside it was warm, and glowing, and vivid; flowers scented the air, and wreathed the head, and rested on the bosom, as if it were midsummer. Bright colours flashed on the eye and were gone, and succeeded by others as lovely in the rapid movement of the dance. Smiles dimpled every face, and low tones of happiness murmured indistinctly through the room in every pause of the music. (14; ch.2)

This is Ruth's perspective on a scene in which she delights without social consciousness or any sense of the transitoriness which foreshadows her future with Bellingham who first enters 'upon the scene of her life' here (31; ch. 3). It is a dream of warmth and happiness, while reality is the cold world outside. The white camellia presented to her resonates beyond its apparently humble place in the story. One wonders whether Gaskell was aware that, in the Language of Flowers, so popular among the early Victorians, a white camellia meant 'perfected loveliness' (Marsh 22);⁵ it is her loveliness which attracts Bellingham. The meaning of flowers may also inform the later adorning of Ruth with white waterlilies which mean 'purity of heart' (ch. 6). Certainly the white flowers associated with her, both before and after the seduction, signify purity.

To Ruth, the camellia is perfect, and in her dreams Bellingham 'presented flower after flower to her' (18;

ch.2). The dream of her dead mother has given way to a happier one, 'And yet,' comments the author, 'was this a more evil dream than the other?' (18; ch.2). She suggests, through this flower dream, not only Ruth's temptation which comes amidst the natural beauty of her old home as an offer of security, but also that there is nothing intrinsically wrong in sexual attraction.⁶ Real life is contrasted with the dream-world of the ball as Ruth walks home in the cold dawn. Her wintry world helps to convince us that circumstance rather than culpable error leads to Ruth's fall.

The following afternoon, 'when the east wind blew keenly down the street, drying up the very snow itself' (20; ch.2), Ruth witnesses Bellingham's, to her, heroic rescue of a drowning child. There are ominous overtones:

As she came to the high ground just above the river, where the street sloped rapidly down to the bridge, she saw the flat country beyond all covered with snow, making the black dome of the cloud-laden sky appear yet blacker; as if the winter's night had never fairly gone away, but had hovered on the edge of the world all through the short bleak day. (20-21; ch.2)

The black dome of the sky, and the winter's night hovering on the edge of the day are threatening. The place speaks of Ruth's situation as well as of her perceptions which so often take in the distant view, and yet the account seems merely factual in its observation of the sloping street,

bridge, and flat country beyond. Ruth watches a boy and his washing-tub boat being 'carried away slowly, but surely, by the strong full river which eternally moved onwards to the sea' (22; ch.2); this foreshadows her dreams of trying to save Leonard from a pursuer by throwing him on land 'which was safety', before he is clutched back 'by a great black whirlwind of waves' (307; ch.25). Now, Bellingham's response to place is revealing. His '"Oh! what a horrid dirty place this is; insufferable two minutes longer"' (24; ch.2), and berating of the poverty-stricken grandmother for the filthy state of her hovel, say more about him than the provision of money for the boy's needs, interpreted by Ruth as 'fine generosity'.

In the next chapter Ruth's loneliness and Mrs Mason's neglect are portrayed through a window-scene. On a Sunday afternoon, as a change from looking out on the 'dreary prospect' afforded by the view from the workroom:

She would carry her Bible, and place herself in the window-seat on the wide landing, which commanded the street in front of the house. From thence she could see the irregular grandeur of the place; she caught a view of the grey church-tower, rising hoary and massive into mid-air; she saw one or two figures loiter along on the sunny side of the street, in all the enjoyment of their fine clothes and Sunday leisure; and she imagined histories for them, and tried to picture to

herself their homes and their daily doings.

(34; ch.3)

Ruth's unhappiness is evident in her response to a scene which is beyond her reach. In the earlier window-scene her separation from home and the natural surroundings she loves is highlighted: here, the figure 'on the sunny side of the street' highlights her separation from all human companionship, as loneliness makes her picture their homes and daily doings. It is no wonder that the prospect of seeing Mr Bellingham is appealing. No hope is offered even by the 'grey church-tower, rising hoary and massive into mid-air'.

Only now are we told of the earlier death of her parents and Ruth's removal to Fordham by an indifferent guardian. Departure from home had been marked by an impulsive running, 'with her eyes streaming with tears, round the garden, tearing off in a passion of love whole boughs of favourite China and damask roses, late flowering against the casement-window of what had been her mother's room' (38; ch.3). This effort to take with her an object, rich with happy associations, conveys the sensitivity and suffering of the orphaned Ruth, torn away from a secure home. Similarly Bellingham's childhood is presented in terms of place: his is 'not so golden in reality as Ruth's, but more dazzling, when recounted with stories of the beautiful cream-coloured Arabian pony, and the old picture gallery in the house, and avenues, and terraces, and fountains in the garden, for Ruth to paint, with all the

vividness of imagination, as scenery and background for the figure which was growing by slow degrees most prominent in her thoughts' (39; ch.3). At the same time, Ruth's innocence is underlined by her response to the early spring countryside she sees on her Sunday afternoon walks with Mr Bellingham whose presence she nearly forgets in exclamations of delight 'at the evening glory of mellow light which was in the sky behind the purple distance, while the brown leafless woods in the foreground derived an almost metallic lustre from the golden mist and haze of the sunset' (40; ch.3). It is not only Ruth who has 'to paint scenery and background' for her hero, but her creator has to do it, with a painter's eye for colour and the effect of light, for the figures in her drama. The filtering of that scenery through Ruth's consciousness, makes it part of her vision and personality.

'Perhaps Elizabeth Gaskell's hardest task is to make the reader believe in Ruth's innocence. Her settings are a vital, though not the only, means of doing so. They reveal far more than mere analysis could do about the forces working within and upon an impressionable nature, by working also within and upon the reader' (Craik 55-56). The Fordham setting enables us to see her as pure and innocent, delighting in beauty, but sentenced to live in a cold and cheerless world, lonely and nostalgic for a lost home.

Milham Grange: a homeless and innocent young dreamer.

At Milham Grange Ruth is in harmony with an environment which is natural to her, but lost through the death of her parents. Its decaying state emphasizes that it belongs to the past, while associations with childhood, and Ruth's present unselfconscious delight in her former home, speak of youthful innocence and a trusting, affectionate nature. The setting and her dream-like state suggest a pre-lapsarian Eden, in which there is no awareness of danger or the possibility of sin. It is important to Ruth's vindication that she should be seen as a child-like, trusting victim, vulnerable because orphaned and with no-one to warn her, in a way that she can understand, against men like Bellingham. She is also devoid of the faults of, for instance, Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*, whose fall comes about as much through her own vanity as Arthur Donnithorne's careless infatuation: Ruth is a willing victim who gives of herself because of a situation which puts her in need of a friend, and because of an affectionate nature which trusts the one who offers love and protection; this is unlike Tess, that other 'pure woman', who distrusts her seducer and is forced to submit.

A gallery of word-paintings fixes Ruth in the surroundings of her old home, the setting for the day on which the fatal 'yes' is uttered. It is an idyllic day of freshness and peace: 'Sunday came, as brilliant as if there were no sorrow, or death, or guilt in the world; a day or two of rain had made the earth fresh and brave as

the blue heavens above', and the first impressions of Milham Grange are ones of tranquillity: the great mill-wheel 'stood in Sabbath idleness, motionless in a brown mass of shade', while the house lay 'still and peaceful in its afternoon shadows' (45; ch.4). What could disturb so peaceful a scene? Even the reader feels relaxed in the languorous atmosphere which is to contribute to Ruth's fall.

The influence of the picturesque can be detected in this view of the house from a little hill:

It was a house of after thoughts; building materials were plentiful in the neighbourhood, and every successive owner had found a necessity for some addition or projection, till it was a picturesque mass of irregularity - of broken light and shadow - which, as a whole, gave a full and complete idea of a 'Home.' All its gables and nooks were blended and held together by the tender green of the climbing roses and young creepers. (45; ch.4).

The emphasis on the house as 'home', and the loving bonds suggested by the climbing roses and young creepers are a sad contrast to Ruth's homeless insecurity. The loss of her old life is also conveyed through a range of descriptive details which enliven the subsequent narrative: the garden is 'untrimmed', the farmyard 'grass-grown', a spider has 'spread her web over the front door', the rooms are haunted by a 'sort of ghostly echo' because 'half-

furnished and uninhabited', and Ruth and Bellingham go along 'damp-smelling stone passages.' This leads into two contrasting pictures of the house's interior, one Ruth's memory, the other the present reality:

In those days the house-place had been a cheerful room, full of life, with the passing to and fro of husband, child, and servants; with a great merry wood fire crackling and blazing away every evening, and hardly let out in the very heat of summer; for with the thick stone walls, and the deep window-seats, and the drapery of vine-leaves and ivy, that room, with its flag-floor, seemed always to want the sparkle and cheery warmth of a fire. But now the green shadows from without seemed to have become black in the uninhabited desolation. The oaken shovel-board, the heavy dresser, and the carved cupboards, were now dull and damp, which were formerly polished up to the brightness of a looking-glass where the fire-blaze was for ever glinting; they only added to the oppressive gloom; the flag-floor was wet with heavy moisture. (47-48; ch.4)

In the wood-fire opposed to the shadows, and the polished surfaces to furniture now dull and damp, Ruth's past and present are contrasted, highlighting her vulnerability; at the same time, her response reflects changing emotions.

Bellingham exploits the situation and her moods. In the garden he watches the unconscious seductiveness of a

child of nature:

She wound in and out in natural, graceful, wavy lines between the luxuriant and overgrown shrubs, which were fragrant with a leafy smell of spring growth; she went on, careless of watching eyes, indeed, unconscious for the time of their existence. Once she stopped to take hold of a spray of jessamine, and softly kiss it; it had been her mother's favourite flower. (49-50; ch.4)

It is no wonder that she rejects the warning of old Thomas, "My dear, remember the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; remember that, Ruth" (51; ch.4).⁷ Ruth can as easily imagine a 'roaring lion' here as Eve a poisonous serpent in the Garden of Eden:

Ruth went on her way, all unconscious of the dark phantoms of the future that were gathering around her.... The evening was still and full of mellow light, and the new-born summer was so delicious that, in common with all young creatures, she shared its influence and was glad. (51; ch.4)

Ruth herself is like the 'new-born summer', and her trustfulness like this tranquil scene, which preludes their departure. The unfrequented inn on 'the far side of the green waste' and the pond at which cattle are drinking, 'their very motions ... so lazy and slow that they served to fill up the mind with the sensation of dreamy rest' are faithfully described to enhance the relaxed atmosphere

(52; ch.4). Next follows a picture of the lovers:

Hand-in-hand, now pricked by the far-spreading
gorse, now ankle-deep in sand; now pressing the
soft, thick heath, which should make so brave an
autumn show; and now over wild thyme and other
fragrant herbs, they made their way, with many a
merry laugh. (52-53; ch.4)

While depicting Ruth's ingenuous happy nature, this is also suggestively sensuous, and there is a hint of future difficulties. Another view which causes Ruth 'breathless delight' shows the remoteness of daily living: 'Far away in the champaign were spires, and towers, and stacks of chimneys belonging to some distant hidden farmhouse, which were traced downwards through the golden air by the thin columns of blue smoke sent up from the evening fires' (53; ch.4). The final reflection of her bemused state is conveyed through sounds with the same precision and aptness to the purposes of place, as previous evocations of the visual:

The air seemed full of pleasant noises; distant church-bells made harmonious music with the little singing-birds near at hand; nor were the lowings of the cattle, nor the calls of the farm-servants discordant, for the voices seemed to be hushed by the brooding consciousness of the Sabbath. They stood loitering before the house, quietly enjoying the view. The clock in the little inn struck eight, and it sounded clear and

sharp in the stillness. (53; ch.4)

The chime of that clock is Cinderella-like. Ruth has 'longed to stop the hours, which would pass too quickly through the afternoon.' Time seems to have been suspended as the lovers saunter 'through fragrant lanes;', or stand 'loitering before the house'. Peace is shattered by the appearance of Mrs Mason. That Ruth 'staggered back to the broken sand-bank, and sank down', suggests the shifting sand of Mr Bellingham's regard, especially if one sets it beside the symbolism of sand and rock in the Abermouth episodes [see p 92]. The shock of a threat of dismissal leaves Ruth at the mercy of Bellingham. Now mist images instability and illusion: 'The future lay wrapped in a golden mist, which she did not care to penetrate; but if he, her sun, was out of sight and gone, the golden mist became dark heavy gloom, through which no hope could come' (56-57; ch.4). Soon after, 'Low and soft, with much hesitation, came the "Yes;" the fatal word of which she so little imagined the infinite consequences' (58; ch.4). Milham becomes 'a strange, varying, shifting dream - with the old home of her childhood for one scene, with the terror of Mrs Mason's unexpected appearance for another; and then, strangest, dizziest, happiest of all, there was the consciousness of his love, who was all the world to her' (59; ch.4).

At the inn the fragrance of sweet-briar evokes a mental picture which offers a last chance of escape:

The bush of sweetbrier, underneath the window, scented the place, and the delicious fragrance reminded her of her old home. I think scents affect and quicken the memory more than either sights or sound; for Ruth had instantly before her eyes the little garden beneath the window of her mother's room, with the old man leaning on his stick, watching her, just as he had done, not three hours before, on that very afternoon.

(60; ch.4)

But youthful timidity and Mr Bellingham stand in the way of seeking help from the old couple at the Grange. 'She entered the carriage and drove towards London' (61; ch.4).

The injunction, 'Remember how young, and innocent, and motherless she was!' is superfluous (56; ch.4). That has been established through the Milham Grange setting, hereafter synonymous with Ruth's seduction.

London: the hidden fall.

Gaskell has been harshly dealt with for her avoidance of the seduction in London. Stoneman calls it 'the most glaring gap in *Ruth*' (102), and Sharps castigates the 'personal inability to deal with the London period, during which Ruth lost her virtue' (150), and he regards as the novel's greatest weakness the fact that the author 'shirked the seduction, and thereby made the account of Ruth's redemption lack its very *raison d'être*' (161), which she does, he claims, because 'in the nature of things

she lacked first-hand experience of seduction, and her imagination could not supply the deficiency' (150). It is not lack of imagination, but sensitivity to the taboos of the age which prevent direct dealing with the seduction; to deal with the subject at all, and especially in the sympathetic way of *Ruth* where, for the first time in literature, the fallen woman is the heroine, is extremely courageous. One can hardly expect a portrayal of sexual passion in the frank manner of some twentieth-century novelists. Aina Rubenius's vindication is more sensible:

Although it is one of the most widely known facts about the Victorian mental atmosphere that these subjects were efficiently tabooed, modern critics of *Ruth* do not generally pay any regard to how much real courage was necessary to disregard the generally accepted standards of propriety and good taste, and Mrs Gaskell has been much criticised for a prudish lack of realism and inability to describe passion. (189)

Other nineteenth-century novelists are no more explicit. In *Adam Bede* the significance of Arthur's discovery of 'a woman's little, pink, silk neckerchief' (ch. 28) is made clear only when the cause of Hetty's 'hidden dread' is revealed and hindsight makes one realize that the Hermitage has been the scene of a seduction (ch.35). Steerforth's seduction of Little Emily in *David Copperfield* is not described, and in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, written nearly forty years after *Ruth*, the

scene of Tess's 'fall' is 'wrapped in thick darkness' so that the reader is never quite certain whether it is seduction or rape. Not only is the physical world dark, but Hardy wraps up the scene in a further blanket of philosophical musings (ch. 11).⁸

It was not ignorance which made Gaskell reticent about describing sexual passion. The child of nature at Milham makes Ruth's physical submission to Bellingham seem inevitable, and her response to the Welsh mountains is an acknowledgement of the power of sexual attraction. The omission of the London scene should not make a belief in the seduction impossible.

Wales: awakened woman.

Response to environment as a means of characterization is well illustrated in the Wales chapters. While Bellingham despises the inferior accommodation and abuses the weather, thinking only of his own comfort, Ruth 'knew not if she moved or stood still, for the grandeur of this beautiful earth absorbed all idea of separate and individual existence. Even rain was a pleasure to her' (65; ch.5). Thurstan Benson, too, rejoices in the beauty of the countryside, '"Rain never hinders me from walking. Indeed, it gives a new beauty to such a country as this"' (68; ch.5). Such responses hint at the relative self-absorption and selflessness of these characters, but the significance of Ruth's relationship with her environment

goes much deeper.

Scenes in which geographical features play a major part show that 'the journey to Wales is the journey she makes into her own awakening womanhood' (Watt 23). This is first revealed when her emotional response to Bellingham is displaced onto the 'Alpine country' of the Welsh village to which she is taken:

It was most true enjoyment to Ruth. It was opening a new sense; vast ideas of beauty and grandeur filled her mind at the sight of the mountains now first beheld in full majesty. She was almost overpowered by the vague and solemn delight; but by and by her love for them equalled her awe, and in the night-time she would softly rise, and steal to the window to see the white moonlight, which gave a new aspect to the everlasting hills that girdle the mountain village. (65; ch.5)

The 'opening a new sense' indicates awakened sexuality as well as delight in the natural scene. Belief in Ruth's love for Bellingham, and a free and natural giving of herself is, paradoxically, integral to an understanding of her purity. With a discretion which has little to do with prudishness, Gaskell suggests pleasure in the sexual act for Ruth, who is 'almost overpowered by the vague and solemn delight', and whose awe as the relationship develops changes into love. As she looks out on the hills girdling the village, the physical union of the lovers is subtly

symbolized, but the distance of mountains seen through a window also suggests an absence of real unity in their relationship, and white moonlight a transitoriness in the apparently protective landscape.

In a prefigurement of her departure from Wales, Ruth moves out of the inn for a ramble in the countryside. The water running 'high and rapidly, as busy as life' between the stepping stones she attempts to cross suggests her precarious future; the 'sound of rushing waters was in her ears to the exclusion of every other noise; her eyes were on the current running swiftly below her feet; and thus she was startled to see a figure close before her on one of the stones, and to hear a voice offering help' (67; ch.5).

Thurstan Benson helps her across the stones, and further on, across a wooden bridge where he fears the rush of waters below may make her dizzy. This foreshadows his role as the instrument of Ruth's salvation: physically, from suicide by drowning, socially, from the consequences of Bellingham's desertion and her pregnancy, and, spiritually, from the possibility of moral degradation.

This is in the future. Before Ruth is forced to leave the private world of Wales to be confronted by the social implications of her surrender to Bellingham, the scene beside the pool presents a memorable picture of the lovers:

A green gloom reigned there; it was the still
hour of noon; the little birds were quiet in some

leafy shade. They went on a few yards, and then they came to a circular pool overshadowed by the trees, whose highest boughs had been beneath their feet a few minutes before. The pond was hardly below the surface of the ground, and there was nothing like a bank on any side. A heron was standing there motionless, but when he saw them he flapped his wings and slowly rose, and soared above the green heights of the wood up into the very sky itself, for at that depth the trees appeared to touch the round white clouds which brooded over the earth. The speed-well grew in the shallowest water of the pool, and all around its margin, but the flowers were hardly seen at first, so deep was the green shadow cast by the trees. In the very middle of the pond the sky was mirrored clear and dark, a blue which looked as if a black void lay behind. (73-74; ch.6)

Gaskell's talent for recreating place in the reader's imagination is at its best. Time is specified and the scene carefully lighted; the eye is guided to notice the shape and situation of the pool, the reflections of trees and sky, the location of wild flowers growing in and around it, and to follow every movement of a bird, and observe the colour and shape of clouds along with an optical illusion which makes the trees seem to touch them. It is no aimless realism, however: in a noonday silence in which even the birds are quiet, this finely drawn backdrop evokes an

atmosphere of calm. Beyond that are symbolic overtones: green and white highlight Ruth's purity, and the half-light of the enclosed space the illusory nature of the lovers' withdrawal. That the trees which were below their feet before they descended to the pool are now above, the sky below them, images their inverted values. The soaring heron suggests eventual escape, and, while the brooding clouds and the black void behind the blue of the sky strike sombre notes, Ruth and Bellingham ignore the moral implications of the code they have broken. Then, as he decks her hair with white water-lilies, Ruth's adoring acceptance of his attentions contrasts with Bellingham's view of her as a temporary plaything:

When he came back he took off her bonnet, without speaking, and began to place his flowers in her hair. She was quite still while he arranged her coronet, looking up in his face with loving eyes, with a peaceful composure. She knew that he was pleased from his manner, which had the joyousness of a child playing with a new toy, and she did not think twice of his occupation. It was pleasant to forget everything except his pleasure. (74; ch.6)

The seduction may have been shirked, but this shows how easily it must have happened.

The scene's climax is a frameable picture which might have won acclaim at the Royal Academy:

She stood in her white dress against the trees which grew around; her face was flushed into a brilliancy of colour which resembled that of a rose in June; the great heavy white flowers drooped on either side of her beautiful head, and if her brown hair was a little disordered, the very disorder only seemed to add a grace. She pleased him more by looking so lovely than by all her tender endeavours to fall in with his varying humour. (74-75; ch.6)

Painterly techniques are reminiscent of Pre-Raphaelite works in which the sexuality of a passive female figure, who is little more than an admired object, is implied in the sensuousness of a detailed backdrop, and the picture explains a situation by implication.⁹ Ruth's love comes from the heart: Bellingham's is self-gratifying and blind to inner beauty.¹⁰ This is the metaphorical crowning of their love, echoed later when, in delirium, Bellingham asks, "'Where are the water-lilies? Where are the lilies in her hair?'" (446; ch.35). What other Victorian writer has shown a fallen woman and her lover in so intimate a scene, after the seduction?

Emotion is again reflected in setting during Ruth's long vigil outside Bellingham's sick-room [see p 40]. The interplay of light and shadow conveys uncertainty; awareness of sound establishes anxiety; the mountains now signify something larger than her feelings for Bellingham, as she begins to see beyond the present, and to suffer more

deeply than in the past: 'Now she knew the truth, that earth has no barrier which avails against agony. It comes lightning-like down from heaven, into the mountain house and the town garret; into the palace and into the cottage' (83; ch.7). Gaskell felt that introspection was 'a weakening of the art [of the novel] which has crept in of late years' (GL 420), but does not exclude it from her work, although, nearly always, as here, it proceeds from without. 'I think,' she says in the same letter, 'you must observe what is *out* of you, instead of examining what is *in* you.'

The vigil ends with a description of dawn, which, although it conveys relief and suggests that Bellingham may have come through the crisis, seems to be the author's, rather than Ruth's response to the scene, decorative rather than relevant. The verbal economy of the passage describing Bellingham's departure is more telling:

Wave above wave of the ever-rising hills were gained, were crossed, and at last Ruth struggled up to the very top and stood on the bare table of moor, brown and purple, stretching far away till it was lost in the haze of the summer afternoon; and the white road was all flat before her, but the carriage she sought and the figure she sought had disappeared. There was no human being there; a few wild, black-faced mountain sheep quietly grazing near the road, as if it were long since

they had been disturbed by the passing of any vehicle, was all the life she saw on the bleak moorland. (93; ch.8)

Ruth's frenzy finds expression in the chase, the blankness of life without her lover in the the bleak moorland.

Subsequently her torment is expressed in the storm-clouds she watches scudding wildly across the moon; and here overt correlation between the inner and outer world confirms symbolic interpretations of other passages: 'The storm was in her mind, and rent and tore her purposes into forms as wild and irregular as the heavenly shapes she was looking at' (100; ch. 9).

A few days later, knowing that she must leave Wales, she tries to imprint the place on her mind: 'She wandered from window to window, learning off each rock and tree by heart. Each had its tale, which it was agony to remember; but which it would have been worse agony to forget. The sound of running waters she heard that quiet evening was in her ears as she lay on her death-bed; so well had she learnt their tune' (131; ch.12). In the Bensons' home, when she retreats into 'the haunts of memory', thoughts of the Welsh mountains and of Bellingham become one (149; ch.14).

Ruth has awakened to love, but also to a realization that a moral code has been broken, and that trust in Bellingham is a delusion: 'She had driven to Llan-dhu, sitting by her lover's side, living in the bright present, and strangely forgetful of the past or the future; she had

dreamed out her dream, and she had awakened from the vision of love' (131; ch.12). The Ruth who leaves Wales with Benson is no longer the naïve girl who leaves Milham with Bellingham, but there is still much to discover about her own spirit in Eccleston and Abermouth.

Eccleston: taking root and blossoming.

Ruth first sees Eccleston as 'a low grey cloud ... the smoke of the town hanging over the plain' (133; ch.12)). One expects an industrial setting, but the manufacturing town is kept in the background through occasional references to Mr Bradshaw and his milieu: the principal setting for this part of Ruth's life is the semi-withdrawn situation of the Bensons' home and its adjunct, the Dissenting Chapel. This locale is the equivalent of the countryside in a pastoral: set apart, close to nature and to simple living, where the personality can be nurtured and matured in preparation for a return to society with renewed strength and deeper insights. Charlotte Brontë uses a similar device in placing Jane Eyre in Moor House where, like Ruth in Chapel-House, she is renewed in the context of a caring family. 'Whether her characters live in country town or industrial city, Elizabeth Gaskell always considers their family relationships as a fundamental part of their lives' (Duthie 88). The place which houses the family is equally fundamental.

Gaston Bachelard, who gives the name 'topoanalysis' to what he terms 'an auxiliary of psychoanalysis', and

defines as 'the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives' (8), devotes two chapters of his *Poetics of Space* to the house, which, he argues, can be used 'as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul' (xxxiii). He maintains that 'room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy' (38), an idea which can fruitfully be applied to Chapel-House. It is a house of peace, quiet, cleanliness, warmth, and shelter, so closely related to its walled garden that nature is integral to it, while the view from Ruth's attic window of the town, the distant hills, and the heavens, makes her room and the house, worlds within other worlds, ultimately within that of God's vigilance so often symbolized by the sky.

Bachelard argues that:

a house is foremost a geometrical object, one which we are tempted to analyze rationally. Its prime reality is visible and tangible, made of well hewn solids and well fitted framework.... A geometrical object of this kind ought to resist metaphors that welcome the human body and the human soul. But transposition to the human plane takes place immediately whenever a house is considered as space for cheer and intimacy, space that is supposed to condense and defend intimacy. (47-48)

Chapel-house, as 'geometrical object', is introduced

directly through the narrator's account of its lay-out. In *North and South* and *Wives and Daughters*, the geography of a house is more indirectly drawn through the observations of a visitor or inmate, but always the impression is gained that, were fiction suddenly to become reality, one would know one's way around Gaskell's houses. Along with that 'visible and tangible reality' they are also 'space for cheer and intimacy', and this home permeates Ruth's spirit which it both influences and reflects.

On her first evening, sitting in the parlour, Ruth watches Sally at work in the kitchen, 'and though she was not conscious of close or minute observation at the time ... yet it was curious how faithfully that scene remained depicted on her memory in after years'. It is a subtly-lit picture: 'The warm light filled every corner of the kitchen, in strong distinction to the faint illumination of the one candle in the parlour, whose radiance was confined, and was lost in the dead folds of window-curtains, carpet, and furniture', and, with the particularities of Sally's costume which were 'painted on Ruth's memory', the whole scene is painted on our imaginations (136; ch.13).¹¹

The house's restorative powers are already at work, and when Ruth is taken to her attic room there is no 'resisting of metaphors that welcome the human body and the human soul':

The white dimity bed, and the walls, stained green, had something of the colouring and purity of effect of a snowdrop; while the floor, rubbed

with a mixture that turned it into a rich dark brown, suggested the idea of garden-mould out of which the snowdrop grows. (137; ch.13)

The room with its green and white decor and dark-brown floor fits the image of a snowdrop growing out of garden-mould, while both room and snowdrop reflect Ruth's purity. This is also the first of many garden images which link the Bensons' home with Ruth's development.

Nature infuses the house literally as well as figuratively: on Ruth's first morning open windows 'let in the sweet morning air, and streaming eastern sunshine. The long jessamine sprays, with their white-scented stars, forced themselves almost into the room ... and the parlour was scented with the odours of mignonette and stocks', while roses picked by Miss Benson, 'lay, all dewy and fresh, on the white breakfast-cloth' (140-141; ch.13). The passing of time, the protective character of the garden, and the links with Leonard's and Ruth's development are emphasized, not only in descriptive passages, but in such narrative comments as, 'before the little celandines were out on the hedge-banks, or the white violets had sent forth their fragrance from the border under the south wall of Miss Benson's small garden, Ruth was able to carry her baby into that sheltered place on sunny days' (170; ch.16). A year after her arrival, 'the flowers were budding now, that were all in bloom when she came down, on that first autumnal morning, into the sunny parlour. The yellow

jessamine, that was then a tender plant, had now taken firm root in the soil, and was sending out strong shoots' (190; ch.18). Five years later the growth of plants reflects the maturing of Ruth's 'heart, and mind, and soul':

The laburnum-tree, which when Ruth came was like a twig stuck into the ground, was now a golden glory in spring, and a pleasant shade in summer. The wild hop, that Mr Benson had brought home from one of his country rambles, and planted by the parlour-window, while Leonard was yet a baby in his mother's arms, was now a garland over the casement, hanging down long tendrils, that waved in the breezes, and threw pleasant shadows and traceries, like some Bacchanalian carving, on the parlour walls, at 'morn or dusky eve.'

(208; ch.19)

The tendrils of the wild hop, like the 'long jessamine sprays which forced themselves almost into the room' in the earlier scene, are apt to the gentle way in which Ruth is bound into this home. Jessamine was her mother's favourite flower, and there are other echoes of the Milham home with its 'tender green of climbing roses and young creepers'. Chapel-house has, in part, compensated for the loss of Milham Grange and Ruth is once again rooted in a home.

This beneficial effect of the house is primarily because it reflects the characters of Thurstan, Faith, and Sally. Even the description of its geography tells us something about their loving concern for one another's

comfort. Sally and Miss Benson would have appropriated the back room for Mr Benson's study had not the kitchen opened out of it, for 'with its garden aspect, it was so much the pleasanter of the two', and Mr Benson's study being the nearest room to the street enables him to give help unobtrusively to many a person who calls (135-136; ch.13). Later the effect of time on the house also reflects their characters:

The furniture looked poor, and the carpets almost threadbare; but there was such a dainty spirit of cleanliness abroad, such exquisite neatness of repair, and altogether so bright and cheerful a look about the rooms - everything so above-board - no shifts to conceal poverty under flimsy ornament - that many a splendid drawing-room would give less pleasure to those who could see evidences of character in inanimate things.

(207-208; ch.19)

Evidences of a very different character are seen in Mr Bradshaw's house which is 'square and massy-looking, with a great deal of drab-colour about the furniture' (188; ch.17). Here the garden is not intimately associated with the interior:

It was full of sunshine and flowers, and this made the contrast between it and the usual large family room ... more striking than usual....
There was the great dining-table, heavy and

square; the range of chairs, straight and square; the work-boxes, useful and square; the colouring of walls, and carpet, and curtains, all of the coldest description; everything was handsome and everything was ugly. (231; ch.20)

Disregard for nature is a sign of disapproval, and Mr Bradshaw, like Mr Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, is as insensitive as the descriptions of their 'square' houses indicate.¹² Dickens's description is more powerful, but Mr Bradshaw's house and Mrs Thornton's dining-room in *North and South*, show that Gaskell can use metonymy with skill. Although Ruth is welcomed in the Bradshaw home, its formidable nature purports trouble in the future. By then she will have matured because of her 'pastoral' education, in which the religious as well as the domestic ambience plays its part, seen principally through scenes in the chapel.

The Dissenting Chapel, like the Bensons' home, is simple and peaceful, and infused by nature. Ivy-covered windows produce 'a green gloom' within, and 'an infinite number of little birds,' which have their homes in the ivy are as much part of the worship as the singing and attitudes of the congregation: 'the walls were whitewashed, and were recipients of the shadows of the beauty without; on their "white plains" the tracery of the ivy might be seen, now still, now stirred by the sudden flight of some little bird' (152; ch.14). Here Ruth realizes her sin, not because of sermonizing, but through the compassion of the

Bensons and the influence of their home, of nature, and of the chapel itself. If her repentant tears flow rather too freely, marring parts of the novel, the depiction of place often helps to redeem it from sentimentality.

Attention has been drawn to the snowdrop image. Apart from its obvious association with purity, the snowdrop symbolizes hope, which gives added significance to its association with Ruth's room as well as to Faith Benson's words on the night of Leonard's birth:

'"Look, Ruth! ... my brother sends you these. They are the first snowdrops in the garden." And she put them on the pillow by Ruth; the baby lay on the opposite side' (161; ch. 15).¹³ The idea of the purity of an unmarried mother shocked some Victorian readers, but others responded to the message in *Ruth* that, given the right conditions of loving acceptance, a sinner could be redeemed, and grow into a spiritually whole person. Much of this message is conveyed through descriptions of place in this phase of Ruth's journey, during which hope replaces despair as she grows quietly, like the garden plants, into maturity. It is a preparation for the major crisis of her life, for which another new setting is chosen.

Abermouth: rock or sand?

The setting of Ruth's life now becomes that space which Bachelard terms "immensity" (ch.8). Unlike the gentle, walled space of Chapel-house, with its cultivated

garden plants, the sea-side house at Abermouth is situated in extensive surroundings, and is exposed to the primitive power of the elements as its 'wild sea-views' indicate:

From every part of the rooms, they saw the grey storms gather on the sea horizon, and put themselves in marching array; and soon the march became a sweep, and the great dome of the heavens was covered with the lurid clouds, between which and the vivid green earth below there seemed to come a purple atmosphere, making the very threatening beautiful; and by and by the house was wrapped in sheets of rains [sic] shutting out sky and sea, and inland view. (259; ch. 22).

The immensity of 'the great dome of heaven', the expanse of 'sky and sea, and inland view', and the disturbance in the storm clouds provides a prelude to the scenes in which Ruth encounters her former lover, and engages in a battle between passion and conscience which is given cosmic dimensions by the images of earth, air, fire, and water which dominate the Abermouth episode.

Bachelard claims to learn philosophy from poets, and argues, from an examination of images of immensity in a number of French writers, that there is 'a correspondence between the immensity of world space and the depths of "inner space"' (205). He feels that contemplation of immensity 'can point the way to intimate depth' (189). When we contemplate or daydream about immensity in the outer world, we are really contemplating a possibility

within ourselves which he calls 'intimate immensity'. Gaskell seems to understand this psychological phenomenon, but her moral vision includes an additional dimension: beyond the observable world and the inner self, although in touch with them, is the infinity of God. These three dimensions interact in the Abermouth episode, with the outer world often indicating the inner and the transcendent.

Interlinked with images of immensity is another recurring pattern of images: storm and rock and sand. 'Eagle's Crag', as the house is named, is 'built on the summit of a rock' (259; ch.22), and the meeting with Bellingham takes place on the sands below it. Images of sand and rock are frequent and signify Ruth's choice between the uncertain foundation of a relationship with Bellingham and the sure foundation of submission to God, her 'rock and strong fortress', a phrase which she herself quotes from Psalm 18 (274; ch. 23). In conjunction with this, the repeated battering of the house by storms points to another biblical reference which seems to underlie the whole episode:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every

one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24-27).

The reappearance of Bellingham (or Donne as he is now known) occurs on the sands where Ruth, Elizabeth, and Mary have been playing in an atmosphere of carefree, childlike happiness. Abruptly the atmosphere changes: 'the September evening was fast closing in the dark and sunless day. As they turned homewards in the rapidly increasing dusk, they saw three figures on the sand near the rocks coming in their direction' (267; ch. 23). Watt suggests that the appearance of Bellingham 'near the rocks' associates him with the 'sharp, jutting outcrops of rock' in the Abermouth scenes, and therefore with danger (27), but, in keeping with the biblical echoes, it seems more appropriate to associate him with sand. She recognizes his voice in the dark, and 'the sands heaved and trembled beneath Ruth. The figures near her vanished into strange nothingness; the sounds of their voices were as distant sounds in a dream, while the echo of one voice thrilled through and through'. Then images of sand and rock express her shock in even more powerful terms: 'It seemed as if weights were tied to her feet - as if the steadfast rocks receded - as if time stood still; - it was so long, so terrible, that path across the reeling sand' (269; ch. 23). All she can say is, '"Those

sands - oh! those sands, those weary, dreadful sands! But that is all over now" (270; ch.23). Ostensibly this refers to the walk on the beach; figuratively it expresses all the emotional weariness of the troubled path Bellingham has caused her to travel.

In the return to 'Eagle's Crag' the reciprocity of environment and character is expressed in various ways. First attention is drawn to the influence of the environment on the spirit: 'the noise, the warmth, the very bustle of the servants, were a positive relief to Ruth, and for the time lifted off the heavy press of pent-up passion. A silent house, with moonlit rooms, or with a faint gloom brooding over the apartments, would have been more to be dreaded. Then she must have given way, and cried out' (270-271; ch.23). Then the link between memory and place is evoked as Ruth stands gazing into the fire, seeing 'not the dead grey embers, or the little sparks of vivid light that ran hither and thither among the wood-ashes - but an old farm-house, and climbing winding road, and a little golden breezy common, with a rural inn on the hill-top far, far away' (271; ch.23). This image, with all its associations, is recalled to remind us of the 'fatal "yes"' at Milham. And when Ruth, at length, releases her pent-up emotion in the seclusion of her room, it is reflected in the environment. In an agony of doubt over her feelings for Bellingham for whom she still yearns as her 'darling love' while the mother in her recognizes the heartlessness

of a father who does not love his child, she opens the window to become one with the storm which rages outside:

She threw her body half out of the window into the cold night air. The wind was rising, and came in great gusts. The rain beat down on her. It did her good. A still, calm night would not have soothed her as this did. The wild tattered clouds, hurrying past the moon, gave her a foolish kind of pleasure that almost made her smile a vacant smile. The blast-driven rain came on her again, and drenched her hair through and through. (274; ch.23)

Here is that connection between emotion and the elements so often associated with Romanticism. One thinks of the storm on the night of Rochester's proposal in *Jane Eyre* (vol.2; ch.8), or Cathy's drenching in the rain on the night of Heathcliff's disappearance in *Wuthering Heights* (ch.9). It is also an association which goes back to Elizabethan ideas about correspondence, and Ruth's act 'is reminiscent of King Lear's own elemental struggle with the dark powers of the universe as they mirror the turbulence of his own soul' (Watt 29). As in Lear's experience, it is a purging, for the storm which mirrors her soul calms it by symbolically washing away rebellious passion, so environment is seen as both reflecting and influencing character.

Ruth's decision to deny her love for Bellingham and put her trust in God, her 'rock and strong fortress', is

followed by a violent buffeting of the house suggesting again the parable of the two houses:

And the wind rose yet higher, and the house shook and vibrated as, in measured time, the great and terrible gusts came from the four quarters of the heavens and blew around it, dying away in the distance with loud and unearthly wails, which were not utterly still before the sound of the coming blast was heard like the trumpets of the vanguard of the Prince of Air. (274-275; ch.23) ¹⁴

The raging storm which has imaged and calmed Ruth's emotions, now signifies a spiritual onslaught. Although she has at last realized the corruptness of Bellingham, the battle is not over and he is still the tempter whose attractions she cannot forget.

Next day, in the church, the tempter's presence in the opposite pew cuts her off from her surroundings which are deftly transmuted into religious images, so that he is also seen as a spiritual barrier separating her from God: 'She durst not lift her eyes to the bright eastern light - she could not see how peacefully the marble images of the dead lay on their tombs, for he was between her and all Light and Peace' (281; ch.23). A strange experience brings consolation. Mysticism is not characteristic of Gaskell's religious view, but the following passage conveys a mystical notion of suffering with a confidence which makes it appear her natural idiom:

While all the church and the people swam in misty haze, one point in a dark corner grew clearer and clearer till she saw (what at another time she could not have discerned at all) a face - a gargoyle I think they call it - at the end of the arch next to the narrowing of the nave into the chancel, and in the shadow of that contraction.

(282; ch.23)

The gargoyle's expression of suffering made beautiful by divine consolation speaks directly to Ruth. Past and present, mortal and immortal, life and art are synthesized in a spiritual experience inspired by a fixed object momentarily unbound by time and space: 'Whatever it was - however it came there - imaginer, carver, sufferer, all were long passed away. Human art was ended - human life done - human suffering over; but this remained; it stilled Ruth's beating heart to look on it' (283; ch.23). Sharps selects this episode as the 'finest single piece we can quote from *Ruth*, being the product of a poetic sensibility more than once displayed in that novel' (162).

That poetic sensibility, together with a strong dramatic consciousness, is indeed displayed again in the succeeding scene. The same elemental setting and sustained images of sand and rock associated with their previous encounters at Abermouth inform the meeting with Bellingham which takes place in an immense space encompassing sea and sand, a rocky descent from cultivated fields and wild moorland, a church and the scattered houses of the village,

as well as distant hills, and bounded only by the sky.¹⁵

As Ruth waits alone on the sands, she looks first towards the land and then turns to the sea, the vastness emphasizing her solitude and the extent of her struggle with conscience:

Once there, she turned round, and in a darting glance, saw that as yet noone was near. She was perhaps half a mile or more from the grey, silvery rocks, which sloped away into brown moorland, interspersed with a field here and there of golden, waving corn. Behind were purple hills, with sharp, clear outlines, touching the sky. A little on one side from where she stood, she saw the white cottages and houses which formed the village of Abermouth, scattered up and down, and, on a windy hill, about a mile inland, she saw the little grey church, where even now many were worshipping in peace. (295; ch. 24)

As well as painterly characteristics of composition, line, and colour, here are, as Craik remarks, 'the cornfields of the farming country which has bred her, the moors and hills of her period of love and despair, the village of the common human lot she has worked to rejoin, and the church and the religion which have guided and sustained her' (59). A seascape speaks further of isolation, and of eternity:

The tide had turned; the waves were slowly receding, as if loth to lose the hold they had,

so lately, and with such swift bounds, gained on the yellow sands. The eternal moan they have made since the world began filled the ear, broken only by the skirl of the grey sea-birds as they alighted in groups on the edge of the waters, or as they rose up with their measured, balancing motion, and the sunlight caught their white breasts. There was no sign of human life to be seen; no boat, or distant sail, or near shrimper. The black posts there were all that spoke of men's work or labour. Beyond a stretch of the waters, a few pale grey hills showed like films; their summits clear, though faint, their bases lost in a vapoury mist. (295-296; ch.24)

There is sombreness in the sounds of waves and sea-birds, and in the prevailing colours of black, grey, and white. Ruth stands alone. Her isolation and the bitter struggle in her soul are more aptly expressed through place than in the sometimes turgid dialogue and narrative in this scene. She is no passive heroine: the painful decision not to live with or marry Bellingham depends on her own spirit which has matured during the Eccleston period, so that Abermouth is the true moral test which Milham was not. This is as central to her justification as the earlier exemplifications of innocence.

After Bellingham's departure, as Ruth clambers up the steep rocky path which leads away from the sands, she finds shelter behind 'a great overhanging rock'. 'In a quick

desire to see him once more', she climbs to 'an out-jutting dizzy point of rock ... commanding a wide view over the bare, naked sands', but when she finds that only a solitary fisherman is visible, she returns to the sheltering rock, where her desolation finds expression in another view: 'the expanse of grey, wild, bleak moors, stretching wide away below a sunless sky, seemed only an outward sign of the waste world within her heart' (304-5; ch.24).

Contemplation of immensity points the way to inner depth, as Bachelard suggests. But as she sits, supported and sheltered by rock which represents the spiritual foundation she has chosen for her life, the expansive view which mirrors the emptiness in her heart is superseded, through her contemplation of a sunset, by an experience of the spiritual dimension of immensity:

She shut her eyes, until through the closed lids came a ruddy blaze of light. The clouds had parted away, and the sun was going down in the crimson glory behind the distant purple hills. The whole western sky was one flame of fire. Ruth forgot herself in looking at the gorgeous sight. She sat up gazing, and, as she gazed, the tears dried on her cheeks; and, somehow, all human care and sorrow were swallowed up in the unconscious sense of God's infinity. The sunset calmed her more than any words, however wise and tender, could have done. It even seemed to give

her strength and courage; she did not know how or why, but so it was. (305; ch.24)

This consoling sight, in which the element of fire symbolizes the rekindling of her spirit, speaks to Ruth of God. 'She did not know how or why', but it is revealed through the objective world.

'I could have put out much more power, but that I wanted to keep [*Ruth*] quiet in tone, lest by the slightest exaggeration, or over-strained sentiment I might weaken the force of what I had to say' (GL 148), yet George Eliot said of *Ruth*, 'Mrs Gaskell seems to me to be constantly misled by a love of sharp contrasts - of "dramatic" effects. She is not contented with the subdued colouring - the half tints of real life' (Haight II: 86). There are moments during the Abermouth scenes when one feels that control is being lost and what is naturally dramatic is becoming melodramatic, but in the handling of setting, Gaskell shows herself capable of a powerful Brontëan Romanticism, which she seldom again attempts. By the time she writes *Wives and Daughters* she has become a master of 'the subdued colouring - the half tints of real life' George Eliot preferred.

Eccleston again: from darkness to light.

Ruth returns to Eccleston and familiar surroundings; although characterization is occasionally aided by environment, there is not that constant awareness of an outer world previously integral to the inner life. The

shift away from setting as a major mode of characterization and narrative partly accounts for a lessening of intensity.

There are other weaknesses such as melodrama and contrivance as regards Leonard and in the story of Richard Bradshaw, and the strained piety of some sections. There is also a falling off of interest in the shift of focus from Ruth to two sub-plots involving the Bradshaw family: the love affair of Jemima and Mr Farquhar, and the story of Richard Bradshaw and the forged deed. Here the predominance of dialogue, although often skilfully deployed, lacks the vitality that setting has provided in the earlier chapters. The relationship between the outer and inner world which has proved so excellent a means of characterizing Ruth, is, however, used, although less sharply, in the story of Jemima's jealousies:

Autumn and winter, with their lowering skies, were less dreary than the woeful, desolate feelings that shed a gloom on Jemima.... And so spring ... came back to her, bringing all the contrasts which spring alone can bring to add to the heaviness of the soul.... The sunny weather mocked Jemima, and the unusual warmth oppressed her physical powers. (314-15; ch.26)

There environment does not reflect mood, but heightens it by contrast, while in the following extract, which is a faint echo of Ruth's experience at Abermouth, there is a correlation between her emotional state and what Jemima

sees:

She opened the window, to let the cool night air blow in on her hot cheeks. The clouds were hurrying over the moon's face in a tempestuous and unstable manner, making all things seem unreal; now clear out in the bright light, now trembling and quivering in shadow. The pain at her heart seemed to make Jemima's brain grow dull; she laid her head on her arms, which rested on the window-sill, and grew dizzy with the sick weary notion that the earth was wandering lawless and aimless through the heavens, where all seemed one tossed and whirling wrack of clouds.

(333; ch.26)

In the story of Richard Bradshaw place is used on only one occasion to enhance one's perception of character. In this passage, the keys, locks, boxes and drawers in Mr Bradshaw's office portray the rigidity of the father and the secretiveness of the son:

He had lingered in the office for the two previous nights; at first, occupying himself in searching for the certificates of the Insurance shares; but, when all the boxes and other repositories for papers had been ransacked, the thought took hold of him that they might be in Richard's private desk; and, with the determination which overlooks the means to get at the end, he had first tried all his own keys on

the complicated lock, and then broken it open with two decided blows of a poker, the instrument nearest at hand.... Then, leaving the letters in a heap upon the table, and the broken desk to tell its own tale, he locked the door of the room which was appropriated to his son as junior partner, and carried the key away with him. (401-402; ch.30)

Mr Bradshaw's decisive locking of his son's room is also a psychological attempt to lock him out of his life, just as his rigid views lock Ruth out of his home; in effect he locks up his own natural affections.¹⁶ Ironically, too, Mr Bradshaw's violent attempt to get at the truth about Richard, imaged in the 'decided blows of the poker', is a step towards the discovery of the truth about his own culpability regarding Ruth, which leads him back to his pew in the Chapel, and, at the end of the novel, to the home of his friend, Mr Benson.

The Bradshaw sub-plots may shift the focus from Ruth, but they emphasize, by contrast, the venial nature of her sin compared to the destructive jealousy of Jemima and the culpable nature of Richard's dishonest dealings. Ruth remains the main concern, however, and the closing stages of her journey are marked by four important milestones: the exposure of the lie about her status; her reintegration into society through her work as a nurse; her sacrificial caring for Bellingham during his illness; and her death.

Although not as closely linked to place as previous episodes, there is in each an underlining of character through setting.

First comes the exposure of what society regards as Ruth's fallen state. The lie which has concealed it has, from its inception, been seen as a falling to temptation: 'Ah, tempter! unconscious tempter! Here was a way of evading trials for the 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' (122; ch.11). The necessity for protecting Ruth and Leonard by lying about her status is part of the novel's indictment of society; at the same time, given the absolute standard of truth upon which Unitarians insisted, Ruth cannot be fully justified while hiding behind such a lie.¹⁷ The punishment which follows its exposure is also an attack on a society which, in the person of Mr Bradshaw, is shown as cruelly judgemental and unforgiving.

The scene of the lie's exposure is set in his daughters' schoolroom. A picnic is planned, for Ruth's pupils had been 'clamorous for an expedition to the hills, before the calm stillness of the autumn should be disturbed by storms'; now 'they sat down to work, while Mrs Denbigh read aloud. A fresh sun-gleam burst into the room, and they looked at each other with glad, anticipating eyes'. Into this peaceful scene bursts Mr Bradshaw, abruptly dismissing his younger daughters. 'A cloud passing over the sun cast a cold gloom into the room which was late so

bright and beaming; but, by equalizing the light, it took away the dark shadow from the place where Jemima had been standing, and her figure caught her father's eye' (334-336; ch.26). Change is heralded: for Ruth from calm to storms, from sun-gleam to cloud, and for Jemima a moving away from the dark shadows of jealousy. At the end of this scene, in which Mr Bradshaw's violent words lash Ruth unmercifully, and Jemima passionately confesses her jealousy, Ruth leaves:

Jemima stood by, dumb and pitying. Her sorrow was past her power. She helped in arranging the dress, with one or two gentle touches, which were hardly felt by Ruth, but which called out all Mr. Bradshaw's ire afresh; he absolutely took her by the shoulders and turned her by force out of the room. In the hall, and along the stairs, her passionate woeful crying was heard. The sound only concentrated Mr. Bradshaw's anger on Ruth. He held the street door open wide, and said, between his teeth, 'if ever you, or your bastard, darken this door again, I will have you both turned out by the police' (341; ch.26)

In this conclusion to a painful scene, setting is again evoked to underscore feelings: Ruth's crying echoing through the house, and Mr Bradshaw's anger expressed in his holding of the door wide open.

Ruth reaches the next milestone when, no longer able

to work as governess, she becomes a nurse. Some see her nursing as an unnecessary penance, but the remark overheard by Leonard is probably nearer the truth of the author's intention: '"Such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God, and of the blessed Jesus"' (429; ch.33). She lives out the commitment to God made at Abermouth through this love of neighbour, and is reinstated in society through recognition of the compassion and fortitude of her nursing, first in the homes of the poor and then in the typhus-ward of the hospital. A clear picture of the setting might have strengthened the novel here, but we are shown neither the homes of the poor nor the hospital in any detail.

In the closing chapters, however, two scenes and their locations regain the vigour of earlier parts of the novel: the hotel-room where Ruth nurses Bellingham; and the attic-room where she dies. 'Was it quite impossible but that your Ruth should *die*? I had that thought of regret in closing the book - Oh, I must confess to it - Pardon me for the tears' sake!' wrote Elizabeth Barrett-Browning (Waller 42); Charlotte Brontë was of the same opinion, and a hundred years later Hopkins wrote, 'The author was brave enough to reinstate her heroine, why could she not have ventured a step further and allowed Ruth the satisfaction of continuing to enjoy, if humbly and chastely, the fruits of her hard won struggle?' (123). That death should be the reward for nursing the unrepentant Bellingham does seem

excessive, but is intended to demonstrate that the highest love is sacrificial, and that Ruth is redeemed in terms of this world and the next: the journey is completed by entering the life beyond death, which the symbolism of sky has anticipated.

In the hotel-room, as fever overtakes her, Ruth's memories are confused with present sights and sounds through a strange interior monologue in which stark reality and a consciousness of place are interwoven with a feverish sense of dissociation:

She could not remember the present time, or where she was. All times of her earliest youth - the days of her childhood - were in her memory with a minuteness and fulness of detail which was miserable; for all along she felt that she had no real grasp on the scenes that were passing through her mind.... Her head lay on her arms, and they rested on the table. Every now and then she opened her eyes, and saw the large room, handsomely furnished with articles that were each one incongruous with the other, as if bought at sales.... The sky through the uncurtained window looked dark and black - would this night never have an end? Had the sun gone down for ever, and would the world at last awaken to a general sense of everlasting night? (444-445; ch.35)

It is not everlasting night, but everlasting day

which is promised in Ruth's dying moments in the attic-room to which she has been taken: "The Light is coming" she said. . And, raising herself slowly, she stretched out her arms, and then fell back, very still for evermore" (448; ch.35). It is fitting that Ruth's death should be set here. After her return from Abermouth, she dreamt of the threatening sea from which she has to rescue Leonard, 'as full consciousness returned, she saw herself safe in the dear old room - the haven of rest - the shelter from storms' (311; ch. 25), and that room remains, to the end, her place, her nest within the house: 'There she lay in the attic-room in which her baby had been born, her watch over him kept, her confession to him made; and now she was stretched on the bed in utter helplessness' (447-448; ch.35).¹⁸

Finally, what irony there is in Bellingham's incongruous intrusion into the place where Ruth lies dead: 'He stood in the humble low-roofed attic, the window open, and the tops of the distant snow-covered hills filling up the whiteness of the general aspect' (451; ch.36). He knows nothing of the room's associations, most of them the consequences of what he glibly calls, "my youthful folly". His blindness to everything in Ruth except her outward beauty, and to everything in himself except his own gratification, is painfully underlined in this scene, for he has entered the room only because, 'he fancied that a change of place would banish the train of reflection that was troubling him; but the change he anticipated was to a

well-warmed, cheerful sitting-room, with signs of life, and a bright fire therein, and he was on the last flight of stairs, - at the door of the room where Ruth lay - before he understood whither Sally was conducting him' (451; ch.36). The juxtaposition of Ruth and Bellingham in her snowdrop room is a telling indictment of the double standard by which society condemned the woman and exonerated the man.

At the end of the novel we are vividly reminded of Ruth's seduction and desertion, when Mr Benson enters the pulpit to deliver his funeral sermon: 'he looked, and, as he gazed, a mist came before him, and he could not see his sermon, nor his hearers, but only Ruth, as she had been - stricken low, and crouching from sight, in the upland field by Llan-dhu - like a woeful, hunted creature' (457; ch.36). He had raised her up and offered that chance of self-redemption to a betrayed woman for which the novel pleads. The simple picture of Ruth 'crouching from sight in the upland field by Llan-dhu' is enough to recall all the circumstances of her plight, because in Mr Benson's mind, and ours, Ruth is intimately linked to place.

This linking demonstrates Elizabeth Gaskell's deliberate use of place. In the most powerful sections of *Ruth*, the outer world so enriches characterization that the settings for the protagonist's life illuminate her thoughts and emotions, while the progress of her spirit, which is the novel's message of hope, finds expression in a journey

through places as varied in their observable features as in their connections with character.

CHAPTER THREE

'Made to be Mutually Dependent': Vision and Place in *North and South*

Setting in *North and South* encompasses places which represent several important aspects of newly industrialized Britain, and, although closely related to an individual journey of discovery as in *Ruth*, it has a significance which goes beyond the personal to the novel's vision of a coherent society. How place in *North and South* relates to the broken society Gaskell observes, and the remedies she suggests, is the theme of this chapter.

"For sure, th' world is in a confusion that passes me or any other man to understand;" says Nicholas Higgins, "it needs fettling [putting right], and who's to fettle it, if it's as yon folks say, and there's naught but what we see?" (382; ch.37). Stephen Blackpool, in *Hard Times*, utters a similar cry: "Ah, Rachael, aw a muddle! Fro' first to last, a muddle!" (bk.3 ch.6). It is an attitude many Victorians shared.

The growth of factories had led to a huge shift of population from country to town and a widening gap between rural and industrial attitudes and interests, represented in the novel by 'North' and 'South'. The new cities like Manchester, on which Milton-Northern is based, exemplified the pride and shame of the age: on one hand the astounding progress in manufacturing and trade which brought wealth and prestige to Britain and, on the other, the appalling

conditions under which large sections of its populations lived. The gap between wealthy employers and poverty-stricken workers was also widening. Competition for jobs or profits emphasized the independence of the individual who, in that sense, gained importance, while the engulfing crowd threatened a loss of significance. As society fragmented, bonds to the old smaller communities were dissolved, and the nature of new bonds within the cumbersome new communities were uncertain. It was this problem of relatedness of parts to one another, and parts to the whole, which underlay much of the confusion within and between the country and the industrial city, and extended to certain traditional communities, represented in *North and South* by Harley Street in London and by Oxford, which had to reassess their roles. Relatedness was also at the core of much of the anxious debate of the time and many of the attempts at reform.¹ Whether it concerned economic, political, social, or religious matters it usually revolved around the meaning of the individual, and how individuals should relate to one another, to the groups in which they found themselves, to society as a whole, and to whatever wider world there was if all was not only, as Higgins says, 'what we see'.

In literature there were attempts to address some of the problems of this new society in novels like Disraeli's *Sybil, or The Two Nations*, Kingsley's *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet*, Dickens's *Hard Times*, and many

others.² In addition to such overt concern with the effects of fragmentation, Carol Christ argues that a concentration in literature and art on what she calls 'particularity' is an indirect response. She shows how this is manifested in different ways in the poetry of Tennyson, Browning, and Hopkins, and finds expression in the writings of Ruskin with his insistence on the minutiae of nature, as well as in the fine detail of Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Chris Brooks, in turn, in a discussion of writers, painters, and architects of the mid-Victorian world, shows that realism (which, naturally, includes particularity) is often symbolic of wider concerns. 'The enterprise of realism,' he writes, 'is an attempt to capture what the *being* of the real world is like. The distinctive character of the artists discussed in this book is that, for them, such an exercise was co-extensive with an attempt to capture the *meaning* of the real world as well' (3). Neither critic mentions Gaskell, but what Brooks calls 'symbolic realism' and regards as 'a fundamental mode of the Victorian imagination' is applicable to her work, as is a concentration on detail akin to Carol Christ's 'particularity'.

North and South is a more mature and comprehensive attempt than either of Gaskell's earlier social protest novels, *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, to 'capture meaning in the real world' and to answer some of the problems of relatedness. She shows that men and women, although infinitely valuable in themselves, are not free to pursue

independent interests to the detriment of others as the Masters attempt to do, nor should they be regarded as mere components of a group in which common interest supersedes that of the individual as with Boucher and the Unions. They are interdependent members of a voluntarily co-operating society which is held together by a common humanity founded on a belief in the fatherhood of God. This is the novel's vision, an ideal as is ruefully shown, but one towards which people should aspire. "God has made us," Margaret tells Thornton, "so that we must be mutually dependent" (169; ch.15). Along with this goes a concentration on the particular in the portrayal of disparate places, which underlines the importance of the part to the whole and thereby the individual to society, and a linking of places which symbolizes reconciliation.

It is a religious view of society underpinned by certain Unitarian ideas. 'Elizabeth Gaskell,' as Lansbury argues, 'has been consistently misunderstood because insufficient attention has been paid to her religion, and what it meant to be a Unitarian, isolated and privileged [sic], dedicated to the principle of individual independence and yet determined to ameliorate society' (15).

Unitarians reject the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, although there is reverence for Jesus and his teachings, particularly about love of neighbour, as the novel assumes. Their view of a unipersonal God is best

summed up in the words of one of its most important exponents, Joseph Priestly:

The connections that all persons and all things necessarily have, as parts of an immense glorious and happy system ... makes us regard every person and every thing in a friendly and pleasing light.... We have all one God and Father, whose affection for us is intense, impartial and everlasting. He despises nothing that he has made, and, by ways unknown to us, and often by methods the most unpromising, he provides for our greatest good. (Bolam 230)³

The idea that no-one is to be despised, and that all are parts, not only of their own society, but of 'an immense glorious and happy system', is at the heart of *North and South's* message.

Originally the Unitarians' arguments against the divinity of Christ were based on their interpretation of the Bible. Later exponents, though they still revered it, abandoned the Bible as a major source of authority, espousing rather reason and individual conscience. In the light of this it is not surprising that Gaskell should appeal to conscience and show changed attitudes as the best redresser of the wrongs she identified. The emphasis is always on the personal.

Philanthropic attitudes led many Unitarians, like the Gaskells themselves, into active involvement in educational programmes and social relief projects. *North*

and *South* approves of engagement in an individual's troubles, and, although the voice is inevitably middle-class and tinged with paternalism, there is a preparedness to give attention to the views of the underprivileged and not merely to prescribe solutions. Higgins is taken seriously.

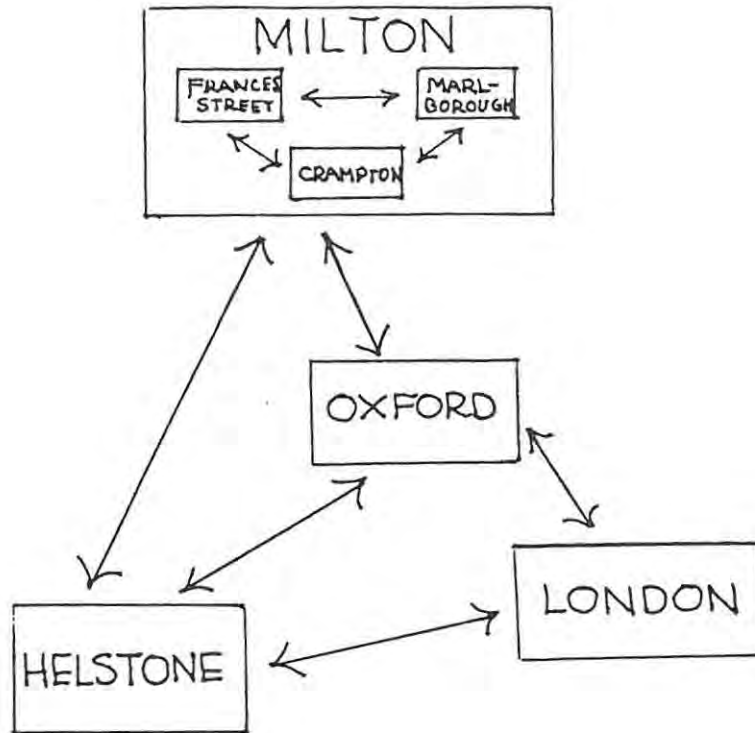
Gaskell conceded the fairness of the disapproval of *Mary Barton* expressed by some of her husband's congregation if she has 'mis-represented, or so represented, a part as the whole, as that people at a distance should be misled and prejudiced against the masters, and that class be estranged from class' (GL 42). In one sense, the purpose of *North and South* is to redress the balance and give the masters as well as the men a hearing, which is typical of the Unitarians' insistence on toleration. Often discriminated against, they tried not to be judgemental themselves. Toleration is essential to the kinds of bonds the novel advocates.

Its setting embraces the industrial city of Milton-Northern, within which different localities represent its internal divisions, the rural village of Helstone, a fashionable district in London, and Oxford as a representative place of learning. Craik observes that:

Whereas in *Ruth* the settings were used once only, as Ruth passed through the phases of her life with which they were connected, in *North and South* the pattern is more elaborate, with a

design of departures and returns, with the ending
a balanced coming-together of the aspects of life
that each place presents and explores. (112)

The diagram on the following page and the discussions which follow aim to show how these milieux and the elaborate 'design of departures and returns' through which they are linked, are established and how they are related to the novel's vision. Because places are visited more than once and also accumulate substance and significance even where they are not the immediate setting of the story, I shall not follow the progress of Margaret's journey as with *Ruth*, but deal with each place as a whole, in reverse order of importance: Oxford; London; Helstone; Milton-Northern.



The places figured in the diagram appear irreconcilable, but by the end of *North and South* have been shown to be parts of a whole through the pattern of visits which forms the plot. Margaret, of Helstone, spends time in London, goes to live in Milton, and visits Oxford when Mr Bell dies; Mr Thornton, of Milton, visits Helstone to understand Margaret, goes to London on business, and attends Mr Hale's funeral in Oxford; Mr Bell, of Oxford, visits Milton where he owns property, and goes to London and to Helstone for the sake of Margaret; Mr Hale, who is also an Oxford man, takes his learning to Helstone and to Milton, visits London, and dies in Oxford; the Londoner, Henry Lennox, visits Helstone and Milton, and his brother attends Mr Hale's funeral in Oxford.

Oxford: 'its beauty, and its learning, and its proud old history'.

Gaskell described Oxford as 'that most beautiful and stately of all the cities I have ever seen' (GL 380), but when she wrote *North and South* she had not yet visited it, and wisely makes no attempt to describe what she does not know personally. Reference to its physical features is brief and unspecific, but enough to indicate a contrast to Milton: '"Ah!"' exclaims Mr Bell, '"I wish I could show you our High Street - our Radcliffe Square. I am leaving out our colleges, just as I give Mr Thornton leave to omit his factories in speaking of the charms of Milton"' (413; ch.40).

It is 'a place to glory in' (410; ch.40), and when Mr Bell says proudly of himself, '"I should like to be the representative of Oxford, with its beauty and its learning, and its proud old history"' (412-413; ch.40), he is summing up the significance of the Oxford element in *North and South*. Its beauty, like that of Helstone, is opposed to the ugliness of Milton, and traditional learning is upheld even within the progressive manufacturing city. Manufacturers are disparaged for placing 'their sons in sucking situations at fourteen or fifteen years of age, unsparingly cutting away all off-shoots in the direction of literature or high mental cultivation, in hopes of throwing the whole strength and vigour of the plant into commerce' (107; ch.8), and those who, like Mr Thornton, try to make up for earlier deficiencies in education, are commended.

He reads Greek and Latin with Mr Hale in spite of his mother's scornful opinion that "classics may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the country or in colleges; but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of to-day" (159; ch.15). Margaret, too, is commended for her intellectual grasp, and Higgins for attending lectures.

Mr Bell, as friend to the Hales and landlord to Mr Thornton, is an essential link in the plot, but beyond that his Oxford connection allows debate about the relative value of traditional learning and practical progress, which is an important issue in the vision of a balanced society. Mr Bell believes that Milton men like the 'bustle and struggle' he finds so distasteful in the North, and that 'as for sitting still, and learning from the past, or shaping out the future by faithful work done in a prophetic spirit - Why! Pooh! I don't believe there's a man in Milton who knows how to sit still; and it is a great art" (410; ch.40). The question of reverence for the past and the need for leisurely contemplation, opposed to the pressing demands for action in the present, is taken up with him by Thornton who pleads eloquently for the Northerners:

'Remember, we are of a different race from the Greeks, to whom beauty was everything, and to whom Mr Bell might speak of a life of leisure and serene enjoyment.... But I belong to Teutonic blood;... we do not look upon life as a time for

enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion. Our glory and our beauty rise out of our inward strength, which makes us victorious over material resistance, and over greater difficulties still....

'If we do not reverence the past as you do in Oxford, it is because we want something which can apply to the present more directly.'

(413-414; ch.40)

He scorns Bell's suggestion that Milton men should condescend to '"send up your to-day's difficulties to Oxford"'. Through their discussion and Margaret's comment that it would do the Milton manufacturer and the Oxford Fellow good '"to see a little more of the other"', the novel underlines the idea that a knowledge and understanding of each other's problems is as vital between industry and the academic world as between the other diverse communities it portrays, if a balanced and healthy society is to be achieved.

London: 'comfort and luxury in Harley Street'.

Bachelard's view of the house as space for the intimate life, closely associated with memories and day-dreams, can be linked to some houses in *North and South* because of their association with Margaret, but, on the whole, they are treated more as distillations of ways of life, and in each major locale the house becomes an important channel of meaning. [see pp 83-84]

The Harley Street home of the Shaws and Lennoxes is the focal point of the portrayal of London. This home is never fully described, but the impression of a spacious, many-storied house of ease and luxury is created through incidental descriptive touches: 'a crimson damask sofa'; 'music in the drawing-room'; 'the nursery at the very top of the house'; a 'chandelier' under which Margaret stands to display Edith's 'beautiful Indian shawls' (ch.1). In this opening chapter the house is the setting for a farewell dinner-party for Edith for which her mother has 'absolutely ordered those extra delicacies of the season which are always supposed to be efficacious against immoderate grief at farewell dinners' (36; ch.1). The gently mocking tone of this remark about the 'extra delicacies' so apt to this setting, persists whenever fashionable London is mentioned, and the house in Harley Street which images that way of life is portrayed as pleasant but stagnant, its inmates affectionate but shallow, and its guests mere acquaintances.

Margaret does not return to Harley Street until near the close of the novel, but there are reminders of London in Henry Lennox's visit to Helstone, the Hales' brief passing through the city on their way north, Edith's letters, and Margaret's occasional day-dreams about it.

Henry Lennox has been 'the person of all others who understood her best in Harley Street' (62; ch.3), but Margaret refuses his offer of marriage largely because he is out of place in the environment she loves and his London

attitudes do not call out her deepest responses, as scenes with them together in Helstone indicate. [see p 129] After he leaves Helstone she thinks about him:

Where was he now? In London, - going through the old round; dining with the old Harley Street set, or with gayer young friends of his own.... he might be gladly putting away his law-books after a day of satisfactory toil, and freshening himself up, as he had told her he often did, by a run in the Temple Gardens, taking in the while the grand inarticulate mighty roar of tens of thousands of busy men, nigh at hand, but not seen, and catching ever, at his quick turns, glimpses of the lights of the city coming up out of the depths of the river. (90; ch.6)

This hints at a London beyond the narrow enclave of the Shaws and Lennoxes, whose fashionable set is oblivious, for the most part, to 'the grand inarticulate mighty roar of tens of thousands of busy men'.

This indifference is underlined when the Hales pass through the city during the Shaws' absence and glimpse its hurry and bustle. Margaret muses 'in a room high up in an hotel':

Every one they saw, either in the house or out in the streets, appeared hurrying to some appointment, expected by, or expecting somebody. They alone seemed strange, and friendless, and

desolate. Yet within a mile, Margaret knew of house after house, where she for her own sake, and her mother for her aunt Shaw's, would be welcomed, if they came in gladness, or even in peace of mind. If they came sorrowing, and wanting sympathy in a complicated trouble like the present, then they would be felt as a shadow in all these houses of intimate acquaintances, not friends. (93-94; ch.6)

Harley Street is too busy to be involved in the troubles of others. Blind indifference is one of the responses to the era's confusions which the novel castigates, largely through the depiction of London.

Its ease and elegance are not altogether condemned, however, and there is a note of nostalgia in Margaret's response to a letter from Edith she receives in Milton, which recalls a dinner they had attended in London: 'the recollection of the plentiful luxury of all the arrangements, the stately handsomeness of the furniture, the size of the house, the peaceful, untroubled ease of the visitors, all came vividly before her, in strange contrast to the present time' (106; ch.8). And after her mother's death, 'Margaret yearned after that old house, and the placid tranquillity of that old well-ordered, monotonous life. She had found it occasionally tiresome while it lasted; but since then she had been buffeted about, and felt so exhausted by this recent struggle with herself, that she thought that even stagnation would be a rest and a

refreshment' (408; ch.39); the author's sense of fairness reminds us of the real family affection of people like Mrs Shaw and Edith, in spite of their indifference towards a wider society. No-one is to be despised.

When Margaret returns to London after her father's death, she is at first refreshed by being 'an inmate of a luxurious house, where the bare knowledge of the existence of every trouble or care seemed scarcely to have penetrated' (457; ch.44), but Milton has sharpened her awareness that behind the 'inarticulate roar' may be individuals with needs to be met, and she is not content for long with Harley Street life:

Then her thoughts went back to Milton, with a strange sense of the contrast between the life there, and here. She was getting surfeited of the eventless ease in which no struggle or endeavour was required. She was afraid lest she should even become sleepily deadened into forgetfulness of anything beyond the life which was lapping her round with luxury. There might be toilers and moilers there in London, but she never saw them. (458; ch.44)

During a sea-side holiday at Cromer when she has time to put her life into proper perspective, she decides to assert her independence and go out to work among 'the toilers and moilers', so heartlessly disregarded by her class in general.

Unfortunately no detail is given about that work nor of what Edith calls "those wretched places she pokes herself into" (520; ch.51). A picture of London without its darker side is incomplete, but the aspect which is shown adds significantly to the picture of society in *North and South*. Margaret's affection for Edith and her family suggests that the London they represent is not utterly condemned, but it is revealed as shallow and uncaring in a world where vital issues of human relationships are at stake. It is also important to the theme of unity as the place where Margaret and Thornton are reconciled. The novel begins and ends here: in spite of the new northern community, London is still regarded as the hub of national life.

Helstone: 'the prettiest spot in the world'.

In London Margaret tells Henry Lennox a little about Helstone: "There is the church and a few houses near it on the green - cottages, rather - with roses growing all over them", and then, to counter his scepticism, insists, "I am not making a picture. I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is" (42; ch.1). This is a key statement: Gaskell wants to describe the South *as it really is*, but can only unfold its full meaning through later comparison with the North. The present reality is that it *is* beautiful: roses really do grow all over the cottages; and it is home, where, on her return, Margaret leads an idyllic life:

Margaret used to tramp along by her father's side, crushing down the fern with a cruel glee, as she felt it yield under her light foot, and send up the fragrance peculiar to it, - out on the broad commons into the warm scented light, seeing multitudes of wild, free, living creatures, revelling in the sunshine, and the herbs and flowers it called forth. This life - at least these walks - realized all Margaret's anticipations. (48; ch.2)

Descriptions of the New Forest establish an air of light-hearted joyfulness, which persists even when the weather changes: 'She was so happy out of doors, at her father's side, that she almost danced; and with the soft violence of the west wind behind her, as she crossed some heath, she seemed to be borne onwards, as lightly and easily as the fallen leaf that was wafted along by the autumnal breeze' (50-51; ch.2). While Margaret's mood is conveyed through the delicate simile of the wafted leaf, the idyllic picture is enhanced. Soon, however, it is tinged with uneasiness as she observes the dissatisfaction of her mother and troubled distraction of her father, neatly summed up in terms of locality: 'Her out-of-doors life was perfect. Her in-doors life had its drawbacks' (48-49 ch.2)).

This contrast is reinforced by indirect picturing when Mr Lennox visits the parsonage and notices that

outside everything is bright and fresh, inside faded and shabby:

The little drawing-room was looking its best in the streaming light of the morning sun. The middle window in the bow was opened, and clustering roses and the scarlet honeysuckle came peeping round the corner; the small lawn was gorgeous with verbenas and geraniums of all bright colours. But the very brightness outside made the colours within seem poor and faded. The carpet was far from new; the chintz had been often washed; the whole apartment was smaller and shabbier than he had expected, as back-ground and frame-work for Margaret, herself so queenly.

(55; ch.3)

In that garden, glimpsed through the middle window, Henry Lennox proposes. The setting emphasizes the beauty of the country and country-life, and reinforces the idea of home; it makes obvious the unsuitability of the Londoner, Lennox, as a marriage partner for Margaret by revealing his uneasiness in the country, and the modification of the idyllic view of the country begins, through the couple's observations about the world around them. Lennox has the city dweller's tendency to romanticize the country and Margaret is forced to remind him "that our skies are not always as deep a blue as they are now. We have rain, and our leaves do fall, and get sodden; though I think Helstone is about as perfect a place in the world" (60; ch.3). Its

country charms are suggested by 'the velvety cramoisy roses' he plucks for her, and the 'few brown beurrés against the south wall' which Margaret picks and arranges on a plate of 'beet-root leaf, which threw up their brown gold colour admirably' (58-59; ch.3). They stroll 'along the little terrace-walk under the south wall, where the bees still hummed and worked busily in their hives', and Lennox points to the '"crimson and amber foliage" ... of some of the great forest trees which shut in the garden as if it were a nest' (60; ch.3).

The nest is a common image of home,⁴ perhaps because, as Bachelard explains:

A nest-house is never young. Indeed, speaking as a pedant, we might say that it is the natural habitat of the function of inhabiting. For not only do we *come back* to it, but we dream of coming back to it, the way a bird comes back to its nest, or a lamb to the fold. This sign of *return* marks an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life, a rhythm that reaches back across the years and, through the dream, combats all absence. An intimate component of faithful loyalty reacts upon the related images of nest and house. (99)

This reflects Margaret's experiences of the Helstone home throughout *North and South*. The novel also suggests that

the country is home in a wider sense to a society which is changing from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban one.

Margaret's departure from Helstone is marked by an elegiac evocation of its garden which could be the lament of all those who have had to leave country for town. At the end of a day of packing, she escapes into the garden where her sadness is echoed in the 'twilight of an early November evening' in which 'there was a filmy veil of soft dull mist obscuring, but not hiding, all objects, giving them a lilac hue, for the sun had not yet fully set' (89; ch.6). There is a prophetic sense of change as she walks 'sadly through that damp and drear garden in the dusk, with everything falling and fading, and turning to decay around her' (90; ch.6). Mood and place correspond admirably in this chapter, and the power of association is stressed; it is prefaced by four stanzas from Section CI of *In Memoriam*, in which Tennyson illustrates how places gradually lose their associations 'And year by year our memory fades / From all the circle of the hills' (l 24).

Memories of Helstone are, however, kept alive in Milton. Margaret recalls the freedom of walks in the forest, or gathers a meagre nosegay of wild flowers 'with an unspoken lament in her heart for the sweet profusion of the South' (109 and 111; ch.8). When asked to describe her forest home, a touching nostalgia comes out in this response, in which sight, touch, and sound are all evoked to recreate the place for Bessy:

'There are great trees standing all about it, with their branches stretching long and level, and making a deep shade of rest even at noonday. And yet, though every leaf may seem still, there is a continual rushing sound of movement all around - not close at hand. Then sometimes the turf is as soft and fine as velvet; and sometimes quite lush with the perpetual moisture of a little, hidden, tinkling brook near at hand. And then in other parts there are billowy ferns - whole stretches of fern; some in the green shadow; some with long streaks of golden sunlight lying on them - just like the sea.' (144; ch.13)

Our sense of Helstone is reinforced, and again it is the beauty of the country and the peace and security of home which are emphasized. But Helstone 'as it really is' takes on new dimensions when viewed from the North. The Hales have brought from the South the gentility of a more settled, traditional community, and despise the pragmatism of the industrial northerners. Mr Thornton offers another perception: "'I would rather be a man toiling, suffering - nay, failing and unsuccessful - here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease. One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly"' (122; ch.10). It is the perspective of the wealthy classes. Margaret, who has been

struck by what she has observed in the streets of Milton, responds with a first impression of factory workers whom she compares with the poor in the South: "Now, in the South we have our poor, but there is not that terrible expression in their countenances of a sullen sense of injustice which I see here" (123; ch.10). They agree, somewhat heatedly, that he does not know the South, nor she the North; both have much to learn. Margaret, in spite of the concession that 'we have our poor' and her objection to Thornton's view of the South as a place of 'slow days of careless ease', is still visualizing 'the lovely haunts she had left far away in Hampshire'. Later, when Bessy says she wishes that she lived down South, Margaret, with some of the new insights acquaintance with a working-class family has given her, speaks of some of the hardships of out-of-doors work in all weathers, telling Bessy that "there's good and bad in everything in this world; and as you felt the bad up here, I thought it was but fair you should know the bad down there" (182; ch.17). This admission is followed by a more positive assertion of its drawbacks when Higgins suggests that he should seek work in the South, and Margaret dissuades him with a picture of a farm labourer's life which is as grim as anything in the North:

'They labour on, from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields - never speaking or lifting up their poor, bent, downcast heads. The hard spadework robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination;

they don't care to meet to talk over thoughts and speculations, even of the weakest, wildest kind, after their work is done; they go home brutishly tired, poor creatures! caring for nothing but food and rest.... Think no more of it, Nicholas, I beg.' (382; ch.37)

The Counter-Pastoral poetry of Crabbe which exposes the harshness of rural labour, is echoed here.⁵ Elizabeth and William Gaskell had once hoped to emulate his poetry, 'but in a more seeing-beauty spirit' (GL 12), and it is possible that there was something like the following passage from 'The Village' in mind when that description of labouring life was put into Margaret's mouth:

Go then! and see them rising with the sun,
Through a long course of daily toil to run;
See them beneath the dog-star's raging heat,
When the knees tremble and the temples beat;
Behold them, leaning on their scythes, look o'er
The labour past, and toils to come explore;
See them alternate suns and showers engage,
And hoard up aches and anguish for their age;
Through fens and marshy moors their steps pursue,
When their warm pores imbibe the evening dew;
Then own that labour may as fatal be
To these thy slaves, as thine excess to thee.
(l. 142-153)

Margaret has countered the idyllic view of the

country three times: gently with Henry Lennox; more firmly with Mr Thornton; and vehemently with Nicholas Higgins. While nostalgia is natural in those for whom the country has been home, there is a need to understand that North and South each "produces its own trials and temptations" (377; ch.37). Mutual understanding of the problems of rural and industrial communities is essential.

When Margaret revisits Helstone with Mr Bell, first impressions suggest that the South really is the idyllic place of her earlier dreams. The sun is warmer, the air purer, and the population sparser, the 'hot air danced over the golden stillness of the land', and, as views of Helstone remind her of the past, it seems to Margaret that 'Nature felt no change, and was ever young' (472; ch.46). At the inn there is 'spring-water scented by a musk rose or two', 'rose and vine branches' almost fill up the window of Margaret's bed-chamber, there are 'lavender-scented towels', and they enjoy 'a rustic luncheon' of 'strawberries and cream, a loaf of brown bread, and a jug of milk' (473-474; ch.46). This is a return to 'seeing-beauty' without the Counter-Pastoral, but there have been changes: 'Here and there old trees had been felled the autumn before; or a squatter's roughly-built and decaying cottage had disappeared. Margaret missed them each and all, and grieved over them like old friends' (475; ch.46). The external world is teaching her one of the lessons of maturity; as Mr Bell says, '"The instability of all human things is familiar to me, to you it is new and oppressive"'

(475; ch.46).⁶ A greater shock is the gruesome tale of the roasting of a cat: cruel, ignorant superstition is also part of the reality of Helstone. Tasteless alterations made to the parsonage by the new vicar and his wife persuade Margaret that it is no longer 'home', in spite of its associations, symbolized in the 'little straggling bit of honeysuckle' she gathers from its garden. 'If we return to the old home as to a nest,' Bachelard explains, 'it is because memories are dreams, because the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy' (100). Margaret leaves, knowing that Helstone to her 'would always be the prettiest spot in the world' (489-490; ch.46), but that she and the place have changed. She acknowledges, as she looks out of the inn window and sees a candle burning in her old bed-room, and then gazes at the stars in 'the purple dome above', that constancy can be found only in God:

'I begin to understand now what heaven must be - and, oh! the grandeur and repose of the words - "The same yesterday, today, and for ever." Everlasting! "From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." That sky above me looks as though it could not change, and yet it will. I am so tired - so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place.' (488; ch.46)

The sense of God's controlling influence despite the social upheavals of the time which Margaret's experiences image,

is the ultimate bond, and it is allied to the neighbourly bonds which she establishes in each new milieu. A caring for ordinary people is essential to her love for Helstone:

She took a pride in her forest. Its people were her people. She made hearty friends with them; learned and delighted in using their peculiar words;... nursed their babies; talked or read with slow distinctness to their old people;... was continually tempted off to go and see some individual friend - man, woman, or child - in some cottage in the green shade of the forest.

(48; ch.2)

Likewise, it is when she makes the acquaintance of the Higgins family that 'Milton became a brighter place to her. It was not the long, bleak sunny days of spring, nor yet was it that time was reconciling her to the town of her habitation. It was that in it she had found a human interest' (113; ch.8); in London, too, work among the poor provides her with a purpose. Another of the unifying factors in society is that, whatever the circumstances, service to people can give meaning to place.

To complete the novel's vision of unity, it is necessary to retrace Margaret's steps, and, through her, observe Milton-Northern, the most important place in *North and South*.

Milton-Northern: 'the manufacturers, the people, the wild and bleak country'.

'Discordant as it was - with almost a detestation for all she had ever heard of the North of England, the manufacturers, the people, the wild and bleak country - there was yet this one recommendation - it would be different from Helstone, and could never remind them of that beloved place' (72; ch.4). Margaret approaches Milton-Northern prejudiced against its masters, its men, and the place itself. She despises all trades-people: '"What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?"' (72; ch.4). She looks down on cotton-spinners: '"Well, mamma I give up the cotton-spinners; I am not standing up for them, any more than for any other trades-people."' Like her mother, she pictures the Darkshire manufacturing town as '"all chimneys and dirt"' (80; ch.5). Distaste for its ugliness and polluted atmosphere persists, like the author's own distaste for Manchester, but Margaret's attitude towards its people is gradually modified.

The Hales' journey north takes them to the sea-side town of Heston, where 'everything looked more "purposelike." The country carts had more iron, and less wood and leather about the horse-gear; the people in the streets, although on pleasure bent, had yet a busy mind. The colours looked grayer - more enduring, not so gay and pretty' (95; ch.7). This succinct account speaks of the change from South to North. Utility, harshness, busyness

are epitomized in the materials of the carts, in people and colours, but this is a mild prelude to the grimness observed by Mr Hale and Margaret from the cab in which they drive into Milton-Northern:

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay.... Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; perhaps, after all, more a loss of the fragrance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell. Quick they were whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick. Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black 'unparliamentary' smoke.... from the station to the hotel, they had to stop constantly; great loaded luries blocked up the not over-wide thoroughfares.... every van, every wagon and truck, bore cotton, either in the raw shape in bags, or the woven shape in bales of calico. People thronged the footpaths, most of them well-dressed as regarded the material, but with a slovenly looseness which struck Margaret as different from the shabby, threadbare smartness of a similar class in London.

(96-97; ch.7)

Such descriptions illustrate urban historian, H.J. Dyos's argument that, 'if we want simply to evoke the urban landscape that we have lost we must not only lift off the encrustations of the motor age but reinvest with their own coarse original grain the places which we have veneered over. There are severe limits to this, for so many of the incidental noises, smells, colours, sense of place have gone beyond recall' (11); hints about such features are best obtained from 'those imaginatively concerned with the contemporary scene, above all the novelists, who penetrate sometimes the very structure of feeling and prevailing values, and persuade us of the truths they utter, though without a shred of proof' (12). Gaskell records for us, through Margaret's first impression of Milton-Northern, the 'coarse original grain' of Manchester, capturing incidental noises, smells, even tastes, and the drive through the city has the immediacy of an eye-witness account. Almost all the major features of a cotton-manufacturing town are included: factory chimneys and smoke, the monotonous regularity of streets and houses, lumbering traffic which gives the sense of a single purpose, and crowds of apparently dulled people. In the picture of Coketown, in *Hard Times*, almost identical features are noticed, although quite different techniques establish place:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black, like the painted face

of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. (bk.1 ch.5)

Dickens relies on metaphor and rhetorical repetition for his startling description which echoes through the novel whenever the savage painted face, uncoiling serpents, and melancholy mad elephant images are repeated to emphasize the grimly polluted, depressing monotony of an industrial city. Gaskell chooses a more literal mode of description in her effort to depict Milton, like Helstone, 'as it really is'. She also wants to set it beside other centres, and, therefore, emphasizes the 'loss of fragrance of grass and herbage' and the difference in appearance of its workers from those in the older urban centre of London. Reminders of its grimness are frequent in the subsequent account of Margaret's sojourn in Milton-Northern. They may be integral to narration: 'They were settled in Milton, and must endure smoke and fogs for a season' (105; ch.8), or to dialogue: '"She is very proud of Milton; dirty, smoky

place, as I feel it to be"' (140; ch.12), unobtrusively gathering significance by accumulation.

The contrast with other centres is kept alive in a similar way. Margaret walks along the streets thinking of the restrictions Mrs Shaw's ideas of propriety had laid on her in London and the contrasting freedom of forest rambles (109-110; ch.8). She speaks of her home to Bessy, and letters remind her of the luxury of London. The dreariness of Milton is also set against the carefree life and sunny skies of the Corfu Edith describes: "'everybody here is young and well, and our skies are always blue, and our sun always shines, and the band plays deliciously from morning to night"' (298; ch.29). The short descriptive piece, used as a narrative link, is another method for pointing the differences:

The chill, shivery October morning came; not the October morning of the country, with soft, silvery mists, clearing off before the sunbeams that bring out all the gorgeous beauty of colouring, but the October morning of Milton, whose silvery mists were heavy fogs, and where the sun could only show long dusky streets when he did break through and shine. (318; ch.31)

In Milton Margaret not only learns that both North and South have their virtues and their faults and should understand each other better, as the foregoing discussion of Helstone has shown [see p 127], but that there is an urgent need for reconciliation *within* the northern world of

Milton itself, a city divided, as Frederick Engels observes of Manchester in 1844, geographically, as well as socially:

The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination, the working-people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle-class; or, if this does not succeed, they are concealed with the cloak of charity. (347-48)

The thoroughfares which he describes leading from the commercial, through the working-class, to the middle-class districts, are lined with shops which 'suffice to conceal from the eyes of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement of their wealth' (348-49). Gaskell agrees that the city's classes are complementary, but her different depiction of essentially the same place, proposes the possibility of harmony where people appreciate one another across the boundaries of their separated localities. Margaret, in Milton, does encounter working-class people in the streets: 'The side of the town on which

Crampton lay was especially a thoroughfare for the factory people. In the back streets around them there were many mills, out of which poured streams of men and women two or three times a day' (110; ch.8), and Mr Thornton lives in a house which is adjacent to his mill so cannot be unaware of the workers although at first he is indifferent to them.

Three localities in Milton-Northern are distinguished: the Crampton home of the genteel Hales; the Marlborough Mills home of the manufacturing Thorntons; and the back-street home of the working-class Higgins family. How each is realized and contrasted with the others is discussed first, and then attention given to ways in which they provide setting for episodes and arguments which reveal the interdependence of Milton's communities.

We are introduced to the geography of the Crampton house through Margaret's plans for the family's accommodation which she discusses with her father:

'The front room down-stairs is to be your study and our dining-room (poor papa!), for, you know, we settled mamma is to have as cheerful a sitting-room as we can get; and that front room up-stairs, with the atrocious blue and pink paper and heavy cornice, had really a pretty view over the plain, with a great bend of river, or canal, or whatever it is, down below. Then I could have the little bed-room behind, in that projection at the head of the first flight of stairs over the kitchen, you know - and you and mamma the room

behind the drawing-room, and that closet in the roof will make you a splendid dressing-room.'

'But Dixon, and the girl we are to have to help?'

'Oh, wait a minute. I am overpowered by the discovery of my own genius for management. Dixon is to have - let me see, I had it once - the back sitting-room. I think she will like that. She grumbles so much about the stairs at Heston; and the girl is to have that sloping attic over your room and mamma's. Won't that do?' (97-98; ch.7)

As well as exposing the cramped nature of their new living-quarters after the spaciousness of the Helstone parsonage, this conversation draws a picture of the Hales' house which assists the visualization of later events. The tension of Frederick's clandestine visit, for instance, is heightened by an awareness of every sound and movement in a house whose lay-out we know, and the impact of the policeman's visit to question Margaret about her movements on the night of Leonards's death is given added impact by being exactly located in the study, beneath the drawing-room where Mr Hale and Mr Thornton are conversing.

Margaret is repulsed by the original decor of the house, which she associates with the vulgarity of the North: 'She had never come fairly in contact with the taste that loves ornament, however bad, more than the plainness and simplicity which are of themselves the framework of

elegance' (98; ch.7). Ironically, however, it is Mr Thornton, whom she regards as equally vulgar, who recognizes that it is inappropriate to her, and arranges privately with the landlord to have the house re-papered. This marks the inception of a regard for Margaret which is reinforced when he pays his first formal call on the Hale family who have now imprinted their own taste on the Crampton drawing-room. He immediately notices the contrast with his own heavily furnished and uncomfortable home:

Margaret was lighting the lamp when he entered, for the darkness was coming on. The lamp threw a pretty light into the centre of the dusky room, from which with country habits, they did not exclude the night-skies, and the outer darkness of air. Somehow, that room contrasted itself with the one he had lately left; handsome, ponderous, with no sign of feminine habitation, except in the one spot where his mother sate, and no convenience for any other employment than eating and drinking. To be sure, it was a dining-room; his mother preferred to sit in it; and her will was ^ahousehold law. But the drawing-room was not like this. It was twice - twenty times as fine; not one quarter as comfortable. Here were no mirrors, not even a scrap of glass to reflect the light, and answer the same purpose as water in a landscape; no gilding; a warm, sober breadth of colouring, well relieved by the

dear old Helstone chintz-curtains and chair covers. An open davenport stood in the window opposite the door; in the other there was a stand, with a tall white china vase, from which drooped wreaths of English ivy, pale-green birch and copper-coloured beech-leaves. Pretty baskets of work stood about in different places: and books, not cared for on account of their bindings solely, lay on one table, as if recently put down. Behind the door was another table decked out for tea, with a white table-cloth, on which flourished the cocoa-nut cakes, and a basket piled with oranges and ruddy American apples, heaped on leaves. (119-120; ch.10)

The arrangement of coloured leaves and the soft lighting of the lamp, combined with openness to the night skies, bring to Milton the naturalness of the country. In this unsophisticated room mirrors are not needed as substitutes for the gentler reflective qualities of water, as popular taste demanded, and furnishings without showy gilding or heavy ornament are further reminders of the simple grace the Hales have introduced from the South. The family's occupations are seen at a glance in the open davenport where letters would be written, pretty baskets of work, and books recently put down. The tea-table speaks of homeliness, with Dixon's cocoa-nut cakes and a simple arrangement of fruit. A taste for 'the plainness and

simplicity which are of themselves the framework of elegance' is amply illustrated, and Thornton recognizes that it is 'of a piece with Margaret'. Without the animating of the inanimate to reflect character which Dickens achieves so well, Gaskell is yet able to show that a taste in furnishings may reveal social, even moral values, as well as aesthetic ones. This is the drawing-room of Helstone transferred to the North, and its depiction, when set beside that of the Thorntons, is one of the ways in which the two places are contrasted, as well as signifying the grace of Helstone and wealth of Milton which are aspects of South and North to be reckoned with in a reconciled community.

The decor of the Crampton home reflects Margaret's character: that at Marlborough, Mrs Thornton's: 'A large-boned lady, long past middle-age, sat at work in a grim handsomely-furnished dining-room. Her features, like her frame, were strong and massive, rather than heavy' (116; ch.9). When Margaret approaches their home for the first time, she anticipates this: 'The street did not look as if it could contain any house large enough for Mrs Thornton's habitation. Her son's presence never gave any impression as to the kind of house he lived in; but, unconsciously, Margaret had imagined that tall, massive, handsomely dressed Mrs Thornton must live in a house of the same character as herself' (157; ch.15). The decor which greets her is daunting:

There was no one in the drawing-room. It seemed

as though no one had been in it since the day when the furniture was bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava, and discovered a thousand years hence. The walls were pink and gold; the pattern on the carpet represented bunches of flowers on a light ground, but it was carefully covered up in the centre by a linen drugget, glazed and colourless. The window-curtains were lace; each chair and sofa had its own particular veil of netting, or knitting. Great alabaster groups occupied every flat surface, safe from dust under their glass shades. In the middle of the room, right under the bagged-up chandelier, was a large circular table, with smartly-bound books arranged at regular intervals round the circumference of its polished surface, like gaily-coloured spokes of a wheel. Everything reflected light, nothing absorbed it. The whole room had a painfully spotted, spangled, speckled look about it, which impressed Margaret so unpleasantly that she was hardly conscious of the peculiar cleanliness required to keep everything so white and pure in such an atmosphere, or of the trouble that must be willingly expended to secure that effect of icy, snowy discomfort. (158; ch.15)

It is a patent contrast to the Hales' room. Almost like a

mausoleum, the Thorntons' drawing-room is pervaded by an unwelcoming sense of something preserved and unvisited, with its bagged-up furniture and drugget-covered carpet, so unlike the friendly lived-in atmosphere of the other. In its heavy ornamentation there is nothing to suggest the natural world like the leaves and the fruit of its counterpart: the representation of flowers on the carpet is smothered by a drugget, while the glass shades, so popular in middle-class Victorian homes, cover 'great alabaster groups' rather than the usual artificial fruit or flower arrangements, or even stuffed birds, which were a reminder of nature.⁷ Even the books are ornamental, unlike those in Margaret's home which 'are not cared for on account of their bindings solely'. The graceful care which the Hales' drawing-room reflects is opposed to a care exerted primarily to ensure the cleanliness of impressive ornament, with little thought for every-day comfort.

The ostentation is even more oppressive on the occasion of the dinner-party when 'every cover was taken off, and the apartment blazed forth in yellow silk damask and a brilliantly-flowered carpet. Every corner seemed filled up with ornament, until it became a weariness to the eye, and presented a strange contrast to the bald ugliness of the look-out into the great mill-yard, where wide folding gates were thrown open for the admission of carriages' (213; ch.20). Now the contrast is with the mill-yard. Mrs Thornton finds nothing incongruous in the proximity of the mill, for it is a reminder of the

achievements of her son. Its proximity is also a reminder that the wealth of the millowners is built as much on labour exerted in the factory as on their own drive and initiative, a situation which Gaskell suggests resolving through co-operation instead of confrontation, as later episodes show.

The genteel straitened life of Crampton and the lavishness of Marlborough are also contrasted with the poverty of the Higgins home. "We put up at nine Frances Street, second turn to th' left at after yo've past th' Goulden Dragon" (112; ch.8), Nicholas Higgins tells Margaret, who finds their home off 'a small court, opening out of a squalid street' (132; ch.11). The slums of Milton-Northern are not portrayed in anything like the graphic detail of those in *Mary Barton*: the Higginses' home is reminiscent of the Bartons' which also opens off a court, as is typical of the city's mid-century slums, but there is nothing in *North and South* to compare with the appalling cellar-dwelling of the Davenports, so memorably described in *Mary Barton* (ch.6). If, however, the poor of *North and South* in the 1850's seem less destitute, and their living quarters less squalid than those of *Mary Barton* in the 1840's, there is no less determination to demonstrate the culpability of mill-owners who are unmindful of the aspirations and ignorant of the suffering of the people they employ. More effort is made to show the possibility of overcoming such indifference in the later

novel, and the Higginses' environment is as crucial to this intent as the Thorntons'.

There is little to describe in this poor dwelling, but a picture is formed through occasional references to the plainest essentials: a wash-tub, fire-irons, chairs, a fireplace with a 'rather high mantelpiece', and the squab, or short sofa, on which Bessy lies. The floors are stone: 'There had been rough-stoning done in the middle of the floor, while the flags under the chairs and round the walls retained their dark unwashed appearance' (143; ch.13), and there is a single downstairs room opening directly onto the street. Here Margaret, and later Thornton, observe some of the implications of poverty.

A network of visits similar to the interlinking pattern of the larger centres in the novel establishes bonds between these three disparate localities as their respective residents learn sympathy by encountering one another in the home environment [see diagram p 119]. Through their conversations Gaskell puts forward conflicting points of view on a comprehensive range of topics, and demonstrates that attitudes can be modified when there is a chance of meeting face to face. She dramatizes her conviction that 'if we only knew people better we should cease to be sarcastic or harsh in speaking of them; and besides harshness and sarcasm are neither good for ourselves, nor productive of right feelings in the one against whom they are used' (Benn 507). A series of

realistic scenes symbolizes the possibility of breaking down the barriers of misunderstanding which separate, in particular, the workers and manufacturers.

Crampton is a point of convergence. In the gentle atmosphere of the Hales' drawing-room, Thornton explains the complexities of industry to the newcomers from the South, as he extols 'the magnificent power, yet delicate adjustment of might of the steam-hammer' (121-122; ch.10) and presents the masters' point of view on the cotton trade and strikes. In this neutral territory Margaret pleads, on the other hand, for recognition of the interdependence of men and masters whom Thornton regards as 'open enemies'. Here Mr Hale and Margaret gain a measure of admiration for the progress Milton epitomizes without compromising their views on the plight of workers, while their company and environment have a softening effect on Thornton.

In the same venue Nicholas Higgins explains the desperate necessity which drives workers to combine in Unions and organize strikes. His qualms about visiting a middle-class home where he stepped 'cautiously on every dark mark in the pattern of the oil-cloth, in order to conceal his dirty foot-prints' (285; ch.28), and Mr Hale's qualms about entertaining a 'drunken infidel weaver' are overcome when the host, 'by his own refinement and courteousness of manner' calls out 'all the latent courtesy in the other' (288; ch.28), and they sit side by side in the study. Where Thornton has expressed contempt for the workers,

Higgins now airs their opinions of their masters. He and Mr Hale also frankly discuss Nicholas's doubts about a religion which does not seem to address his daily needs. Religious was as important as social toleration to Unitarians, and the picture of 'Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel' kneeling together in the Crampton study, signifies this aspect of the plea for reconciliation (297; ch.28). Higgins's contacts with the Hales in the uncondescending environment of their own home help him, at least partially, to overcome some of his prejudices against religion, and his change of heart is demonstrated when Margaret offers him her father's Bible as a parting gift: "'If it were the deuce's own scribble, and yo' axed me to read in it for yo'r sake, and th' oud gentleman's, I'd do it'", he promises (456; ch.43).

The prejudices of the Thornton mother and daughter and of Mrs Hale are ironically disclosed through their response to place and ornament on the occasion of a morning call when Mrs Thornton notices 'the knick-knacks, which must take a long time to dust; and time to people of limited income was money', and Mrs Hale is 'captivated by some real old lace which Mrs Thornton wore' which, she snobbishly informs Dixon, "'shows that she has ancesters"'. Fanny despises Margaret because she has no piano, and Mrs Thornton's pride in Milton's factories is opposed to Mrs Hale's contempt as she fastidiously remembers "'once going in a lilac silk to see candles made, and my gown was utterly ruined"' (139-141; ch.12). Gaskell's idealism is

not without its realistic side: petty prejudice is shown up as foolish, but difficult to overcome.

The importance of traditional learning is also underlined in Crampton, for it is there that Mr Hale tutors Mr Thornton in the Classics, and it is the setting for the Oxford-Milton encounter, discussed previously, which shows that the academic and the practical have something to offer each other. [see p 120]

The Hales' visits to Marlborough teach them that 'the proud mother's world was not their world of Harley Street gentilities on the one hand, or country clergymen and Hampshire squires on the other' (160; ch.15). The 'millocracy' has its own social status, and some claim to be respected for its achievements, but the supercilious attitude to workers which Mrs Thornton and her son express is vigorously opposed by Margaret, even in their own overpowering drawing-room. At the lavish dinner, however, even though it contrasts so markedly with the meagreness of Bessy's home which Margaret has visited on the same day, she responds sympathetically to 'the exultation in the sense of power which these Milton men had.... If in her cooler moments she might not approve of their spirit in all things, still there was much to admire in their forgetfulness of themselves and the present, in their anticipated triumphs over all inanimate matter at some future time which none of them should live to see' (217; ch.20). Account must be taken of industrial progress even as the sufferings of the workers

must be exposed and alleviated. 'The question always is, has everything been done to make the suffering of these exceptions as small as possible? Or, in the triumph of the crowded procession, have the helpless been trampled on, instead of being gently lifted aside out of the roadway of the conqueror, whom they have no power to accompany on his march?' (108; ch.8).

No-one is a more helpless victim of the triumphant march of industry than Bessy Higgins. Watching her suffering in her slum dwelling, and hearing from her own lips of the lethal conditions which pertain in places of employment like the badly-ventilitated carding-room where she has breathed fluff into her lungs, teaches the Hales and the reader that such conditions are intolerable. Her acquaintance with the harsh conditions which force Nicholas to live in poverty and render him powerless to help the daughter he loves, enables Margaret to understand his religious doubts and occasional recourse to drink, and she *sees*, in his home, what leads to the desperate measure of striking. In Frances Street she also witnesses the bitter dispute between Higgins and Boucher, and learns that, in their fight for the rights of the group, the Unions can overlook the immediate interests of the individual. It is a well-staged scene:

Higgins was in a passion when Margaret entered. Boucher stood, with both hands on the rather high mantelpiece, swaying himself a little on the support which his arms, thus placed, gave him,

and looking wildly into the fire, with a kind of despair that irritated Higgins, even while it went to his heart. Bessy was rocking herself violently backwards and forwards.... Her sister Mary was tying on her bonnet ... to go to her fustian-cutting, blubbering out loud the while, and evidently longing to be away from a scene that distressed her. (205-206; ch.19)

Boucher's desperation is intensified for Margaret and her father when they see his home. The consequences of the suffering so thoughtlessly imposed, on one hand by the employers and the other by the tyranny of the unions is memorably dramatized in the scene of the bringing home of his corpse, starkly set in this back-street locality.

Indirectly this event brings Thornton into Frances Street where he visits Higgins whose long vigil at the mill offices to ask for work to support Boucher's children, has impressed him. It is the first of many visits which enlighten him about the aspirations of his employees, for Higgins is not daunted in his own house, as he tells Mr Hale, and speaks frankly to his 'maester' about his duties. On one occasion Thornton notices '"a miserable black frizzle of a dinner - a greasy cinder of meat"' which sets him thinking about the idea of a dining-room for the factory workers (444; ch.42). This enterprise in which the men take much of the responsibility, is a tentative step towards the kind of co-operation for which the whole novel

pleads. Thornton, like his creator, knows that 'genial intercourse between classes' will not bring immediate solutions to the nation's problems, but believes that it will go a long way towards building a better society.⁸ The possibility has been demonstrated through the mutual respect gained by seeing and listening to people in their own homes:

He and they had led parallel lives - very close, but never touching - till the accident (or so it seemed) of his acquaintance with Higgins. Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him, and (take notice) out of the character of master and workman, in the first instance, they had each begun to recognise that 'we have all of us one human heart' (511; ch.50).

The plea for reconciliation is reinforced by the love-story of John Thornton and Margaret Hale who, like the representative social groups, have to overcome prejudice, and accept each other's worth. Central to the love-story and to the wider implications of the novel, is the riot at Marlborough Mills, where the delineation of place and its interlinking with character and event demonstrates important aspects of the novel's vision.

The mill-yard setting for this episode is described well in advance of the event, on the occasion of the Hales' first visit to the Thorntons:

The lodge-door was like a common garden-door; on one side of it were great closed gates for the ingress and egress of luries and wagons. The lodge-keeper admitted them into a great oblong yard, on one side of which were offices for the transaction of business; on the opposite, an immense many-windowed mill, whence proceeded the continual clank of machinery and the long groaning roar of the steam-engine, enough to deafen those who lived within the enclosure. Opposite to the wall, along which the street ran, on one of the narrow sides of the oblong, was a handsome stone-coped house, - blackened, to be sure, by the smoke, but with paint, windows, and steps kept scrupulously clean.... the stone facings - the long, narrow windows and the number of them - the flights of steps up to the front door, ascending from either side, and guarded by railing - all witnessed to its age.

(157-158; ch.15)

This sketch-plan assists visualization of the later scene, which features the yard, the lodge-door, the great gates, the proximity of the mill to the house, and the flight of steps up to the door. The riot is presaged by an account of Margaret's two-mile walk from Crampton to Marlborough, during which tense expectation is aroused through an interweaving of sound images suggesting 'a

thunderous atmosphere, morally as well as physically' with accounts of Margaret's distracted thoughts centred on her mother's illness, descriptive touches which bring concrete objects into focus, and narrative details about the movements of workpeople in the streets (226-227; ch.21). This prologue is dominated by the image of a gathering storm, and then, as Margaret leaves the streets and enters the precincts of the mill, the calm preceeding it is suggested by the unusual silence of the factory: 'There was no near sound, - no steam-engine at work with beat and pant, - no click of machinery, or mingling and clashing of many sharp voices; but far away, the ominous gathering roar, deep-clamouring' (227; ch.22).

The drama is to be acted out on three levels, the yard, the steps leading to the house-door, and the upstairs rooms of the Thorntons' house.⁹ As Margaret waits in the Thorntons' drawing-room, which has 'returned into its normal state of bag and covering', unusual effects of light and sound heighten the anticipation of a storm:

The windows were half open because of the heat, and the Venetian blinds covered the glass, - so that a gray grim light, reflected from the pavement below, threw all the shadows wrong, and combined with the green-tinged upper light to make even Margaret's own face, as she caught it in the mirrors, look ghastly and wan. She sat and waited; no one came. Every now and then, the wind seemed to bear the distant multitudinous

sound nearer; and yet there was no wind! It died away into profound stillness between whiles.

(228; ch.22)

The portent of 'the distant multitudinous sound' is made clear only with Mrs Thornton's exclamation, '"They're at the gates!'" The women gather 'round the windows, fascinated to look on the scene which terrifies them'; the 'infuriated multitude' bursts through the strong gates into the yard below; Mr Thornton crosses from the mill to his own door, and then, followed by Margaret, goes out onto the steps. The grouping of characters within an area which assumes the characteristics of a theatre for the events which follow, emphatically demonstrates visual imagination and dramatic acumen.

When the mob breaks into the mill-yard, the storm image gives way to that of a wild beast: 'As soon as they saw Mr Thornton, they set up a yell, - to call it not human is nothing, - it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening' (232; ch.22). Margaret sees, not an angry beast or an anonymous mob, but 'poor creatures' like Boucher, enraged by the experience of starving children at home. Thus a distinction is made between the humanity of the individuals who make up the crowd and the mob hysteria which temporarily overcomes them. From her upstairs vantage point she pleads with Thornton to speak to his men '"as if they were human beings,... to go out and speak to them man

to man !"' (232; ch.22). On the steps where she joins him to appeal to the mob, when she sees that a missile is about to be hurled, 'She only thought how she could save him. She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond' (234; ch.22). In taking the blow meant for Mr Thornton she saves him from the mob, and the mob from the consequences of its own unleashed fury: 'They were watching, open-eyed, and open-mouthed, the thread of dark-red blood which wakened them up from their trance of passion' (235; ch.22).

The vigour with which the episode is portrayed springs from that deep conviction about the worth of the individual which all Gaskell's work proclaims, and it reinforces the message that even the mob, so feared by many of her contemporaries, is made up of men with the same human heart and needs as their employers. In addition, the violent clash of group-interests has, throughout, restrained sexual overtones making it central to the personal as well as to the social elements in the novel. Its moment of greatest intensity is Margaret's protective embrace of Thornton, which is burned into his consciousness as a physical awareness of Margaret's desirability, and into hers as a deep humiliation. The next day's fiercely rejected proposal is followed by months of estrangement, during which recollections of this moment in this place recur. When the carriage drives up which is to carry Margaret away after her farewell visit to Mrs Thornton and her son, 'he and Margaret stood close together on the door-

step, and it was impossible but that the recollection of the day of the riot should force itself into both their minds' (454; ch.43). It is recalled again in the reconciliation of the novel's closing moments, when the barriers are at last down:

After a minute or two, he gently disengaged her hands from her face, and laid her arms as they had once before been placed to protect him from the rioters.

'Do you remember, love?' he murmured. 'And how I requited you with my insolence next day?'

'I remember how wrongly I spoke to you, - that is all.' (529-530; ch.52)

The fortune which Margaret now places at the disposal of the once despised Marlborough Mills is her acceptance of the North as well as her declaration of love; the dried roses from Helstone are Mr Thornton's acceptance of the South, and a love-offering, gathered on a visit "to see the place where Margaret grew to what she is, even at the worst time of all, when I had no hope of ever calling her mine." (530; ch.52).¹⁰ Unity is possible when prejudice is overcome, but keen observation of human nature gives a humorous twist to the end of the novel. Mrs Thornton, whose prejudice against Margaret is bound up in her exclusive pride in Milton, and Mrs Shaw, whose vehement dislike of Milton extends to Mr Thornton, have the last words. Mr Thornton knows that the aunt's reaction to their

engagement will be to exclaim "'That man!'", while Margaret imagines the mother's 'indignant tones as she says, "That woman! "'. Toleration is an ideal not easily realized. The vision of reconciliation Gaskell expresses through *North and South* has, however, been powerfully reinforced by her significant use of place.

CHAPTER FOUR

'This Growth and Progress of Events': Action and Place in *Wives and Daughters*

This chapter examines ways in which place is integral to action in *Wives and Daughters*. The spaces within which events are set and the *mise en scène* associated with them are discussed, because where an event occurs may be significant and objects may be essential to action. The novel's time-scale and the relationship between place and plot are considered because, as Lutwack notices, 'plot is a map of a story's physical environment as well as a pattern of its events' (66). Attention is also given to the visualization of particular locales, and to the relationship between the ideas which hold the plot together and the choice of settings.

A letter to her daughter, Marianne, records Gaskell's advice to an aspiring novelist, Herbert Grey:¹

Well! every day your life brings you into contact with live men & women.... Think if you can not imagine a complication of events in their life which would form a good plot.... The plot must grow, and culminate in a crisis; not a character must be introduced who does not conduce to this growth & progress of events. The plot is like the anatomical drawing of an artist; he must have an idea of his skeleton, before he can clothe it with muscle & flesh, much more before he can

draped it. Study hard at your plot. (GL 420)

Here narration is regarded as the principal characteristic of a novel, and plot as its foundation; this echoes Aristotle who uses similar terms in describing the importance of plot in drama: 'The plot then is the first principle and as it were the soul of tragedy: character comes second.... And it is mainly because a play is a representation of action that it also for that reason represents people' (27; ch.6). Gaskell suggests that characters come first, but only in so far as 'some complication of events in their life ... would form a good plot'. No character should be introduced who does not contribute to the 'growth and progress of events' which involves 'complication and crisis'. She insists on unity (characters must contribute to the plot), and on movement ('plot must grow'). Further, she advises the writer to visualize whatever goes into his work, the emphasis being on 'seeing the story in action':

Then set to & imagine yourself a spectator & auditor of every scene & event! Work hard at this till it become a reality to you, - a thing you have to recollect & describe & report fully & accurately as it struck you, in order that your reader may have it equally before him.

Again her advice closely parallels Aristotle's:

In constructing plots and completing the effect by the help of dialogue the poet should, as far as possible, keep the scene before his eyes.

Only thus by getting the picture as clear as if he were present at the actual event, will he find what is fitting and detect contradictions.

(65; ch.17)

Gaskell's main criticism of the novel she is discussing centres round the action element:

It was the want of a plot, - & the too great dwelling on feelings &c, - & the length of the conversations, which *did not advance the action* of the story, - & the too great reference to books &c - which only impede the narration - that appeared to me the prevalent faults in your book.

Here four terms are used: 'plot', 'action', 'story', and 'narration'. Differentiating them is important to an understanding of ways in which they interact with place.

Aristotle regards plot as 'the arrangement of the incidents' (25; ch.6), and, 'the stories,' he says, 'whether they are traditional or whether you make them up yourself, should first be sketched in outline and then expanded by putting in episodes' (65; ch.17). E.M. Forster defines a story 'as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence' and a plot as 'also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality' (60). This is limiting - story also involves 'causality' - and for the purpose of unravelling some of the intricacies of *Wives and Daughters* I find Boris Thomaschevsky's emphasis, like Aristotle's, on selection and ordering more useful:

Mutually related motifs form the thematic bonds of the work. From this point of view, the story is the aggregate of motifs in their logical, causal-chronological order; the plot is the aggregate of those same motifs but having the relevance and the order which they had in the original work. The place in the work in which the reader learns of an event, whether the information is given by the author, or by a character, or by a series of indirect hints - all this is irrelevant to the story. But the aesthetic function of the plot is precisely this bringing of an arrangement of motifs to the attention of the reader. Real incidents, not fictionalized by an author, may make a story. A plot is wholly an artistic creation. (68)

Both plot and story, then, are made up of events, but their arrangement may not coincide. Narration is the way in which the story is told, or the plot put together, and is similar to what some critics call 'discourse'. It may operate through enactment or exposition, and often involves manipulations of time such as flashbacks or summary. The way in which events are presented turns story into plot, and affects the pace of the novel, or what Gaskell calls 'the progress of events'.

This, in turn, is controlled by the ideas in the author's mind which are conveyed through the fiction. They constitute what R.S. Crane calls 'the formal principle

which makes of this system a definitely effective whole' (631). Gaskell never intends merely to instruct, or she would, as she suggests to Grey, have chosen the Essay: 'I suppose you mean that you used the narrative form merely to {convey} \introduce/ certain opinions & thoughts. If so you had better have condensed them into the shape of an Essay'. There are, however, as has already been shown in discussions of *Ruth* and *North and South*, important issues which influence the choice of character and place. Such issues also affect the selection of events and the form of plot to which, in turn, they give significance.

To sum up, *story* provides the material for *plot*, which is the artistic *selection* and *arrangement* of that material; both story and plot consist of *events*; these involve *action* in the sense of what happens or what is done or said, and they are communicated in a number of different ways through *narration* or *discourse*; selection, arrangement, and narration are determined by the *ideas* of the novel; *time* is essential to plot the progress of which has to be seen against a time-scale; lastly, plot, like other elements in the novel, is dependent on the author's ability to assist the reader to *visualize* events. These principles of narrative structure have been taken as the basis for the discussion of action and place in *Wives and Daughters*:

The advice to Grey concludes with these words:
'Please don't thank me. But try & follow my advice for I

am pretty sure it is good. You know everybody can preach better than they can practise'. Gaskell herself has obviously practised what she preaches and studied hard at plot, even though there may be occasional weaknesses when, in some earlier plots, not everything contributes to the 'growth and progress of events', or situations are contrived or melodramatic. *Wives and Daughters* exemplifies the careful construction she advocates, a construction which depends for its artistry largely on a firm attachment of plot to place.

PLACE AND STORY

The plots of both *Ruth* and *North and South* are patterned on place, but, whereas each focuses almost exclusively on one story, with a primarily linear plot, *Wives and Daughters* has a complex plot constructed out of a number of linked stories. Molly's is the main one, and there are parallel sub-stories of varying degrees of importance. Each is centred on a place, the narration moving among these places, as well as backwards and forwards in time, to create the complicated ordering of the plot. Transitions are so smoothly managed that only close inspection reveals the constant changes of direction and myriad events which move each story, and the plot as a whole, towards its inevitable conclusion. As Pollard points out, 'while nothing much happens, everything is happening all the time' (225).

Clues to the ideas which unify the stories are

found in the title, *Wives and Daughters*, and sub-title, 'An every-day story': the novel deals with marriage and family life. Stories of marriage (and its prologue, courtship) include the stories of Molly and Roger, Mr and Mrs Gibson, Mr and Mrs Hamley, Osborne and Aimée, Lord and Lady Cumnor, and Cynthia and her suitors. Stories of family relationships include Molly's relationship with her father, her stepmother, and her stepsister; the relationships of Roger, Osborne, and their parents, particularly of Osborne and his father, and, later, of the Squire, Aimée, and her child; the relationship of Cynthia with her mother, and, more distantly, with her Fitzpatrick connections; and, in fairly minor rôles, the family life of the Cumnors, and of the Browning sisters. Within that family context it is 'an every-day story' of quite ordinary people to whom nothing out of the way happens.

The unifying idea is, however, of universal significance. In all these stories family love is tested, and altruism shown to be the ideal, as Roger's advice to Molly indicates:

'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 prejudge 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.'

(152; ch.10)

This is deeply serious, but lightly presented, in a manner typical of a novel in which there is no heavy moralizing, although important principles for all human relationships are laid down at the level at which it can be most difficult to practise them: in the family. "We are not angels," Molly says to Roger, "to be comforted by seeing the ends for which everything is sent" (170; ch.11), and the authenticity of love is tested in a variety of circumstances by every-day people who are neither wholly saints, nor wholly sinners. If Gaskell has turned away from the larger issues of national life in the new industrial age, she has not turned away from fundamental moral concerns or the problems of community living. The family is for her the microcosm of society, and the limited setting of *Wives and Daughters* certainly does not indicate a lack of depth.

The domestic theme dictates the choice of settings which are, naturally, homes. Within the village of Hollingford and its environs lie the homes of the three principal groups of characters: Mr Gibson's home in the village itself; Cumnor Towers on its outskirts; and Hamley Hall about seven miles away. Also in the village is the home of the Miss Brownings, and within its orbit, Ashcombe Manor. There are references, too, to places beyond Hollingford: Cambridge, Winchester, London, France, and

Africa, but only rarely is any of them the direct setting for action.

Before attempting to follow the sequence of the plot to show the importance of place in its design, some of the means by which these locales are visualized and made significant in terms of particular events are discussed.

Hollingford: 'the little straggling town'.

At one side lay the little town of Hollingford, into a street of which Mr Gibson's front door opened; and delicate columns, and little puffs of smoke were already beginning to rise from many a cottage chimney where some housewife was already up, and preparing breakfast for the bread-winner of the family. (35-36; ch.1)

After this brief introduction, details of the town's geography are filled in during the course of the narrative: Molly watches for the approach of the Cumnor coach 'through the winding street' (44; ch.2). When the Cumnors are known to be returning, Hollingford is stirred into life as, first the cottages belonging to Lord Cumnor, and then the buildings owned by others, are refurbished: 'the ladders of white-washers and painters were sadly in the way of the ladies tripping daintily along to make their purchases, and holding their gowns up in a bunch behind, after a fashion quite gone out in these days' (315; ch.25). An old-fashioned character is also hinted at in the lingering in

the 'town's livery' of two sedan chairs, and its possession of one yellow post-chaise.

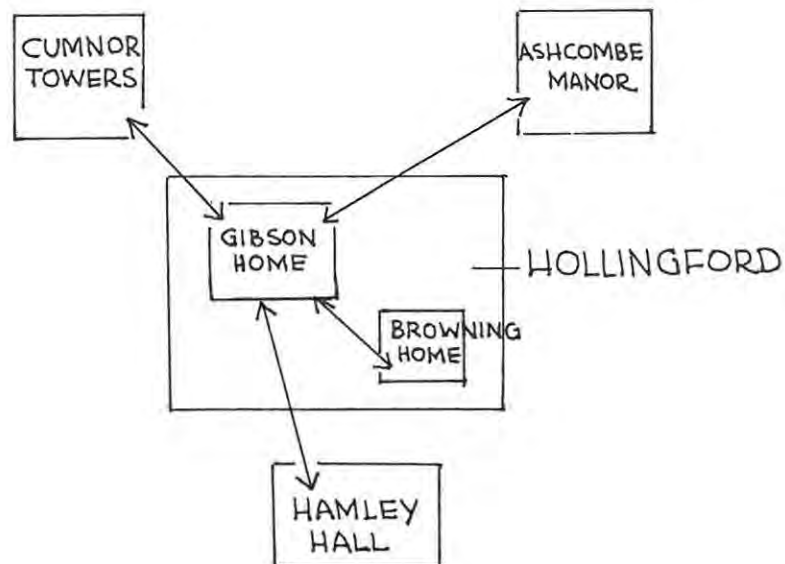
People in this old society are as rigidly separated by prejudice as those in the new society of *North and South*, and *Wives and Daughters* abounds with ironic references to the affectations and prejudices, shallow and deep, of a small town. While society's hierarchical character seems to be taken for granted, the novel shows that sympathy is more important than social status, and, through events which range from the lightly amusing to the near-tragic, it pleads for acceptance. Mrs Gibson's pretentiousness is ridiculed in her condescension towards the townsfolk and boasted intimacy with the Towers family; Lady Harriet is upbraided by Molly for speaking patronizingly of the class of people to whom she herself belongs and for mocking the Miss Brownings by calling them Pecksy and Flapsy; Squire Hamley's family pride leads him to regard the Cumnors as 'mere muck of yesterday' (106; ch.6), and his ingrained prejudice against Roman Catholics, the French, and the working-class is responsible for the tragic misunderstanding with Osborne. Lady Cumnor's snobbishness is succinctly characterized in her remark, "I never think whether a land-agent is handsome or not. They don't belong to the class of people whose appearance I notice" (128; ch.8), and, at the same time, the land-agent, Preston's pretensions to being a gentleman, are ridiculed. It is the social rather than the topographical which is important in the portrayal of Hollingford.

The village itself provides the setting for only a few events, the most notable of which is the Spring Charity Ball, humorously observed through the eyes of the Miss Brownings and their guests. The uneasy encounters with Mr Preston, so important to the story of his affair with Cynthia, and other threads of story, such as Molly's friendship with Lady Harriet, are interwoven with an awareness of the dancers, the band, 'consisting of two violins, a harp, and an occasional clarionet', and the 'kindly old maids' viewing the proceedings as they air 'their old lace and their best dresses' (ch.26). The people of various social classes who attend the ball are as much items of setting as the evergreens which overload the room, or Miss Hornblower's 'ponderous gold eyeglass', the nosegay from Hamley which Cynthia accepts in preference to Mr Preston's hot-house offering, and the absent diamonds of the ill-mannered Duchess of Menteith. This bringing together of divergent characters and story-lines in a colourful setting instances the necessity of place to story.

Mr Gibson's House: 'the "unked" home'.

The Gibsons' home in Hollingford is central: Mr Gibson moves out from it on professional and personal visits to all the other places in the neighbourhood, and Molly likewise moves out from there to visit neighbouring homes while, in turn, their home is visited by almost all

the other major characters. It is thus essential to most of the action, and not only to those events which occur within it.



The opening chapter sets the house in its wider context and takes us into the bed-room of the young heroine:

To begin with the old rigmarole of childhood. In a country there was a shire, and in that shire there was a town, and in that town there was a house, and in that house there was a room, and in that room there was a bed, and in that bed there lay a little girl. (35; ch.1)

The language of the nursery is appropriate to Molly's age and to the scene. In her bed-room the newly-trimmed bonnet on its 'primitive kind of bonnet-stand', covered with a large handkerchief, hints at the promise of an exciting day: 'Up jumped Molly, and ran with her bare little feet across the room, and lifted off the handkerchief and saw

once again the bonnet; the pledge of the gay bright day to come' (35; ch.1). Thus the novel opens in a room of the home which lies at its heart; already impressions of place are integral to what is happening, and an insignificant item of setting introduces the first important event, Molly's visit to Cumnor Towers.

In the retrospective third and fourth chapters, where the story of Molly's childhood is sketched, few physical details of the house are given, but an impression is gained of a happy secure place, the typical protective nest or childhood home which has featured in the other novels.

The disturbance of the nest begins with the interception by Mr Gibson of his apprentice's love-letter to Molly. This disruptive incident is introduced by a narrative passage which first stimulates our sense of the house's lay-out:

One day, for some reason or other, Mr Gibson came home unexpectedly. He was crossing the hall, having come in by the garden-door -- the garden communicated with the stable-yard, where he had left his horse -- when the kitchen door opened, and the girl who was underling in the establishment, came quickly into the hall with a note in her hand, and made as if she was taking it upstairs, but on seeing her master she gave a little start, and turned back as if to hide herself in the kitchen. (79 -80; ch.5)

In later chapters the position of the dining-room, the surgery, the first-floor drawing-room, the bed-rooms, and the attic are all similarly filled in as each event is placed in an appropriate part of the house, which, in turn acquires significance from the events which occur in it.

Meanwhile a more profound disturbance occurs with the intrusion of Mrs Gibson, ironically intended as a protector of the nest, and the emotional changes wrought in Molly by her father's marriage are often exemplified in accounts of alterations to the furnishings of the home. These are anticipated by the new decor Mr Gibson commissions the Miss Brownings to effect. Molly dislikes the salmon-pink walls 'of a very glowing hue' and the new curtains 'of that pale sea-green just coming into fashion', and is distressed that nearly everything is altered in the bed-room which she has always associated with her dying mother. After visiting the Hamleys and Brownings, she returns to a home 'which was already strange, and what Warwickshire people would call "unked", to her. New paint, new paper, new colours; grim servants dressed in their best, and objecting to every change - from their master's marriage to the new oilcloth in the hall, "which tripped 'em up, and threw 'em down, and was cold to the feet, and smelt just abominable"' (207; ch.15). There is more 'unking' on the evening of Mrs Gibson's arrival when she insists on taking supper in the bed-room:

... and poor Molly, not daring to tell the servants of this whim, had to carry up first a

table, which, however small, was too heavy for her; and afterwards all the choice portions of the meal, which she had taken great pains to arrange on the table, as she had seen such things done at Hamley, intermixed with fruit and flowers that had that morning been sent in from various great houses where Mr Gibson was respected and valued. (208; ch.15)

Here, and on many other occasions, the new wife's insensitivity to the needs of anyone but herself is portrayed through criticism of old house-hold arrangements. 'Molly's little white dimity bed, her old-fashioned chest of drawers, and her other cherished relics of her mother's maiden-days' are consigned to the lumber-room so that her bed-room can be refurnished to match Cynthia's with 'a little French bed, and a new paper, and a pretty carpet, and a dressed-up toilet-table and glass' (220 and 219; ch.16). Thus setting reinforces the story of Mr Gibson's unsuitable marriage and its effect on Molly, and new furnishings also anticipate her step-sister's arrival.

Cynthia is first seen in the context of the house: 'Molly saw the beautiful, tall, swaying figure, against the light of the open door, but could not see any of the features that were, for the moment, in shadow'; those features become clear only when she is 'in the full light and repose of the drawing-room', a room in which much of her story is to be acted out (252 - 253; ch.19). The

succeeding months are marked by further changes: the growing friendship between the step-sisters, and Mrs Gibson's manœuvres to secure first Osborne, and then Roger, for her daughter. Here the story is told through a number of scenes set in the garden or drawing-room, Mrs Gibson's 'little dinner' being one of the most vivid:

Mr Gibson had had to go out to his evening round; and the young men were all too glad to come up into the pretty drawing-room; the bright little wood fire; the comfortable easy-chairs which, with so small a party, might be drawn round the hearth; the good-natured hostess; the pretty, agreeable girls. Roger sauntered up to the corner where Cynthia was standing, playing with a hand-screen. (308 - 309; ch. 24)

The culmination of Roger's infatuation with Cynthia in his hasty declaration of love in the Gibsons' drawing-room is not directly presented, only the eaves-dropping Mrs Gibson's version being given: "I've reason to think - in fact I did open the door unawares, but I shut it again softly, and I don't think they heard me..." (417; ch.34), but the place and the event are so closely associated that when Roger at last realizes that it is Molly he loves, he tells Mr Gibson, "I determined not to repeat the former scene in the former place - in your drawing-room - however I might be tempted " (700; ch.60).

The events set in Molly's home in the succeeding stage of the plot, such as Osborne's final visit when he

tells Molly about Aimée, or Cynthia's confession of the involvement with Mr Preston, can be visualized without elaborate description because the house has become familiar through incidental picturing, like the glimpse of Cynthia waltzing round the room with Molly 'to the imminent danger of the various little tables, loaded with "*objets d'art*" (as Mrs Gibson delighted to call them) with which the drawing-room was crowded' (474; ch.39).

Latent throughout is Molly's patient endurance of her stepmother's selfishness and the loss of her father's companionship; there is also the sadness associated with Mrs Hamley's illness and death, and, later, the knowledge that Cynthia is indifferent to the love of Roger, towards whom Molly will hardly admit her own real feelings. Her unspoken distress is sometimes expressed through response to surroundings: 'Molly - very often sitting by Cynthia, and surrounded by ribbon, and wire, and net - heard the bulletins [about Mrs Hamley] like the toll of a funeral bell at a marriage feast.... She loathed the small vanities with which she was surrounded, and would wander out into the frosty garden, and pace the walk, which was both sheltered and concealed by evergreens' (256; ch.19). On the day of Roger's proposal to Cynthia, 'the room grew stifling, and instinctively she went to the open casement window, and leant out, gasping for breath. Gradually the consciousness of the soft peaceful landscape stole into her mind, and stilled the buzzing confusion' (418; ch.34). [see p 35]

When Roger leaves, her unexpressed love is manifested in a frantic effort to undo the stiff window-clasp in the lumber-room so that she can catch a last glimpse of him.

The novel is broken off during one of Mrs Gibson's inconsequential conversations in the drawing-room which has witnessed so many of the events which make up the story of Molly and her family, and, as the simple bonnet-stand introduces us to her home, a frivolous item of setting has the last word on her self-indulgent step-mother: "'And now cover me up close, and let me go to sleep, and dream about my dear Cynthia and my new shawl!'" (705; ch.60).

Hamley Hall: 'old ancestral pride'.

Hamley Hall is seen through the eyes of Molly, a visitor observing the unfamiliar, so there is more conscious picturing than there is of the Gibson home. Leisurely descriptions of rooms, furnishings, and grounds create an atmosphere of gracious serenity, dominated by the sadness of a passing era, and physical features reveal an old-fashioned character which parallels the outworn formalities and attitudes of the Hamley parents.

On her first visit Molly is 'left at leisure to make acquaintance with her surroundings' (95; ch.6). Her impressions are presented in terms of what she does, narrative melting imperceptibly into description as she experiences each feature of the Hall. We share her view of the grounds as she goes 'to the window to see what was to be seen', and when she hurries 'to unpack her box, and

arrange her few clothes in the pretty old-fashioned chest of drawers, which was to serve her as dressing-table as well', we notice, with her, that 'all the furniture in the room was as old-fashioned and as well-preserved as it could be. The chintz curtains were Indian calico of the last century - the colours almost washed out, but the stuff itself exquisitely clean' (95; ch.6). In Mrs Hamley's sitting-room, Molly notices the similarly old-fashioned, faultlessly clean furnishings, as well as the crayon portraits of Osborne and Roger, whose stories are to be so closely interwoven with hers. In the drawing-room before dinner, she again has leisure to look about her: 'The room was forty feet long or so, fitted up with yellow satin at some distant period; high spindle-legged chairs and pembroke-tables abounded. The carpet was of the same date as the curtains, and was thread-bare in many places; and in others was covered with drugget' (99; ch.6). Discomfort is the key-note of the dining-room, where 'they dined at a small table in a great large room'. Molly finds the slow formality, so different from the bustle of hurried meals in her own home, tedious: 'She measured the distance from the sideboard to the table with her eye, and made allowances for the men who had to carry things backwards and forwards ... at length the tablecloth was cleared away, and dessert was put upon the mahogany table, polished like a looking-glass' (100; ch.6).

After breakfast the next morning, the Squire

withdraws to his study. The angle alters, and it is now from the narrator's viewpoint alone that his retreat and the library are seen:

It was the custom to call the room in which Squire Hamley kept his coats, boots, and gaiters, his different sticks and favourite spud, his gun and fishing rods, 'the study.' There was a bureau in it, and a three-cornered arm-chair, but no books were visible. The greater part of them were kept in a large, musty-smelling room, in an unfrequented part of the house; so unfrequented, that the housemaid often neglected to open the window-shutters, which looked into a part of the grounds over-grown with the luxuriant growth of shrubs. (103; ch.6)

The descriptions of each room, from the washed-out curtains and threadbare carpet to the slow formality and musty smell, illustrate the fading of the genteel old order, and the sadness thus evoked is appropriate to the events set in these rooms, and in the garden, which Molly tours with the Squire later in the morning, thus completing the preliminary picturing of Hamley Hall. One or two events in each of these settings have been chosen to indicate their intimate relationship with place.

The drawing-room. The most memorable of the scenes which focus on Osborne is set in the drawing-room, where he and his father are shown at variance, their failure to appreciate each other highlighted in the contrast between

their watches. The Squire, weighed down by financial worries and the emptiness of life without Mrs Hamley, lashes out at the neglected fire, the servants, and finally at Osborne whom he is sure is late for dinner, but who denies the offence:

'It surely isn't six o'clock?' said Osborne, pulling out his dainty little watch. He was scarcely more unaware than it of the storm that was brewing.

'Six o'clock! It's more than a quarter past,' growled out his father.

'I fancy your watch must be wrong, sir. I set mine by the Horse Guards only two days ago.'

Now, impugning that old steady, turnip-shaped watch of the Squire's was one of the insults which, as it could not reasonably be resented, was not to be forgiven. That watch had been given to him by his father when watches were watches long ago. It had given the law to house-clocks, stable-clocks, kitchen-clocks - nay, even to Hamley Church clock in its day; and was it now, in its respectable old age, to be looked down upon by a little whipper-snapper of a French watch which could go into a man's waistcoat pocket, instead of having to be extricated with due efforts, like a respectable watch of size and position, from a fob in the waistband. (291-2; ch.22)

Here the gentle humour which pervades the novel underlines the Squire's idiosyncrasies, but there is an accompanying note of sadness: father and son, like their watches, do not agree, and the failure to communicate their real feelings is to have heart-breaking consequences. The watches are apt to the situation as is the drawing-room associated with the Mrs Hamley whose presence might have been conciliatory.

The study. The strained relationship with Osborne is set against the Squire's concord with Roger, as they sit together smoking their pipes in the study, which is the father's private domain, imprinted with his practical, earthy character:

'I may come in and have a pipe with you, sir, mayn't I?' said Roger, that first evening, pushing gently against the study-door, which his father held only half open.

'You'll not like it,' said the Squire, still holding the door against him, but speaking in a relenting tone. 'The tobacco I use isn't what young men like. Better go and have a cigar with Osborne.'

'No. I want to sit with you, and I can stand pretty strong tobacco.'

Roger pushed in, the resistance slowly giving way before him.

'It will make your clothes smell. You'll have to borrow Osborne's scents to sweeten yourself,'

said the Squire grimly, at the same time pushing a short smart amber-mouthed pipe to his son.

'No; I'll have a churchwarden. Why, father, do you think I'm a baby to put up with a doll's head like this?' looking at the carving upon it.

The Squire was pleased in his heart, though he did not choose to show it. He only said,

'Osborne brought it me when he came back from Germany. That's three years ago.' (303; ch.23)

The Squire's anger against Osborne is dramatized when he hits the bowl of his pipe so sharply against the hob that it breaks in pieces. Roger's reaction in filling another and distracting him with a humorous story is as typical of his sympathetic nature as his sharing of the space where he knows that his father is most at home; Osborne would have been decidedly ill at ease in the study. This room and the pipes exemplify harmony as tellingly as the drawing-room and the watches exemplify discord.

The dining-room. The vacant place at the head of the table in the dining-room, where 'the plate and glasses and napkin were always arranged as regularly and methodically as if Mrs Hamley would come in as usual' (233: ch.17) speaks of her illness, and, when Molly breaks the news that her father has sent for Roger and Osborne, while the Squire is standing at the fireplace, the room, its formality now empty without the gracious presence of Mrs Hamley, and the attitude of Squire Hamley, say all that has to be said about

his anguish: 'Then there was a dead silence, which Molly thought would never end. The Squire had placed his two hands on the high chimney-piece, and stood leaning over the fire' (234; ch.17).

The library. Osborne's secret marriage is hinted at through an incident which occurs in the library. An examination of references to this room shows how apparently inconsequential material is introduced in anticipation of a central event, and how that event is subsequently made to reverberate through memories of place. The foundations of the scene are laid as far back as Chapter 6, with the initial description of the library [quoted on p 184]. In Chapter 7 we learn that Molly 'had found her way into the library, and used to undo the heavy bars of the shutters if the housemaid had forgotten this duty, and mount the ladder sitting on the steps for an hour at a time, deep in some book of the old English classics' (114; ch.7), and in chapter 8 that she is dismayed to find, shortly after Roger's arrival, 'that he was in the habit of occupying the library, her favourite retreat' (121; ch.8). Much later, in Chapter 18, the significance for the plot of the shutters and the ladder becomes clear. On her last afternoon at the Hall, Molly wanders out into the garden remembering the happiness of the past summer in contrast to the present wintry scene and the sadness of Mrs Hamley's impending death:

Death seemed the only reality. She had neither energy nor heart to walk far or briskly; and

turned back towards the house. The afternoon sun was shining brightly on the windows; and, stirred up to unusual activity by some unknown cause, the housemaids had opened the shutters and windows of the generally unused library. The middle window was also a door; the white-painted wood went halfway up. Molly turned along the little flag-paved path that led past the library windows to the gate in the white railings at the front of the house, and went in at the opened door.... She mounted on the ladder to get to a particular shelf high up in a dark corner of the room; and finding there some volume that looked interesting, she sat down on the step to read part of it. There she sat, in her bonnet and cloak, when Osborne suddenly came in.

(246; ch.18)

The carefully prepared setting makes Molly's eavesdropping seem unavoidable, and when the event is recalled in later chapters, the place is always connected with it: 'Molly had wondered many a time about the secret she had so unwittingly become possessed of that last day in the Hall library' (362; ch.29), or, 'sometimes she wondered if it was a dream - that short half-hour in the library at Hamley Hall - when she had learnt a fact which seemed so all-important to Osborne, yet which made so little difference in his way of life - either in speech or action'

(272; ch.21). The final reminder comes in Chapter 52 with Molly's succinct version of the event when she confesses her prior knowledge of Osborne's marriage: "I was in the library - was reading there, some time ago; and Roger came in and spoke to Osborne about his wife. Roger did not see me, but Osborne did. They made me promise secrecy. I don't think I did wrong" (609; ch.52). Like Molly's, our minds go back to the library where she sits innocently on the ladder, hearing Roger give away his brother's secret. Place and event are inextricable.

The garden. An event which lies at the heart of the story of Molly and Roger occurs in the garden; it is also fundamental to the novel's vision, for it is here that Roger's central advice to Molly is offered [see p 171]. He is in search of rare specimens for his plant collection when he discovers her beside a moss-grown seat 'almost surrounded by the drooping leaves of a weeping ash' on a walk 'concealed from sight as much as possible by shrubs and evergreens and over-arching trees' (147; ch.10); she is giving vent to a 'passion of grief' after hearing of her father's plan to remarry. Again, place and event are so interwoven that one cannot be remembered without the other. Roger's tactful sympathy is epitomized in the manner in which he offers Molly water from a spring he knows of in the wood, 'bringing a little in a broad green leaf, turned into an impromptu cup' (149; ch.10). The sense of place is gently reinforced when he breaks off their conversation to examine 'one or two abnormal leaves of the ash-tree, partly

from the custom of his nature, partly to give her time to recover' and again when he drops 'the leaf he held in his hand' to turn round and look at her. Roger's discomfort, too, is indicated when he looks on the ground, 'kicking softly at a loose pebble with his foot', a tiny item which is not forgotten when suddenly he knows what to say to Molly, and begins 'kicking the pebble again' (150; ch.10).

The intimacy of the encounter is reflected in the secluded garden setting, where Molly expresses emotions inappropriate in drawing-room or library, and Roger reveals that sympathy which is at the core both of his sensitivity to nature and to the needs of those for whom he cares. Gaskell attends to the details of the scene because she wants her readers to recall this moment during later complications to the plot, and to remember its offer of hope for the desired resolution.

Although it is set in the drawing-room there is an appropriate garden connection in the last scene in which Molly and Roger appear together. The 'large bunch of choicest flowers' (690; ch.59) he presents to her before leaving for Africa for the second time is both a peace-offering and a bonding symbol. She holds it 'as a sort of link between them', and, pressed to choose a flower from the bouquet to give him as a pledge that he has 'never vexed her', Molly offers a rose. The significance of this to the plot is not revealed because Elizabeth Gaskell died before writing the final pages, but it may be assumed that,

on his return, the rose would be produced and become the means to a declaration of love.²

The Hamley family's story, particularly where it concerns the Squire's relations with his sons, speaks of the painful consequences of clinging to the past instead of grasping the present, and of neglecting family affection for the sake of stubbornly-held traditional precepts. This is echoed, as has been shown, in setting and action, with the only hope for renewal lying in Roger's scientific interests which take him out into the world beyond its boundaries, and in his relationship with Molly, so often associated with gardens.

Cumnor Towers: 'the great family mansion'.

There is a sense of greater energy at Cumnor Towers where the family represents the newer wealthy aristocracy as opposed to the traditional squirearchy. Lord Cumnor is interested in new farming methods and Lord Hollingford in the scientific developments which Roger Hamley also pursues in spite of his father's prejudices. Like the Squire, the Cumnors are proud, but events such as Lady Harriet's championing of Molly show them capable of sympathy, and scenes at the Towers during Lady Cumnor's convalescence indicate an affection which puts them on the same level as the other families in the novel, just as the troubles of the Hamleys reveal the need for unconditional family love.

In the plot Cumnor Towers is a catalyst. At the

beginning of the novel it brings together Molly and 'Clare', and later Mr Gibson and his prospective bride. It allows for the introduction into Hollingford society of Mr Preston as an employee of Lord Cumnor, and, at the end, provides a neutral setting for the renewed friendship between Molly and Roger.

Molly's visit on the Gala-day etches its gardens and huge rooms on her mind. The picturing of the garden has been discussed in Chapter One [see pp 25-26]; the mansion is similarly seen through Molly's childish eyes, when she is overwhelmed by the vastness and opulence of its reception rooms, and the length of its passages. Five years later she spends an uncomfortable day there with her prospective stepmother, 'the recollection of her last day of misery at the Towers fresh in her mind as if it had been yesterday' (160; ch.11). Invited to stay with the Cumnors after the wedding, Molly prefers the Brownings' home because of the 'nightmare-like recollections of the last, the only evening she had spent at the Towers' (199; ch.14), associations with place again serving as a reminder of past events.³ Meetings with Roger in this setting, however, indicate a maturity and poise which will make Molly a fitting wife for the scientist, so obviously destined for fame. Observed by Lady Harriet and her brother, they 'became absorbed in what they were talking about and wandered away into the shade of the long avenue' (676; ch.59); this visual foreshadowing of their eventual union

is appropriately set in a garden, which like those of the Gibsons' home and Hamley Hall, reflects the naturalness of their love, so different from Roger's drawing-room infatuation with Cynthia.

Ashcombe: 'the Manor-house came up to its name'.

Ashcombe, 'a small town close to another property of Lord Cumnor's, in the same county' (136; ch.9), is connected with the stories of Mrs Kirkpatrick, Cynthia, and Mr Preston, and is the setting for the marriage of Mr Gibson and Mrs Kirkpatrick.

Mrs Kirkpatrick's distaste for the school at Ashcombe, where she is deprived of the comforts she regards as necessities, partly accounts for her alacrity at entering into marriage, as this soliloquy in the comfort of 'her' room at the Towers, reveals:

'One would think it was an easy enough thing to deck a looking-glass like that with muslin and pink ribbons; and yet how hard it is to keep it up! People don't know how hard it is till they've tried as I have. I made my own glass just as pretty when I first went to Ashcombe; but the muslin got dirty, and the pink ribbons faded, and it is so difficult to earn money to renew them; and when one has got the money one hasn't the heart to spend it all at once. One thinks and one thinks how one can get the most good out of it; and a new gown, or a day's pleasure, or

some hot-house fruit, or some piece of elegance that can be seen and noticed in one's drawing-room, carries the day, and good-bye to prettily decked looking-glasses.' (131; ch.9)

Conditions at Ashcombe also underline, and partly explain, the predicament Cynthia gets into when, neglected by her mother, and '"shut up in that great dreary house at Ashcombe, where mamma had her school"' (517; ch.43), she accepts help from Mr Preston through an incident she later describes to Molly: '"So on this day, when he came to see how the workmen were getting on, he found me in the deserted schoolroom, looking at my faded summer bonnet and some old ribbons I had been sponging, and half-worn-out gloves - a sort of rag-fair spread out on the deal table"' (519; ch.43). Cynthia's love of finery is already known, so the rag-fair tells its own tale.

For Molly, however, the first sight of Ashcombe Manor is delightful: 'It was built of stone, had many gables and mullioned windows, and was covered over with Virginian creeper and late-blowing roses' (188; ch.13). There Molly and Mr Gibson are greeted by Mr Preston, whose constant apologies, in spite of the manor's comfort and tasteful luxury, expose his irritatingly pretentious character and introduce a disturbing note:

They were taken by their host into a wainscoted parlour, where a wood fire crackled and burnt, and the crimson curtains shut out the waning day

and the outer chill. Here the table was laid for dinner; snowy table-linen, bright silver, clear sparkling glass, wine and an autumnal dessert on the sideboard. Yet Mr Preston kept apologizing to Molly for the rudeness of his bachelor home, for the smallness of the room, the great dining-room being already appropriated by his housekeeper, in preparation for the morrow's breakfast. (189; ch.13)

An object in the Louis Quinze cabinet Molly examines after dinner is the means for introducing Cynthia's name, when Mr Preston asks whether the miniature of Madame de St Quentin, 'a great beauty at the French Court', does not remind her of Miss Kirkpatrick. Molly, naturally pleased to find someone who can tell her a little about Cynthia, unsuspectingly tells Mr Preston that her step-sister will soon be returning from France. Another little item of setting becomes a tool of plot, while the significance of Ashcombe itself lies primarily in its convenience to various story-lines: the Gibson marriage; Cynthia's affair with Preston; Molly's friendship with Lady Harriet which begins here.

The Miss Brownings': 'clean and neat ... as could be'.

The house of the Miss Brownings, with its 'little upstairs drawing-room, looking into the High Street' (83; ch.13), is as much like them in simplicity and homeliness as Mrs Gibson's feminine drawing-room, Mrs

Hamley's faded but meticulously preserved apartments, or Lady Cumnor's ostentatious public rooms, are like those ladies. The guest-room in which Molly stays is 'clean and neat as a bedroom could be, with draperies of small delicate patchwork - bed-curtains, window-curtains and counterpane; a japanned toilet-table, full of little boxes, with a small looking-glass affixed to it, that distorted every face that was so unwise as to look in it' (185; ch.13). As the ladies of Hollingford weave in and out of the plot, the comments they pass are as distorted as those images in the mirror, and the drawing-room gossip occasioned by Molly's attempts to rescue Cynthia from Mr Preston indicates the potential harm of such distortions.

It is a convenient setting for the meeting of Roger and Cynthia at the card-party, and for other social occasions which characterize life in Hollingford, but it also epitomizes the gentle and unpretentious attitude of those like Miss Phoebe who are better models for Molly than her step-mother, and closer to the altruistic ideals of the novel.

The countryside: 'riding together down the lanes'.

Just as Mr Gibson, who reckoned that he 'rode the world around in the course of a year' (87; ch.5), links the stories of the various groups of characters, the country lanes he traverses on visits to his patients connect the novel's localities. Journeys along them sometimes assist smooth transitions from one centre of action to another, as

when Molly drives to Hamley for the first time:

It was very pleasant driving quickly along in the luxurious carriage, through the pretty green lanes, with dog-roses and honeysuckle so plentiful and fresh in the hedges, that she once or twice was tempted to ask the coachman to stop till she had gathered a nosegay. She began to dread the end of her little journey of seven miles. (94; ch.6)

Apart from this linking role, brief descriptions of the countryside, often viewed along the lanes, provide a serene background of changing seasons, and one critical event is set in them: Cynthia's clandestine meeting with Mr Preston, which Molly interrupts (ch.42). It is as skilfully managed in its depiction of place as Molly's other stumbling on a secret in the Hamley library.

London, Cambridge, Winchester, and Africa: beyond 'the sight of Hollingford church-spire'.

Mrs Gibson and her daughter associate London with parties, theatres, and fashion, which makes it a suitable place for Cynthia, although her visits to it, and wedding there, are not directly presented, and no impression is given of the city. Off the map of the novel, it yet plays an important part in the story of Cynthia and the romance with Mr Henderson. Mr Gibson associates it with the world of scientific ideas, and, although Molly does not visit London, it seems that she and Roger were intended to live

there after their marriage, a sign that they are to move into the new age, for Hollingford is, in many ways, depicted as a relic of the past.

Cambridge, where Roger and Osborne are students, is also indirectly presented, and events which occur there, like Osborne's failure, and Roger's success as senior wrangler, are recounted mainly through conversation, but they have important repercussions. Winchester too, Aimée's secret home, is presented principally in conversation, and sometimes in Osborne's thoughts, the reader travelling to it (or rather away from it), only briefly when Aimée's journey to Hamley is described.

Africa is 'far away in the mysterious darkness of distance' (513; ch.42), and we learn of it only through letters and oblique remarks. Roger undertakes dangerous journeys through Abyssinia and down the east coast to the Cape, but the dangers, apart from fever, are never spelled out, nor is topography described. At the Cape, as he later recalls, he receives the news of Osborne's death simultaneously with Cynthia's letter of relinquishment: "I was wretched when I got her letter - at the Cape I mean - but I believe it was for the best" (687; ch.59). It is the most remote of the unvisited places, but essential to the stories of Hamleys and Gibsons.

These places all function in the plot because of the parts they play in the stories of Hollingford's people; thematically their only significance is to

indicate that, however close-knit a community may be, it can never be entirely isolated from the wider society, especially in the era of impending change which the novel depicts. As her father tells Molly when she expresses a wish to stay forever in sight of Hollingford church-spire, '"Nonsense!... Why, you've all your travelling to do yet"' (616; ch.52).

PLACE AND PLOT

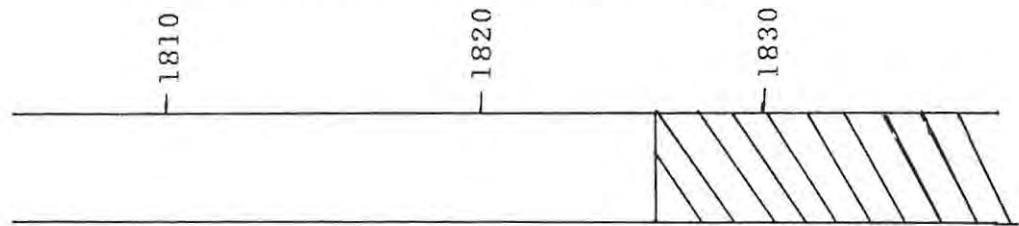
So far consideration has been given mainly to the relationship between place and story. Now it is necessary to look at some of the ways in which the events selected from the various stories in *Wives and Daughters* are arranged to form its plot, and how place is integral to the resulting design. Every event happens at a particular time as well as in a particular place, and plot can hardly be thought of independently of either, so that the interrelationship of place and time must also be considered. As Gullón argues, 'the connection between one and the other makes each what it is while defining how it is: intemporalized, space would lack distinguishable elements' (11). [see note 5 p 218]

Time is the fourth dimension of our four-dimensional world, space providing, in fiction as well as in reality, the other three; in *Wives and Daughters*, this time dimension works in different ways. There is historical time against which the story is set, chronological time at which each event takes place (each parallel story in *Wives*

and Daughters having its own parallel chronological time), and plot-time, which is the time in the sequence of the novel when an event is brought to the notice of the reader.⁴ Place often plays an important role in ensuring a smooth transition from one event to another, and thereby from one time to another.

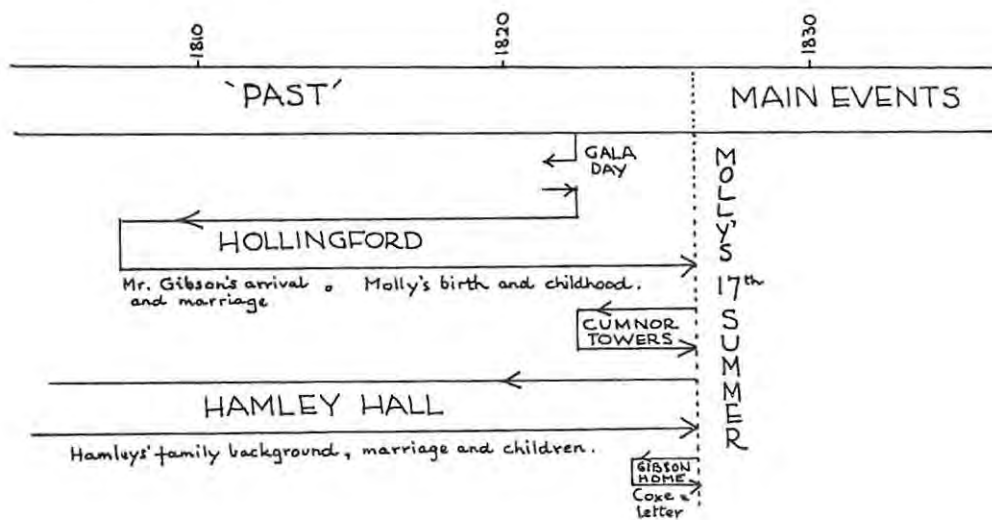
The historical time of *Wives and Daughters* is the first three-and-a-half decades of the Nineteenth Century. No years are given other than the birth-date of Osborne's son: 21 June, 183__ (621: ch.53), but the period is clearly indicated in references to the time 'before the passing of the Reform Bill' of 1832, and to 'those days before railways', which would have been before the 1830's and 1840's (36 and 37; ch.1). The 'five and forty years ago' of a novel written in the mid-60's would be about 1820, which is when Molly first visits Cumnor Towers. Sixteen years before, Mr Gibson has arrived in Hollingford, and shortly afterwards married, his wife dying 'four or five years after her marriage ... when her only child Molly, was just three years old' (62; ch.3). This puts Molly's birth in about the same year as that of her creator - 1810 - and the main events of the novel in the late 20's and early 30's. The era is evidently that of Elizabeth Gaskell's own youth, in the relative calm after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and before the full effects of major political, agricultural, and industrial changes were felt.

The historical time-span is thus:



The shaded part represents the major focus of the novel, the unshaded part its 'past', into which the narrative periodically dips. Both are shown as open-ended because there are occasional references to events before Mr Gibson's arrival in Hollingford, and we do not know precisely when the novel was to close.

Much of the 'past' is covered in the first four chapters where the plot has this complicated time-pattern:



Four major locales are introduced in these opening chapters: the Gibson home; Cumnor Towers; Hollingford, including the Browning home; and Hamley Hall. Tracing the

movement of the narrative among them helps one to see how time and place work together in the construction of plot.

The novel opens in the personal space of Molly's bedroom and soon moves to the more general one of Hollingford as viewed from her window. The time is six o'clock on a June morning. A broader time and place are introduced through the remark about children's pleasures in a country town being very simple forty-five years ago, and the anticipation, introduced through the earlier account of the newly-trimmed bonnet, is heightened by the statement that 'the pleasure that she was looking forward to today was her first share in a kind of annual festival in Hollingford' (36; ch.1). But, before the nature of the festival and the events of that day are described, the focus moves, through a link between the town Molly is observing from her window, and Cumnor Towers on its outskirts, to a more general exposition of local society:

The little straggling town faded away into country on one side close to the entrance-lodge of a great park, where lived my Lord and Lady Cumnor: 'the earl' and 'the countess', as they were always called by the inhabitants of the town; where a very pretty amount of feudal feeling still lingered, and showed itself in a number of simple ways, droll enough to look back upon, but serious matters of importance at the time. (36; ch.1)

The drollery is underlined by a description of Lord Cumnor's habit of gossiping which is counterbalanced by the countess's 'unapproachable dignity'. The remark that 'once a year she was condescending', is preliminary to a description of Lady Cumnor's charity school and annual entertainment of the school visitors at the Towers which now comes into focus as 'the great family mansion standing in aristocratic seclusion in the centre of the large park, of which one of the lodges was close to the little town' (38; ch.1). The altered focus allows for a description of the 'order of the annual festivity' which, in turn, prepares for an explanation of how Molly has come to be invited to the Towers. The discourse moves back to a day about a week before that of the opening scene, and to a farm on Lord Cumnor's estate, where he and Mr Gibson meet, and the earl absent-mindedly invites the doctor's '"nice little girl"' to '"our school scrimmage on Thursday"'. Two more sharply-focused incidents follow, which, like the first, are deftly placed in their appropriate environments and enlivened by dialogue. One is Mr Gibson's visit to the Towers to obtain confirmation of the invitation, the other a visit to the Miss Brownings to ask them to accompany Molly. Alterations in focus and shifts in time have been adroitly managed, and exposition and enactment nicely balanced in this introductory chapter, where bearings are established without lengthy explanation or description. It is already obvious that the movement of the plot is dependent on a consciousness of individual places and their

topographical and social relationships with one another.

A different method is used in Chapter Two, most of which is set in a single place on a single day. It opens in Molly's home four hours after her awakening on the Gala-day, and is then devoted to an enactment of her experiences at the Towers on that day. Chapter Three takes us back 'sixteen years before this time'. Mr Gibson's arrival in Hollingford, his marriage, and the death of his wife, leaving three-year-old Molly, are narrated in lively summary form which includes the perspectives of various Hollingford folk. There follow general comments on the doctor's domestic arrangements, highlighted by brief dialogues which focus on specific events such as the employment of Miss Eyre as Molly's governess, or the rivalry over Molly's upbringing between Miss Eyre and Betty. Again pace and perspective have been varied, but the setting, Hollingford and the doctor's home, kept constant.

'Molly,' we are told, at the beginning of Chapter Four, 'grew up among these quiet people in calm monotony of life, without any greater event than that which has been recorded - the being left behind at the Towers - until she was nearly seventeen' (67). Having gone back sixteen years before the Gala-day, the narration now moves beyond that day to a time five years later, but, before the events of the summer of Molly's seventeenth birthday are related, information about Hollingford society is given through a

narrative which moves from place to place in the neighbourhood, and backwards and forwards in time. First we go to Cumnor Towers to learn a few facts of later significance to the plot such as Mr Gibson's relationship with the scientifically-minded Lord Hollingford. Then a few salient details about Squire Hamley take us to Hamley Hall and back into the past. His wife's character and situation are described, with occasional directly presented scenes, through the last of which we learn that Mr Gibson has asked that Molly be allowed to visit Mrs Hamley. Mr Gibson's reasons for this request involves another retreat in time to learn how Mr Coxe has come to be one of his pupils. Thus the narrative travels in leisurely fashion, from four different directions, towards the day of Mr Gibson's interception of Mr Coxe's letter, the spark which sets off the rest of the action. [see p 202]

This smoothly gliding discourse contributes to the quiet atmosphere of *Wives and Daughters* which, in spite of domestic and emotional disturbances, gives the impression that all will be well in the end. The structure of two contemporary novels confirms that a correlation between plot and atmosphere, in which movement from place to place plays a vital role, is not uncommon. In Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), the often unexplained leaps taken by the narrative from Dover to Paris, Paris to London, London to Paris, and from place to place within the two cities, as well as the abrupt changes in time which mark major stages in the plot, contribute to a violent disturbing atmosphere.

In Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) St Ogg's, like Hollingford, is a paradigm for provincial society, and each locale contributes to a different aspect of that society. There, too, homes are central, the narrative moving among them, with setting and event as inseparable as in *Wives and Daughters*, but narrative transitions less smooth; this reflects its more disturbing atmosphere: Maggie is prey to far stronger conflicts and passions than Molly, and her story moves forward to a tragic rather than happy conclusion, jumping rather than gliding from stage to stage. Each of the seven books into which *The Mill on the Floss* is divided opens abruptly into a scene removed in place and time from that of the closing scene of the previous book, while, in the case of *Wives and Daughters* the action moves 'steadily forward without a break in continuity' (Hopkins 278).

After the introductory chapters, it is possible, however, to discern four major stages in the plot within each of which various concurrent stories are unfolded in an order which is not always chronological, but in which events are so closely interwoven that there are no obvious breaks. 'The plot must grow,' Gaskell suggests, 'and culminate in a crisis' (GL 420); in *Wives and Daughters* there are complications and crises in each of the main locales, some of which affect other centres of action. Tracing the major stages, the interweaving of stories, and the structure of crises, provides further insight into

ways in which plot and place work together.

The chart on page 209 provides a scheme of the major events in each place in their chronological order, with an indication of where major complications or crises occur. As it demonstrates, the seasons provide a time-scale inseparable from physical setting, evidence about time being obtained, in the most natural way, in the course of the narrative. Mr Gibson makes his rounds on 'this soft and pleasant summer evening' (87; ch.5); on his wedding day Molly and Lady Harriet take tea together 'in the fading September twilight' (197; ch.14); Roger calls on Cynthia and Molly on 'a delicious, fresh, lovely June day, the air redolent with the scents of flower-growth and bloom' (357; ch.28); or Mr Gibson visits the Squire on 'one of those still and lovely autumn days' (408; ch.33). Seasonal flowers and fruits (honeysuckle, roses, blackberries, lily of the valley), and the habits of birds ('the farewell whistles and pipes of birds' or 'a robin perched on a holly bush, piping cheerily') enrich the sense of place and of passing time, which together form a frame for events.

During the first Summer, Autumn, and Winter the narration moves among the Gibson, Hamley, and Cumnor homes, with occasional scenes in the Brownings', and the events leading to the marriage of Mr and Mrs Gibson provide the main interest in this stage of the plot (chapters 5-14). Molly's relationship with the Hamleys is interwoven with the story of the Gibsons which reaches its first crisis in the marriage at Ashcombe. This, in turn, introduces new

	GIBSON HOME	HAMLEY HALL	CUMNOR TOWERS	HOLLINGFORD	ELSEWHERE
SUMMER	Mr Cox's letter Domestic difficulties	Molly visits Molly meets Roger News of Mr G.'s marriage Roger comforts Molly	Clara's visit Mr Gibson proposes Molly spends day	Mr Gibson asks Miss Brownings' help Molly stays w. Miss B. Lady Harriet calls	Cumnors in London Cynthia in France Hamley boys at Cambridge (Marriage of Osborne?)
AUTUMN	New furnishings RETURN OF MR & MRS GIB. Changes to house Visits of Rog. & Osb.	Molly's second visit Molly meets Osborne Osborne's secret	Plans for wedding		*GIBSONS MARRY AT ASHCOT Osb. fails at Cambridge Roger Senior Wrangler
WINTER	Arrival of Cynthia Molly & Cynthia friends Preston visits	MRS HAMLEY DIES Difficulties Squire & sons Osborne not well	(Cumnors away)		
SPRING	Dinner party Preps for Ball Osb. visits	Matches scene Pipes scene Quarrel over visit to Cumnor Towers	Cumnors return Mrs Gibson visits	Charity Ball	
SUMMER	Roger visits Roger discouraged Osborne & doctors Roger encouraged	Quarrel between Squire & Preston		Preston moves to Hollingford	
AUTUMN	Lady Harriet visits ROG PROPOSES CYNTHIA & GOES TO AFRICA Row betw. Mr & Mrs Gib.	ROGER TO AFRICA Cynthia visits	Home for autumn sojourn		Roger to London
WINTER	Mr Cox's visit Cheerless winter Letters from Roger Mr Kirkpatrick visits	OSBORNE NOT WELL Further quarrels			Roger in Africa Osborne visits Aimée periodically
SPRING	Mrs G. & Cyn. to London Molly & father together			Molly & father visit Beginning of gossip	Mrs Gibson & Cynthia visit London Lady Cumnor ill in Lond.
SUMMER	Mrs Gib. returns Cynthia returns				Roger fever in Africa (Roger Jun born)
AUTUMN	Molly no rest Cynthia anxious Cynthia tells Molly abt Preston		(Lady Cumnor ill in London)	MOLLY DISCOVERS CYNTHIA & PRESTON TOGETHER Molly meets Preston	Cynthia to London
WINTER	Truth abt Cynthia Osb. speaks of Aimée CYNTHIA BREAKS OFF ENGAGEMENT TO ROG.	OSBORNE DIES Aimée arrives	Family returns Lord Cumnor & gossip Mrs Gibson visits	Preston returns letters Gossip about Molly Lady Harriet champions	Mr Gibson to London for Lady C.'s op. Aimée leaves Winchester
SPRING	Molly ill Cynthia returns	Molly at Hall Aimée ill - recovers			
SUMMER	Cyn. engaged Henderson Roger visits Bridal visits	Roger returns Aimée in separate house			
AUTUMN	DEPARTURE OF ROGER	Molly visits Child has scarlet fever Rog. tells Mr G. loves M. ROGER DEPARTS	Molly and Roger visit		CYNTHIA MARRIES

threads to be developed later when Cynthia's story becomes important, while the events leading to Mrs Hamley's death continue into further chapters. Off-stage Cynthia is at school in France, and the Hamley boys at Cambridge, with Osborne's movements something of a mystery. References to place make it possible to keep all these threads going simultaneously.

The next major stage (chapters 15-34) leads up to the crisis of Roger's declaration to Cynthia and his departure for Africa. Hollingford is the setting for changes to Molly's home. Parallel events at Hamley Hall tell of the Squire's irritability. The Cumnors are kept in mind by occasional references to their movements between the Towers and London or other fashionable centres, while Mr Preston's importance in relation to Cynthia is suggested through visits to the Gibsons, his transfer to Hollingford, and his unwelcome attentions at the Charity Ball.

The next year is uneasy: Molly is unhappy, Osborne unwell, Roger away in Africa, and Cynthia increasingly nervous (chapters 35-51). Cynthia's first visit to the Kirkpatricks in London introduces a new thread, climaxed by the exposure of her forced obligation to Mr Preston. Winter brings her decision to break off her engagement to Roger, which is almost simultaneous with the death of Osborne at Hamley, another crisis in that story.

The final section (chapters 52-60) deals with changes at Hamley brought about by Osborne's death and the arrival of Aimée and her son. Cynthia's story culminates in her

marriage, in London, to Mr Henderson. At Hamley, Roger's temporary return helps to bring a measure of peace, and his meetings with Molly at Cumnor Towers bring a realization that she is the one he loves, although there is a further complication in his return to Africa without a declaration. Another year passes, and the final conclusion was to be Roger's return and marriage to Molly.

This brief description of the over-all way in which the plot is constructed has, perforce, glossed over the many subtle modulations from events in one centre to those in another, and the chart which figures the events in each major centre shows only their chronological order: 'the aggregate of motifs in their causal-chronological order'; it does not show plot-time. 'The plot is the aggregate of those same motifs but having the relevance and the order which they had in the original work.... the aesthetic function of the plot is precisely this bringing of an arrangement of motifs to the attention of the reader' (Thomaschevsky 68). It is impossible to map the plot of *Wives and Daughters* in such a way as to indicate exactly when each event is brought to the attention of the reader, because it consists of so fine a network of time-space journeys, but a few examples of ways in which events are linked demonstrates the role of place in its intricate construction.

An event may be enacted in a particular place in the present of the novel, or recounted in its here and now

although it has occurred elsewhere at another time, as when Cynthia sits in a chair by Molly's dressing-table and explains the involvement with Mr Preston by telling her about what happened in the Ashcombe school-room years before (ch.43). On the other hand, events may follow one another in chronological order, or parallel events be recounted in succession, like those leading to the Gibson marriage, with transpositions so natural as to be almost imperceptible. Chapter 6, which is set in Hamley and tells of the early days of Molly's visit, ends with the Squire's considering her reaction to his chance remark about remarriage: '"But what a tight hold the wench got of the notion of his marrying again!... To think of her never having thought of the chance of a stepmother. To be sure, a stepmother to a girl is a different thing to a second wife to a man!'" (107; ch.6). Then Chapter 7 opens thus:

If Squire Hamley had been unable to tell Molly who had ever been thought of as her father's second wife, fate was all this time preparing an answer of a pretty positive kind to her wondering curiosity. But fate is a cunning hussy, and builds up her plans as imperceptibly as a bird builds her nest; and with much the same kind of unconsidered trifles. The first 'trifle' of an event was... (107; ch.7)

We move to the Gibson home, but soon return to Hamley where Mr Gibson requests the prolonging of Molly's stay. Roger's arrival is described, and then events at Hamley are gently

interrupted with, 'During this absence of hers Mr Gibson was drifting into matrimony' (122; ch.8), and, for a moment we are with him in Hollingford, before entering one of the rare scenes set outside the environs of the village: that in which the Cumnors, in London, discuss their return to the Towers and the advisability of inviting Clare to join them there. The next chapter opens with Clare's reaction to the invitation, where it is difficult to pinpoint the moment when the narrative moves out of day-dreaming at Ashcombe into the present reality of her visit to the Towers:

It was a very pleasant change to a poor unsuccessful school-mistress to leave her own house, full of battered and shabby furniture ... where the look-out was as gloomy, and the surrounding as squalid, as is often the case in the smaller streets of a country town, and to come bowling through the Towers Park in the luxurious carriage sent to meet her; to alight, and feel secure that the well-trained servants would see after her bags, and umbrella, and parasol, and cloak, without her loading herself with all these portable articles, as she had had to do while following the wheelbarrow containing her luggage in going to the Ashcombe coach-office that morning; to pass up the deep piled carpets of the broad shallow stairs into my lady's own

room, cool and deliciously fresh, even on this sultry day, and fragrant with great bowls of freshly gathered roses of every shade of colour.

(130; ch.9)

Thus, parallel events in Hollingford, London, Hamley, Ashcombe, and Cumnor Towers lead to the marriage, but through all the narrative to-ing and fro-ing, there is no audible intake of breath with each 'meanwhile', partly because familiarity with place makes transpositions quietly acceptable to the reader.

As well as 'meanwhiles' there are occasional inversions of time, as in Cynthia's meeting with Roger. In Chapter 21, shortly before the Easter Ball, Roger meets Cynthia at the Miss Brownings' card-party. The next day he calls on the Gibsons, and, after speaking to Cynthia and Mrs Gibson in the house, finds Molly in the garden, where they speak briefly about his father. Chapter 22 begins with a neat transposition - 'Affairs were going on worse at the Hall than Roger had liked to tell' - to an account of life there which leads into the watches scene, which has occurred 'on an evening in the March succeeding Mrs Hamley's death' (290; ch.22). Roger returns (we already know this because of the account of the card-party, but here we see it from the Hamley viewpoint) and, on his first evening home, smokes with his father in the study. 'All this had taken place,' the narrator explains, 'before Roger's first meeting with Molly and Cynthia at Miss Brownings'; and the little dinner on the Friday at Mr Gibson's, which followed

in due sequence' (306; ch.24); the said dinner, to which Roger is invited on the day after the card-party, forms the substance of chapter 24. Thus we have:

Chronological-time

1. Watches scene. (Hamley)
2. Roger's arrival and the pipe-smoking. (Hamley)
3. Card-party. (Brownings')
4. Visit to Gibsons, and invitation. (Gibsons')
5. Dinner-party. (Gibsons')

Plot-time

3. Card-party. (Brownings')
4. Visit to Gibsons and invitation. (Gibsons')
1. Watches scene. (Hamley)
2. Pipe-smoking scene. (Hamley)
5. Dinner-party. (Gibsons')

Each shift in time has involved also a change of venue. Such intricate movements give the plot its closely-knit texture, as well as its slow tempo.

'Real incidents, not fictionalized by an author, may make a story. A plot is wholly an artistic creation' (Thomaschevesky 68). The plot of *Wives and Daughters* has been created with consummate artistry; each character, each incident, each aspect of setting has been skilfully selected, and introduced in the most appropriate manner at the most appropriate time to contribute to a 'growth and progress of events' (GL 420), which moves through complications and crises towards resolution. The plot, as

the author suggests, 'is like the anatomical drawing of an artist; he must have an idea of his skeleton, before he can clothe it with muscle & flesh, much more before he can drape it'; that skeleton is as much an arrangement of places as of events, and the visualization of place an important part of the clothing. *Wives and Daughters* is also given life by Elizabeth Gaskell's spirit of sympathy which enables her last and most artistically crafted novel to proclaim the value of authentic love in family relationships through its unique synthesis of event, character, and place.

CONCLUSION

Analysis without synthesis can be deceptive. *Ruth's* strengths do not lie only in the interplay of character and place, *North and South's* in the admirable way in which place underlines the moral vision, nor *Wives and Daughters's* solely in its intricacies of plot. Each demonstrates how plot, character, setting, and vision, as pictured in the model with which this exploration began, work interdependently towards beautifully crafted, if not flawless, organic wholes [see p 15]. As Henry James remarks:

People often talk of these things [description and dialogue, incident and description] as if they had a kind of internecine distinctness, instead of melting into each other at every breath, and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression.... A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. (34)

Place is, indeed, part of each of these novel's other elements, and, in Elizabeth Gaskell's unobtrusive art, it enhances the completed design.

The artistry with which setting is deployed in them is discernible also in other works. *Mary Barton* assisted

Gaskell's contemporaries to see Manchester with new eyes. *Cranford* is a memorable portrayal of place in its social sense: Miss Matty and her circle are Cranford, which is, in turn, the ground of the novel's episodic structure. In *Sylvia's Lovers* there is an imaginative entering into the past, with the town of Monkshaven and the neighbouring Haytersbank farm as graphically depicted in the period of the Napoleonic Wars as contemporary Milton-Northern in *North and South* or the Hollingford of 'half a life-time ago' in *Wives and Daughters*.¹ The shorter fiction depicts diverse places with varying success, and the transformation^{of} Grandfather Holland's Sandlebridge farm into fiction in *Cousin Phillis* aptly illustrates Kenneth Clark's suggestion: 'Facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plain of reality' (16). If Gaskell's aim was 'to really SEE the scenes I tried to describe ... and then to tell them as nearly as I could, as if I were speaking to a friend over the fire on a winter's night and describing real occurrences' (GL 48), she also assists us to see more than the physical nature of her scenes by making what she describes, including place, significant on 'a higher plain of reality'.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Title: 'Placed, Ready to Your Imagination' GL 384.

1. (p 1) 'Her Stratford schooldays played their part in making a writer of her, since it was her article on "Old Clopton Hall", sent to William Howitt in 1838 and published by him in his collection of *Visits to Remarkable Places* (1840), that brought her in touch with professional writers and gave her the first experience of appearing in print' (Gérin 28).
2. (p 3) 'If Chicago was the "shock city" of the 1890s, one of the British nineteenth-century cities - Manchester - was the shock city of the 1840s.... Every age has its shock city' (Briggs 51).
3. (p 7) Wright ix, quoted from Leonard Huxley. *The House of Smith Elder*, printed for private circulation, 1923, 205-7.
4. (p 11) I am grateful to Dr N.W. Visser for his notes, 'Space in the Novel'. I have not adopted his term, 'space', but found his discussion most useful, and his bibliography invaluable.
5. (p 18) Particularly interesting, in this regard, is Ricardo Gullón's essay, which includes definitions of 'space' from science and philosophy. His interest is in an enveloping context and the symbolic nature of literary spaces. Gaston Bachelard's ideas about the 'poetics of space' provide useful ways of thinking about

specific spaces and reference is made to them in my chapters on *Ruth* and *North and South*.

CHAPTER ONE

Title: 'A Fancy of My Own' GL 48.

1. (p 33) This scene is dealt with on pages 58-59.
2. (p 40) James Thomson was a cousin of Elizabeth Gaskell's paternal grandmother (Gérin l), and she was almost certainly familiar with 'The Seasons'.
3. (p 44) A number of letters refer to visits to these artists, or to their works e.g. 397, 444, 485, 484b, and 646. In 444, Gaskell writes, 'I am not going to define & shape my feelings & thoughts at seeing either Rossetti's or Hunt's pictures into words; because I *did* feel them deeply, & after all words are coarse things.'
4. (p 46) I have in mind such paintings as Hughes's 'The Long Engagement' (1859), Martineau's 'The Last Day in the Old Home' (1862), or Danby's 'Disappointed Love' (1821).

CHAPTER TWO

Title: 'Evidences of Character in Inanimate Things' *Ruth* 206; ch.19.

1. (p 51) Four of Gaskell's letters refer to this girl: 55, 61, 62, and 63.
2. (p 56) I am indebted for this idea to a discussion of Victorian art with Mrs Lyn Stonestreet. Patsy Stoneman confirms the idea in her study of *Ruth*: 'The disruptive factor is female sexuality, which cannot be acknowledged

in the ideological surface of the novel, but is repressed, emerging as a sub-text of imagery and dreams' (100).

3. (p 58) Mme Mohl, asking for advice about her own manuscript, writes: 'You will give a good scratch with a pencil when you see any ungraceful testimony of opinion; for I agree with you that a thing should always be let seen, and not shown'. Rubenius quotes this letter, as does Sharps (8) as evidence of Gaskell's aesthetic. It is from Mary Charlotte Mair Simpson. *Letters and Recollections of Julius and Mary Mohl*. London: Paul, 1887 (not available in South African libraries).
4. (p 58) Agnes Wickfield, in *David Copperfield*, is similarly first seen in the light of a stained glass window, for the same purpose of emphasizing her purity: 'I cannot call to mind where or when in my childhood, I had seen a stained-glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us above, I thought of that window, and I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards' (ch. 15).
5. (p 62) Dumas's novel, *La Dame Aux Camélias*, was published the previous year, 1852. It is based on the story of Alphonsine Plessis. 'She was a country girl who came to Paris in 1840, at the age of fifteen, worked at a dressmaker's, fell in love with Lizst, and had an

affair with Alexandre Dumas the younger. She became rich and famous and was in the habit of wearing white camellias' (Tergit 159). When she died, in 1847, her coffin was filled with camellias, and admirers went on placing them in her grave. The correspondences with the story of Ruth are striking, and it seems possible that Gaskell may have been familiar with the story or even with Dumas's novel, and used the camellia in this context because of its associations with a courtesan. Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, based on the same story, was first performed in 1853, too late to have had any influence on *Ruth*, but it did, of course, add to the popularity of the camellia.

6. (p 63) Apart from the symbolism of the imagery in *Ruth* there is one heavily veiled reference to sexuality: 'She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting *the* subject of a woman's life - if, indeed, wise parents ever directly speak of what, in its depth and power, cannot be put into words - which is a brooding spirit with no definite form or shape that men should know it, but which is there, and present before we have recognized and realized its existence' (44; ch.3).
7. (p 70) Mr Harthouse, Louisa Bounderby's would-be seducer, in *Hard Times*, is also associated with this biblical reference, 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour' (1 Peter 5: 8). The *Hard*

Times passage reads: 'When the Devil goeth about like a roaring lion, he goeth about in a shape by which few but savages and hunters are attracted. But, when he is trimmed, smoothed, and varnished, according to the mode; when he is aweary of vice, and aweary of virtue, used up as to brimstone, and used up as to bliss; then, whether he take to the serving out of red tape, or to the kindling of red fire; he is the very Devil' (bk 2; ch.8).

8. (p 75) Crick makes the same point: 'The supposedly daring equivalent in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is after all shrouded in a great deal of literal as well as philosophical mist and darkness' (94 fn 25).
9. (p 80) Stonestreet points out that, in Millais's 'Ophelia', 'Sensuality is not inherent in the body of Ophelia, in fact there is careful avoidance of it, but it is displaced onto the surrounding textures of the plants and water.... The artist permits a hint of sexuality in the watery abandonment of her hair' (25-6).
10. (p 80) Gaskell may have been aware that the water-lily is known as 'the flower of purity and resurrection. Each season it arises undefiled from the depths of the dark muddy waters, a living symbol of regeneration' (Chwast 68). In this sense it is certainly apt to Ruth.
11. (p 85) Irwin argues that many Victorian novels are 'open to misconstruction through descriptive insufficiency', and he recommends Gaskell particularly

for her attention to lighting: 'Again and again Mrs Gaskell's evening scenes are carefully lighted - by candles, or by a fire, or by both. As a result they are shadowed, softened, "placed", where an equivalent scene from a novel visually vaguer may seem, to the imagination of the modern reader, to be sharply illuminated, as by electric light' (112 and 113).

12. (p 89) 'The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders - nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was - all helped the emphasis.... A very regular feature on the face of the country, Stone Lodge was.... A great square house, with a heavy portico darkening the principal windows, as its master's heavy brows overshadowed his eyes. A calculated, cast up, balanced, and proved house...' (*Hard Times* chs 1 and 3)
13. (p 90) The snowdrop is also known as 'the fair maid of February' because it flowers around Candlemas, the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary which falls on February 2. February is the month when Leonard is born. That the snowdrop signifies hope has its origins in this folktale: 'Adam and Eve faced a bleak, snowy, northern winter as, banished from the Garden of Eden, they trudged away. Eve fell behind, exhausted and discouraged, believing that life would henceforth be all winter. When she could go no further an angel appeared and succeeded in convincing her that the weather would

- eventually change, and there was such a thing as spring. The angel proved that point dramatically by transforming some falling snowflakes into white flowers of spring. Reassured by the sight of the snowdrops, Eve took heart and found the courage to travel onwards' (Bourne 48).
14. (p 96) 'Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience' (Ephesians 2: 2).
15. (p 98) Abermouth is based on Silverdale where the Gaskells often spent holidays, and where much of *Ruth* was written; one of its attractions for the author was ' the expanse of view ... such wide plains of golden sands with purple hill shadows, - or fainter wandering filmy cloud-shadows, & the great dome of sky' GL 401). Mrs Chadwick points out that 'the meeting of Ruth and Mr. Donne (*alias* Bellingham) took place on the Abermouth sands, which those who know Silverdale can locate as the spot opposite The Cove' (231).
16. (p 104) Bachelard's comment is interesting: 'Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life' (78).
17. (p 105) Unitarians placed a strong emphasis on absolute truthfulness: 'For a man to lie was to obscure God's design for a world of virtue and knowledge. Truth to a Unitarian was the torch that would eventually illuminate

the whole of mankind' (Lansbury 14). Gaskell wrestles with the problem that a strict adherence to truthfulness can involve a grave moral dilemma. In *North and South*, Margaret agonizes over the lie she has told to protect her brother, and in *Ruth* the lie is pivotal. On the one side there is Faith's defence: '"have we any right to go and injure her prospects for life, by telling Mr Bradshaw all we know of her errors - only sixteen when she did so wrong, and never to escape from it all her many years to come - to have the despair which would arise from its being known, clutching her back into worse sin?"' (198-9; ch.18). On the other side there is Thurstan's conviction that '"God's omnipotence did not need our sin"' (362; ch.27).

18. (p 109) The association with home of the image of the nest is dealt with in Chapter Three [see pp 130-136].

CHAPTER THREE

Title: Made to be Mutually Dependent: 'God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent' (NS 169; ch.15).

1. (p 113) Among the voices in that debate were those of the Christian Socialists, F.D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley, and J.M.F. Ludlow, with all of whom Gaskell corresponded. She records going to church 'to hear Mr Maurice, whom I like very much indeed' (GL 47), and later writes, '"Influence" is such a difficult thing to trace and define; the most powerful is so like the great powers of nature, so imperceptible in its working that

it almost seems to me as if too much talking about it vulgarized it. There is no doubt whatever it seems to me of the *fact* - that Mr Maurice has more influence over the more thoughtful portion of the English people than any one else I know of' (GL 172). Kingsley she called 'my hero' (GL 55), and, through William's brother-in-law, William Robson, she helped distribute their pamphlets, 'Politics for the People' among working-men (GL 67). The Christian Socialists were in favour of social and educational, rather than political reform, and aimed at self-help associationism in co-operative workshops. There are many echoes of their beliefs in *North and South*; Gaskell would naturally sympathize with those who sought to reform society on Christian principles. 'They [Maurice's disciples] were attracted by his sense that all of mankind constitutes the living material of the spiritual and universal kingdom, and that social behaviour which recognized Christ in a brother creature was a form of reverence to God himself' (Norman 24).

2. (p 114) Kestner notices how many of such novels were written by women.
3. (p 116) 'The doctrine of philosophic necessity illustrated, 1782', 123, quoted by Bolam.
4. (p 130) David Copperfield, for instance, returning to his home after his visit to Yarmouth, felt 'all the more for the sinking of my spirits, that it was my nest, and

- that my mother was my comforter and friend' (ch.3).
5. (p 134) I am indebted to Raymond Williams for this idea about the Counter-Pastoral, although he does not mention Gaskell in this connection.
 6. (p 136) DeLaura suggests that Hopkins's poem. 'Spring and Fall' ('Margaret are you grieving / Over Goldengrove unleaving?') may have been inspired by this episode in *North and South*.
 7. (p 150) Nature was represented in many Victorian homes by 'cabinets and cases of shells, butterflies and stuffed birds ... bouquets of grasses and peacock feathers, flower stands and potted plants in profusion' (Scourse 15). 'Shades' (glass domes) often protected decorative natural objects.
 8. (p 158) The dining-room is reminiscent of such schemes as the Co-operative tailors' shop in London set up by the Christian Socialists, which Gaskell mentions in a letter to Eliza Fox (GL 55).
 9. (p 160) Frank draws attention to the 'spatiality' of Flaubert's country-fair scene in *Madame Bovary* (ch.8), where the action also occurs on three levels simultaneously (43). There are other similarities in the 'realism' of the scenes.
 - 10 (p 163) Kestner draws attention to occasions when Margaret is associated with roses. Of this incident he says, 'At the novel's conclusion Thornton gives her a dead rose from Helstone, marking her assimilation to a new order, the dominance of agriculture by industry'

(166). Other features suggest that it is mutual acceptance, rather than assimilation, which is the major theme, as, I hope, my analysis has shown.

CHAPTER FOUR

Title: 'This Growth and Progress of Events' GL 420.

1. (p 165) Gaskell relied on her daughters to assist her with correspondence and here she is telling Marianne what to say to Herbert Grey about his novel, *The Three Paths*; he had apparently sent the manuscript to her.
2. (p 192) In a 'conclusion', based on the author's known intentions, the editor of *The Cornhill* describes how Roger would show Molly the flower when he returns (706).
3. (p 193) An unusual lapse of memory, on the author's part, occurs when Molly visits the Towers at Lady Harriet's invitation: 'she had never even seen the outside of the Towers since that unlucky day in her childhood when she had fallen asleep on Clare's bed' (666; ch.56). She has, in fact, seen it twice. Perhaps Elizabeth Gaskell may be forgiven for this minor slip. The novel's almost faultless cohesion, and serenity of tone contrasts with the frantic letters written during the closing months of her life, when she was house-hunting, and suffering the effects of a heart condition which was to cause her death before the novel's completion.
4. (p 201) In a review of *Wives and Daughters* in *The Nation* (New York) for 22 February 1866, James testifies

to the craftsmanship with which the novel is ordered when he writes of 'the gentle skill with which the reader is slowly involved in the tissue of the story' and of 'the delicacy of the handiwork which has perfected every mesh of the net in which he finds himself ultimately entangled' (Hopkins 328).

CONCLUSION

1. (p 218) 'Half a Life-Time Ago' was a story by Elizabeth Gaskell, published in *Household Words* in October 1855.

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