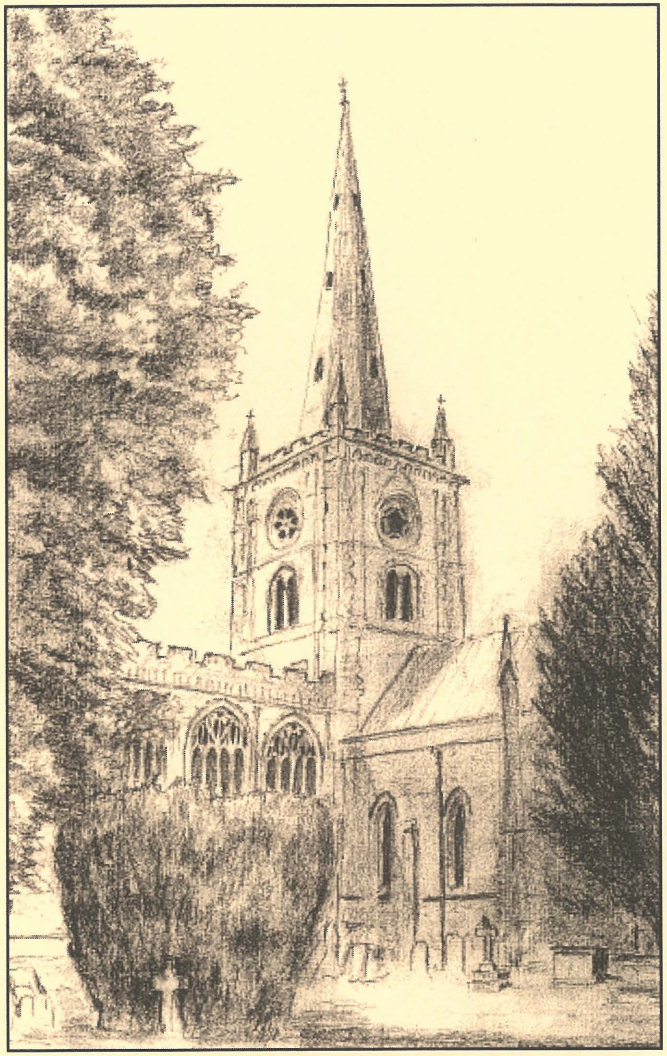
The Gaskell Society



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2013 - Number 56

THE GASKELL SOCIETY HOME PAGE has all the latest information on meetings.
http://gaskellsociety.co.uk

If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs. Helen Smith, 11 Lowland Way, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 9AG.
Telephone - 01565 632615 E-mail: helenisabel@ntlworld.com

Treasurer: Clive Heath, 39 Bexton Lane, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 9BL

Membership Secretary: Miss C. Lingard, 5 Moran Crescent, Macclesfield SK11 8JJ

ISSN 0954 - 1209

Editor's Letter

Helen Smith

Welcome readers and writers to our 56th Newsletter. We are hotfoot from the Conference, which has definitely surpassed our previous record for success; and now we really are fired with even more enthusiasm for Mrs Gaskell, for her life and especially for her works. As soon as the euphoria subsides, we shall start planning the next biennial Conference for 2015, 150 years after the death of Mrs Gaskell.

We should also like to welcome new member Dr John Ross (who wrote an article on Mrs Gaskell's death in Newsletter no 48).

However we are very, very sorry to report the deaths, in May 2013, of two of our members: Margaret Birchall (aged 96); and Hilda Holmes (considerably younger), a stalwart of the Society and a tireless worker for the Friends of Plymouth Grove. We shall certainly miss them and we extend our sympathy to their families.

The summer outing for North-West members was to Chatsworth (last visited by the Society in 1992). This event took place on 22 May and proved to be another action-packed day very much in the Joan Leach tradition. En route, the party visited Buxton, death place of "our dear good valuable friend" Hearn, aged 80 in 1892, after 50 years of service to the Gaskell family. (See Christine Lingard's article on Hearn in Newsletter no 52.) Many thanks are due to Pam Griffiths for organising this trip and to Christine Lingard for her invaluable research and extensive knowledge which she happily shares with us all.

Knutsford is celebrating Mrs Gaskell in August. The Heritage Centre, King Street, and the Schoolroom (on Adams Hill) of the Brook Street Chapel are hosting events and holding exhibitions. This is a joint venture with Knutsford Heritage Centre, The Gaskell Society and Friends of Plymouth Grove. By the time this Newsletter is sent out, these will be past events.

For the smooth running of the Society's finances, we must again express our thanks and gratitude to Brian Williams for going that extra mile in his role as Treasurer. We are now very happy to give a warm welcome to our new Treasurer Clive Heath. We are also delighted that Celia Crew has become Minutes Secretary.

Important date for diaries: AGM Saturday 12 April 2014, Cross Street Chapel, Manchester

A correction! Professor Barbara Hardy has pointed out to me that she promoted the Honourable Mrs Jamieson to Lady Jamieson in her article in the Spring Newsletter. The Editor (Lady Helen!) apologises for failing to spot this error before publication.

To all, and especially new, writers who have contributed to this Newsletter I offer my grateful thanks. Please continue to write and encourage others to do so, "when inclination prompts and leisure permits" as Charlotte Brontë wrote so invitingly to ECG in 1850. Many thanks are due to my brother David Robinson in Canada for his cover drawing of Holy Trinity in Stratford where ECG along with other pupils from the school run by the Misses Byerley worshipped (and where the Bard is buried). As ever, we owe thanks to Rebecca Stuart of Lithoprint for her meticulous work and care in printing the Newsletter. Deadline for next Newsletter: 25 January 2014.

Joan Leach Memorial Essay Prize

The biennial Joan Leach Memorial Essay Prize for Graduate Students is running again, to showcase some of the newest research being undertaken in Gaskell Studies. The deadline for entries is January 10th, 2014. Entries will be judged by members of the journal's editorial board, and the final decision will be made from a shortlist by a leading scholar in Gaskell Studies. The winning essay (and impressive runners-up) will be published in the 2014 Gaskell Journal. Please see journal website for more details: www.gaskelljournal.co.uk

The Gaskell Society Conference 19-22 July Stratford Manor Hotel, near Stratford-on-Avon

Helen Smith

He was not of an age, but for all time. Ben Jonson, of Shakespeare, 1623

In the prologue before dinner on Friday, former Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and author of *Thanks to Shakespeare*, Roger Pringle enthralled us with tales of writers who had visited Stratford over the last few centuries. An early visitor was the actor David Garrick in 1769, and one of the most recent was Carol Ann Duffy (British Poet Laureate), who likened Stratford to Bethlehem. Of the many notable visitors to the town, were Keats (place of abode, "everywhere"), Sir Walter Scott, Tennyson, Edward Fitzgerald, Dickens (several times but not for the Tercentenary in 1864), Thomas Hardy, a huge host of Americans, including Henry James, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jefferson and Adams (later to become Presidents of the USA); Yeats, Rupert Brooke, et al: some inscribed the walls of the Birthplace, others signed the visitors' book and others declined to sign at all. The Gaskell Society follows in good company.

After dinner Geoff Holman, the actor from Knutsford, brought to life the practicalities of performing Shakespeare. Geoff taught us much, with humour and anecdotes

which spiced up the evening. Geoff pointed out to us how Shakespeare himself wished his plays to be performed as Hamlet advises his players in Act III scene ii "…but let your own discretion be tutor: suit your action to the word, the word to the action…" Delia Corrie as Lady Macbeth joined Geoff, in the role of Macbeth, for the few lines of intense drama just after the murder of Duncan. And so to bed, eventually, perchance to dream of iambic pentameters and trochaics - Macbeth had not murdered our sleep.

Business began in earnest at 9.00am sharp on Saturday. The Conference was now in possession of the Amazons.

Professor Michèle Cohen (of Richmond American International University in London) addressed us on "A mother's dilemma: where best to educate a daughter, at home or at a school?"

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was no standard curriculum for girls (unlike boys, who were taught Classics). Should girls be taught at home by mother as governess "intended by nature" or at school; followed by promotion to "a dignified marriage"? ECG feared she was "becoming a lazy mother" by sending Marianne to school. In general girls studied a very wide range of subjects, from globes to orthoepy, albeit at a rather superficial level. Good habits were considered of more importance than academic learning.

Professor Ruth Watts (University of Birmingham) spoke on "A liberal education for women: Elizabeth Gaskell, her educational ideals, practice and networks".

Professor Watts approached the subject from the perspective of Unitarians with their rational religion and concentration on action, not mysticism. Joseph Priestley believed in association of ideas and favoured environment rather than heredity. Joseph Wright advocated learning in the family. Girls had to obtain 'polish'. Professor Watts reminded us that Molly Gibson (in *Wives and Daughters*) and Margaret Hale (in *North and South*) became intellectual companions to their fathers and Ruth herself was a prime example of Mrs Gaskell's principles.

After the break for coffee, Dr Mary Summers gave the third and final lecture of the morning: Anne Brontë's approach to education, parenting and marital relationships in Victorian times.

At first Aunt Branwell and Patrick Brontë educated the girls at home and then Eliza and Maria went off in 1823 to Crofton Hall which proved to be too expensive. The two older girls with Charlotte and 6-year old Emily then moved on to Cowanbridge (immortalised as Lowood in *Jane Eyre*) which led to the deaths of the 2 eldest girls. Charlotte eventually taught at Roehead where Anne joined her as a non-paying pupil in 1831.

Anne had many theories about education and child-rearing: she believed in kindness and joy when children are good and showing disappointment and sadness when they were not good; a trusting relationship was essential between parents, or in loco parentis, and children. Discipline was required for Branwell: "reason with him, then whip him." Poor Branwell eventually succumbed to his addictions to opium and rum.

Some interesting questions were posed to these three excellent and really riveting speakers before lunch. This discussion was chaired by Rosemary Marshall of the South-West of England Group.

In the afternoon, we departed by coaches for Barford to see, from the exterior, the house where some of the six Misses Byerley ran their school. We sauntered through the very English village to St Peter's Church where we were warmly welcomed by Barford Heritage Group and Revd David Jessett, Rector of St Peter's, led a short service. A small booklet had been written in our honour by Ann McDermott.

We then proceeded to Stratford - Shottery to visit Anne Hathaway's Cottage set in an English country garden basking in English sun and swarming with visitors from around the globe.

And then the Conference Dinner. Chairman Ann O'Brien welcomed us all to the Conference and mentioned all from abroad by name. After an excellent meal, Ann O'Brien and Elizabeth Williams brought us all up-to-date on the refurbishment of the Gaskell House in Plymouth Grove.

Sunday morning began with Sister Rosemary Kolich (Assistant Professor of English at the University of Saint Mary in Leavenworth, Kansas) in a very moving (and appropriate for Sunday) lecture: Prophetic imagining; the Gospel according to Elizabeth Gaskell.

Delia Corrie read from relevant passages of Mrs Gaskell's letters. Rosie spoke of women's role and fulfilment and we were totally drawn into her spell. Rosie explained how Mrs Gaskell empowers her characters to act through Scriptures. "Forgive them for they know not what they do": this occurs many times in the works and most movingly when John Barton dies in Mr Carson's arms: the creation of a Pietà - the man of sorrow supporting the dying man - creating a powerful religious image.

Dr Valerie Fehlbaum (English Dept, University of Geneva): 'A woman's no business wi' being so clever'- George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss.*

Although Valerie claimed to be a Gaskell neophyte, she excelled herself in this

fascinating lecture on George Eliot, a 'dark blue stocking'. Mr Evans recognised and nurtured his daughter's exceptional talents from a young age. We were of course relieved that George Eliot did not include Mrs Gaskell's works in her 1856 *Westminster Review* article "Silly novels by lady novelists". Valerie analysed the novels of George Eliot and as Valerie herself now well-accustomed to the author's 'preachiness' was able to point out, sympathy is a leitmotif in George Eliot.

Our final lecture was given by Professor Valerie Sanders (Professor of English and Director of the Graduate School at the University of Hull): 'My school-days! What recollections!' Gaskell's contemporaries recall their education.

As a specialist in Victorian women's writing, autobiography and family studies, Val covered recollections of home education, school environment and self education with frequent quotations from authors' memoirs. Continental boarding schools provided a less stultifying education than governesses and English schools: the Queen Olga School in Stuttgart sounded much more exciting for Ménie Muriel Dowie.

After a brief question session with the morning's lecturers chaired by Mary Kuhlman (Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska) we adjourned for lunch.

Sunday afternoon outing whisked us off to the Vale of Evesham and Dumbleton: Church and Hall: set in a beautiful landscape with lake, black swans and immense cedars. The Hall, (where ECG, as guest of her cousin Edward Holland, wrote part of *The Life* in 1856) now functions as an hotel where we relaxed over a cream tea and heard Professor Adrian Phillips narrate the history of the fine house.

After dinner we were somewhat relieved that music no longer remained "a small kind of tinkling symbolising the aesthetic part of a young lady's education" as George Eliot satirised.

Rosie Lomas a graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama accompanied by Katarzyna Kowalik (Artist Fellow at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama) entertained us with Mrs Gaskell's music. Rosie opened the recital with an unaccompanied song (words by Burns) "Oh my love is like a red, red rose". The young ladies continued with folk songs and classical works from Schumann, Haydn and others. Rosie spoke between items and placed them in context in Mrs Gaskell's works: a very fitting epilogue to the week-end's activities. President Shirley Foster had final word in her vote of thanks and presentation to the young recitalists.

PS En route back to the North-West we visited Clopton Hall (ECG described this fine seat to William Howitt who then incorporated it in *Visits to Remarkable Places*, 1840), now converted to flats in private ownership; and Baddersley Clinton, a mediaeval moated manor owned by the National Trust.

Many thanks are due to the Conference Sub-committee for all their very hard toil over the last two years to make this Conference operate like clockwork. We are more than grateful to Jean Alston for organising the outings and the weather, in addition to engaging Rosie Lomas and Katarzyna Kowalik to entertain us on Sunday evening.

Hotel staff and coach drivers deserve to be commended for their assiduity and skills in dealing with us all. Our thanks to all who contributed to this week-end.

Elizabeth Gaskell and Shawls
Creative Artistry and Identity

Alison Lundie

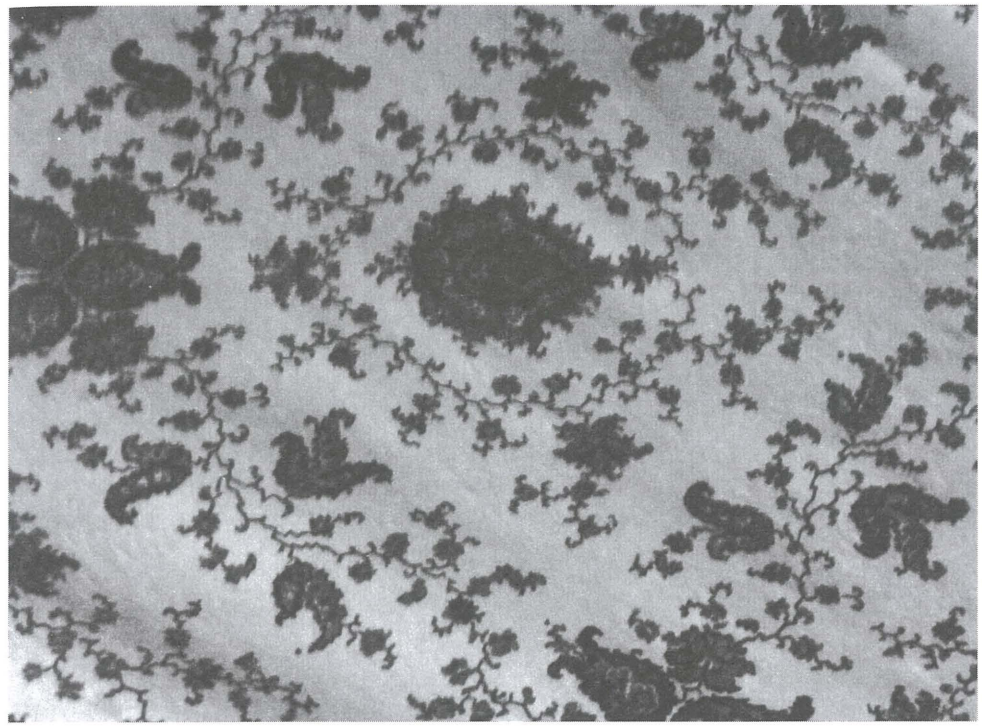
In the nineteenth century women's dress from bonnets, caps, hats, gloves, morning dress, afternoon dress and evening dress was a vast and motile world of continual change according to the fashions of the day. Every item of dress, including the specific fabrics and colour of clothing were considered to be a display of selfhood and a code for judging character. One particular item that might be overlooked because of its apparent simplicity as an accessory is the shawl.

In the 1840's and 1850's, regardless of social class, from the aristocracy to the middle and working classes, the shawl had established itself as the desired and revered garment in a woman's wardrobe. "Shawls began to be appropriated by all women, from the wealthiest aristocrat to the humblest kitchen maid, as beautiful, exotic and practical adjuncts to feminine dress" (4). The favoured and sought-after Paisley shawl had its origins in the importation of Indian shawls, originally admired for splendour of colour and woven with the luxuriously soft pashmina wool of the Himalayan goat. The newly acquired Jacquard power-looms in the 1830's enabled fast production, and designs that impressively displayed the ambition to produce an imitation of the Indian shawl in the traditional Paisley design.[1]

There are four shawls in existence that belonged to Elizabeth Gaskell. These have been passed down through the family line to her descendants. The obvious care that Mrs Gaskell must have taken with these shawls is testament to at the very least the high esteem in which they were held.

I am indebted to Sarah Prince for her kind generosity in an invitation to see and photograph these exquisite shawls, and in providing an historian's description of the materials, patterns, colour and dimensions of the shawls.

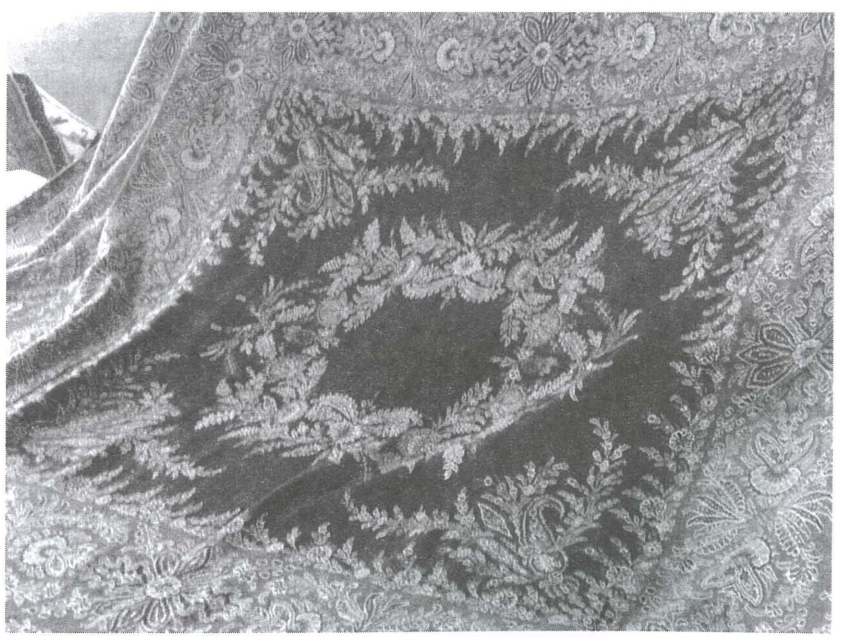
Printed cashmere shawl decorated with arabesques and foliage, 155 cm square.



Paisley shawl with a border of blue arabesques, 153 x 312 cm.

Victorian printed shawl, the central square reserve with a garland of leaves surrounded by bands of stylised foliage and on a red ground, 152 x 147 cm.

Paisley shawl with a central black reserve, within a broad border of arabesques, 173 cm square.



It is the intricate and variegated patterns and blending of colours, the detailed attention to produce what can certainly be described as a work of art that we can see when looking at these shawls. But it is also the condition of the shawls and the brocade surrounding them that is particularly striking. Although a precise historical date to distinguish between the shawls does not exist, we can be certain, particularly in view of the Paisley design, that they would be dated somewhere between the 1830's and early 1860's. Were they possibly gifts, like Gaskell's description of the Indian shawl in *North and South*. Mrs Shaw explains the origin of her daughter Edith's trousseau, "she has all the beautiful Indian shawls and scarfs the general gave to me" (7). Or perhaps Gaskell purchased them herself, because we know from her letters that she was fond of shopping for shawls and she describes her shopping expedition to Marianne and Meta. Going "to look at black shawls for you, MA & Meta, at Moore and Butterworth's – silk barège *scarf* shawls, 35s – grenadine *shawls* ditto – (like E. Marslands) cashmeres embroidered 3 guineas – I inclined to the barèges much; but we left it for you to choose" (487). Either way it is interesting to speculate on these existing shawls' origin. The cherished shawls are now protected in layers of acid proof paper. They are subsequently enfolded in heavy cotton and kept away from light to resist any deterioration to the fabric and colour.

The shawl is just one item in a massive collection of garments that we encounter in Gaskell's novels. But its frequent appearance implies that there has to be some underlying meaning. On many occasions when the mention of a shawl appears in Gaskell's novels it tells us of an aspect in a character's personality. In *Cranford*, Miss Matty's appearance in "such a thin shawl! It's no better than muslin. At your age Ma'am you should be careful" (77) suggests the characteristic trait of regression in her personality. Dressing in a shawl that befits a young woman is an attempt to recapture a return to her youth and restore her loving relationship with Holbrook. But there is also the luxurious "large, soft, white Indian shawl" (102) described by Miss Matty and this tells us of both character and culture. The Indian shawl was often given as a gift, deriving from 1798, when Napoleon and his army returned from Egypt with Indian shawls as presents for their womenfolk. The Indian shawl in *Cranford* is also a gift sent from Peter to his mother. It is then a symbol of generosity, a generosity of feeling from Peter, as Miss Matty explains it was "just what my mother would have liked". The generous feeling extends when Miss Matty repeats her father's words concerning the shawl. "She shall be buried in it," he said; "Peter shall have that comfort; and she would have liked it" (102). But also and crucially this shawl is an emblem of the generosity that extends between the ladies of Cranford. The setting up of a shop for Miss Matty, and particularly Miss Matty's open-handed liberality in distributing sweets to the children. In *Cousin Phillis*, the absence of a shawl to cover Phillis's body, "Phillis had nothing on but her indoor things – no bonnet, no shawl" (269) suggests an aspect of self-development in her character. Until this point we know that Phillis had been forced by parental restriction to dress in a manner that would suppress her growth into womanhood.

Dressed in clothing that reminds us of the conventionally de-sexualised woman of the era we are informed that Phillis "so old, so full grown as she was wore a pinafore over her gown" (226). When Phillis refuses to dress in the conventional manner of bonnet and shawl she demonstrates a move toward erotic self-development, expressed in the pivotal scene when Phillis and Paul are caught in a thunder shower. It is notable that *Mary Barton* begins with an intricately detailed and rich description of the shawl, which markedly arrests the reader's attention and requires explanation.

"Groups of merry and somewhat loud-talking girls, whose ages might range from twelve to twenty, came by with a buoyant step. They were most of them factory girls, and wore the usual out-of-doors dress of that particular class of maidens; namely a shawl, which at midday or in fine weather was allowed to be merely a shawl, but toward evening or if the day were chilly, became a sort of Spanish mantilla or Scotch plaid, and was brought over the head and hung loosely down, or was pinned under the chin in no unpicturesque fashion." (6)

It is the feminine realm of display that asserts itself when Gaskell introduces the women factory workers. This is the display of a particular type of shawl that would have been of natural interest to the female reader.[2] The fundamental point that clearly appears is that these women are represented as possessing creative talent. They demonstrate skill in using their hands to adjust the material of the shawl in the creative process of fashioning the garment to the design of a "Spanish mantilla". It is an interesting analogy because placing this in an historical context we know that the mantilla was introduced by Queen Isobel of Spain, and the garment was composed of luxurious fabrics particularly lace and silk. Most importantly would be the image of complete sophistication that these working class factory women demonstrate if seen through the eyes of a Victorian woman reader. In mentioning the mantilla there is the suggestion that the women are artistically arranging their hair over combs, this being a form of dress associated with middle class womanhood. This is certainly a considerable elevation in status for the factory woman worker. During the nineteenth century in fiction and non-fiction it was the euphemism "hands" that became the recognised description of the factory worker. "Hands" is a term that suggests a metonymic dismissal of an individual's identity, and an aspect of industrial dehumanisation. Gaskell's concern is to humanise the factory workers, and this is particularly clear in the image of the women factory workers' hands that demonstrate their creative talents. They are women who share comparable skills to those attributed to the middle class woman in showing their familiarity and expertise in the popular domestic art of working with the hands.[3] This is a skill that Gaskell would confirm again in *North and South* when the women factory workers express their expert knowledge concerning Margaret's dress and choice of fabric. They would "even touch her shawl or gown to ascertain the exact material" (67).

"For the apparel oft proclaims the man"(12) Isabella Beeton, in *Mrs Beeton's Book*

of Household Management informs her nineteenth century reader, suggesting that in this era clothing was understood to be a form of language that communicates identity. In considering the various designs, fabrics, colour and colourlessness of the shawls encountered in *Mary Barton*, I will suggest that the shawl can be read as a key symbol appertaining to traits in a character's identity. It is the contrast in Esther's choice of the design and colour of her shawls that implies both an intention to redeem her, and also an unmistakable, powerful aspect of good in her identity. When John Barton encounters Esther on the streets, Gaskell presents a detailed description of the fabric of Esther's shawl. Her shawl is composed in the material "barège" (124) a semi-transparent material that can naturally be interpreted in line with the fine thin semi-transparent cotton of her "muslin dress", as an accessory to her trade as a streetwalker by drawing attention to her body. Although the barège shawl was a garment thought to be of middle class attire, the barège shawl is also in this episode a garment that Gaskell associates with an immoral aspect of Esther's identity, and not least in Esther's choice of the suggested gaudy colours "the gay-coloured" material Esther favours. But it is when Esther exchanges her barège shawl for a "plaid shawl, dirty and rather worn to be sure, but which had a kind of sanctity" (236) that an aspect of her character more suitably fitting to the role she performs in the narrative emerges. The plaid shawl was a practical outdoor garment, and the plaid is often thought of solely in terms of the pattern of the material. Rather than functioning as an item of adornment it was in general a shawl that was used to protect the body from external conditions, explicit for instance in *The Moorland Cottage*, when Maggie's brother Edward returns home in wet clothing following a rain storm and Maggie in an effort to prevent Edward's increasing chill "brought her old plaid to wrap around him" (71). The plaid shawl also functions as a protective garment in the characterisation of Esther. In an era that considered to even touch the skin of a streetwalker was tantamount to contamination, Esther performs her final deed of protection. Enveloped in the widths of material, which were often a feature of the shawl, Esther places a barrier, a form of cordon sanitaire around her body to prevent any touch and thus a spread of infection to Mary. Certainly when Mary attempts to kiss her aunt goodbye "her aunt pushed her off with a frantic kind of gesture, stating 'Not me. You must never kiss me. You!' (242). In considering Esther's continual mission of protection toward her child, and as a "watcher" (159) continually roaming the streets in an attempt to watch over and protect Mary, Esther's selection of a plaid shawl with its capacity for protection is well suited in keeping with the positive aspects of her identity. It is a shawl that crucially, as Gaskell tells us, has the quality of "sanctity", the holiness that we interpret in Esther's good deeds for others.

It is Mary's redemption from self-absorbed vanity that is apparent in her choice of a modest shawl. We are presented with Mary's choice between two unmistakably different types of shawl. One of which Sally Leadbitter owns and offers to Mary in the expectation that Mary will be attracted to the design of the garment and accept it. Not unexpectedly, in keeping with Sally's paramount desire to attract attention

she offers Mary the most favoured garment in her possession, the "black watered scarf" (276). But Mary selects her "old plaid shawl" (276). In contrast to Mary's probable choice of the "black watered scarf" in her earlier life, Mary's decision to opt for the practically designed plaid is entirely appropriate in Mary's consideration, because it reflects a new aspect of her identity. It is the developing characteristic trait of a practical consciousness that she expresses in her comment to Sally when she states, "How can I think of dress at such a time? When it's a matter of life and death to Jem" (276).

In a minimal but perfectly apt comment on choice of clothing, Margaret informs Mary that in attending her debut as soloist she wore her "white shawl" (94). The design of this shawl is omitted any description because the emphasis is on "white". Recognising in the colour "white" the reflection of a radiant light, Margaret's choice is appropriate with her holy role in the narrative. She is described as "angelic" and "an angel from heaven" and "an angel of peace" (175,193,280). There are many occasions when Margaret puts her angelic role into practice. Not only does she purchase the expensive material bombazine to make mourning dresses as a personal gift to the Ogden family, but also insists on Mary accepting a "golden sovereign" (94) to help toward feeding herself and her father after the contents of the Barton home are pawned. The interests of others are always a concern for Margaret, and she proceeds on her errand of mercy to assist the exhausted Mrs Wilson in caring for the dying Alice. But perhaps it is Margaret's selfless loyal devotion to her grandfather Job Legh that might be considered as the epitome of her angelic goodness. When Margaret puts on her "white shawl" it reflects light and this is the light of holy goodness that is a leading trait in her identity.

Notes

1 Pamela Clabburn, *Shawls* (Buckinghamshire, England: Shire Publications Ltd, 2002), pp. 4-11.

2 Harriet Martineau in *Household Words* vol.v. ed. Charles Dickens (London: Wellington Street North, 1852), pp. 552-556.

3 Marjorie Henderson and Elizabeth Wilkinson, eds. *Cassell's Compendium of Victorian Crafts* (London: Macmillan Publishing Co.,Inc., 1977).

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Cranford. London: Penguin Classics, 1986.

North and South. London: Wordsworth Classics, 2002.

Cousin Phillis. London: Penguin Classics, 1996.

The Seamstress

Christine Lingard

Sewing is a traditional activity of women of all classes and consequently something to which most can relate. Molly Gibson on arrival at Hamley Hall unpacks her clothes and her worsted work. Mrs Hamley approves: "Ah! You've got your sewing like a good girl."

Gaskell's knowledge is shown in her advice to a young mother who wanted a career in writing:

> As well as having always some kind of sewing ready arranged to your hand, so that you can take it up at any odd minute and do a few stitches. I dare say at present it might be difficult to procure the sum that is necessary to purchase a sewing machine; and indeed unless you are a good workwoman to begin with you will find a machine difficult to manage. But try, my dear, to conquer your 'clumsiness' in sewing; there are thousand little bits of work, which no sempstress ever does as well as the wife or mother who knows how the comfort of those she loves depends on little peculiarities which but she [who] cares enough for the wearers to attend to...[L515]

The plight of professional needlewomen was a different matter. Like today's sweatshop workers they were on the bottom rung of the employment ladder, suffering appalling hardship. 106,000 seamstresses are listed on the 1841 census. After a two-year apprenticeship, usually living on the job, and paying a premium of up to £35 for the privilege, a journeywoman received £15-50 a year depending on how much accommodation was offered. Hours were usually 8am to 11pm sometimes working all night to meet a deadline for an order. As little as 20 minutes were allowed for dinner, other meals being taken as they worked. Conditions were unhealthy. There was a marked lack of ventilation in case valuable fabrics were damaged. Small fibre-particles irritated the lungs. Dusting was discouraged to keep the circulation to a minimum. The death rate from lung disease was high. Of 52 milliners and dressmakers, whose deaths were recorded in the London Metropolitan Union area in 1841, the average age was 28. 33 died of lung disease.

Though Gaskell would have met girls when off duty, she was only likely to have seen their working environment on a prearranged visit such as the one she made to the Schwabe's factory, near Middleton. Few of her middle class readers would have had even that opportunity. Seamstresses, however, were just that bit closer to personal experience. They were to be found all over the country, as everyone needed clothes.

Libbie Marsh was a seamstress, as too was Mary Barton. John Barton was determined that his daughter should not follow him into the mill and tramped around trying to find her a position – but he couldn't afford the premiums. Mary was more determined and found a job herself, but was able to live at home. Later through the character of Margaret Jennings we learn of the hardship. Eye problems were another common concern. Margaret was going blind:

> Th'only difference is that if I sew a long time together, a bright spot like th'sun comes right down where I'm looking; all the rest is quite clear but just where I want to see...Plain work pays so bad and mourning has become so plentiful this winter I were tempted to take any black work I could; and now I'm suffering for it. [Chapter 5]

It was also the profession of Ruth Hilton:

> Mrs Mason was particularly desirous that her work-women should exert themselves tonight for, on the next, the annual hunt-ball was to take place. For many were the dresses she had promised should be sent home 'without fail' the next morning; she had not let one slip through her fingers, for fear if she did, it might fall into the hands of a rival dressmaker.
>
> She could not sleep or rest. The tightness at her side was worse than usual... but then she remembered the premium her father had struggled hard to pay, and the large family younger than herself, that had to be cared for, and she determined to bear on. [Chapter 1]

Gaskell was concerned not only with physical conditions but also the temptations which the girls encountered. Some argued that their position was worse than factory girls because there was less regulation and their exposure to luxury products encouraged dissatisfaction. Young girls were often long distances from home. Though weekly hours were long they didn't work on Sunday, unlike domestic servants who were also in this situation. Employers often took no interest in them. No dinner was cooked or fires lighted in any rooms to which they had access. They were left to their own devices. The risk of prostitution was high.

The image of the needlewoman became a cultural icon. There was a whole body of fiction on the subject. Most has sunk without trace but Gaskell couldn't have failed to be aware of it. First was John Galt's short story *The Seamstress* (1833). In poetry too – Thomas Hood's *The Song of the Shirt* is the most famous example. It was inspired by real life reports of needlewomen pawning their work. Charlotte Tonna (1790-1846), whose *Helen Fleetwood* is often described as the beginning of the social problem genre, wrote *The Wrongs of Women* (1844) – a collection of four documentary stories quoting verbatim from *The Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission*. One told of a needlewoman who dies and whose sister succumbs to prostitution:

> The pain, sir in my chest is constant. I must stoop, because it seems to relieve the great pain in my shoulder-blades; but the stooping makes my breath shorter. Palpitation of the heart comes on if I only change my attitude or speak: a mist is over my eyes, and a choking in my throat and very great sickness... there is such a headache! Grievous racking pain in the limbs, and you may see my right shoulder-blade is growing out.

Dickens took up the cause, on the recommendation of the sanitary reformer, Thomas Southwood Smith, in his short novel *The Chimes*, based on a true incident of a seamstress who tried to drown both herself and her baby. She was charged with attempted murder. A death sentence was commuted to seven years transportation, after a public outcry. In *David Copperfield* Little Em'ly was a dressmaker, as were Little Dorritt and Kate Nickleby. In *Alton Locke* Charles Kingsley has his hero visit the garret of a seamstress:

> There was no bed in the room, no doubt. On a broken chair by the chimney sat a miserable old woman fancying that she was warming her hands over the embers which had long been cold, shaking her head, and muttering to herself, with palsied lips, about the guardians and the workhouse; while upon a few rags on the floor lay a girl, ugly, small-pox marked, emaciated, her only bedclothes the skirt of a large handsome riding-habit, at which two other girls, wan and tawdry, were stitching busily, as they sat right and left of her on the floor.

Two forgotten novelists, with whom Gaskell was acquainted, also tackled the issue. Elizabeth Stone (1803-56) of Manchester was the novelist, whom she claimed was the author of *Mary Barton* when trying to preserve her anonymity. Her brother, James Wheeler, published an anthology of poetry including William Gaskell's verse. Her novel *William Langshawe* described a mill owner whose son was murdered by some of his workers. Though Mrs Gaskell denied it, this may have inspired *Mary Barton*.

In 1840 Stone wrote an extensively illustrated history of fashion, edited by the Countess of Wilton of Heaton Park, Manchester. Another novel, the *Young Milliner* contrasted the lives of workers with that of their rich clients. The preface sets out her aims:

> Fashionable ladies, individual kind and good and exemplary, - are collectively the cause of infinite misery to the young and unprotected of their own sex. Of the existence even of this misery, they are, it may well be believed, scarcely aware; of its frightful extent, utterly unconscious...Should this narrative meet their sight, it is hoped that its appeal will not be in vain.

This rare novel, despite its long-term failure, was reviewed in London journals:

> It was very bitter – it was almost unbearable. Sometimes, in the earlier part of the season, she had stood to her sewing throughout the night and had thereby been enabled to repel the advances of sleep more effectively: but this she could no longer do, her ancles [sic] swelled...On Sunday morning about ten o'clock she retired to bed, after being (for it had been a dreadfully busy week) at work for upwards of seventy hours consecutively...

The other author is Eliza Meteyard (1816-79) of Shrewsbury. The only recorded meeting with Gaskell was a dinner with the Howitts in 1850. She is now only remembered for her monumental, though unscholarly biography of Josiah Wedgwood. She eked out a living writing fiction to support her siblings, using the pseudonym Silverpen to conceal her gender. Though justly deserving criticism the biography made a lot of information available for the first time. Her stories were published in *Howitt's Magazine*, along with *Libbie Marsh*. One tale *Lucy Dean, the noble needlewoman* was serialized in the popular feminist magazine, *Eliza Cook's Journal*. The heroine was typical to type – lonely garret, spluttering candle, wintry moon, and prostitute sister:

> untying the parcel she had brought she laid the two unfinished shirts on the table...'you see, ma'am,' she continued 'so much was taken off the last job of waistcoats, owing to the fault you found with the match of the stripes, that but sixpence was left me for bread and rent, and, as even my last candle end was burnt out tonight, I have brought those in the hope that you will let me have a trifle as my need is sore.'

The answer to her heroine's problems was emigration, as it was for Pasley, the 16-year-old dressmaker, in whose fate Gaskell showed an active interest. She was in Manchester's New Bayley prison for prostitution in 1850. On Tottie Fox's recommendation, Gaskell involved Dickens and his friend, the philanthropist, Angela Burdett Coutts. They arranged passage for her to the Cape. This incident is generally seen as the inspiration for *Ruth* though the outcome is different.

Irish born Julia Kavanagh (1824-77) cared for an invalid mother, and earned a living writing fiction and biographies, forestalling Gaskell's plans for a book about Madame Sevigné, with one on French women of letters. She died in Nice, ten years before her mother. William borrowed her *Rachel Gray* from the Portico Library. This novel in which the heroine, again a needlewoman, is credited with having influenced the writings of George Eliot.

In 1850 Gaskell forwarded two Christian Socialist pamphlets by Charles Kingsley to her brother-in-law, William Robson, of Warrington.

> They are anxious to obtain a circulation among the working-classes for these tracts, and it is they that have instituted the Co-operative Tailors' Society, and who hope to form a similar Society for Needlewomen. [L67]

Kingsley was the only Christian Socialist to express his views in fiction. *Alton Locke* was influenced by Henry Mayhew's report *London Labour and the London Poor* based on a series of interviews with poorly paid and unemployed tailors and needlewomen. Controversially many of the East End tailors interviewed said that women had cheapened the trade. It caused public indignation. A stream of the letters to the press followed, for example, one pointing out the double standards of a famous American novelist currently visiting Britain.

> In the East End dressmakers performed 16 hours of work irrespective of season with 40 minutes allowed for eating... Workrooms in which 10 or 12 of them are employed in making a dress for Mrs Beecher Stowe, the champion of the black slaves of America. [Times 1853].

As Gaskell abandoned the social-problem novel, the burgeoning Women's Movement took up the cause. She had been exposed to this group since coming to London in 1849. It was the literary editor William Howitt, who found a publisher for *Mary Barton.* His home was a perfect environment for Gaskell to pursue her religious, artistic and social interests. His wife, Mary was a feminist. She gathered around her a number of younger women with like interests – her daughter, Anna and her friend from Art School, Tottie Fox, who formed a special bond with Gaskell, Adelaide Procter, author of *The Lost Chord*, who visited Plymouth Grove, Jessie Boucherett, a product of Avonbank school like Gaskell, Emily Faithfull, founder of the women's Victoria Press, Bessie Rayner Parkes, great granddaughter of Joseph Priestley, and Barbara Bodichon (née Leigh-Smith) whom Gaskell "admired but did not like".

Generally known as the Langham Place Group, they were actively involved in the unsuccessful campaign to present the Married Women's Property Petition to Parliament in 1855. Married women's earnings were by law automatically the property of their husbands and they had no right to them. Mary Howitt was the secretary and collected most of the 20,000 signatures herself, with the help of 18-year-old Octavia Hill (of National Trust fame) pasting the sheets together. They thought it propitious to secure the support of as many respectably married women as possible. By then Gaskell's reputation was sufficiently high, so with Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Jane Carlyle, her name was at the top of the list. She was pleased to oblige – it was her only overtly feminist act.

One of the first feminist articles on the cause of the seamstresses was a plea by Anna Jameson (1794-1860) in *Sisters of Charity, Catholic and Protestant and the Communion of Labour*. She called for Protestant women to adopt the charitable activities of Catholic sisterhoods. Jameson belonged to an older generation of more moderate feminists, and took the younger ones under her wing – 'her nieces' as she called them. Known principally as an art historian and travel writer she had both popular and critical success. One of several books she gave to Gaskell was her *Commonplace Book*:

> [I] peep in, and read a sentence and shut it up to think over it's [sic] graceful suggestive wisdom in something of the gourmet spirit of a child with an eatable dainty...I do like your book – I liked it before – I like it even better now. [L219]

Another gift was the tract – *The Communion of Labour: a Second Lecture on the Social Employment of Women* which placed emphasis on the need of women to lead useful lives, and have the opportunity to earn their own living. In her younger days she had been governess in Dublin to the children of Lord Hatherton, who married Mrs Davenport of Capesthorne. Though not intimate acquaintances, they exchanged a number of letters. It is evident that Gaskell valued the older women's opinion highly and sent her a copy of her latest book for approval, which was forthcoming.

Bessie Rayner Parkes (1825-1923) came from a Unitarian family in Coventry. Her great uncle had married one of the Byerley sisters of Avonbank School. Her daughter claimed that Gaskell had taken her mother to Haworth. She was definitely entertained at Plymouth Grove. A gift from Bessie of her poetry is in the Manchester Central Library collection, along with the gift from Anna Jameson. She was devoted to Mary Merryweather (died 1880), a Quaker nurse – a friendship which survived Bessie's conversion to Roman Catholicism. Gaskell was familiar with her charitable activities:

> her management of Mr Courtauld's girls is the most successful I ever heard of – [L630]

She managed the girls' school founded by Samuel Courtauld at his silk factory in Halstead, Essex for 14 years from 1847, established a night school, a factory kitchen, a hostel for working girls, a nursery for mothers to leave their babies and a sick fund. The project failed for lack of support. Girls resented the restraint of the hostel and the mothers preferred to leave their babies with friends. Perhaps it was antipathy to 'do-gooders' that was the problem.

The Courtaulds were shareholders in *The English Women's Journal*, the magazine founded by Bessie with Leigh-Smith. Matilda Hays was co-editor. This 1865 letter probably refers to the journal and would therefore be written to her:

> Dear madam, I have received a letter from Miss Parkes this morning in which she tells me of your kind wish that I should contribute to the Magazine that you propose to start. I am, however, unable to promise this as my time will be very fully occupied during the next year or so. [L568]

Perhaps there is more to her refusal. She had not responded to Eliza Cook's request for her to contribute to her feminist journal. Bessie's friend Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) was also reluctant, pleading pressure of novel writing. She disapproved of another of Bessie's projects, *The Waverley Journal,* declaring the

writing was not up to standard. Quality journalism was more important than the 'woman-only' tag. She was equally dismissive of *The English Woman's Journal.* 'It is middling' she wrote. Did Gaskell feel the same?

Bessie abandoned her cause after her marriage to Louis Belloc, whose Irish born mother Louise Swanton had translated several of Gaskell's books into French. She was the mother of Hilaire Belloc.

The English Woman's Journal contained several articles on the lot of seamstresses. Bessie was critical of many of the philanthropists, calling for the foundation of associations of women, similar to those in New York. Other articles were contributed by Ellen Barlee (1826-93), who with aristocratic patrons, founded the Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen in Lamb's Conduit Street, London, designed to cut out the middleman and get the full profit for the women' efforts. She placed regular appeals in *The Times*. Jenny Lind gave a concert on her behalf. Gaskell wrote in 1861:

> I shall be very glad to make Miss Barlee's acquaintance and when I next go to London...I will call on her, or try to see her in a way most pleasing to her and you. I am very interested in her paper for the Report – having seen something of the kind of work at York St., Westminster, under Miss Stanley's auspices. I fancy Miss Barlee must be well acquainted with this as Miss Stanley shares the Army contract for shirts and until recently I have been the means of her purchasing the calico here in Manchester. Owing I believe to the undermining of the former contractors, difficulties have arisen in procuring the description of shirting, - difficulties which, possibly Miss Barlee has met with as well.

Hon. Mary Stanley (1813-79), was the sister of Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster. This aristocratic Cheshire family had known the Hollands for decades. She had been a friend of Florence Nightingale, but they became estranged when she converted to Roman Catholicism. Bishop Manning prevailed on her to take a second contingent of nurses to Scutari, but she proved to be unsuitable for the task and soon returned. A.J. Munby, a lecturer at the Working Man's College described her thus:

> Behind a counter, also full of shirts in progress, sat Miss Stanley, stitching away at a wristband...She is the Hon Miss Stanley, who was with Miss Nightingale in the Crimea: and here she now sits, day by day, looking after the making, by poor needlewomen at their own homes of some thirty thousand soldiers' shirts per annum. A quiet self devoted woman of forty or so; slight and worn, with traces of past beauty in her calm & ladylike and unpretending face. A woman worthy of deep respect; and of a certain desideratum too, when one looked at her busy hands – thin, uncared for, dignified by no wedding ring. [L494a]

The early 1860s period in Manchester is known as the Cotton Famine, when the

American Civil War cut off this important source of cotton. There was great hardship. Ironically the provision of sewing circles was seen as a means of relief. She wrote to David Grundy, vice-chairman of the Sewing Circles Committee.

> Marianne and Meta are so sorry to see the thin poor clothing they go out in, to receive their parish money...& we think if you would kindly let us have a few fents & scraps of cloth we could manage a cape or cloak apiece for Xmas Day...you once gave us a grand beautiful bundle of woollen slag, and therefore we ask you to give us more. But I know two or three poor women to whom I should be glad to give the employment of making up even such small scraps of woollen stuff, - and poor old women shivering to the Union in a warm bombazine petticoat, & calico gown & shawl equally worn, won't be particular if they have a covering of many colours, so that it is warm. [L606]

In 1862, Barlee published the findings of a visit to one circle set up in City Road, Hulme by William Birch, a young clerk still in his twenties. Within a year there were 3,000 women employed in a network of circles, paid 8d a day with lunch included (potato hash on the day of the visit). Unwanted clothing was also collected and distributed, and pawned clothing redeemed. In 1859 Gaskell had expressed reservations about sewing circles.

> I think a sewing club is an error – good for the people whh [sic] sew, as it is self denying on their part, but not for doing half a quarter so much good to others as might be done by the same amount of self-denial. The best mode of administering material charity seems to me by giving employment and taking thought in adopting the kind of employment and in helping to find out who can do it. If you cut out the work, gave it to poor women to do for a moderate payment and then either gave the ready-made clothes yourselves or sold it at cost price to be given by others to the poor who needed it I should say it was far better wiser and more noiseless. [L424]

Yet the Gaskell women were tireless in their efforts for the relief of victims. Work on *Sylvia's Lovers* was set aside.

> Last autumn and winter was such hard work – we were often off at nine, - not to come home till 7 or ½ past, too worn out to eat or do anything but go to bed. The one thought ran through all our talk almost like a disease. Marianne worked quite as hard, if not harder than Meta...but Marianne did not think about it all as Meta...but Meta laboured day and night in weighing and planning and thinking...– the pressure on the brain was telling on the spine. [L526]

In the end the experience was dispiriting. She feared that in the long run more harm was done than good.

It is interesting that many of these descriptions of philanthropy are included in

letters to Janet, Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, of Gawthorp Hall. Estranged from her husband from 1853 she spent her time at health resorts here in Britain and on the continent, but never returned to Lancashire. Most biographers fail to expand on her character, but if her replies to Gaskell's letters (which haven't survived) are of equal stature she was a woman of intelligence and compassion. Perhaps she was one of those titled people who provided financial support for charities but directed her activities from her sofa, as a semi-invalid, (there was a period of a year when she never left her bedroom), but then so did Florence Nightingale.

This issue was certainly a major one that concerned Gaskell at all times of her career. I certainly feel there is still a lot more to be learnt about her charitable activities.

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The Connection between Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Eliot Norton and Autumn Leaves by John Everett Millais

Pat Barnard

For those of us who treasure the painting Autumn Leaves by Millais and who are also members of the Gaskell Society this connection is very exciting!

Millais painted Autumn Leaves in the orchard of his first marriage home Annat Lodge in Perth. I found the site which is now a small cul-de-sac of attractive houses.

Effie (Euphemia) wife of Millais, and former wife of John Ruskin, chose the girls for the painting. The two girls on the left are Effie's younger sisters Sophie and Alice. Sophie is holding a bunch of leaves which are dropping into the garden wicker basket held by Alice.

Effie then had problems finding some girls pretty enough. There was nothing to suit in Mr Murdoch's school and the girls at the School of Industry (for orphans) were all so ugly except for Matilda Proudfoot! She is wearing the brown cotton dress and cape of the school and her brilliantly red hair glows against the background, with the peak of Ben Vorlich in the distance. Isabella Nicol was found sitting over the fire and watching with great interest two pears roasting in the room of an invalid named Kitty Fox whom Effie had been visiting for 12 years. Mrs Nicol came in to tidy the room and in return Isabella was being taught to read by Kitty.

Charles Eliot Norton wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell on 24/7 1857 that during a walk he had met her daughters (with I think, Hearn) and the scene had reminded him of the painting Autumn Leaves by Millais.

The original hand-written letter is to be found in Box 21 of the Tatham-Worthington collection in the Rylands Library. Tatham-Worthington were the solicitors to Meta Gaskell and other members of the family. The well-worn fragile letter was found amongst the papers. This was on display for the 150th anniversary exhibition of the Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857 in the Rylands library.

Editor adds: Autumn Leaves (oil on canvas, measuring 104.3 x 74cm and first exhibited in 1856) is now exhibited with the Pre-Raphaelites on the first floor of Manchester Art Gallery.

'Such a life': Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë

Patsy Stoneman

A shortened version of a talk given to the Gaskell Society at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, on Tuesday, 5th March, 2013

'Scheherazade' was Dickens' name for Elizabeth Gaskell and Jenny Uglow writes that 'she could not help turning lives into stories'.[1] It was certainly as a good story that she first encountered Charlotte Brontë.

When *Jane Eyre* was published under the pseudonym 'Currer Bell', in October, 1847, it caused a sensation. Everyone who could read wanted to read it, and of course Gaskell agog with curiosity about the author. Two years later, *Shirley* was published 'by Currer Bell, Author of Jane Eyre', and Gaskell was still in the dark, begging Tottie Fox to find out 'who wrote Jane Eyre and Shirley'.[2] Less than a week later, however, she was able to gloat over Catherine Winkworth about 'Currer Bell (aha!, What will you give me for a secret?) She's a she – that I will tell you – who has sent me 'Shirley'.[3]

By early in 1850 the secret of Charlotte Brontë's identity was generally known,[4] and the two women finally met at the Kay-Shuttleworths' Lake District home in August, 1850. Gaskell was genuinely drawn to Charlotte. 'She and I quarrelled and differed about almost everything,' she writes, 'she calls me a democrat, & can not bear Tennyson – but we like each other heartily… and I hope we shall ripen into friends'.[5] It was Charlotte's life which fascinated Gaskell, and as soon as she returned home, she dashed off letter after letter.[6] 'Such a life as Miss B's I never heard of before', she writes, sweeping on not only to describe what she herself had seen and heard, but also to repeat the ill-founded gossip passed on to her by Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, much of it derived from a disgruntled servant dismissed from the Brontë household.

In these letters Gaskell conjures up Brontë's bleak moorland home, the early death of her mother and the eccentric ways of her 'strange, half-mad' father. She paints Charlotte's audacious journey to Brussels and rushes on to the success of *Jane Eyre*, so rapidly followed by the deaths of her brother and sisters – all in a typical Gaskell torrent of emotive detail.[7] Charlotte, for her part, writes to Ellen Nussey that Gaskell 'is a woman of the most genuine talent – of cheerful, pleasing and cordial manners and – I believe – of a kind and good heart'.[8]

The two women also wrote to one another, and Charlotte visited the Gaskells' home in Manchester three times in the early 1850s.[9] They continued good friends, and when Gaskell's *Ruth* and Brontë's *Villette* both appeared in January 1853, Charlotte wrote, 'I daresay we shall not be able wholly to prevent comparisons… but we need not care: we can set them at defiance: they *shall* not make us foes: they *shall* not mingle with our mutual feeling one taint of jealousy: there is my hand on that: I know

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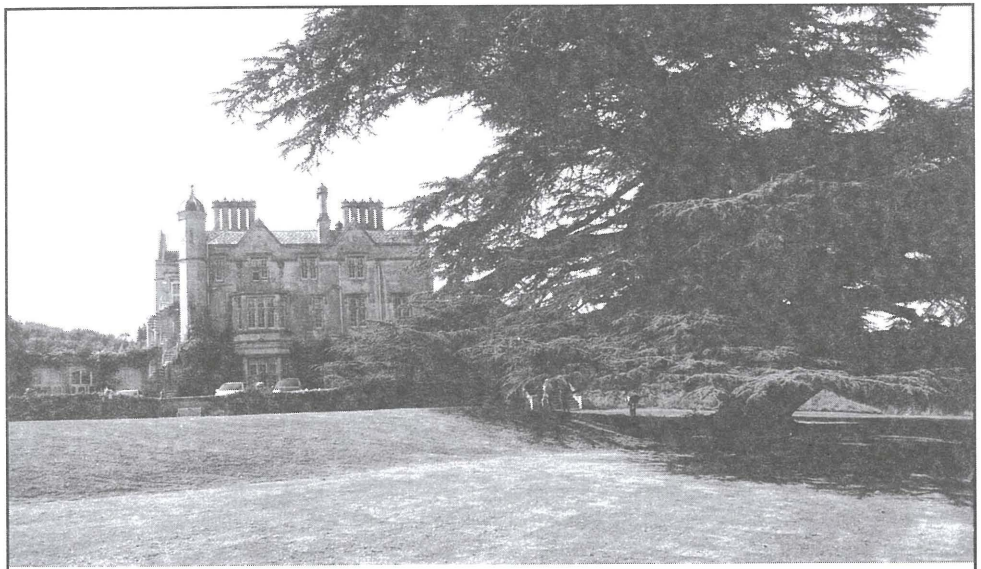

Dumbleton Hall

you will give clasp for clasp'.[10]

Indeed the friendship was not damaged, and in September 1853 Gaskell finally visited Charlotte at home in Haworth, again writing long letters describing Charlotte's warm welcome, together with the odd behaviour of her father, Patrick Brontë, who took his meals alone and handled 'a deadly little pistol'. She was now able to describe at first hand how 'the wind goes piping and wailing and sobbing round the square unsheltered house in a very strange unearthly way' and how Charlotte's conversation was filled with 'the wild, strange facts of her own and her sisters' lives'.[11]

Gaskell's busy life meant that though she took a lively interest in Charlotte's marriage to Arthur Bell Nicholls, further visits were deferred, so that it was a great shock when, in March, 1855, she received a letter from John Greenwood, the Haworth stationer, informing her of Charlotte's death. 'I can not tell you how VERY sad your note has made me', she wrote. 'My dear dear friend that I shall never see again on earth! .... I loved her dearly, more than I think she knew. I shall never cease to be thankful that I knew her: or to mourn her loss'.[12]

Charlotte's death stirred up a new storm of interest in her life, not all of it sympathetic. In June, *Sharpe's London Magazine* published what Juliet Barker, the Brontë biographer, calls 'a gossipy article... which, with salacious glee, related a series of lurid anecdotes about Charlotte's life and gave a grim portrayal of her home and father'.[13] The article stung Charlotte's life-long friend, Ellen Nussey, who urged Charlotte's father and husband to take action. 'I wish', she writes, 'that Mrs Gaskell, who is every way capable, would undertake a reply and would give a sound castigation to the writer. Her personal acquaintance with Haworth, the Parsonage, and its inmates, fits her for the task'.[14]

'The great irony', Juliet Barker comments, 'is that Mrs Gaskell was actually responsible for the article' – not that she wrote it herself, but that it 'quoted extensively from the [...] letters she had written from the Lake District in 1850 after her first meeting with Charlotte'.[15] By 1855, however, Gaskell saw Charlotte as a dear friend rather than as a source of sensational tales, writing to George Smith, who was publisher to both women, saying 'I can not tell you how I honoured & loved her.... Sometime... I will publish what I know of her, and make the world... honour the woman as much as they have admired the writer.' Gaskell was imagining writing something perhaps 'years hence',[16] but only days later she received a formal request from Patrick Brontë 'to publish a long or short account of [Charlotte's] life and works, just as you may deem expedient & proper'.[17]

Gaskell rose to the occasion, albeit with misgivings. 'I never *did* write a biography', she writes to a friend, 'and don't know quite how to set about it; you see you have to be accurate and keep to facts; a most difficult thing for a writer of fiction'.[18]

Nevertheless she set herself a programme of research which was possibly unprecedented for a biography of that time. She had access to the hundreds of letters which Charlotte had written to Ellen Nussey, but she also travelled to almost every place where Charlotte had lived, and interviewed as many people as possible who had known her.

Her absolute priority was to 'make the world... honour the woman', and in defence of her friend she was fearless – even foolhardy – in exposing the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, the original for Lowood in *Jane Eyre*, and the perfidy of Lydia Robinson (later Lady Scott), the woman who, she believed, had seduced Charlotte's brother Branwell. 'Do you mind the law of libel', she writes to George Smith ' – I have three people I want to libel – Lady Scott (that bad woman who corrupted Branwell Brontë) Mr Newby, & Lady Eastlake'.[19] Newby was the unscrupulous publisher who held the manuscripts of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, and tried to exploit the success of *Jane Eyre* by suggesting that they were by the same author. Lady Eastlake wrote a notorious review of *Jane Eyre* suggesting that if it were written by a woman, it must be 'one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex'.[20]

Like several other critics, Eastlake found Charlotte's writing 'coarse', meaning 'indelicate' or 'improper', and Gaskell tried to head off this kind of criticism by stressing the hardship of Charlotte's life, in the process painting Patrick Brontë as an eccentric tyrant and Branwell as abject in his lack of self-discipline. She also concealed the fact that Charlotte had fallen in love with a married man. In May, 1856, Gaskell followed Charlotte to the Pensionnat Heger, in Brussels, where she had spent two years learning French and German, and Charlotte's teacher, M. Heger, showed Gaskell the desperate letters which Charlotte had written to him after leaving Brussels. 'Day and night', she had written, 'I find neither rest nor peace. If I sleep I am disturbed by tormenting dreams in which I see you always severe, always saturnine and angry with me.... If my master withdraws his friendship from me entirely I shall be absolutely without hope; if he gives me a little friendship – a very little – I shall be content – happy, I would have a reason for living - for working'.[21] Gaskell kept the secret, writing not a word to suggest Charlotte's obsession.

Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* was published in March, 1857, but she was obliged to make extensive revisions to a third edition, published in August, to pacify the various people who felt themselves to have been libelled. Modern scholars voice a different objection to the biography – that it puts an over-romantic emphasis on the Brontë children's melancholy childhood, Patrick's reclusive eccentricity and Branwell's dissipated worthlessness. Yet Elizabeth Gaskell was probably the best biographer that Charlotte Brontë could have had.

The book was stunningly original. There was no outstanding biography of a woman writer which might stand as a model for Gaskell's work, and she wrote a new and

unique kind of memorial, in which Charlotte's private trials and emotions took equal place with her public life. And if Gaskell occasionally 'plays to the gallery' in recording the difficulties of such a life, it is her story-teller's skill which renders the story memorable. As Patrick Brontë said to an objector, 'Mrs Gaskell is a novelist, you know, and we must allow her a *little* romance, eh?... But the book is substantially true, sir, for all that'.[22]

There were, however, aspects to Charlotte's life which Gaskell could not or did not know. She seriously misrepresented Patrick Brontë. She only met him twice – once before, and once after Charlotte's death – and confessed to being 'sadly afraid of him in my inmost soul',[23] This trepidation meant that she was reluctant to apply to him for information, and that he had no opportunity to deny some of the bizarre behaviour which she attributed to him. Patrick's response to her stories demonstrates, as Barker puts it, his 'self-deprecating sense of humour' and 'his remarkable forebearance'.[24] 'I do not deny' he writes, 'that I am somewhat excentrick. Had I been numbered amongst the calm, sedate, *concentric* men of the world, I should not have been as I now am, and I should, in all probability, never have had such children as mine have been'.[25] Despite all the trouble it had caused, his opinion of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* was 'that it is every \way/ worthy of what one Great Woman, should have written of Another, and that it ought to stand, and will stand in the first rank, of Biographies, till the end of time'.[26]

It is Juliet Barker, among the modern biographers of the Brontës, who has done most to rehabilitate the figure of Patrick Brontë, showing that far from being an eccentric recluse, he was actively involved in social reform, and took a deep interest in the education of his children – indeed, he was remarkable for his time in giving his daughters access to uncensored reading. He was remarkable in many ways. Born in the north of Ireland in 1777 in considerable poverty, he raised himself by his own efforts to become a minister in the Church of England.

At each stage of his early career he was caught up in scenes of potential danger. In 1798 the punitive massacres by which the British army suppressed the rebellion of United Irishmen gave him a life-long horror of insurrection, which Charlotte came to share. As a student at St John's College, Cambridge, in an England in a ferment over the Napoleonic wars, Patrick aligned himself with law and order, striking out his Irish name, 'Prunty', and registering himself as 'Brontë', in homage to Lord Nelson, newly created 'Duke of Bronté'. He drilled under the young Lord Palmerston, and eagerly followed the Peninsular campaigns (1807-14) of Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington. As a curate in West Yorkshire, he witnessed men from his parish take part in Luddite attacks.

Patrick undoubtedly spoke of these experiences to his children, and also encouraged them to read current journals, all of which meant that Charlotte Brontë was much less isolated from the world than she sometimes suggested. The 'little

books' which she and her siblings wrote as children were hardly childish in tone, since they copied their format and their preoccupations from the regular journals of the day, particularly *Blackwood's Magazine*. Gaskell did read some of the 'little books', but she was clearly bewildered and a little alarmed by them. 'They are the wildest & most incoherent things' she wrote to George Smith. All of them, she noted, 'purport[...] to be written, or addressed to some member of the Wellesley family'.[27] Indeed, the young Charlotte had followed her father in adopting as heroes first Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, and then a fictionalised version of his son, also Arthur Wellesley. In the stories she created with her brother Branwell, these heroes establish an imaginary country called Angria in West Africa, and here Arthur's brother, Charles, becomes Charlotte's regular mouth-piece, appearing in one story after another as a cynical, frivolous man about town.

Although this work is normally described as 'juvenilia', Charlotte was quite grown up before she abandoned the Angrian saga. Heather Glen's recent anthology, *Charlotte Brontë: Tales of Angria*[28] includes five of Charlotte's 'novelettes' written when she was in her early twenties, and Glen demonstrates that the social milieu of this writing derives from the so-called 'silver fork' novels of the 1820s and 30s. Readers who are only familiar with Charlotte's later work will be astonished at the jaunty, dissipated tone and racy slang of novelettes like 'Stancliffe's Hotel' (1838) and 'Henry Hastings' (1839).

It was a wrench for Charlotte to give up the over-coloured world of Angria, but she recognised that if she was to gain an audience outside her own family, she must address the world in its everyday form. In *The Professor*, therefore, she took as her hero and narrator a man who would 'work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs – that he should never get a shilling he had not earned – that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station'. Ironically, publishers rejected it because they 'would have liked something ... more consonant with a highly wrought fancy'.[29] The irony is the greater in that *The Professor* derives from Charlotte's time in Brussels, the most 'highly wrought' period of her life, and it was to keep sentiment under control that she adopted a male persona with something of the worldly Angrian tone.

Jane Eyre, by contrast, speaks openly not only of its heroine's emotional deprivation as an unloved orphan, but also of her indignation at her lot. '"Unjust! – unjust!"', Jane's reason cries to her as a child,[30] and as a lonely governess she protests that women 'suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer'.[31] Jane is notably anxious about the prospect of marriage, even to her beloved Rochester, and resists the status of a 'kept woman', whether inside or outside marriage. Their final union comes about only when their economic, physical and emotional standing has been equalised by her inheritance and his disability. Margaret Oliphant, writing in 1855, credited Charlotte Brontë with having created a new kind of relationship between men and women, in which their

'furious love-making' is 'but a wild declaration of the "Rights of Woman" in a new aspect'; she finds Jane Eyre 'a dangerous little person, inimical to the peace of society'.[32] It is an aspect of Charlotte's writing which Gaskell does not emphasise, and it is possibly the novel's intense self-centredness that left the Unitarian uneasy.

In *Shirley* (1849), Charlotte did attempt a wider social scene, and though she distanced her new novel by setting it in the past, in the Luddite years 1811-12, these events offered clear parallels to recent Chartist activity. She was therefore dismayed when, well into her new work, she read Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, which deals specifically with a Chartist hero in contemporary Manchester. *Shirley*, however, is a very different book from Gaskell's impassioned account of working-class suffering. The main male character is not a working man but an exiled Belgian manufacturer, Robert Gérard Moore, the master of Hollow's Mill, and Charlotte's treatment of the workers themselves is almost dismissive.[33] Their local spokesmen are worthless men[34] while the more serious demagogues are 'strangers: emissaries from the large towns'.[35] Only one worker, William Farren, is treated seriously,[36] and, like Dickens' Stephen Blackpool, he is shown as a special case.

The social problem which attracts Charlotte's passionate engagement, in fact, is not that of industrial workers but that of unmarried women, represented by Caroline Helstone. Caroline contemplates the life of old maids in her district and concludes that the place allotted to them 'is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted'. This is 'a very convenient doctrine for the people who hold it' but, she asks, 'Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on?'[37] This protest might be a response to many of Gaskell's short stories, where single women find fulfilment through caring for other people's children. Charlotte's faith in the possibilities of marriage itself had also waned since *Jane Eyre*. Although Caroline does marry Robert Moore in the end, Charlotte does not imagine the reciprocal married life which Gaskell foresees for Margaret Hale in *North and South*.[38]

Charlotte's last novel, *Villette* (1853), returns to the theme of single women. It is one of the most intense representations of loneliness ever written, and although Gaskell found it to some extent 'morbid', she acknowledges that 'it reveals depths in her mind, aye, and in her *heart* too which I doubt if ever any one has fathomed. What would have been her transcendent grandeur if she had been brought up in a healthy & happy atmosphere no one can tell.' Gaskell attributes Charlotte's 'morbidity' to 'her life of monotony and privation of any one to love',[39] and Thackeray went further, writing that 'rather than have fame, rather than any other earthly good or mayhap heavenly one she wants some Tomkins or another to love her and be in love with'.[40]

Yet Charlotte does not deserve this patronising tone. In a letter to Ellen Nussey, she is precise: 'The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart – lie in position – not that I am a *single* woman and likely to remain a *single* woman – but because I

am a *lonely* woman and likely to be *lonely*'.[41] Charlotte's need to escape solitude was complicated by her fear that marriage comes at the price of lost independence. *Villette* ends with its heroine established in a successful single life, while her promised husband may or may not have perished at sea.[42] Charlotte's triumph here is to use fiction to give her heroine two rewards which in reality she feared were incompatible – on the one hand the precious consciousness that for one other human being she was the 'dearest, first on earth',[43] and on the other hand, the equally precious gift of 'scope and work'.[44]

Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë were very different women. Gaskell was a generally happy, optimistic wife and mother, member of a hopeful and rationalistic community, courageous in the defence of the suffering poor but sure that a woman's destiny, whether married or single, lay primarily in the care of others. Brontë by contrast felt impotent when faced with large social problems but was radical in claiming 'scope and work' for single women. While craving the acknowledgement of love, she was dubious about the married state and (with the exception of Gaskell's daughters) disliked children. What drew the two together was perhaps their mutual recognition that, in the words of Wordsworth, whom they both admired, 'we have all of us one human heart'.[45]

1 Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories.* London: Faber & Faber, 1993, p.249.

2 J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (eds), *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell.* MUP, 1997, No.55, p. 90.

3 *Gaskell Letters* No. 57, p. 93.

4 Juliet Barker, *The Brontës.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, [1994] 1995, p. 627.

5 *Gaskell Letters* No. 79, p. 129.

6 to Catherine Winkworth, to Charlotte Froude, to Tottie Fox, and to two unknown recipients,

7 *Gaskell Letters* No. 75.

8 Margaret Smith (ed), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë.* 3 Vols, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995 - 2004, Vol. 2 p. 450.

9 Alan Shelston, *Elizabeth Gaskell.* London: Hesperus Press, Brief Lives series, 2010, p, 67.

10 *Brontë Letters,* Vol. 3 p. 104.

11 *Gaskell Letters* No. 166, pp. 243-7.

12 *Gaskell Letters* No.232, p. 336.

13 Barker, p. 780.

14 Quoted in Barker, p. 780.

15 Barker, p. 780.

16 *Gaskell Letters* No. 241, p. 345.

17 Quoted in Barker, p. 782.

18 Quoted in Uglow, p. 397.

19 *Gaskell Letters* No. 314, p. 418.

20 Elizabeth Rigby (Lady Eastlake), *Quarterly Review*, December 1848, Vol lxxxiv, pp. 153-85; quoted in Miriam Allott (ed), *The Brontës: the Critical Heritage*.London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 111.

21 *Brontë Letters* Vol I, p. 379.

22 Quoted in Uglow p. 429.

23 *Gaskell Letters* No. 166, p. 245.

24 He even laughed over the scandalous article in *Sharpe's Magazine*. Barker, pp. 781, 803.

25 Quoted in Barker, 803.

26 Quoted in Barker, p. 808.

27 *Gaskell Letters* No. 297, p. 398.

28 Heather Glen (ed), *Charlotte Brontë: Tales of Angria*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006.

29 Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor* [1857]. Ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, p. 3.

30 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* [1847]. Ed. Margaret Smith, Intro. Sally Shuttleworth, Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, p. 15.

31 *Jane Eyre*, p. 109.

32 Margaret Oliphant, 'Modern Novelists – Great and Small', *Blackwood's Magazine lxxvii* (May 1855), 557-9; in Allott, *The Brontës*, 312.

33 Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* [1849]. Ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, Intro. Janet Gezari, Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, p. 53.

34 *Shirley*, pp. 114-6, 532.

35 *Shirley*, p. 322.

36 *Shirley*, p. 117.

37 *Shirley*, p. 149.

38 *Shirley*, p. 541.

39 *Gaskell Letters*, No 154, pp. 228-9.

40 Quoted in Barker, p. 719.

41 *Brontë Letters*, Vol 3, p. 63.

42 Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* [1853]. Ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten, Intro. Tim Dolin, Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008, p. 496.

43 *Villette*, p. 491.

44 *Shirley*, p. 330.

45 Gaskell quotes this line from 'The Cumberland Beggar' in *North and South*, p. 419.

Elizabeth Gaskell and Honoré de Balzac

John Greenwood

Alas, I am no Gaskell specialist but a recent article from a Gaskell specialist has encouraged me to take up Helen Smith's invitation in her Editor's Letter in the last issue of The Gaskell Society Newsletter (Spring 2013 – No.55) to submit some item on Gaskell. The article, appearing in the same Newsletter, is by Barbara Hardy: "Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot" (pp 9-16). She considers the kind of influence Gaskell (as the earlier writer) had on Eliot. The article begins by referring to the

Jo Pryke/Shirley Foster talk on the possible plagiarism of Gaskell's *The Moorland Cottage* (1850) by Eliot in her *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Hardy then goes on to consider further resemblances, such as *Ruth* and *Adam Bede*, then *North and South* and *Middlemarch*. Hardy is surely right in rejecting blatant plagiarism but accepting that "there are affinities, echoes, multiple associations" (p.12). There is "the affinity between the two great novelists... several echoes...unconscious memories, some coincidences... all show similar preoccupations and affinities " (p.14). This most stimulating article justifiably concludes with the assertion that "*North and South*, *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* played a part in the making of *Middlemarch*, and stand comparison with it" (p.16). I am reminded of a similar assessment made by Patricia Thomson in her *George Sand and the Victorians* (1977) where she deals with (among many other English 19th century novelists) the close connection between Sand's *Mauprat* (1837) and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1849) : "The parallels and connections are there in profusion and I have little doubt that *Mauprat* formed part of the literary experience on which Emily Bronte drew. The fact that she was able to produce a totally different and much greater book simply emphasises her remarkable powers of assimilation and transformation as well as her originality and creative power." (p. 89)

In short, a creative artist in painting, music , literature and other art forms is aware of, and often draws on, previous work in that particular art form, which is quite definitely not plagiarism. Very shortly after reading the Hardy article I read (I confess for the first time) Gaskell's *The Manchester Marriage*, written in 1858. My first impression was how similar in many ways it was to Balzac's *Le Colonel Chabert*, written first in 1832, then an enlarged version in 1835. The most obvious similarity between the two short stories is the common theme of the returning husband (a soldier in Balzac, a sailor in Gaskell) after many years to his wife and home. What kind of a reception will he get? Is he making true or false claims? Is he really who he claims to be? Of course, this theme is as old as the hills. Ulysses is welcomed back by faithful Penelope, after 20 years of resisting marriage offers, while Agamemnon is killed on his return by his wife Clytemnestra for having sacrificed their daughter Iphegenia. In France in the 1820s there were many accounts (often in fictional form) of the difficulties experienced by soldiers who fought under Napoleon but were ostracised under the restored Monarchy. Rebecca West's first novel, *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), is a very moving and sensitive account of the effect of a returning shell-shocked casualty on three women very close to him. In our own time Vietnam and Iraqi veterans from UK and USA have had similar treatment. Furthermore, Gaskell herself often uses the theme of the loss or absence and then return of a husband, lover or brother, e.g. Peter in *Cranford*, Frank Wilson in *The Manchester Marriage*, Frederick in *North and South*. Nevertheless, I was intrigued by the possibility that Gaskell had read and was influenced by *Le Colonel Chabert*, for not only is the common theme *one* of a returning husband, but also in both works the situation involves a wife who remarries when she thinks her absentee husband is dead, only for the first husband

to reappear years later; thus, the wife enters into a bigamous situation. After all, Gaskell did know French, there were quite a few dramatisations of *Chabert* over the years and Gaskell could have seen the play at a Paris theatre on one of her many visits when she stayed with her friend, Madame Mohl. Does she mention this in any of her letters?

In both works the preliminary exposition is fairly long so that the reader is in no doubt as to the problem. In *Le Colonel Chabert*, Chabert recounts to a sympathetic lawyer, called Derville, his adventures as a successful soldier under Napoleon, whom he worships, only to be thwarted when he returns to claim his wife and property; whereas in *The Manchester Marriage* Gaskell narrates briefly the first marriage between Alice and Frank, then a much longer - and amusing - portrait of Alice's second husband, Mr Openshawe. It is made quite clear by both writers that now the story is ready for action. Gaskell actually concludes this first section with a one-sentence paragraph: "This was the previous history of the Lancashire family who had now removed to London". Another similarity is the fate of the two first husbands: Frank commits suicide and Chabert ends up a pauper in an asylum, thus allowing the second marriage to survive in both stories.

However, by the time I had finished reading Gaskell and re-reading Balzac I had changed my mind about the possible influence Balzac had on Gaskell. In spite of the similarities mentioned (and others) my reaction was that either Gaskell had not read the Balzac story or, if she had, she had deliberately ignored its most important aspects; and in my view this was a pity. The difference lies mainly in the treatment of the various characters. In Balzac the main characters are

i. Chabert, the returning first husband;
ii. La comtesse Ferraud, his wife and wife of le comte Ferraud;
iii. Derville, the lawyer representing both Chabert and his wife.

Le comte Ferraud, the second husband, plays a very minor role and never meets Chabert. Derville acts as the go-between in this very tricky situation, trying to establish a compromise solution, satisfactory to both parties. He arranges meetings between Chabert and his wife who therefore have the opportunity to discuss in detail their respective positions and to judge each other's motives and personalities after so many years. Chabert's feelings for his wife change from still loving her and hoping to "regain" her when he first re-appears in Paris to finally (after many face-to-face confrontations) despising her and realising her true personality, i.e. a selfish worldly socialite. There is , as usual with Balzac, superb dialogue, often bitterly satirical, indicating a negative outcome. Derville tries to bring reason and compromise to the problem, but fails - though provides ample input to the intractable situation. To Chabert's simplistic "no problem" attitude, Derville warns him : "Things just aren't like that in the judicial world… It's your word against theirs, and they have two children and you have none." Thus Balzac produces

an in-depth treatment of a known social and personal problem. As so often with Balzac, the personal, public, financial and judicial sides of life are all of a piece. In Gaskell's story the main characters are

i. Mr Openshawe, the second husband;
ii. Norah, the loyal servant

Alice, wife of the two husbands, and Frank, the first husband, play minor roles. In fact, Alice is kept out of things by her second husband, Mr Openshawe, so that she will be saved anxiety and remorse. Frank appears briefly at the Openshawe's house while only Norah is there, so the first husband never sees his wife nor his replacement. Thus Gaskell does not allow any direct contact between the principal parties, no discussion, no attempt at resolving an admittedly insoluble problem. Norah's main concern, while showing sympathy for Frank ("… the desolation of the poor man who had so lately gone forth in lonely despair"), is to get Frank out of the house before Alice and her second husband return. Instead of developing a situation where this very real problem of an unintentional bigamous second marriage could be thrashed out, if not resolved, Gaskell focuses (very successfully in itself) on the character of Mr Openshawe, the typical self-made and hard-working Manchester businessman in contrast to the "fine lazy people" of London. Gaskell is able to convince the reader by the end of the story that Openshawe has become a changed man, now much more sensitive, less confident but more humane as a result of discovering two things : Norah, the servant, is honest and no thief; and Frank has committed suicide. Fine, but I feel Gaskell, having set up the specific situation of a bigamous marriage resulting from the return of the first husband, fails to tackle it head on, as Balzac did.

My point has been that I feel in this case, if Gaskell had indeed read the Balzac story, she has not followed the "affinities and echoes" mentioned in the Hardy article. However, she wrote *The Manchester Marriage* in 1858, and only 5 years later in 1863, appeared *Sylvia's Lovers* where her study of a not exactly similar but allied situation was so superbly treated. Balzac would have been proud of her!

'Trawling Private Accounts out to the Public Gaze': Answers and Problems

Angus Easson

Last December, fittingly at Plymouth Grove, Irene Wiltshire introduced her invaluable edition of the Letters of Mrs Gaskell's Daughters. In the lively discussion afterwards, despite Meta Gaskell's objections to "our private accounts" being exposed to public gaze in Mrs Chadwick's Homes, Haunts, and Stories

(Wiltshire, ed., p.249), the ever-interesting topic was raised and pursued: where did the money come from that allowed Meta and Julia to "keep house" at Plymouth Grove after their mother's death in some style (pheasants, and champagne on the side) - and indeed not only keep house but, looking to further questions, build a cottage, the Sheiling, at Silverdale, and buy in 1900 for £3,500 not only the freehold of Plymouth Grove, but also four properties adjacent to it for charitable purposes (Janet Allen, "The Gaskells' Bequests", GSN, Autumn 2001, p.4).

A number of answers were offered during the Plymouth Grove meeting: profits from the Warrington sail-making manufacture that the Gaskell family was engaged in (see Barbara Brill, William Gaskell: A Portrait, 1984, p.3); posthumous royalties from Elizabeth's works; from the rent of The Lawn at Holybourne. There were also, though I think no one mentioned them, shares that Elizabeth had, for example, in the Katherine Dock, the dividends from which she was, in August 1865, anxious to hear of ("I want them sadly"), taken up as she was with her grand scheme of house-buying (Gaskell Letters, p.936).

Certainly, it is clear that William Gaskell was well-to-do if not wealthy by the end of his life. Meta provides evidence about the sail-making, noting that £400 or £500 a year had been inherited by William from the business (Wiltshire, p.249; Meta in 1910 is noting corrections to Mrs Chadwick's Homes, Haunts, and Stories). Janet Allen, in her important "The Gaskells' Bequests" (GSN, Autumn 2001, pp.2-4), shows that in his will William, after leaving all his household effects to Meta and Julia, divided the rest of his property equally between his four daughters. On his death in 1884 his net estate was declared as £46,103 (and odd pence), and was divided, since Florence had died on 1881, three ways, Meta and Julia each inheriting £15,367 (Allen, p.3). The sum is surprising if we only think of William's stipend, astonishing even, however difficult to convert into modern terms. Still more surprising, perhaps, are the estates of Julia and Meta. In 1908, Julia left, after nineteen legacies had been paid, £28,300 to Meta (Allen, p.3). Eight years later, Meta's estate was valued at £50,223.

William's will had made no mention of freehold property, "and 'no leaseholds' is noted on the probate document" (Allen, p.3), yet Meta's will makes clear that The Lawn had been kept in the family and that the freehold was owned jointly by Marianne, Julia, Meta, and Charles Crompton as the widower of Florence (Allen, p.4). William Shaen reported, within days of Elizabeth's death, that William Gaskell "wishes as far as possible to carry out just what [Elizabeth] has planned, and has taken to the place" (quoted Jenny Uglow, Elizabeth Gaskell, 1993, pp.610-11; letter dated 15 Nov 1865). So whether William's will failed to mention freehold possession or whether he had already settled the freehold on his daughters, The Lawn and any rent from it, remained in the family.

We will come back to The Lawn by way of another suggestion made in that

discussion last December. Royalties were mentioned. Early in her career, at least, Gaskell had preferred to sell copyrights rather than rely upon royalties. If more wary later about the possible returns from reprints, from selling early proofs to American publishers, from translations, and from Otto Tauchnitz's English language editions, for sale only on the Continent, she sold copyrights to George Smith of Smith, Elder, her publisher from *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Indeed *Wives and Daughters*, as serial and volume issue, was to go some considerable way towards buying The Lawn. The whole issue for Gaskell of payment and copyright could still be explored. The evidence about royalties after Gaskell's death, though, is thin and they would probably not have been all that spectacular. Smith, Elder was acquired by John Murray, and its archive which might bear examination for royalty payments, is now in Edinburgh.

All this, though, raises another question, a puzzle I have thought about from time to time, but not yet resolved. Notoriously, until the 1870 Married Women's Property Act (with further acts in 1882 and 1893), a married woman's income and earnings were not hers but her husband's. The necessary legal provision, if a woman about to marry was to keep control of her money or property, was a trust set up before the ceremony and agreed to by both prospective partners. Charlotte Brontë did this, so that Nicholls could not touch any of her money (Juliet Barker, The Brontës, 1994, pp.755-6) - such agreements or provisions are exploited by Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, in Sir Percival Glyde's machinations against Laura.

Legally, all Gaskell's earnings belonged to William - she laments at one point that William "composedly buttoned up" £20 earned for *Lizzie Leigh*, though he promised to let her have some for the Refuge (GL, p. 113). Actually, as was often the fact, William, like other husbands, at a time when married women, noticeably in literature and journalism, were increasingly earning significant sums, allowed his wife to have free use of her money, even if much clearly went into the everyday expenses of the household. The law and the practicalities of everyday life are often adrift. Nonetheless, in the house-buying scheme, William Shaen was holding £600 "towards the nest egg for the house" (GL, p.740; 6 December 1864). Gaskell expected £1,000 from *Wives and Daughters*, or more likely £1,600, since it was to appear as serial and volume, whereas *Sylvia's Lovers*, only in volume issue, paid £1,000 (GL, p.967).

But, and it is a big but, even if Gaskell could enter into contractual agreements with her publishers and these stand, because not challenged by husband or law, how did she buy The Lawn? From at least 1864 she was planning to buy a retirement home for herself, William, and unmarried daughters. By December 1864 she could lament already having let the East Grinstead house "slip through my fingers" (GL, p.740). Shaen held money for the purpose, Smith was to pay well for *Wives and Daughters*. The Lawn was to cost £2,600, the gap of £1,000 was made up by an "equitable mortgage" advanced by Smith (GL, p.774).

Gaskell always refers specifically to herself, in intention and in fact, as buying the house. Once The Lawn was bought, she set about finding a tenant. Yet, she could not herself legally buy a house or take out a mortgage or set up a tenancy agreement. It would beside be risky (to put it no more strongly) to enter into agreements open to legal challenge. William might be content as things stood at home, but involve third parties and they could well question Gaskell's status or at least reveal what she was up to.

So what went on? A "mortgage" with Smith, though without legal validity, could depend upon the trust and friendship established since the Brontë biography, but a house sale, involving strangers - the original owner, lawyers, others who might know and question the status of the new "owner" - was a legal transaction and therefore liable to upset. Yet Gaskell was confident in her plans. Since William Shaen was involved, he as a lawyer presumably knew both pitfalls and possible solutions. It may be, though I have no evidence, that Shaen himself bought the house on the understanding that it was Gaskell's (might this be regarded in law as a conspiracy?). Certainly, the house passed without question to William on Gaskell's death.

So out of craddies raised at Plymouth Grove last December some answers can be provided - and yet, more craddies remain. What did the royalties amount to after Gaskell's death? and more urgently perhaps, how, legally, was The Lawn bought? The Land Registry (now on-line) or the title deeds might provide clues, answers, or a dead end. I hope though that some alert researcher may pursue these questions - and hope that answers are found.

The Uncertainty of Endings

Alan Shelston

Elizabeth Gaskell invariably had trouble with her endings. In *North and South* she fell out with Dickens when she asked for more instalments to build up the approach to the coming together of Margaret Hale and Mr Thornton, for her a priority equal to that of the novel's industrial agenda. For Ruth Hilton, of course, there could be no happy ending, so she is made to sacrifice herself nursing Mr Bellingham, her erstwhile lover, in a cholera epidemic. In *Sylvia's Lovers* Gaskell adopted Charlotte Brontë's recurrent pattern of a pair of contrasting lovers for her heroine, Sylvia Robson: the final pages complete a sequence of deaths which is the only way in which this 'saddest story I ever wrote' can be concluded.

These things are never easy. Most of the Victorian novelists had difficulty at some point in providing a satisfactory 'sense of an ending', as the critic Frank Kermode called it. In *Jane Eyre* for example it is usually assumed that when Charlotte Brontë

records her heroine's triumphant cry 'Reader, I married him!' that will be the end of the matter: Edward Fairfax Rochester, the brooding monster of the early part of the novel, is now domesticised – maimed and blinded in fact – and Jane will achieve both domestic happiness and independence in looking after him. But the last words of *Jane Eyre* are not the ones uttered by Jane at this triumphal moment but those of the missionary St John Rivers, dying far away in India, who has written to Jane informing her of his impending death: 'Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!' Is Mr Rochester aware that Jane is still carrying on a correspondence with the other man in her life? In *Villette* Lucy Snowe's lover and potential husband Paul Emmanuel never makes it back home, being apparently lost at sea, an ending to which Patrick Brontë objected. Men in Charlotte's novels are never safe; in her fiction Charlotte was expert at having the cake and the halfpenny.

George Eliot called the last book of *Middlemarch* 'Sunset and Sunrise' and she opens her final chapter ('Finale') in *Middlemarch* with the observation that 'every limit is a beginning as well as an ending.' But after giving a short account of the future lives of her characters - 'Dorothea has a little boy', etc - she concludes the complete novel with a reference to 'the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs', after which, in the first edition, come the words 'The End'. Throughout her novel her readers have paced themselves through the beginnings and ending of chapters, as we all do, and of individual 'books' - eight of the latter in all. These are not accidental: every one has been worked out by the author and to be aware of them is an essential part of the reading experience. Now the element of finality is absolute. One further example, and then I turn to Gaskell's novels. Dickens, in *Great Expectations* contrived a famously ambiguous ending, when Pip, his first person narrator, tells us of his future with Estella in the final sentence: 'I saw no shadow of another parting from her.' Well, did Pip and Estella live happily after? Or was there a parting, with its shadow to come, unanticipated by Pip at the point of uttering that final sentence?

Gaskell's difficulties in concluding her novels remained throughout her career. In *A Dark Night's Work* the plot is manipulated so that a loyal servant, who has been blamed for a murder that he has not committed, may escape the shame of the gallows. For *Cousin Phillis* she supplied her publisher, George Smith, with two endings to choose from: a long one involving Phillis, now grown to adulthood, looking after her widowed mother, supervising the supply of clean water to the village (Gaskell at this time had trouble with the drains at Plymouth Grove) and adopting twin orphans. Gaskell would have preferred this version but it would have required a further instalment. In her letter to Smith outlining all this she wrote 'on the other side you will find the ending that I suppose *must* do if you want it to end this year.' Smith did want it to end that year, and so we have the ending as it now stands with Phillis's final statement: '...we will go back to the peace of the old days. I know we shall; I can and I will.' (*Further Letters*, pp. 259-60) Gaskell was disappointed, but Phillis's words, however courageous, are a statement of intent, and such is

the subtlety of the story that she may well speak more in hope than in certainty. I certainly prefer the ambiguous ending as we have it: it acknowledges the fact that we cannot tell what the future may hold. I am reminded of Henry James's conclusion to his novella *Washington Square*, where another vulnerable young woman has been betrayed by a lover: 'Catherine, meanwhile, in the parlour, picking up her morsel of fancy-work, had seated herself with it again — for life, as it were.' I am reminded too of Meta Gaskell's breakdown and recovery after the collapse of her engagement to Captain Hill. In life, as in literature, it was 'for life as it were'.

But it is a recent re-reading of *Wives and Daughters* that has led me to these random thoughts. In this final case of course the novel was effectively terminated by the death not of any of its characters, but of its author. Elizabeth Gaskell had only a few pages to write when she so suddenly died. This was a fear that threatened all producers of instalment fiction. As one of Gaskell's obituarists wrote: 'it is an odd thing, surely, to think how many readers, who begin to read any novel in numbers, must die before the word "finis" is written at the door.' (cit.,Linda K. Hughes, *Victorian Publishing and Mrs Gaskell's Work* p. 33) This must apply even more to the author. Anyway, an ending was supplied in those few pages by Frederick Greenwood, her editor at the *Cornhill Magazine*. Greenwood wrote that 'it is useless to speculate upon what would have been done by the delicate strong hand which can create no more Molly Gibsons' but this is somewhat contradicted by his own strong argument for the marriage of Molly Gibson and Roger Hamley after Roger's return from Africa. This has always satisfied readers of the novel and it follows the thrust of the narrative. But those who saw Andrew Davies's adaptation for the BBC some years ago will remember his marvellously inventive solution whereby Molly was shown in a fetching pair of jodhpurs looking out with Roger over the sunlit African plains. Davies clearly thought that after so long a story Molly, not to mention his audience, needed more for this most likeable of Gaskell's heroines than a life as a dutiful wife tidying Roger's scientific papers so he deliberately chose the romantic route. But there remains a further possibility. *Wives and Daughters* is subtitled 'an every-day story.' And it is characteristic of the every-day that it should be unpredictable: Gaskell's tragic death alone should remind us of that. The final illustration of the novel is entitled 'The last turning': it shows Roger looking back in the pouring rain to give one last wave to Molly as he departs on his African journey. In forecasting a happy ending Greenwood wrote with considerable confidence, saying that 'we *know* that Roger Hamley will marry Molly, and that is what we are most concerned about '(my italics). But Africa was a dangerous place, particularly in the nineteenth century: as Doctor Spooner was said to have remarked of a clergy widow in Oxford: 'Poor dear lady, her husband was eaten by missionaries.' Roger's mission was a dangerous one and it is certainly legitimate to remember that there must be a frisson of anxiety created by that last illustration. That of course is to confuse the logic of literature with the possibilities of life, but that has always been the problem for the realist novel. It is a staple, incidentally in French cinema, where the recent film *In the House* played endlessly - the appropriate term

- with the issue. Oscar Wilde once wrote that 'anybody can write a three-volume novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature.' This goes some way to resolving the problem, but so too does the uncertainty of endings.

Book Notes

Christine Lingard

North and South. New edition with afterword by David Stuart Davies, London: Collector's Library, 2013.

Female gothic histories: gender, history and the gothic by Diana Wallace.

Gothic literary studies, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2013. Available as hardback and ebook: 9780708325759

A wide ranging study of gothic and historical fiction from the eighteenth century Sophia Lee's The Recess to Vernon Lee and Daphne du Maurier and Victoria Holt, from the early twentieth century to the contemporary novelist Sarah Waters. It contains an essay - Be-witched and Ghosted: Elizabeth Gaskell's Gothic historical tales.

Transnational Gothic: literary and social exchanges in the long nineteenth century, edited by Monika Elbert (Montclair State University, USA) and Bridget M. Marshall, (University of Massachusetts, Lowell, USA), Ashgate, 2013. Also available electronically 9781409447719 (PDF) 9781409473480 (ePUB)

A collection of essays discussing the treatment of the Gothic by a wide range of unusual British and American authors such as Mary Rowlandson and Bram Stoker, Frances and Anthony Trollope, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Gaskell, Theodore Dreiser, Rudyard Kipling, and Lafcadio Hearn, as well as the actors Edmund Kean and George Frederick Cooke on their American tours.

Romanticism, Revolution and Language: The Fate of the Word from Samuel Johnson to George Eliot / John Beer Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Cambridge. Cambridge books online, Cambridge University Press, 2009 and also ebook 9780511720055

A collection of essays on the repercussion of the French revolution on English literature - both poetry and fiction especially Languages of memory and passion: Tennyson, Gaskell and the Brontës. It also deals with Hazlitt and Jane Austen.

Down the Belliard Steps : Discovering the Brontës in Brussels by Helen MacEwan. Brussels Brontë Editions, 2012 ISBN 9780957377202

This book arises out of Charlotte and Emily Brontë's links with Brussels, and tells the story of the foundation and development of the Brussels Brontë Group – written with much enthusiasm, lavishly illustrated and very readable.

Charlotte Brontë by Patsy Stoneman, Emeritus Reader in English, University of Hull and Vice-President of The Brontë Society. (Writers and their work series) Tavistock: Northcote House, 2013. ISBN 9780746308561

This succinct volume covers a brief biography, analyses the novels and concludes with the chapter, "Readers and reproducers".

North and South [DVD] Starring Rosalie Shanks, Patrick Stewart, Robin Bailey, et al. (2013)

Keeping in Touch

Jean M Layton

On a chilly morning in May a group of Friends of Plymouth Grove met at Manchester Art Gallery for a tour of some of the treasures of the Gallery's collection of Chinese artefacts. (It was to have been a tour of the Silver, but that is a different story).

This was part of the Keeping in Touch strategy - a means for Friends of Plymouth Grove to meet whilst the Gaskell House is closed for renovation, and we have Pat Barnard to thank for arranging it all.

Our guide took us up to the exhibition hall on the second floor with the collection of artefacts from all countries, and many centuries.

The room was once a small theatre and still retains some of the original features. It is painted in pale cream and filled with beautifully lit display cases. We stopped at several of these where our guide picked out eight items that represented Chinese art and craft through the ages.

The first item was a libation cup, made out of rhino horn, beautifully carved and coloured, and the last one a life sized carving of a goddess made out of a single piece of wood. So relaxed she looked, one leg across the other and with a small child at her side. Although was not particularly old, it had a timeless quality. In between we were shown fine examples of enamelling, glassware, pottery and a magnificent ivory tusk from Canton, beautifully carved and depicting the story of one of the sources of Chinese wealth – the production of tea. My absolute favourite though was a large blue and white ceramic ginger jar illustrated with charming little children at play.

We all admired the wonderful craftsmanship of the Chinese, producing fine items through the ages, so far ahead of the western world. One of the questions asked though, was: "How did these items get here? How did seventeenth & eighteenth century (and earlier) items from China come to Manchester?" Most of them, we were told, came from wealthy Manchester business men, private collections bequeathed to the Gallery, but it still begged the question, who was importing them, were there agents involved?

We did learn a little of the donors though, notably the Blair brothers who between them collected 40000 assorted objects. These were offered to the Gallery when the last brother died. Sadly it could only accept about 400. Other benefactors mentioned were bankers, businessmen and industrialists, reflecting not only the wealth of the city in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century but also the generosity of it citizens.

Once again grateful thanks to Pat Barnard for organising the visit with her usual quiet efficiency.

Idyll and Reality: a Weekend with George Eliot
13-15 September 2013

Readers might be interested to know that Howard Gregg is due to lead a weekend discussion group entitled 'Idyll and Reality', and relating to George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*.

This will take place 13th to 15th September 2013. Accommodation is at The Green Man Hotel in Old Harlow, Essex. The weekend will start with dinner on Friday evening followed by a lecture given by Howard.

We then have discussion sessions and readings from the two books, with Saturday afternoon free. The weekend concludes after Sunday lunch.

Fees, which include full board, are: single £268; shared twin or double £228 per person. Non-residents pay £145. A free taxi service will collect participants from Epping underground station.

More information from 01992 572510, e-mail: johnmarilyn2000@yahoo.co.uk or by post: Marilyn Taylor, Wansfell College 2, 17 Amesbury Road, Epping, Essex CM16 4HZ.

Autumn General Meeting

Saturday, September 28, 2013 Methodist Church, Knutsford.

10.30 am	Tea and coffee
11.00 am	Elizabeth Williams will give the Joan Leach Memorial Lecture: *Elizabeth Gaskell and Gossip*
12.30 pm (approx)	Lunch
2.00 pm	Dr Sandie Byrne : Elizabeth Gaskell in Context
3.30 pm (Approx)	Finish

Cost £12-50 to include lunch (£5 without lunch)

Sunday September 29 (203rd Birthday of ECG)

10.45 am	Placing of flowers on the Grave at Brook Street Chapel
11.00 am	Service Brook Street Unitarian Church

North-West Group

Manchester Meetings
The Manchester meetings will be held at 1.00 pm on the first Tuesday of the month (October to February excluding December) in Cross Street Chapel, Manchester (across from The Royal Exchange). The Chapel will usually be open from noon for lunch (bring your own, coffee available) in the Percival Room where the lectures will be given at 1.00 pm.

Tuesday, October 1, 2013
Ron Thorn: The Diary of Tryall Holcroft
Ron is Honorary Librarian of Macclesfield Silk Museums.

Tryall Holcroft was a contemporary of Elizabeth Gaskell and a real life John Thornton. This 200,000-word diary, 'being a brief account of remarkable transactions and changes occurring to him through life' is a view into the world of a mid-19th century, Manchester-based textile manufacturer.

Tuesday, November 5, 2013.
Anthony Dawson: William Gaskell and the Crimean War.
Anthony was a post-graduate researcher at the University of Leeds 2010-2013

(graduating with an M.Res.) studying the perception of the Crimean War from soldiers' letters sent home. His interest in Gaskell stems from studying the Crimean War as seen on the "home front" particularly by the churches - and, especially the Unitarian response.

Tuesday, December 3, 2013
Bill Hutchings: Jane Austen

Bill is a National Teaching Fellow and a Research Fellow at the University of Manchester. He is a regular lecturer for the Jane Austen Society and a specialist on eighteenth century poetry. We can look forward to an entertaining lecture and discover whether Gaskell ever read Jane Austen!

Tuesday February 4, 2014
Christine Musgrove: Mrs Gaskell, Art and Manchester

Christine is an art historian (Edinburgh University) with extensive experience as a teacher in Higher Education

Tuesday March 4, 2014
Elizabeth Williams: Fanny Trollope

Elizabeth is a former F.E. lecturer, who regularly gives entertaining Gaskell-related talks to the Society and elsewhere. She also leads the discussions at the Knutsford meetings. Fanny (Frances) Trollope, mother of Anthony Trollope was a novelist in her own right.

For further information about events held at Cross Street Chapel is available visit the website: http://cross-street-chapel.org.uk

Knutsford Meetings
These meetings held in St John's Church Centre will resume on Wednesday 30 October and continue on the last Wednesday of each month (excluding December) until April. Buffet Lunch (£8, please pay on arrival; if not having lunch, please pay £2) available from 12.15 with literary talk and discussion led by Elizabeth Williams at 1.30. We shall be studying *Sylvia's Lovers.*

The Gaskell Society South-West

Sunday, 1 September 2013, 12.30 pm. Bring and Share Lunch at Kate and Alec Crawford's house, Valley View, Norton St Philip. The arrangements for this will be made soon. Please 'phone Elizabeth Schlenther for more information.

Saturday, 12 October 2013, 2.30 pm. Elizabeth Williams, Vice-Chairwoman of the national Gaskell Society, will speak to us on 'Gaskell and Gossip' – a most intriguing topic. Elizabeth has been with us before, so we know we have a good afternoon in prospect and very much look forward to her being with us. The lecture will take place at the BRLSI, Queens Square, Bath, and there will be a charge of £2 for members of the Gaskell Society and the BRLSI and £4 for non-members. Coffee and tea will be available after the lecture.

Our book for discussion in February and March next year will be Mrs Gaskell's *Biography of Charlotte Brontë*. The dates for the discussion groups will be announced nearer the time.

Any queries to Elizabeth Schlenther, 14 Vellore Lane, Bath, BA2 6JQ, Tel: 01225 331763.

London and South-East Branch

Saturday, 14 September, 2013. Alison Lundie: 'Domestic Arts in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*'

Alison Lundie, a founding member of the London Gaskell Reading group, is studying for a PhD at Roehampton. Her talk will focus on shawls and needlewomen in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Objects in Victorian fiction and the idea of the domestic arts are a current academic theme.

Saturday, 9 November, 2013. Janet Allan: A progress report on The Gaskell House 84 Plymouth Grove

As you will be aware the house is currently closed for renovation and development thanks to Janet's successful efforts to secure a lottery grant. We have already heard from Ann Brooks about her plans for the garden; this time we shall learn more about the house!

Saturday, 8 February 2014. Dr Ann Brooks: the Gaskell Marriage

Ann Brooks and Bryan Haworth (who came with Ann this year to speak about the Portico Library) have researched a paper and have some ideas about the Gaskell marriage. As we all enjoy biography this subject will make an interesting afternoon.

Saturday, 10 May 2014. Dr Fran Twinn: 'Writer', 'tiger parent', 'shopaholic', 'socialite' and 'control freak': the many 'Me's' of Elizabeth Gaskell.

Fran will speak and then lead a discussion. She is aware there are many other aspects to Mrs Gaskell's personality but she will focus on these and hope that in discussion members will be able to contribute others!

Sandwich lunch will be available from 12.45 pm. Meetings begin at 2 pm and tea and cake will be served after the meeting. Usually the formal part of the meeting finishes about 3.30 pm for those needing to catch trains.

Venue: Francis Holland School, Graham Terrace, London.

The entrance is via doors on Graham Terrace, please ring the bell marked 'RECEPTION' loudly to gain entry. For security reasons the door must be locked until opened from inside.

The school is a three minute walk from Sloane Square tube station which is on the District and Circle lines and about a 15-20 minute walk from Victoria. There are also buses from Victoria. (Please check running of the tubes as they often carry out engineering work at weekends).

Book stall: We have a 'bring and buy' book stall the proceeds of which go to the renovation of the Gaskell House in Plymouth Grove Manchester. Please bring unwanted books and buy replacements!!

Meetings are £5.00 payable on the day.

Notes