

# The Eagle and the Dove: Dickens, Mrs Gaskell and the Publishing Culture of the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Alan Shelston

The quotation in my title, I have to confess, has little to do with Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell – it comes in fact from a poem by the seventeenth century poet John Donne. But books, as Dickens once observed to Gaskell, ‘usually have names’, and so do lectures, and when I was thinking about the relationship between these two nineteenth century authors, Donne’s line kept coming into my mind – ‘we in us find the Eagle and the Dove’.<sup>1</sup> Gaskell was famously called a dove by the English critic Lord David Cecil, in a judgement that has done her considerable harm. Cecil goes on to say that Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot ‘are unfeminine ...they were eagles’.<sup>2</sup> No one, to my knowledge, ever described Dickens as an eagle, but clearly Cecil thinks of eagles as very masculine birds, and in his role of editor and adviser to Elizabeth Gaskell, Dickens could be both powerful and predatory. This lecture will not primarily concern itself with the personal relationship between Dickens and Gaskell. We shall need to do that of course, but my priority is to discuss the relationship – one which lasted from 1850, when Dickens opened his new periodical, *Household Words*, with Gaskell’s story ‘Lizzie Leigh’, effectively until Gaskell’s death in 1865 – in the context of publishing history, and in particular in terms of the developments in the publishing of fiction in England in those years. Those fifteen years, after all, were a period of astonishing achievement in the genre of the realist novel. Dickens, Gaskell, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Trollope, all published major work in that short period of time. Gaskell began her career as a novelist at the same point in time as Charlotte Brontë and she was immediately taken up by Charles Dickens. She ended it alongside George Eliot and Trollope,

the 'new blood' of the 1860s. But George Eliot and Trollope are very different novelists from their predecessors, defining their audience in a very different way. These differences are reflected in differing circumstances of publication, even differences in the physical reality of the books themselves, and these developments provide a context for the often very problematic relationship between Dickens, editor, publisher, and publicist, and the novelist he called 'my dear Scheherezade' in a tribute to her story-telling powers.<sup>3</sup> In the time I have available to me I shall consider, first Dickens's recruitment of Gaskell for the early numbers of *Household Words*, then the difficulties which developed over the publication of *North and South* in the magazine, and finally the way in which she grew away from Dickens and established a professional identity of her own.

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I begin in 1850. This was a very significant year in the history of Victorian publishing. It saw the first publication not only of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, but of the completed version of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, started almost half a century earlier. These are great poems of memory; the great novel of memory is surely *David Copperfield*, whose final instalment was published in November 1850. As Dickens was concluding the writing of *Copperfield* he was embarking on his new project, the weekly journal *Household Words*, the first issue of which appeared on 30 March. I mention these well-known details to set a context, but they are in fact linked. The theme of 'memory', for example, was always a powerful one for Dickens, as it was for Gaskell – and indeed for the Victorians generally. In *The Haunted Man*, the last of Dickens's Christmas stories, published in 1848, he gives us a tragic figure who has effectively been lobotomized – he makes a bargain whereby he loses his memory to free himself from the painful memories of the past and the result is that his personality and indeed his whole being is destroyed.<sup>4</sup> Several of Gaskell's early stories focus on the subject of memory – 'The Old Nurse's Story', for example, with its conclusion that 'What is done in youth can never be undone in age!' The theme had a very real significance for

the Victorian readership; conscious of the enormous changes and pressures of the present, anxious about where their material success might lead them, they were desperate to keep contact with the ever-receding past. Scrooge, in *A Christmas Carol*, is confronted by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet to Come. The concern with memory runs right through nineteenth century poetry from Wordsworth to Thomas Hardy and on to T.S. Eliot; it is the fabric of our consciousness, while at the same time it is an all too potent reminder of everything that we have lost. But at the same time, if our past has made us what we are, we live very much in the present. In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell gives us old Alice Wilson, the factory worker, who recounts memories of her past – of her childhood, of the way she came to Manchester in search of work and of what that has cost her – to Mary and Margaret, young women whose lot lies in the Manchester of the present. But Alice, like many such migrant workers, recognizes that she will never return to her Cumberland home: ‘ugly, smoky Manchester; dear busy, earnest, noble-working Manchester,’ as Gaskell tells us in another of her Manchester stories, was ‘where God had cast their lives, and told them to work out their destiny.’<sup>15</sup> If *David Copperfield* is the greatest of all novels about memory its hero also has to learn how to live in the here and now, and to learn from Aunt Betsey the lesson of ‘earnestness,’ the value that is to sustain him through life’s journey. Dickens’s journalism, of which *Household Words* was to prove by far the most successful example, was certainly conceived in terms of the needs of the contemporary world. As he wrote to Mary Howitt, seeking her support for *Household Words*, ‘All social evils, and all home affections and associations, I am particularly anxious to deal with well’ (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 41). The social evil that was very much in Dickens’s mind at this point in time was the problem of the ‘fallen woman’, and of course he was practically involved in his emigration schemes for such unfortunates. It is no accident that the first issue of *Household Words* contained amongst its articles material about emigration to Australia. The same issue preoccupies him in *David Copperfield*, but above all *David Copperfield*, with the beauty of its

Yarmouth scenes, celebrates more than any other novel by Dickens 'home affections and associations' – affections and associations that will no doubt remain in Em'ly's mind when she is separated from them in Australia. Gaskell, in 'Lizzie Leigh' and in *Ruth*, was writing on exactly the same theme; both of those stories are tragedies and there, as in *Mary Barton*, as in *David Copperfield*, tragedy is set within an affirmation of the values of family.

The two novelists thus had a great deal in common at the point in time when Dickens founded *Household Words*. The very title, arrived at, as was often the case with Dickens, only after extensive consideration, defined the relationship between the agenda of the journal and the here and now of its readers. Titles were important to Dickens – they had to make an impact and attract the reader, and this was particularly so with a journal. The opening page of the first number of *Household Words* indicates what kind of magazine it was to be. Cheaply produced and in double columned type, it was aimed at a literate but in the traditional sense uncultured audience. In his 'Preliminary Word', published at the head of the first number, Dickens sets out his agenda and defines his relationship with his readership: 'We aspire to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered amongst the Household thoughts of our readers.' He continues:

We have considered what an ambition it is to be admitted into many homes with affection and confidence; to be regarded as friend by children and old people; to be thought of in affliction and in happiness ... We know the great responsibility of such a privilege ... the pictures that it conjures up in hours of solitary labour, of a multitude moved by one sympathy; the solemn hopes which it awakens in the labourer's breast, that he may be free from self-reproach in looking back at last upon his work, and that his name may be remembered ... in time to come, and borne by the dear objects of his life with pride. <sup>6</sup>

*Household Words*, it cannot be too strongly emphasized, was a product of Dickens's sense of mission, the belief shared with figures like the popular publishers Charles Knight, and Mary Howitt, and Elizabeth Gaskell too, that writers had a responsibility to inform and to instruct. And especially to inform and instruct a new urban and lower class readership. Not in any oppressive or utilitarian way – 'No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities will give a harsh tone to our Household Words'<sup>7</sup> – but in a way which will include these new readers in the Victorian social project. It is interesting that according to Gaskell's own account, *Household Words* was not taken at her Plymouth Grove home: 'I seldom see the Household Words' she wrote in a letter to John Forster in May 1853 (*FL*, p.87) although she wrote for the journal frequently during the decade of its existence. The inference, I think, is one of social class; as the lending books of Manchester's Portico Library reveal, the Gaskells would have been familiar with more traditional and dignified publications.<sup>8</sup> I have already referred to the Christmas books, and it is there, and in Dickens's public statements on the subject of education for example, that we find the agenda that was to lie behind *Household Words*. It is an essentially philanthropic and benevolent agenda, and it is an interesting paradox that at a time when Dickens's novels take on an increasingly sombre symbolic tone – following *David Copperfield* we have the great dark novels – *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Our Mutual Friend* – the optimism of his social mission is never stronger. One might say that in this, as in so much else, there were two Dickenses – the Dickens of the panoramic social fiction whose analysis of society was to become increasingly pessimistic, and the 'public' Dickens whose social agenda, as publicised and reflected in his journalism and public speaking, retains its spirit of benevolence and its professed belief in the potential of the common man. That after all is the message of Stephen Blackpool's tragedy – a tragedy of frustrated potential – in *Hard Times*, the novel he himself wrote for his own magazine, and it is, I suspect, what he admired so much in Gaskell's

*Mary Barton.*

Let me turn now to Elizabeth Gaskell. When Dickens was recruiting his contributors to *Household Words* he wrote to Gaskell that 'I *do* honestly know that there is no living English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist, in preference to the author of *Mary Barton* (a book that most profoundly affected and impressed me)' (*Letters*, vol.6, p.22). In fact Gaskell had sent him a complementary copy of her novel and she complains in one of her letters that he failed to acknowledge it, but with his new journal up and running he clearly felt the need to flatter her into accepting his commission. What would have impressed him about *Mary Barton* was its belief in the resilience of working people – given his comments in his 'Preliminary Word' – that, and the novel's humanity and realism. Gaskell wrote in her 'Preface' to *Mary Barton* that she had been moved by the thought of 'how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the streets of the town where I resided' and it is interesting to find Dickens expressing identical sentiments in his 'Preliminary Word': 'in all familiar things ... there is Romance enough if we will find it out.'<sup>9</sup> 'Romance' is an interesting term. It can refer, obviously, to a love-story, and we remember that *Mary Barton* was originally to have been sub-titled 'A Manchester Love-Story.' Its larger meaning is simply that of fiction itself – or more specifically the fantasies of fictional invention – as in the novels of Scott, or of Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, and in that sense it can be opposed to the concept of realism. Here, as used by both Gaskell and Dickens, there are echoes I think of that meaning. But for Dickens, as for Gaskell, 'Romance' is to be found not in the stories of traditional heroes and heroines, but in the lives of ordinary people. By associating 'Romance' with ordinary people it gives their lives a meaning and a dignity previously denied them. These lives too are worthy of fictional invention – they too have their heroes and heroines, their tragedies and human triumphs.

However that may be, Gaskell was regarded from the start as a very special contributor for Dickens. In his preparations for *Household Words* he

contacted a number of well-known writers of the day and he invariably did so in flattering terms, as he did with Gaskell, but for her he did something more – he offered the freedom to write very much on her own terms. In his first approach to her he asks for ‘a *short* tale, or any number of tales for its pages’ For ‘Lizzie Leigh’ he wrote:

*‘Let me particularly beg you not to put the least constraint upon yourself, as to space. Allow the story to take its own length, and work itself out. I will engage to get it in, very easily, whatsoever the extent to which it may go.*

Your design as to its progress and conclusion are undoubtedly the best. The inventor’s, I consider *must be.*’ (*Letters*, vol.6, p.55)

This kind of editorial generosity was unusual for Dickens – he did not normally offer his contributors this degree of license. Once he had contributions to hand he expected to exercise total authority over them. Initially at least this was not the case in his dealings with Gaskell, although it is significant that in a separate letter he does describe the story to his sub-editor, W.H. Wills as ‘very good, but long’ (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 50). This is the first example we shall find of a disparity with what he wrote to Gaskell, and what he wrote privately to Wills.

J. G. Sharps suggests that Gaskell already had ‘Lizzie Leigh’ to hand, but Dickens writes as if she is still working on her story. Be that as it may, when the first issue of *Household Words* appeared Gaskell’s ‘Lizzie Leigh’ was the very first item to face the reader. The title was supplied by Dickens himself, a point I want to come back to. Like *Mary Barton*, ‘Lizzie Leigh’ was a tale of Manchester life. Its opening words – ‘When death is present in a household on Christmas Day’ – may seem gloomy for a magazine that has promised to be uplifting but that word ‘household’ is the key. (One wonders whether Gaskell had been cunning enough to make sure that the word appeared so prominently in that first sentence.) The story concerns the effect on a household of a young woman’s

sexual lapse, but it shows also how the maternal instinct of the mother who seeks out her daughter restores the family to a kind of wholeness after the rupture created by the daughter's exclusion.

Dickens was clearly pleased with this first contribution. He thought it 'excellent ... And it made me cry – which I mention because I take that to be indisputable proof of its effect' (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 48). He was soon asking for more. 'Can't you – won't you – don't you ever mean to – write me another story?' (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 121) he writes to Gaskell in July 1850, and in that year she followed up with two further regional stories, 'The Well of Pen-Morfa' (November 1850) and 'The Heart of John Middleton' (December 1850). Again Dickens was impressed – 'I think The Heart of John Middleton – that's the name I have given it – a story of extraordinary power, worked out with a vigour and truthfulness very few people could reach' (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 238). The comment is an interesting one for it shows us what Dickens admired in Gaskell's work – 'power' – or 'vigour' – and 'truthfulness.' Furthermore Dickens reveals that here, as on other occasions, it was he who supplied the title, and this perhaps marks a difference between the two authors. For Dickens, as I said earlier, titles were very important – they were a crucial element in the marketing of the work, bringing it to the reader in a way that made an immediate impact. He had many changes of mind until he finally decided upon a title for *Household Words* itself and this was typical.<sup>10</sup> As his working notes show, he had a number of projected titles for almost all of his novels – it was something he was determined to get right.<sup>11</sup> Gaskell we know to have been far less concerned about titles, as she was indeed about the names of her characters, and she often failed to supply them for her *Household Words* contributions, in a way rather playing into Dickens's hands. Famously, it was Dickens who chose a thematic title for *North and South* rather than have the book named after its central character. For Gaskell *North and South* was always 'Margaret', or perhaps 'Margaret Hale' and what we have here is Dickens as editor imposing his conception of the project over his contributor's preference.

Gaskell's early contributions to *Household Words* were varied, but they were all very much appropriate to Dickens's priorities for the journal; for him they fulfilled the promise he had detected in *Mary Barton*. The stories that she wrote for him all dealt with the lives of humble or working people, they all identified the values of their working communities, and they all asserted the potential of their characters for love, for loyalty, and for the endurance of suffering. As we have seen, Dickens conceived of himself as editor entering the homes of working people, and these stories do exactly that. In addition Gaskell provided other material for Dickens that was in line with his plans. Fiction was only one element of the *Household Words* programme, indeed it was not the major one. In the nine years of its existence *Household Words* published only three full-length novels. Most of its space was taken up with articles of different kinds. One popular subject was articles about the newly created institutions of Victorian Britain; another was articles about places and people in distant parts. Thus the first number carried Dickens's own article 'Saint Valentine's Day in the Post Office' about the wonders of the new postal service, together with 'A Bundle of Emigrant's letters', an article which neatly combined this interest with his philanthropic activities. In the early years of *Household Words* Gaskell herself contributed articles as well as stories. 'Disappearances', published in 1851, is in fact about the successes of the new detective police force in tracing missing people – she argues that mystery writers will soon have nothing to write about since the detectives will have solved all the mysteries. 'The Shah's English Gardener' published in 1852 is the story of an Englishman she had met who had been gardener to the Shah of Persia. 'Cumberland Sheep-Shearers' (1853) by contrast brings her closer to home. She wrote a number of these topical articles for Dickens; it is obvious that the developing range of her writing was one of her great attractions for him.

This I think brings us to *Cranford* which in its finished form reflects a hybrid of all the *Household Words* styles. Part fiction, part anthropology, part travelogue and part celebration of the new world of railways and postal services

(the plot depends crucially on the safe delivery of a letter from England to India), it was ideally conceived to suit Dickens's needs. Never was human affection more gently displayed than amongst Miss Matty and her friends; never were the interactions between past and present, country and city, so deftly deployed. Furthermore the device of the narrative – a younger narrator – a thoroughly modern miss – reporting her visits to the little town in a way that gradually reveals its values – is ideally suited to the instalment pattern of the magazine. As Gaskell tells us, *Cranford* originated just in the first two 'papers' as she called them; the full work only developed over a series of irregular intervals. She was writing *Ruth* at the time and could only turn to the *Cranford* instalments when she had time to spare (perhaps *Cranford's* gentle humanity was an antidote to the tragic matter of the full-length novel). Dickens however seems to have tolerated this arrangement – a further sign of his indulgence to her. 'Cranford???' he writes to her at one point (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 812), but for the most part he seems to have contained his impatience.

There were, however, already signs of difference between the two writers. There was, for example, a protracted dispute over the conclusion of Gaskell's fine ghost story, 'The Old Nurse's Story', published in the Christmas number of *Household Words* in 1852. Dickens not only wanted a different ending, he offered to write and insert it – an offer which Gaskell promptly refused. When Gaskell submitted her opening instalment of *Cranford* she was surprised to find that Dickens did alter it before it went to press, removing references to his own works – I suspect that she was not convinced by his argument that there had not been time to consult her. Dickens's reasons for what he had done were valid; everything in *Household Words* was published anonymously and he did not want his journal to seem to be advertising his own work. But Gaskell promptly restored the references immediately *Cranford* was published as a single volume. Nevertheless, *Cranford* is arguably the triumph of Gaskell's connection with *Household Words*, not least in that it represents the most successful alliance of the instalment method of publication and the matter of the work itself.

But I want to move on now to *North and South* because this represents a watershed in the relationship between Dickens and Gaskell – the point in fact at which a break developed in that relationship that was to prove ultimately irreparable.

*North and South* was published in *Household Words* in weekly instalments from 2 September 1854 to 27 January 1855. Unlike *Cranford*, there were no interruptions. By this time Gaskell had written no fewer than sixteen items for the journal, but she had never before committed herself to the unrelenting pressures of pre-advertised weekly instalment writing, something which Dickens warned her about and which a later novelist, Henry James, was to regard as extremely threatening. The novelist who takes on such a project must always fear interruption, but no one had more experience of the form than Dickens himself. He frequently over-committed himself, but in all his long career he only ever failed to deliver once when, after the death of Mary Hogarth in May 1837, he failed to complete the June instalment of *The Pickwick Papers*. Such industry took a lot out of him, but it accounts perhaps for his impatience with his less determined contributors.

It is not clear from the existing correspondence on whose initiative *North and South* appeared in *Household Words*. The first mention of the novel by Dickens comes when he thanks Gaskell for 114 pages of the manuscript of the opening of a novel which she has sent him:

I have read the MS you have had the kindness to send me, with all possible attention and care. I have shut myself up for the purpose, and allowed nothing to divide my thoughts. It opens an admirable story, is full of character and power, has a strong suspended interest in it (the end of which, I don't in the least foresee), and has the very best marks of your hand upon it. If I had had more to read, I certainly could not have stopped, but must have read on. (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 355)

Dickens immediately addresses himself to the practicalities of instalment publication, explaining how he would divide the material she has sent, warning her of the need for care on 'a difficult and dangerous subject' (the issue of Mr. Hale's religious doubts) and over excessive dialogue. (Dialogue, of course, makes heavy demands on space.) Nevertheless, he already has the first six instalments planned from what she has sent him and he prides himself on the accuracy of his calculations:

As nearly as I can calculate, about 18 sides of your writing would make a weekly No. On about this calculation, the MS I have, would divide at the good points I have mentioned, and pretty equally.

He reverts to these issues in a post-script:

That my calculations might be accurate, I thought it well to stop my note and send eighteen of your sides to the Printer's (I took them out at random) to be calculated. Their estimate exactly accords with mine. I have therefore no doubt of its correctness. (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 356)

The letter is an interesting one. It expresses Dickens's enthusiasm for Gaskell's new novel, but it also reveals the differing perspectives of writer and editor. Gaskell submits her manuscript, in her not always tidy – if you know it – hand; Dickens immediately thinks in terms of the printed page, envisaging how the narrative will be divided up, in terms of both narrative impact and word-count, and what is likely to impress, and what to offend, his readers. All this is based, as he says on 'my long comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of the periodical form of appearance' (ibid). and so it was. Gaskell had little such experience but she was by now an increasingly experienced author in her own

right, and Dickens was to find that she was no longer to be dictated to as a novice.

Gaskell's practice once the novel was under way was to submit the required amount of manuscript several weeks in advance of her copy being due. The correspondence suggests that it was Dickens however who took the decision as to where instalments should begin and end, and sometimes apparently even where chapter divisions should come. In a later letter he writes, 'I do not understand whether you permit me to divide the story with chapters. But I believe you will be aware that it will at least be necessary to begin every weekly portion as a new chapter' (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 378). Of course much of this interaction is lost when we read our texts in modern editions – we assume that everything is the work of the author, but when we go back to their origins this is, in fact, rarely the case.

There is no surviving manuscript for *North and South*, but from the manuscript of *Wives and Daughters*, held in the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester, it is clear from that even in the last stages of her career Gaskell was prepared to leave such issues to her publisher. Dickens, for his part, was both efficient and demanding: he knew exactly how many words made up a page and how long an instalment needed to be, and he could get very impatient with contributors who seemed to disregard these essentials. Already, in August 1854, even before the first instalment had been published, he was expressing alarm to his sub-editor, Wills, about Gaskell's work:

I am alarmed by the quantity of *North and South*. It is not objectionable for an opening, but would become so in the progress of a not compactly written and artfully devised story. (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 399)

In the case of *Hard Times* Dickens had controlled his own impulse towards expansion and arrived at a format that was entirely suited to the requirements

of his journal. The result was, in his terms, the 'most compactly-written' of his full-length novels. He is concerned, perhaps, that Gaskell may not be aware that the magazine format might require something very different from a conventional novel; certainly 'quantity' is seen as problematic. And the following day he actually wrote to Gaskell rebuking her for failing to observe his requirements to cut material 'where Mr. Hale states his doubts to Margaret' (*Letters*, vol.7, p. 402). At some point William Gaskell became involved in the negotiations surrounding the publication of the novel, raising the possibility of its pre-publication in America, and this would have caused additional complications for Dickens.<sup>12</sup>

This initial episode reminds us that what Dickens wrote to Gaskell and the views that he expressed elsewhere were often not the same. Two months later he writes to Wills, 'I am sorry to hear of the Sale [sic, i.e. of *HM*] dropping, but I am not surprised. Mrs Gaskell's story, so divided, is wearisome in the last degree' (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 439). By this time Margaret had only just arrived in Milton-Northern (Chapters 8-9) – was Dickens already beginning to suspect he had commissioned more than he bargained for? To Gaskell herself he is invariably complimentary, but even that could have been making the best of a bad job, since there could be no going back. It seems clear enough that once it was under way *North and South* was creating problems for both parties: Gaskell was struggling with the relentless pressure of the writing process – she always found her larger projects difficult, but had never before had to write under the pressure of weekly publication. 'I've been as nearly dazed and crazed with this c – , d – be h – , to it story as can be. I'm sick of writing and everything connected with literature or improvement of the mind.' She wrote to her friend to Eliza Fox on Christmas Eve 1854, just as she was finishing the writing of the novel (*GL*, p. 325). Dickens for his part seems more and more to have wanted the novel off his hands. This inevitably led to the ultimate cause of contention with Dickens, the question of its ending.

Gaskell had retreated to Florence Nightingale's home in the country to

isolate herself from family distractions in order to finish the novel, but the conclusion she had in mind required far more space than Dickens was prepared to allow her. She seems to have asked Dickens for two extra numbers to accommodate her material, but he insisted on keeping to the original contracted number of twenty. She complained frequently to friends about the pressures this imposed upon her. Thus she wrote to her fellow novelist to Anna Jameson: 'Every page was grudged me ... Just at the very last I was compelled to desperate compression' (*GL*, pp. 328-9). The difficulties of reaching a conclusion appear in a desperate letter to Dickens in December of 1854 where she concedes to Dickens the right to cut what she has written since 'Shortened I see it must be' (*GL*, p. 323).

The immediate consequence of all these difficulties was that once the serialization was concluded Gaskell set about revising the ending as she had ideally intended it, adding the chapter describing Margaret's return to Helstone, and expanding the sequence of events surrounding her return to London. These constitute the main differences between the *Household Words* text and that of the first edition, published in two volumes in March 1855. It is worth bearing the timing in mind – the weekly instalments ran from September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1854 to January 27<sup>th</sup> 1855 and the revised first edition appeared on March 26<sup>th</sup> 1855. And, since there were serious flaws in the first edition text, Gaskell revised it once more for the publication of the second edition in June, three months later. Victorian publishers could move at an astonishing pace.

From these revisions we can see where the real difference between Dickens and his contributor lay. The material that Gaskell was required to foreshorten for the *Household Words* version of the novel all involves Margaret Hale, the heroine, coming to review her life, and fully to understand what she has made of it – only then can the marriage to Thornton take place. In other words Gaskell's focus is now totally fixed upon the career of her heroine, and in the revised version of the novel she writes with considerable force on the psychology of her situation. That being so, it would have been totally

appropriate for the novel to have been issued under Gaskell's familiar title of 'Margaret Hale.' But Dickens's priorities were indicated by *his* choice of title – *North and South*. What he had wanted was another industrial novel, a successor to both Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and his *Hard Times*, and this of course would have been entirely consistent with his *Household Words* agenda. (This is confirmed by his placing some lines from Tennyson on the subject of class division at the head of the novel in *Household Words*; Gaskell removed them for the volume publication.)<sup>13</sup> The industrial subject, for Dickens, was effectively concluded when Margaret leaves Milton-Northern; from his point of view it hardly needed another nine chapters to conclude the novel.

Once the novel was finished Dickens was his old emollient self:

My Dear Mrs Gaskell,

Let me congratulate you on the conclusion of your story; not because it is the end of a task to which you had conceived a dislike ... but because it is the vigorous and powerful accomplishment of an anxious labor...

You will not, I hope, allow that non-lucid interval of dissatisfaction with yourself (and me?) which beset you for a minute or two once upon a time, to linger in the shape of any disagreeable association with *Household Words*. I shall still look forward to the large sides of paper, and shall soon feel disappointed if they don't begin to reappear. (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 513-4)

The 'large sides of paper' did in fact re-appear. Despite the difficulties over *North and South* Mrs Gaskell continued to contribute to *Household Words* and then, when the title changed in 1859, to its successor, *All the Year Round*. These contributions included some of her most interesting work – the supernatural stories, 'The Poor Clare' in *Household Words* in 1856, and 'Lois the Witch', 'The Grey Woman' and *A Dark Night's Work* in *All the Year Round*. Each of these

works represents a new interest for Gaskell, notably with the emphasis on the psychology of the supernatural, and of crime; one of the advantages of regular periodical publication was that it allowed authors to experiment with matters of form and genre. But at the same point in time Gaskell was writing her biography of Charlotte Brontë, commissioned by Brontë's own publisher, George Smith of Smith, Elder and Co. She had not published with Smith before, but she was to go on to publish her last great novels – *Sylvia's Lovers*, *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* with the same firm, and the shift represents a very significant change in her circumstances as a writer. Meanwhile the change of title for his journal which Dickens believed to be necessary at the end of the fifties decade marks an important turning point for him, and in a number of ways. At the end of the 1850s, therefore, both Dickens and Gaskell were exploring new possibilities.

It is usually assumed that the change of title from *Household Words* to *All the Year Round* made little difference to the content of the journal. In fact this is not the case. As I have said, the staple fare of *Household Words* was not the fiction it carried, but its extensive range of articles. As editor Dickens believed in contributions of restricted length that would not tax the attention of his reader. But *All the Year Round*, published perhaps in less socially exacting times, deliberately emphasized the priority of full length fiction. In the issue of 26 November 1859 the following advertisement appeared immediately following the final sentence of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

We purpose always reserving the first place in these pages for a continuous original work of fiction, occupying about the same amount of time in its publication, as that which is just completed. The second story in our series we now beg to introduce to the attention of our readers.<sup>14</sup>

Immediately following this came the opening sentence of Wilkie Collins's new

novel, *The Woman in White*. These two novels were both 'sensation' novels, as indeed was Dickens's *Great Expectations*, soon to follow them – this was a recent development in the genre of fiction itself. Gaskell had always been interested in criminality, and the novel which she published in *All the Year Round*, *A Dark Night's Work*, was of this kind. The fiction that she wrote for Smith, however, was of the kind that one might call 'regional' – it set her alongside George Eliot, and Trollope, two more of Smith's authors. Gaskell herself said that she wished *Framley Parsonage* would never end, thus identifying herself with the new school of sixties rural realism. It also, in a way that was also typical of this school of fiction, took as its primary subject the lives of what Henry James, citing George Eliot, was to call 'those frail vessels – the 'Hettys and Maggies and Rosamunds and Gwendolens'<sup>15</sup> – the heroines of English realist fiction. Margaret Hale in *North and South*, was just such a heroine, and she was followed by Sylvia Robson, Phillis Holman and Maggie Gibson, not to mention the real-life example of Charlotte Brontë. In *North and South* Gaskell had found her true subject – women's experience – and this I think is not the least of the factors that took her in a different direction from Dickens.

The initiation of *All the Year Round* coincided with a turning-point for Dickens in his domestic arrangements as well as in his literary career. It was in 1859 – the year of the title-change – that he publicly announced his separation from his wife. Gaskell refers to these developments specifically in a letter to her American friend, Charles Eliot Norton. There she acknowledges Dickens's generosity to her as a contributor, but then goes on to say that she wishes to sever her connection with *Household Words*:

I am afraid he [W. H. Wills] is making some arrangement whereby they can take my story; as Mr Dickens happens to be extremely unpopular just now, – (owing to the well-grounded feeling of dislike to the publicity he has given to his domestic affairs,) & I think they would be glad to announce my name on the list of

contributors. And I would *much* rather they did *not*. (GL, p. 535)

Gaskell sees herself now as a marketable property in her own right, someone whose name carries authority, and who prefers to negotiate on equal terms with anyone who seeks to publish her work. Indeed she goes on to ask Norton whether her current story might be published in America: 'I should like the Atlantic to have it'.<sup>16</sup> Equally she expresses personal misgivings about Dickens, which I think she must always have held privately. We know, for example, that she accused him of stealing a story she had once told at a gathering and presenting it as his own, and in fact there was always an element about Dickens that made people suspicious of him. Gaskell once referred to his publishing activities as 'Dickensy' a term which was not intended to be complimentary and in a letter of 1862 she deliberately distances herself from the *All the Year Round* (GL, pp. 675-6).<sup>17</sup> At the end of the same year she was approached by another editor (unnamed) for a contribution to his new journal and in her reply she refers back to her experience with *Household Words*:

I beg to decline your proposal of writing for a new weekly periodical. I am not in the habit of writing for periodicals, except occasionally (as a personal mark of respect & regard for Mr. Dickens) in *Household Words*. ... But half a dozen papers in H.W. are all I ever wrote for any periodical as I dislike & disapprove of such writing for myself as a general thing. (GL, p. 699)

In that by the time this letter was written Gaskell had written not six but some thirty occasional pieces for Dickens alone this statement is less than truthful. What she is doing here – as in the equivalent case of *All the Year Round* – is trying to distance herself, rather like Miss Deborah Jenkyns in *Cranford*, from the socially demeaning practice of publishing in numbers. By now she is the author not of occasional pieces in a cheap weekly journal, but of full scale novels

– and a biography – for George Smith, that ‘Prince of Publishers’, who now dominated the London publishing scene.

The factor of social status is important in more than a personal sense. Dickens’s publishing ventures were always populist; his obsession with the size of his readership was not simply a concern for financial success, although that was certainly a factor, but for reaching the widest popular readership. It comes out of his long-held belief that literature and the arts should not be the exclusive preserve of the affluent middle-classes. Part publication, with its spread of the cost of a novel over a long period, and its cheapness of production had always been a means to this end. In *Our Mutual Friend*, completed in 1870, the year of Dickens’s death, he added a ‘Postscript’, justifying his lifelong practice of publishing in parts: ‘that I hold the advantages of the mode of publication to outweigh its disadvantages may be easily believed of one who revived it in the *Pickwick Papers* after long disuse, and has pursued it ever since.’ Dickens is looking back over thirty years of publishing in this format but in fact he is trying to hold back the tide. Increasingly volume publication was becoming the socially accepted form for the novel – a sign indeed of its acceptance as a literary form in its own right – and while all of George Smith’s stable of novelists published novels in parts at some point in time – Gaskell for example published both *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* in monthly instalments in Smith’s *Cornhill Magazine*, as did George Eliot *Romola*, and Trollope *Framley Parsonage* – there was a very real difference between the cultural milieu in which these authors operated and the assumed readership of Dickens’s projects. It was George Eliot who accused Dickens of ‘lacking artistic truthfulness’,<sup>18</sup> implicitly in his search for popularity, and I think it is arguable that it is at precisely this point in time that the division between popular fiction and the ‘serious’ novel becomes an issue in the history of the form.

‘Dickens reads aloud, instead of writing, and is said to earn more money in this way’, Gaskell wrote to the Paris publisher, Louis Hachette in 1858 (*FL*, p. 188), although she does concede at about the same time that she has been

reading *Little Dorrit* over her neighbour's shoulder in an omnibus, and was impatient because he turned the pages so slowly (*GL*, p. 373). Dickens continued to solicit material from her, although with varying success, and his few comments on her work for him at this time suggest editorial impatience rather than gratitude: to Wills he writes, suggesting cutting one of her stories, 'Is such a thing to be done with that lady? If so, do it' (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 710). For her part Gaskell was distant; when Dickens came to Manchester in 1852 he was received and entertained at the Gaskell household, but there is no evidence of her having attended any of his later readings and performances in the city. It is clear from her letters that Gaskell continued to read Dickens's novels, but one wonders whether he was so faithful to hers. This was, in fact, a partnership and a friendship that had served its purpose; by the late 1850s these two great Victorian novelists were going their separate ways. But so too perhaps was the novel form itself.

#### Notes

1. 'The Canonization', *The Oxford Authors: John Donne*, ed. John Carey, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York (1990), p.95. Dickens's reference to the need for titles comes in a letter to Gaskell dated 2 July 1854, *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (The Pilgrim Edition), general editors. Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, et al, 12 vols. (1965-2004), vol 7, p.363. Further references to Dickens's letters are given in the text. They are to the Pilgrim Edition, identified as *Letters*, and giving volume and page number. References to letters by Elizabeth Gaskell, also given in the text, are to *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, Manchester: Manchester University (1966), and to *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. John Chapple and Alan Shelston, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2000), identified as *GL* and *FL* respectively.
2. Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists*, London (1934), pp. 197-8.
3. Dickens addressed Gaskell thus in a letter dated 15 November 1851. *Letters*, vol. 6, p. 545.

4. John Forster, in *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1870), makes an explicit link between the conclusion of the sequence of Christmas stories and the initiation of *Household Words* (vol. ii, bk. 6, Ch.4, 'Christmas Books closed and Household Words begun').
5. 'Libbie Marsh's Three Eras', *The Works of Mrs Gaskell* (The Knutsford Edition), with Introduction by A.W. Ward, 8 vols. (1906), vol. 1, p.477. Exactly this might have been said of the Gaskells' long-serving servant Ann Hearn, who came to them from the west of England and was fifty years in the service of the family.
6. *Household Words*, vol. 1, p. 1, 30 March 1850.
7. *ibid.*
8. The Portico Library was Manchester's leading subscription library in the Victorian period; William Gaskell was its chairman for over thirty years. Lending books, recording the borrowing of books by members in the 1850s remain in existence. See Barbara Brill and Alan Shelston, 'Manchester: "A behindhand place for books"', *Gaskell Society Journal*, 5, 1991, pp.16-26.
9. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (1848), ed Edgar Wright, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York ('World's Classics' edn, 1987), p.xxxv; *Household Words*, vol. 1, no.1, p. 1.
10. Forster, *loc. cit.*
11. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson provide examples in *Dickens at Work*, London; Methuen (1957), *passim*.
12. See Dickens's letter to W.H. Wills of 29 September 1854: 'Mr. Gaskell's letter raises a rather difficult question. I think I would reply to him that Mrs. Gaskell is free to act in the matter – so far as we are concerned – as she thinks best; always supposing that her precautions as to time, render it *impossible* that whatever she sends out there in advance can get back here, before its ordinary publication here. But I would add that we (I, if you like) think it very doubtful whether she would ever derive any pecuniary benefit from such an arrangement which would counterbalance the risk of a transaction with such people' (*Letters*, vol. 7, pp. 427-8).
13. The lines are from Tennyson's poem 'Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue', concluding: 'But for some true result of good/All parties work together.'

14. *All the Year Round*, 26 November 1859, vol. 2, p. 95.
15. See Henry James, 'Preface' to *The Portrait of a Lady* reprinted in R. P. Blackmur, ed., *The Art of the Novel*, Charles Scribner's Sons: London (1935), p. 49.
16. *The Atlantic Magazine* was a Boston journal with which Charles Eliot Norton had connections; the story Gaskell refers to was probably 'Lizzie Leigh', a story with a specifically American theme.
17. Gaskell's comments concern a proposed study of French life. She writes, 'I think my MSS. Promises to be interesting, and I am unwilling to send it to 'All the Year Round' to be broken up into bits....'
18. George Eliot, '*The Natural History of German Life*' (1856), reprinted in *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt, Penguin: Harmondsworth (1990), p. 111.

