

North and South which was Elizabeth Gaskell's second social novel was initially published in episodes in Charles Dickens' weekly magazine called *Household Words*. It appears that Dickens himself imposed the title that clearly hinted at the differences between Southern England's and Northern England's lifestyles, with the affluent landed gentry, and agricultural workers on the one hand, and capitalist manufacturers, and poverty-stricken workers on the other. Interestingly enough Gaskell herself wanted to call her novel, *Margaret Hale* – thus wishing to repeat her choice of an eponymous title for her first novel, *Mary Barton, A Tale of Manchester Life* written in 1848.

Such attachment to her heroine can be felt through this passage that describes Margaret wandering in the house and around the garden, just as her family are getting ready in their various ways to leave the house and move out – it turns out that they are having to move north because the father has left the Church of England and has thus become a dissenter. Because of those circumstances the reader is confronted throughout the text with movement in time – various characters taking advantage of the preparations to look back towards the past, Margaret looking at a future that could have been hers – and space, and yet the impression that the reader is left with at the end of the text, is one of peacefulness and permanence. It will therefore be interesting to study how the author using different types of focalisation manages to provide harmony through such traumatic changes. I will first show that this impression is formed thanks to the way the narrator describes the strong inflexible character of Margaret that stands out in this time of changes. Then I will examine how pathetic fallacy is used to reflect the evolution of the main character's mood and her attachment to nature. Finally it is worth studying how the rural setting conjures up permanence and peacefulness, and seems to affect a certain type of relations between people, as opposed to the bustling life in the city.

If the UK underwent huge changes all through the 19th century, in the form of mass industrialization and sweeping electoral reform, it seems that, on a minor scale, the family of Gaskell's heroine is experiencing major changes too, as the reader is meant to understand that they are leaving their rural setting for a new destination, moving from South to North, as the title of the novel suggests. If the move means something traumatic for some characters, it seems to be an opportunity for the narrator to show how strong a character Margaret Hale can be, how remarkable she is, and how she stands out in relation with the others. She actually literally stands in the passage twice, each time characterised with a couple of adjectives aiming to show she does not behave like everyone else. Unlike her mother who feels nostalgic and tearful while packing with her maid, and who is mentally so fragile that her “dressing room was left untouched to the last” (l.6), Margaret is “calm and collected” (l.9). Her outward appearance is such that the two servants (whose point of view the narrator subtly shifts to) think she is already estranged from the house, having spent so long in London – presumably to become an accomplished young lady. And yet when the narrator focuses back on her, it is to describe her as “very pale and quiet” (l.13), which suggests that beneath a veneer of coolness and indifference she might not be as unmoved as she appears for the servants. The very fact that she should refer to them as “household friends” (l.20) through some introspection by the narrator, shows how much she cares for them. What is certain is that she does not express her attachment for the house in the same way as the others: not only does she not display her affection explicitly, but when the reader is made aware of her despair with “her heart ...aching all the time” (l.15), then it is nevertheless difficult to pinpoint what she particularly regrets about her time there as her heartbreak seems of an unclear nature.

If she looks unaffected by the move it is mainly because of the role she has been cast in, i.e. the person in charge of the move, “ready to counsel or advise” (l.10), a role which would normally be assumed by the (male) head of the family. She clearly has this assumption in mind when, through free indirect speech, she wonders who else but her could do it, and mention is immediately made afterwards of what her father is busy doing, “examining papers (...) in the vestry” (l.18), which points to him being a clergyman. Supervising the move means that she is on her own, which adds to the impression that she stands out, being almost the odd one out, contrarily to the other characters who go in pairs, whether it be the mother and her maid, the two servants, the father and his clerk, or even the four removal men. This new status which she has acquired probably accounts for the maturity she seems to have gained, as in the exclamation she lets out, once in the garden: “All so changed!” (l.34). Even if of course the phrase at that point applies to her surroundings and her relation with Henry Lennox, I cannot help feeling it is so vague lexically and syntactically that it could also apply to herself.

Despite these mixed impressions of Margaret as a central character, wavering between her duty as the impromptu head of the family and her sadness, the narrator manages to provide some harmony in his portrayal of the heroine through the point of view he adopts. Indeed it feels all through the indoor scene as if he glides from one point of view to another, first casting an external look at the house, the mother and the maid, then reporting on the servants' conversation, before focusing on Margaret, and delving into her inner thoughts. In the midst of this panoramic view of the household there is a matter-of-fact statement, "They did not make much progress with their work" (l.9), which may question the focalization: is it the narrator judging the mother and the maid, which looks somewhat strange, or could it be Margaret, who as the person in charge is complaining about the lack of progress? I would be tempted to think it is her, particularly if I take into account how she views her father later on when she describes what he is busy doing, "examining papers, books, registers, what not.." (l.18). There is a certain familiarity in the adverbial phrase that suggests a tinge of irritation from the daughter towards her non-practically-minded father. This would lead me to think that in actual fact the whole scene is seen from Margaret's point of view, and when I referred to the narrator gliding from one character to the other, the same impression is gained about Margaret eventually smoothly making her way from one part of the house to the other, "from the place in the hall (...) out through the bare echoing drawing-room, into the twilight of an early November evening" (l.23-24). This could account for the terribly laconic statement made about the day at the very beginning: Margaret is so overcome with emotion that the day of the move looks like the end of the world.

A similar sense of harmony is to be found in the recurring feature of what I could call the double, sometimes redundant characterization: very often things, actions or people's feelings are described through the use of pairs of adjectives or verbs or adverbs, sometimes meaning the same thing. This is the case for the light said to come "harshly and strongly" (l.4-5), or Margaret depicted as "calm and collected, ready to counsel or advise" (l.9-10).

As already mentioned Margaret's sadness is expressed in vague terms, and it is only when she goes out into the garden that her attachment for the place is made clearer, through the links she has forged with her surroundings. What is interesting to notice first, is the "filmy veil of soft dull mist" (l.24) (another emphatic way of describing things with the juxtaposition of "filmy" and "veil") that is covering everything outside. This makes the atmosphere special and mysterious since the veil is said to be "obscuring ... objects" (l.24), and the reader might then wonder, through the use of the noun "objects", if Margaret is actually outside or still inside the house. Once she is outside it is then possible for her to relate her nostalgia to definite items, starting with the robin that reminds her of an exchange with her father. This memory is actually an opportunity to see another dimension to the father: he initially looked like somebody engrossed in his work as a clergyman, thereby forgetting his role as the head of the family. Here there is a more tender version of the same man, whose extreme fondness for animals is visible – which might also mean that he is a man finding it difficult to interact with people, one may wonder.

The walk that she takes outside is literally and figuratively a walk down memory lane since it is set "along the walk under the pear-tree wall" (l.30), with the definite determiner hinting at a familiar action. As she follows the path the reader gradually understands it is where a major event happened in her life a fortnight before with Lennox proposing to her and her refusing him, and yet the whole occasion seems to be lived through again in an atmosphere of serenity. First of all the various stages of the proposal are unusually associated with natural elements, which confirms the deep attachment to nature I have already mentioned. His proposal (which she forbids herself to think of, and which the reader has to guess through the use of the modal verb "must not" lines 31-32) happened when they were close to a bed of thyme which she is now walking past; she hesitated and presumably failed to respond positively to it when looking at "that late-blooming rose" (l.32), the deictic determiner perhaps suggesting that the rose is no more; and his response to her hesitation corresponds to this singular yet so suggestive description of her catching the beauty of "the feathery leaves of the carrots" (l.33), which is bound to puzzle any reader who probably never thought that not only were carrot leaves beautiful, but that they could form the background to a romance. Does this go to show how dreamy she was in such a serious situation as a proposal, or that she only remembers the circumstances in which the proposal was made because she wants to wipe out the event from her memory? The second option may be confirmed by the use of the strong radical modal verb which I have already pointed out. In either case, the event seems to have left its impact on her, almost helping her to gain maturity, I feel, if one considers the exclamation she lets out, "All so changed!" (l.34). The impression that emerges from her is once more mixed: on the one hand, she feels at peace in nature, remembering without any regret the proposal which she declined, but on the other, thinking about his routine in London means that nature takes on a gloomier aspect straight away. The "leaves [that] were more gorgeous than ever" (l.27-28) a few

meters before seem to have disappeared from sight, and the garden becomes “damp and drear” (l.36) as she walks “sadly” (l.36) through it. There must be more to it than just night gradually falling – “dusk” is mentioned after “twilight” and there is hardly any difference between the two – and Margaret’s mood must therefore be reflected in this change of light and atmosphere.

Margaret imagining what Lennox must be doing while she is taking a walk down memory lane helps to support the traditional view that rural and urban lifestyles are not only opposed but also affect the way people relate with one another. Whereas Margaret is quietly strolling through her garden Lennox only manages to take some exercise in between two activities: his walks are said to be “hasty” and they are “snatched in the intervals between study and dinner” (l.42). Even if no access is given to Margaret’s inner thoughts at that point of the text, the contrast between her taking in the beauty, even though fading, of the garden, and Lennox taking in “glimpses of the lights of the city” (l.41) is enough to suggest her favouring the permanence and cyclical nature of one as opposed to the changeability of the other. This may be why the idea of the walks taken by Lennox only “struck upon her fancy” (l.43-44), thus causing no more than a fleeting thought. The city is made to appear like a huge monster through the image of the “grand inarticulate mighty roar of tens of thousands of busy men” lines 39-40 (once more some adjectival emphasis with “grand” and “mighty” used in the same phrase), and in a curious almost supernatural effect the lights of the city are said to be “coming up out of the depths of the river” (l.41) rather than be reflected in the river. These busy men obviously contrast with the serene image of the labourer that Margaret, still the focaliser, imagines coming back home after a day’s work. Once more despite the lack of direct references to her thoughts (with the exception of the laconic statement, “Here there was no sound” that echoes similar previous equally brief statements) the frantic life that goes on in London seems to pale in comparison with the “vast stillness in the night” (l.44), to the extent that the “stealthy, creeping, cranching sound” (l.46) may not be viewed as something threatening, particularly as it is said to be “close at hand” (l.47), as if its proximity made it more friendly and familiar than alarming.

Finally another aspect of the difference between town and countryside lies in the relation between people. I have already said a word about the servants being referred to as “household friends” by Margaret. Similarly when Dixon, Mrs. Hale’s maid is seen interacting with her mistress over the memories linked to the children’s clothes, the remembrance process is said to be mutual: they were “interrupting each other every now and then”, which turns Dixon into a member of the family able to conjure up the same memories as the mother. Conversely no such intimacy is conveyed in the relations Lennox seems to maintain with people. There is even a sense of constraint suggested by him “going through the old round” (l.34-35), as if human relations had to be developed according to a fixed pattern, with him either “dining with the old Harley Street set” (l.35), presumably older colleagues, or “with gayer young friends of his own” (l.35-36) – therefore suggesting that his older colleagues were not friends as such, whereas the family’s servants are to Margaret.

This scene which shows the end of a period for a family through a traumatic move is among other things a way for the author to show the fondness she has for strong heroines. In the middle of such a harrowing experience, having to witness the dramatic impact of the move on the house and its residents, Margaret looks for a while like a captain stoically standing on the deck of a sinking ship until she finds refuge in nature. Even if the garden turns out to be the place where she experienced a similarly distressing event she is strong enough to overcome it and find peace there. Such a heroine is about to face a major upheaval in her life, and undergo experiences more exhilarating than the ones that she would have lived through in London – had she accepted Lennox’s proposal – but also unsettling, with northern England’s political and social agitation, its social ills and ruined nature in the background.