NORTH AND SOUTH

ELIZABETH GASKELL



EDITED BY ALAN SHELSTON

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Elizabeth Gaskell NORTH AND SOUTH



AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT CONTEXTS CRITICISM

Edited by

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Preface

North and South, published as a serial in Dickens's Household Words between 2 September 1854 and 27 January 1855, and then in volume form, was Elizabeth Gaskell's third full-length novel. Gaskell came late to professional authorship: her first novel, Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life, was published in 1848 when she was thirtyeight years of age. However she soon made up for lost time. The success of Mary Barton led Dickens to invite her to contribute to his new journal, Household Words: her story Lizzie Leigh (reprinted in this Norton Critical Edition) was the opening item in the very first number. It was followed by a variety of essays and stories from Gaskell, not least the chain of stories that make up Cranford (1853), the work with which she has very often been associated. The commission for North and South therefore was to an author who was rapidly establishing herself on the literary scene of the 1850s and who, as disputes with Dickens would show, was becoming increasingly aware of her own literary priorities and standards.

Gaskell's first writings had a strongly philanthropic agenda, Mary Barton, as she herself claimed, was written to "give some utterance to the agony which from time to time convulses this dumb people" i.e., the industrial workforce—an agony intensified by their sense of their own helplessness.2 In Ruth (1853) she addressed the inflammatory subject of the heroine's sexual fall. Lizzie Leigh combines the urban setting of the Manchester streets with its own story of female experience (not only that of the woman betrayed, but that of the mother who searches for her and the woman who takes in her child), and it skillfully places these women's histories in the context of the shift from a rural to an urban society, thus anticipating North and South. It was Dickens who recommended the title of North and South for Gaskell's second "industrial" novel, with its wider frame of social reference; for Gaskell her novel was "Margaret," or "Margaret Hale," the story of its heroine. Mary Barton too was a title that had been wished upon Gaskell, not inappropriately since this first novel also had a heroine who comes to discover her own moral strength.

2. "Preface" to Mary Barton (1848).

^{1.} See the correspondence between Gaskell and Dickens reprinted in this Norton Critical

All of these stories and novels thus have a dual focus: a consciousness of social change, and of the challenges that it provokes, and an awareness of the implications of such change in particular for the lives of women, especially women negotiating their own significant change from girlhood (one uses the Victorian term deliberately) to adulthood-whether working-class women like Mary, Lizzie, and Ruth, or a solidly middle-class figure like Margaret Hale. The central character of North and South is Gaskell's first full-scale study of a heroine from her own social background. It is to the point that Gaskell had four daughters of her own, aged between twelve and twenty at about the time that North and South was completed, and her letters to them, in particular to the eldest, Marianne, show how careful she was in the matter of their upbringing. If Gaskell's heroines often seem more complex, especially psychologically, than those of many of her fellow novelists that is because in this particular area she is likely to have known what she was talking about.

It is useful to set Elizabeth Gaskell's work in the context of that of her fellow novelists at mid century. The year of the publication of Mary Barton, 1848, saw the first installments of David Copperfield, while one year previously Charlotte Brontë had published Jane Eyre. "I have tried to write truthfully," Gaskell wrote in her "Preface" to Mary Barton, and each of her contemporaries might have said the same. "Writing truthfully" was the key objective of the realist novel at mid-century, as was an assumed relationship with the reader that could eliminate the barriers between literature and life. "Millions have suffered a fate far worse than mine," Jane suddenly exclaims in chapter 12 of Jane Eyre, in a direct appeal to the reader—or is it Charlotte Brontë herself who is speaking at this point? Certainly the rhetoric assumes the reader's complicity in the fiction, and makes it more than fictional in its agenda. In the same way, in Mary Barton, Gaskell appeals directly to the sensibilities of her readership when revealing the injustices suffered by the Manchester poor. And when Aunt Betsey sets the moral standard for David Copperfield— "'Never,' said my aunt, 'be mean in anything; never be false; never be cruel' " (chap. 15)—she is setting a standard not just for an individual but for a generation.

In his "Preliminary Word" to the first number of *Household Words*, Dickens expressed his aspiration to "live in the Household affections, and to be numbered amongst the Household thoughts, of our readers." The awareness of the readership could not be more clearly stated, and in particular of a readership conceived in family terms. *David Copperfield*, whose completion overlapped the opening of *Household Words*, fulfills his aspiration to a degree that even he might not have imagined. There is, moreover, a further dimension. If Dickens's venture had a moral agenda, the morality was not to be

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prescriptive. The "Preliminary Word" explicitly rejects the negative aspects of "reality": "No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words." Instead "we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy. . . . To show to all, that in all familiar things . . . there is Romance enough, if we will find it out . . . [We shall] teach the hardest workers at this whirling wheel of toil, that their lot is not necessarily a moody, brutal fact." Finally, the editorial policy will be "to bring the greater and the lesser in degree, together . . . and mutually dispose them to a better acquaintance and a kinder understanding. [This] is one main object of our Household Words."

With Dickens's words before us we can see why the Gaskell of Mary Barton had seemed such an ideal choice as his first contributor. She too had written with the declared intention of bringing together those whom the new social developments had divided, and of assuring them of their community of interest, and she also had referred to the "romance" which might be found "in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided" ("Preface" to Mary Barton). Dickens's "there is Romance, enough if we will find it out" is almost a direct echo of Gaskell's credo, and it shows how realism—meaning here the concentration on "real" lives in recognizable situations—was to be a criterion not just for its own sake, but as part of a larger social and moral agenda, asserting the value of lives that conventional "romantic" fiction had neglected. The belief in family—or what Dickens called "Household affections"—is asserted on every page of Mary Barton, as it is throughout Dickens's writings of the period, and to an extent that the present-day reader will often find sentimental. Suffice it to say that both authors give evidence enough that there is another side to the picture.

It is worth investigating in some detail the situation in which Gaskell found herself when Dickens so eagerly accepted *North and South* for *Household Words* if only because Gaskell's second "industrial" novel in important ways fails to conform to the journal's proclaimed agenda. As the correspondence between them shows, Dickens became increasingly dissatisfied with Gaskell's narrative, while she in her turn was frustrated by his attempt to impose his will on her writing. Mostly the disputes are about matters of planning and length, but the correspondence between them invariably has a subtext with larger implications. Dickens was concerned about the length of Gaskell's exposition of Mr. Hale's doubts, for example—this was hardly the kind of subject matter that he had promised his readers. Gaskell for her part felt that he had not allowed her the

^{3.} Household Words, vol. 1, no. 1, 30 March 1850, p. 1.

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space she needed to complete her narrative, so essential for the coherence of her heroine's story. It is to the point that the staple fare of Household Words was shorter fiction and discursive articles: Dickens's first approach to Gaskell suggested "a short tale, or any number of tales." In fact Hard Times and North and South were the only preplanned novels of any distinction to be published in Household Words in the nine years of its existence.4 But the real development in Gaskell's art revealed by North and South is to be found in the clear-mindedness of its realism—in the absence in fact of just that element of "romance" that Dickens had identified as his priority. That element is clear enough in the scenes of working-class family life in Mary Barton: the comparable scenes in North and South are much more astringent in their presentation of life in a working-class environment. Furthermore both the geographical and the psychological realities of North and South are more complex than anything Gaskell had attempted before, and perhaps than the Household Words readership might have been accustomed to. In a letter to John Forster, Gaskell wrote "I seldom see the Household Words"5—and this as early as 1853, when she was writing regularly for the journal. The decision to publish North and South in Household Words may well have been misjudged therefore, and by both parties. In spite of her protest when she had finished North and South that she would never write for Household Words again. Gaskell was to continue to write for the magazine until 1859, when the title was withdrawn. Nevertheless there is certainly a very real sense in which North and South marks a considerable step forward in her career as a novelist and it is a step which perhaps took her beyond Dickens's agenda.

Dickens's choice of title—"North and South"—has a fine rhetorical ring. It is taken from a comment by the working man, Nicholas Higgins, to Margaret Hale, early in the novel when she tells him of her home at Helstone: "'That's beyond London, I reckon? And I come fro' Burnley-ways, and forty mile to th' North. And yet, yo see, North and South has both met and made kind o' friends in this big smoky place' " (p. 67). The Victorians liked the signification of these opposed polarities: Thomas Carlyle's Past and Present provided a precedent if one were needed; Cardinal Newman called his polemical religious novel of 1848 Loss and Gain. Furthermore it signified where Dickens's priorities lay; that is, in the novel's engagement with the pressing issues raised by the new industrialism. Dickens himself of course, had addressed the same topic in Hard Times, which immediately preceded North and South in his magazine. But, as can be seen from the Chronology (pp. 581-82), Gaskell had an unusually varied formative experience of her native country and, as W. A. Craik

^{4.} The Dead Servant, by Wilkie Collins, also appeared January-June 1857.

^{5.} Further Letters, p. 87.

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shows in the extract from her book reprinted in this Norton Critical Edition (pp. 524-31), North and South has a much wider and thus more suggestive frame of geographical reference than its title implies. While it juxtaposes the new northern industrialism with the traditional rural environment of the South, it opens and effectively closes in a London populated by lawyers, members of parliament. and other professionals. "South" is not only representative of the rural way of life, therefore, it is where England has always been governed from, and by a government from which until 1832 cities like Manchester had largely been excluded. North and South thus engages with central issues of authority. Hale is an establishment clergyman and his wife a daughter of the English landed gentry: they are members of a class accustomed to govern, and when Hale leaves the church in which he is a beneficed clergyman and goes to live amongst dissenters the gesture is a political as well as a theological one. His son, for his part, has challenged the authority of his superior officer in the Navy. Hale is an Oxford-educated classical scholar. and in its references to Oxford North and South anticipates Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy (1869), which similarly invokes not only the classics but the spirit of Oxford in a search for cultural authority at a time of political instability. (Gaskell was a friend of the Arnold family and she developed friendships with a number of Oxford acquaintances.) Furthermore, beyond England lies the naval base of Corfu-it is a fascinating accident of circumstance that having initiated her novel with a reference to the pleasures of this military posting Gaskell finished writing it in the home of Florence Nightingale just as the military at Corfu were being drawn into the Crimean War. Beyond England too lie the oceans on which Frederick Hale has pursued his naval career in the defense of British trading and imperialist interests. North and South was certainly recognized by contemporary commentators primarily as a contribution to the debates over industrialism, and this has remained the priority for some later critics. But clearly it is not just about the simple geographical opposition identified by its title. Rather is it, to adopt Carlyle's term, a total "condition of England" novel—a novel, that is, about the whole political culture of England at the midpoint of the nineteenth century.

But for Gaskell the novel was "Margaret," and it is clear from her own references to the novel in her correspondence that the story of its heroine was her central focus. The opening chapters are entirely focused on Margaret Hale, and in particular on her sense of frustration—a frustration that she herself cannot fully define—in polite middle-class London society. And when she returns to London at the end of the novel, in the chapters that Gaskell expanded for the volume publication, it is again with this sense of frustration, now

intensified by the fact that after the excitements of life in Milton-Northern she has a life of apparently inescapable emptiness in front of her. Charlotte Brontë, of course, made this the subject of her fiction—perhaps the only subject of her fiction—"Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine." Margaret Hale is closer perhaps to Caroline Helstone, in Shirley (1850), than to Jane Eyre among Charlotte Brontë's heroines, not least in that she seeks fulfillment in making some contribution to the wider world, but for the daughters of the middle class that fulfillment was not easily to be found. It is an interesting point that in the new industrial society working-class women were able to take paid employment, albeit of a physically demanding and often degrading kind, whereas the outlets for their middle-class equivalents were more limited.6 Gaskell knew of highly capable young women among her daughters' friends and acquaintances who did in fact forge independent lives of their own, and she had the example of Florence Nightingale-about whom in fact she had some misgivings—immediately before her.7 But Margaret's problem at the outset of the novel is clear enough: it is the simple one expressed by Caroline Helstone: " 'How am I to get through this day?" (Shirley, chap. 7).

The problem is ultimately solved, in terms of the narrative, by the needs of John Thornton, and by the fortunate inheritance which enables Margaret to supply them. But, to use George Eliot's terms, to reduce North and South to the diagram is to do serious injustice to the picture with which we are presented. Margaret's difficulties are defined in a way that rejects the schematic. Gaskell is especially astute on the mental processes of her heroine: for example we have not only her frustration in the London setting but, when she is alone in the garden at Helstone, her psychological vulnerability on the point of departure from the home she loves (vol. I, chap. 6). As critics have pointed out, her relationships with her potential suitors, both

^{6.} See the extracts by Aina Rubenius (pp. 516-20).

^{7.} For example, the Winkworth sisters, pupils of William Gaskell and friends of the Gaskell daughters. Catherine Winkworth in particular, who remained unmarried, became a considerable student of German and a theological scholar; she was later prominent in the field of girls' education. Of Florence Nightingale Gaskell wrote:

[&]quot;She & I had a grand quarrel one day. She is, I think, too much for institutions, sisterhoods, & associations, & she said if she had influence enough not a mother should bring up a child herself; there should be créches [sic] for the rich as well as the poor. If she had 20 children she would send them all out to a créche seeing of course that it was a well-managed créche. That exactly tells of what seems to me the want,—but then this want of love for individuals becomes a gift, & a very rare one, if one takes it in conjunction with her love for the race: her utter unselfishness in serving & ministering." (Further Letters, p. 116).

The passage is worth quoting at length, since it is typical of Gaskell's way of coming to a worked-out moral judgment.

^{8.} George Eliot uses these terms at the opening of Scenes of Clerical Life (1858): "new-varnished efficiency . . . will yield endless diagrams, plans, elevations but alas! no picture" (The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton, 1858, chap. 1).

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Henry Lennox and more potently, John Thornton, are conducted with a real sense of what is involved sexually as well as socially and psychologically. If Gaskell is allusive rather than direct in this area her allusions can be more readily decoded than those of many of her contemporaries, some of whom in fact were disturbed by them.9 In all of this Margaret increasingly has to find her own way: morality is not something given, in this novel, but something which has to be discovered, as in her attempts to protect her brother from the law. It is one of Gaskell's great qualities as a novelist that she is aware of the complexities of moral issues and aware too that they cannot be easily, or sometimes indeed entirely, resolved. An early chapter is titled "Doubts and Difficulties" (vol. I, chap. 4), and these are things that Gaskell handles well. Writing to her friend Tottie Fox about conflicting priorities in her own life, she says: "I try to drown myself ... by saying it's W[illia]m who is to decide on all these things ... only that does not quite do." For the novelist until recently invariably known as Mrs. Gaskell, even her husband's authority cannot resolve the problem. In her fiction she was prepared to concede the difficulties of resolution, even as the fictional form demands it. In Milton-Northern Margaret has to find her own way through these difficulties. She is brought up against not only love, but the sickness and death of those whom she most loves and most depends upon. Volume II, chapter 17, which follows on the death of Margaret's father, is headed "Alone! Alone!" The quotation is from Coleridge but it was Gaskell's fellow Victorian, Matthew Arnold, who wrote that "We mortal millions live alone."2 In a paragraph which Gaskell inserted toward the conclusion in the second edition of the novel, she wrote of her heroine: "On some such night as this she remembered promising to herself to live as brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read or heard of in romance . . . it had seemed to her then that she had only to will, and such a life would be accomplished."3 But as things turn out for Margaret Hale it is not as easy as that. If, more than any other Victorian novelist except perhaps and only perhaps—George Eliot, Gaskell is able to register the deepest experiences of a young woman's development it is because she oversimplifies neither the problems nor their solution.

Many of Gaskell's later titles—My Lady Ludlow (1858); The Grey Woman (1861); Sylvia's Lovers (1863); Cousin Phillis (1863–64); and the posthumously completed Wives and Daughters (1864–66)—identify her as a novelist of women's experience. In that sense North and South is pivotal, looking back to Mary Barton, the "Tale of Man-

^{9.} See, e.g., the review by Margaret Oliphant (pp. 421-23).

Letters, p. 108.
 In his poem "To Marguerite—Continued" (1852). The emphasis is Arnold's own.
 See pp. 373–74.

chester Life" that launched her career, and forward to these later works. Like so many of the novelists of the Victorian period, her fictions record the changes that were taking place in contemporary society. Unlike so many of them however—and here again comparison with George Eliot is to the point—she always reacted positively to the prospect of change. If there is affection for the past in her work it is never transformed into conservatism: she recognizes that the world of the new brings its own challenges which must be met on their own terms. This is clear in the story both of Margaret Hale's personal life, and that of the world in which she finds herself. For that reason, if for no other, *North and South* is one of the most astutely observed novels of its time.

North and South originally appeared in Household Words under the editorship of Charles Dickens from 2 September 1854 to 27 January 1855.4 As was standard practice, Gaskell was not named as the author: Dickens's attribution of her novel to "the author of Mary Barton," without mention of her other works, clearly identifies where its interest for him lay. It was then published in book form by Chapman and Hall in two volumes on 26 March 1855. This English first edition was preceded by a two-volume edition published by Harper and Brothers of New York on 14 February 1855, and followed in England by a "second edition" in June 1855, which included a number of significant corrections, and then by a one-volume "cheap edition" in 1859.5 For the English first edition Gaskell inserted chapter titles and mottoes for the first time: these had not been a feature of the Household Words text. She also made a number of changes from the Household Words version; in particular she revised the ending of the novel, redrafting the final chapters. I have identified the point at which these changes become significant in my notes. This edition is based on the English first edition. I have corrected a few minor typographical errors and altered archaic spellings (for example "sate" to "sat") throughout. I have also regularized punctuation where the conventions observed by Gaskell no longer apply. I have retained the chapter numbering, with a separate sequence for each volume: readers who require a single sequence should add twenty-five to the chapter numbers of the first volume. I am grateful to the Librarian of the Portico Library, Manchester, for allowing me access to its copy of the first edition for the preparation of the text.

4. Household Words, vol. 10, nos. 232-53, 2 September 1854 to 27 January 1855.

^{5.} The history of the publication of North and South during Gaskell's lifetime is given in Walter Smith, Elizabeth Gaskell: A Bibliographical Guide (Los Angeles: Heritage Book Shop, 1998). Readers interested in matters textual and contextual should also consult John Geoffrey Sharps, Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention (Fontwell, Sussex: The Linden Press, 1970); Sharps's book is a mine of information on all aspects of Gaskell's literary career.

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I have incurred debts too extensive to acknowledge individually. But I cannot allow the help I have had from Nancy Weyant, associate professor and coordinator of Reference Services, Bloomsburg University, whose generosity with her up-to-date knowledge of what has been written about Gaskell in recent years has been invaluable, to be anonymized under a general acknowledgment, nor that of my editor at W. W. Norton & Company, Carol Bemis, who answered every one of my many queries with patience and with such precision that I never had to ask twice. And especially I must thank Dr. Graham Handley for his generous gift to me of the second edition of North and South.

In my annotations I have tried to provide explanations that will enhance the reading of the text. Inevitably I am much indebted to the work of previous editors, and especially to Professor Angus Easson, whose "World's Classics" edition of North and South covers the ground comprehensively.6 On matters of industrial history my greatest debt is to my wife, Dorothy Shelston. John Chapple read much of my material and saved me from many errors. Gaskell was an author who used literary reference and allusion instinctively and extensively, and two aspects of her practice in this respect call for comment. First, as I have indicated, for her volume edition she introduced mottoes at the head of each chapter. Where the writers involved are well known I have identified the works from which the quotations are taken. Where the writers are less familiar I have provided basic information about them, without necessarily identifying the specific works referred to. I have usually left as such material that is unidentified. Second, embedded in her writing are frequent references to the Bible, some of them casual, not all of them accurate. Here I have identified the most obvious examples, giving a reference to the King James Bible, but without correcting any accidental misquotation. Finally, Gaskell attempts to achieve authenticity in the speech of her working-class characters by her use of Lancashire dialect. (Her husband's two lectures on this topic were published in the fifth edition of Mary Barton [1854].) Where the sense is clear from the context I have not provided a gloss, but I have done so wherever the sense is not easily understood. Throughout I have annotated only the first instance of a particular reference or usage. In all of this I am indebted to friends and colleagues too numerous to mention. I hope though that they will accept my thanks.

Elizabeth Gaskell, North and South, ed. Angus Easson (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1973 ["World's Classics"]); hereafter Easson 1973.

ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this volume the following abbreviations have been adopted:

Letters: The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, edited by J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard. Manchester: Manchester (1966).

Further Letters: Further Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, edited by John Chapple and Alan Shelston. Manchester: Manchester (2000).

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