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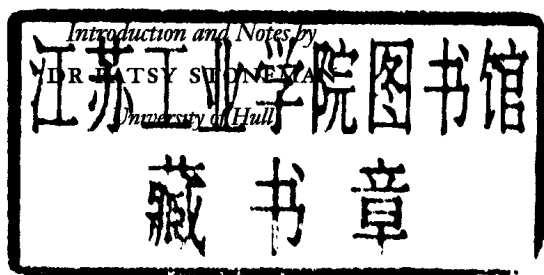
# *North and South*

ELIZABETH GASKELL



# NORTH AND SOUTH

Elizabeth C. Gaskell



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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## INTRODUCTION

*North and South* is a title which seems to announce its subject, but it is not an exclusive guide to a novel which includes scenes of industrial strife, a courtship-and-marriage story and an inner scrutiny of its heroine's development. I shall argue that it is a richly complex novel in which apparently disparate elements – love story and class conflict, religious doubts and naval mutiny – are necessary and interconnected. One way of approaching this complexity, however, is to consider some of the more exclusive readings.

Its most obvious topic is the relationship between the north and the south of England – an issue very much alive still, in the twenty-first century. Present-day differentials of income and welfare still relate to an older division between the industrial north, with its harsh landscapes, crowded conurbations and working-class population, and the softer landscapes of the south, where the parklands of stately homes survive amid suburban sprawl. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, when

*North and South* is set, this division was even sharper. The industrial revolution in England had had the effect of unsettling class structures which had shaped English life for centuries. Up to the end of the eighteenth century, the main source of wealth was agriculture, and power was largely in the hands of the landowning aristocracy. The industrial revolution, however, by developing the mechanised mass-production of goods such as textiles, placed wealth and power in the hands of those who owned the new means of production – the water and coal to fuel the machines, the factories which housed them and the capital to buy raw materials and labour. It was the rugged landscapes of the north which provided the fuel, as well as the technical inventions, for the mechanised industries, and during the first half of the nineteenth century the north of England saw a massive demographic shift, with vast towns such as Manchester hastily constructed to house the workers who moved from the semi-feudal countryside to work for wages in the new factories.

The south thus came to represent the past, where landowners inherited the right to gather rents from farmers and peasants along with a certain responsibility for their welfare. The north claimed to be the future; its leaders were the middle-class entrepreneurs – ‘self-made men’ – who accumulated capital by shrewd calculation based on the ‘laws’ of supply and demand. For such men, ‘labour’ did not mean known workers who occupied the same cottages as their forefathers and could expect to be eased through bad times by charitable visits from the ladies of the ‘big house’. For the new northern leaders, described by Thomas Carlyle as ‘captains of industry’,<sup>1</sup> workers were nameless ‘hands’, one commodity among others, to be bought in or turned off in response to shifts in the market. Philanthropy, or charity – giving something for nothing – was in their view a dangerous interference with ‘political economy’, a self-regulating system in which the relation between employers and employees involved nothing beyond what Carlyle called the ‘cash nexus’ – the exchange of cash for labour (*Chartism* [1839], Ch. 6).

The first generations of urban workers in the north of England thus found themselves in a kind of historical limbo. They were cut off from the old system of ‘*noblesse oblige*’ (‘privilege entails responsibility’) which,

1 Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843), Bk 4, Ch. 4. For full details of brief references in the text turn to the Bibliography at the end of this Introduction. Wherever possible, the surname and page number will follow in parentheses after the quotation.

unreliable as it was, gave rural workers some claim on the charity of their landlords, but they were not yet protected by the statutory provisions which now make up the Welfare State. When trade was bad, workers were simply 'turned off' and there was nothing to prevent them and their families from starving to death. This was the state of affairs in England in the 1830s and 1840s: an unprecedented social crisis, huge enough to be described by Thomas Carlyle as the 'Condition-of-England Question' (*Chartism*, Ch. 1).

*North and South* thus emerged in 1854-5 from a public ferment about social problems. By the 1840s the distress of the working class had been voiced in the People's Charter, initially a peaceable claim for parliamentary representation which later became violent, alarming the ruling classes with a fear of social breakdown as it reached its peak in 1848 - the 'Year of Revolutions' throughout Europe. The urgent questions of social need and justice were debated in Carlyle's essays, in articles in the national press, and also in a stream of 'social-problem' novels from the 1820s onwards (see Cazamian). Many of these novelists were women, and although Harriet Martineau wrote to 'illustrate' the laws of political economy,<sup>2</sup> they mostly wrote as 'interventionists', protesting that human life was too high a cost for the market dogma of '*laissez-faire*' or 'let things alone' (see Kestner). Elizabeth Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848), had already made an enormous impression with its heartfelt picture of life in working-class Manchester. *North and South* first appeared as a serial in Dickens's new weekly journal *Household Words*, which carried frequent articles on social problems (Uffelman, p. 75), where it followed on from Dickens's own novel *Hard Times*, which was also set in a northern cotton-spinning town.<sup>3</sup> By the late 1850s, however, the crisis seemed to be passing, and *North and South* was almost the last example of its kind (see Cazamian, Conclusion).

Because it was defined as a topical work, *North and South* quickly dropped from public attention. By the 1920s Gaskell was known mainly as the author of *Cranford* (1853), her charming story of spinster ladies in a rural town. Lord David Cecil, writing in 1934, thought 'it would have been impossible for her if she had tried, to have found a subject less suited to her talents' than the Industrial Revolution (Cecil, p. 235).

- 2 Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-4) are fictionalised sketches designed to demonstrate the 'leading principles' of political economy.
- 3 Gaskell was fully alert to this context. *Hard Times* was being serialised while *North and South* was being drafted, and both Meckier and Schor see *North and South* as a deliberate response to *Hard Times*.

Gaskell the 'social-problem' novelist was only rediscovered in the 1950s by Marxist and socialist critics (Kettle, Williams and Lucas) who praised her detailed and accurate representation of the physical conditions of life in the early phase of industrial capitalism, which they saw as fictional corroboration of such documentary accounts as Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845). These critics were not, however, so impressed by her political analysis. Believing that class struggle was inevitable, they found Gaskell's attempt to foster social contacts merely sentimental. They were particularly impatient of the way in which her 'real' story of class conflict becomes merged in what seems a conventional love story, with the implication that class problems can be 'solved' at an individual level. If only Gaskell had read *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), they imply, what a novel she might have written!

Neither did Gaskell appeal to the feminist literary critics of the 1970s. 'Mrs' Gaskell's domestic image as wife and mother, and her non-combative position on the rights of women, allowed feminist readers to overlook her genuine innovations. My own book on Gaskell was the first to argue that in dealing with class conflict Gaskell was not ignorant of rhetoric about inevitable struggle, but deliberately opposed to it (Stoneman, 1987). In *North and South* especially, rather than adopting a class alignment, Gaskell shows her female characters in revolt against the masculine posturing of both classes. Bessy Higgins, the factory girl, who is dying from a lung disease from working in polluted air, describes the battle between masters and men as being 'like th' great battle o' Armageddon' (p. 141), and Margaret, the middle-class heroine, is similarly appalled by the threat to life involved in this confrontational mode of conducting public affairs, in which the 'wild beating and raging' of the men meets only 'stony silence' from the masters (pp. 165-6). The novel works hard not only to bring the opposed sides into dialogue, but also to expose the way in which aggression has been built into our concepts of masculinity, so that although both Thornton, the master, and Higgins, the worker, have 'tenderness in [their] heart' (p. 301) towards children and weaker comrades, neither of them is initially willing to break the code of masculine toughness which forbids them to reveal this 'weakness'. Margaret's great achievement in the novel (and thus Gaskell's) is to show that concern for suffering does not undermine strength.

It is Margaret Hale, the heroine, who comes from the 'south' into the class conflicts of the 'north', and Gaskell herself referred to the novel in draft as *Margaret* or *Margaret Hale*. The letters between Gaskell and

Dickens show that *North and South* was the title suggested by Dickens, and the revisions Gaskell made for publication in book form all 'emphasized the changing character of Margaret Hale – not the North–South division – as the focus of the story' (Uffelman, pp. 74, 76). This suggests that the novel is best read as a *Bildungsroman* – a novel about the development of its heroine – but the shift of focus need not imply that the industrial and class conflict subsides into 'background'. We need a reading which puts Margaret at the centre without diminishing the importance of the issues she has to confront.

A reconsideration of Gaskell's own position encourages a complex reading. Since Cecil produced his (entirely inaccurate) picture of Gaskell as 'gentle, domestic, tactful, unintellectual, prone to tears, easily shocked' (Cecil, p. 198), John Chapple and Jenny Uglow have vastly expanded our knowledge of Gaskell's life. To read their biographies is to realise that Gaskell was a vivacious, resilient woman, at the centre of a web of intellectual and social connections. Indeed, as Jenny Uglow points out:

She moved in a world where personal contacts and the flow of ideas were so interconnected that the idea of the web will not do, unless one thinks of an autumn hedgerow where web after web glistens in the sun, each so intricately linked to the other that the slightest touch sets them all in motion. A better image is that of overlapping circles, drawn by a compass whose point is fixed in a central circle of Elizabeth's family, marriage and faith. [Uglow, p. 309]

She had family connections with such famous Victorian names as the Wedgwoods, the Darwins and the Nightingales. To describe her, as is sometimes done, as 'a minister's wife' is to miss, first, the significance of her Unitarian faith and, secondly, that as minister of Cross Street Chapel in Manchester, William Gaskell sat at the very hub of intellectual enquiry and innovation. Unitarians were at the free-thinking end of the Christian spectrum, drinking an annual toast to 'civil and religious liberty the world over', regarding independent reason as vital to both men and women and making science and mathematics central to their academies. Through the Unitarian network, Elizabeth had links with all kinds of literary, philosophical, political and scientific developments. William Gaskell was not only a pioneer of social causes but a trustee of Owen's College, which later became Manchester University (Uglow, pp. 9, 319–20, 350). The British Association for the Advancement of Science met in Manchester in 1842 and again in 1861, when William was on the organising committee (Uglow, pp. 134, 555), and throughout



her married life Gaskell played hostess to a stream of literary, social and scientific thinkers. Unlike Dickens, who wrote about the industrial north from the distant perspective of London, Gaskell lived in the midst of the new north and knew not only its distresses but also its triumphs of intellect and enterprise. Many of the industrial entrepreneurs were members of William Gaskell's congregation, and whereas Dickens presented his industrialist, Bounderby, as a caricatured villain, Gaskell was personally acquainted with forward-looking manufacturers such as Samuel Greg (Uglow, p. 344).

Gaskell also knew most of the literary figures of the day (Chapple 1980, Ch. 10). She visited Edinburgh, Newcastle, Oxford and London. She travelled (without her husband) throughout France, Germany and Italy and wrote about them; she was an indefatigable letter-writer and corresponded with friends in Paris, Rome and Boston. She supported Mazzini and Garibaldi in their fight to liberate Italy and Maria Chapman in the fight against slavery (Uglow, pp. 535, 318). She had an opinion about everything but constantly begged information (e.g. Uglow, p. 496). Throughout this complex public life, she also kept in touch with domesticity; a letter to a would-be novelist includes advice about the family wash (Chapple, 1980, p. 124) and fears about Roman Catholicism or British rule in India surface in the context of her daughters' love affairs (Uglow, pp. 500, 437). To read Gaskell's letters is to see, decisively, that she did not keep aspects of her life in compartments. It makes sense, therefore, to read *North and South* not as an industrial novel 'unfortunately' grafted on to a love story, or as a novel of psychological development with Manchester as its accidental background, but as a system of interconnected webs in which everything gains significance from its connection with everything else.

It is true that *North and South* seems to make several 'false starts'. First there are the scenes in Harley Street, where Margaret's cousin Edith is planning her fashionable wedding. The novel seems to be establishing a courtship-and-marriage plot with Henry Lennox, Edith's brother-in-law, as Margaret's suitor. Oddly, however, Henry Lennox makes his proposal, after very little preamble, in Chapter 3, and he is refused in terms which do not seem to promise development. Sure enough, the next chapter introduces an entirely different theme, focused on Margaret's father, Mr Hale, who has decided to give up his living as a Church of England vicar because of religious doubts. The exact nature of these doubts remains obscure, but the question is dwelt on sufficiently for Charlotte Brontë, reading the novel in draft, to have assumed that this was to be the main theme of the story (Easson, 1991, p. 330). By Chapter

7, however, the Hale family have said goodbye to the southern village of Helstone where Mr Hale held his living and are established in the town of Milton-Northern. Margaret becomes absorbed in her new acquaintance with the mill-manager, Mr Thornton, and the trade unionist, Mr Higgins, but Chapter 14 is suddenly devoted to the story of Margaret's brother Frederick, who is in exile for having taken part in a naval mutiny. Just as Mr Hale's doubts have been read as a plot device to get the Hales to Milton, so the 'Frederick plot' has been read as a device to create misunderstandings between Margaret and Mr Thornton, which cannot be explained because of the secrecy surrounding Frederick's visit to England. 'The story is clearly rather incoherent,' Richard Hutton wrote in 1855 (Easson, 1991, p. 353). The reason for this apparent 'incoherence' may be that Gaskell was writing a kind of novel for which there was no existing model. Hilary Schor, in her book, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace*, stresses Gaskell's gift as a storyteller, and argues that the uncertainty of direction of the plot in *North and South* mimics the uncertainty of the 'social plot' produced by industrialisation. Each new 'plot', she argues, suggest a new 'character' for Margaret, with its own discourse, which Margaret needs to negotiate (Schor, pp. 125-6).

Thus we can see the first chapters as establishing the kind of 'life story' which might be expected by a young lady in the south of England in the mid-nineteenth century. It is important that Margaret's mother and aunt were wards – effectively daughters – of Sir John Beresford, a landowner whose family traditionally 'racked' or extorted rent from their tenants (pp. 19, 122), though it is possibly from Lady Beresford that Margaret derived the code of *noblesse oblige* which sends her out visiting the poor of Helstone. Although Margaret's mother has lost status and wealth by marrying 'beneath her', she has not become 'middle class'. Before the industrial revolution, the 'middle class' consisted mainly of 'tradesmen' – the 'shoppy' people whom Margaret will not tolerate even as acquaintances in Helstone (p. 18). The respectable 'professional' classes – the church, the army and the law – were still regarded as adjuncts of the aristocracy and many church 'livings' were in the gift of local landowners. Margaret's contacts in the early chapters of the novel thus include the gentry (Aunt Shaw), the church (her father), the army and the law (the Lennox brothers), as if to lay before her the possible options for her life, which must lie in marrying into one of these groups. The contrast between Edith as 'a soft ball of muslin and ribbon' (p. 5) and Margaret 'tramp[ing] along' in the woods at Helstone (p. 16) forcibly suggests that life as a lady of leisure is not the one for Margaret, and this is one of the reasons why she refuses Henry Lennox.

This first 'false start', therefore, is best read as a deliberate rejection of the usual novelistic route open to heroines, which does not offer the kind of *Bildung*, or development, which Margaret needs. The feminist critics Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland have pointed out, in fact, that the term *Bildungsroman* hardly applies to female protagonists of the nineteenth century. Where David Copperfield or Nicholas Nickleby embark on a 'voyage out' from childhood to full social identity, female protagonists like Jane Eyre or Dorothea Brooke find that theirs is a 'voyage in' – a return, by way of marriage, to the domesticity where they began (Abel *et al*, p. 7). The early chapters of *North and South* seem to look at this route and turn away. These chapters also, however, establish Margaret as a nubile woman, and subsequent scenes stress her stately bearing, her masses of black hair, her 'taper fingers', to an extent which modern readers find annoying. One memorable scene in Milton finds Mr Thornton mesmerised by Margaret's bracelet, which she repeatedly pushes up her arm only for it to fall again (p. 74). Such descriptions insist that Margaret is desirable, and this was more necessary than we now realise for a heroine who will develop independent views. Cousin Edith would not be the only one to assume that a 'strong-minded' woman will necessarily 'go a figure' – that is, look a fright (p. 385).

What about Mr Hale's doubts? There is, of course, an autobiographical reason for this theme, since Mr Hale aligns himself with the clergy who were ejected from the Church of England by the 1662 Act of Uniformity – the 'dissenters' some of whom established the Unitarian church (p. 32). It is not important to know exactly what Mr Hale's doubts were; the point is that they emphasise the Unitarian principle of declaring one's beliefs, whatever they may be. For Unitarians, the duty to 'bear true witness' – that is, to tell the truth as you see it – does not imply that anyone has exclusive or infallible access to the truth, and this tolerance – remarkable in Victorian England – lies behind the scene where 'Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm' (p. 216). It is thus characteristic of Gaskell that some of the novel's most thought-provoking scenes are those of dialogue. Chapter 15, 'Masters and Men', is effectively one long dialogue between the *laissez-faire* of the north and the Christian charity of the south. The process of debate tests 'principles' and 'theories' against other people's different assumptions, revealing them to be not absolutely true but relative to the situation of the speaker (Pryke, pp. 32–3).

Margaret is able to point out Thornton's self-contradiction as he

professes to admire both his own 'despotism' and the 'independence' of his workers, just as later she is able to show that the 'democratic' principles of the union include the 'tyranny' of forced membership (pp. 116, 215). Yet both masters and workers hold their theories inflexibly true; each side 'reckoned on their fellow men as if they possessed the calculable powers of machines, no more, no less' (p. 211). The denouement of the novel involves both sides moving away from dogmatic positions and towards practical arrangements such as the setting up of a works canteen, and Thornton's new flexibility is prompted partly by his surprise, in talking to Higgins, that two men working in the same trade could see the situation 'in so strangely different a way' (pp. 388-9). Later, Thornton's loss of capital sharpens this perception that economic theory looks different from different social perspectives (Pryke, p. 38), and by the end, he explicitly opposes Carlyle's 'cash nexus' (p. 398). Although no one believes that his change of heart will produce a utopian end to class struggle, nevertheless the novel shows that significant amelioration of social problems can be produced by interested parties testing their case in dialogue. 'Political economy', like other theories, appears situated in specific conditions (Pryke, p. 39).

The 'Frederick plot', which is often regarded as a melodramatic irrelevance to the novel, also serves to show how judgement is conditioned by context. Frederick, a junior naval officer, is threatened with court-martial for having helped seamen to mutiny against a tyrannical captain. The story has an air of romantic chivalry, reinforced by the motto for Chapter 25, drawn from Byron's poem 'The Island' (1823), based on the mutiny on the *Bounty*. The exotic episode may, however, have been meant to enlist the sympathy of readers who would not readily support a mill-workers' strike. In Chapter 14, Margaret declares her response to Frederick's story: "Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power unjustly and cruelly used – not on behalf of ourselves but on behalf of others more helpless" (p. 102). Three chapters later, in 'What is a Strike?', Nicholas Higgins speaks of " . . . dying at my post sooner than yield. That's what folks call fine and honourable in a soldier, and why not in a poor weaver-chap? . . . It's just as much in the cause of others as yon soldier" (p. 126). If this analogy seems far-fetched, we should remember that the Combination Acts, used for decades to suppress trade unions, were initially passed to prevent mutinies during the Napoleonic Wars.

Frederick's conversion to Roman Catholicism, which modern readers tend to see as a mere gesture enabling him to marry his Spanish bride,

also presented a particular challenge to thinkers like Gaskell for whom tolerance of other people's views was an article of faith: given the oppressive history of Roman Catholicism, it raised the question of whether one had a duty to tolerate intolerance. If we take Margaret's 'voyage out' as a progressive encounter with people different from herself, then Gaskell is here presenting Margaret 'with a further crisis in her developing sense of "the other"', begun with her father's dissent, and continued with the antagonistic attitudes of masters and men (Sanders, 1996, pp. 49-50). At the same time, Margaret's self-reliance is accentuated by the deaths of her parents and guardian. Returning to Helstone expecting to find stability in the timeless perpetuity of rural life, she is dismayed to find that 'Nothing had been the same' (p. 370), and this is the final stage in her realisation that her hard-won independence of thought will not find its future in the southern life represented either by Helstone or by Edith and her aunt and the Lennoxes. As Andrew Sanders puts it, Margaret's longing for stability will be

fulfilled in an essentially liberal impetus to leave the world a better place than she found it. Established in the industrial north of England as the wife of a reforming Milton-Northern manufacturer, she can be seen as central to Gaskell's larger social message in *North and South*. [Sanders, 1996, p. 50]

It is notable, of course, that this liberal destiny still involves Margaret in being someone's wife. Like Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, she discovers how difficult it is for a woman to act in the public world unless through the agency of men. Margaret, like Dorothea, becomes an heiress, theoretically in control of her own capital; in practice, however, only men can deploy money in the world. It might be argued, in fact, that in 'influencing' Thornton through conversation, Margaret is only doing what the conservative writer Sarah Lewis recommended in her 1839 book *Woman's Mission*, which argued that women could achieve everything necessary in this indirect way. In *The Feminine Political Novel in Victorian England*, however, Barbara Harman argues that *North and South* is a deliberate response to, and advance upon, Charlotte Brontë's novel *Shirley* (1849) in this respect. Although *Shirley* is also an heiress, she can only put her money to good social use by persuading all the local vicars that it was their idea, and when a riot threatens the mill on Shirley's land, she and her friend Caroline can only watch at a distance. Because the public appearance of women is always given a sexual interpretation, such action as is available to them must always be achieved 'under cover' (Harman, p. 40): 'both knew they would do no

good by rushing down into the mêlée' and making 'a romantic rush on the stage' (*Shirley*, Ch. 19).

Gaskell not only knew *Shirley* but had discussed it with its author (Uglow, p. 247), and placing the two novels together allows us to reassess the radical challenge of Gaskell's novel. For Harman, the riot scene in *North and South* is a defining moment in the history of women's participation in public and political life because it forces us to confront the obstacles to women's public appearance (Harman, p. ix). A contemporary review of *Woman's Mission* points out that 'women . . . cannot enjoy, at the same time, the immunities of weakness and the advantages of power' (quoted by Harman, p. 67), but this is exactly the claim Margaret makes. When she flings her arms around Thornton, she tries to take control of the situation by including him in the traditional protection given by chivalry to weakness. By venturing 'on the stage', however, she loses the 'immunity' reserved for women 'under cover', and instead of gaining 'power', lays herself open to sexual misinterpretation. Rosemary Bodenheimer points out that Margaret suffers 'exactly the consequences that Shirley foresees for Caroline' (Bodenheimer, p. 66), and it is especially notable that when Margaret asks herself, ' "Did I do any good?" ' she almost quotes from *Shirley*, lamenting, ' "I . . . must needs throw myself into the mêlée, like a romantic fool!" ' (p. 177).

The rest of *North and South* follows through the difficulties encountered by Victorian women who tried to take public action. Although in public opinion Margaret has flaunted her sexual motives, she herself is bound by a code of 'purity' which prevents her naming such motives even to disclaim them. We may remember that after Henry Lennox's proposal, she even 'felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage' (p. 30). Patricia Ingham argues that Margaret's feelings of sexual guilt are displaced on to the lie which she tells to protect Frederick (Ingham, p. xix), which explains the excessive emotion attached to the lie; the excess points to the torturing dilemma of a woman dedicated to truth-telling who is prevented, by her own code of 'delicacy', from telling the truth about sex, even to defend herself against its imputation. In the end, of course, the truth is told, not only about Margaret and Frederick, but also about her feelings for Thornton; but the long delays before these misunderstandings are cleared up are not accidental. In her revisions for publication in book form, Gaskell even added to the final chapters to emphasise the links between public and private understandings; Margaret's increasing self-reliance allows her to acknowledge her longing for Thornton's good

opinion, just as Thornton's passion for Margaret includes respect for her co-operative ideas.

A marriage at the end of a novel is easily read as symbolising harmony. The marriage of Thornton and Margaret does not, however, bear a simple relationship to the class conflicts of the novel. The classes that most need reconciling in *North and South* are the employers and the employed, and although Margaret is sympathetic towards the working class, she cannot be said to 'represent' them beyond getting them a hearing. Nor does the marriage represent a reconciliation of 'north' and 'south', because by the end of the novel Margaret has detached herself from the feudal values of 'the south'. Rather, the marriage represents something more obvious – a coming together of masculine and feminine modes of thinking. Margaret is energised by contact with the enterprise and self-reliance of Thornton's northern pattern of masculinity, which makes the Lennoxes seem effete, while Thornton is humanised by his contact with Margaret's feminine care for others, which is distinct both from Aunt Shaw's self-indulgence and Mrs Thornton's exclusive self-respect. The marriage cannot, however, be 'mapped on to' the other oppositions in the novel. Catherine Gallagher, in one of the most important recent books on the social-problem novel, points out a crucial difference between *North and South* and novels such as Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) and Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854). Each of these novels focuses on family relations in the context of class relations, and each ends with a family resolution which seems to offer some message for the larger world. But whereas Disraeli and Dickens offer metaphorical resolutions, where family harmony 'stands in for' social peace, *North and South* offers a 'metonymic' pattern, where the personalised solution does not 'stand in for', but is *part of* and *contributes* to the larger questions of progress (Gallagher, p. 170).

So long as industrial relations are left to men whose notion of masculinity involves 'standing on principle' and 'batting things out', Gaskell implies, we shall continue to see innocent victims of this warfare, such as Boucher's children. So long as women are educated to be decorative and dependent, like Edith, their supposed 'influence' will remain a pretty myth. So long, in fact, as public and private life are conceived of as 'separate spheres' to which men and women can be confined, there is little hope of solving the social problems in which, as this novel shows, public and private are intricately connected. Elizabeth Gaskell is not generally regarded as a feminist, and this may be because she advocates advances for women not in the cause of women's rights but because only by including women in public life can larger wrongs be

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righted. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* there is a famous feminist 'manifesto', where Jane declares that women 'need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do' (*Jane Eyre*, Ch. 12). In *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell shows that the 'field' of industrial relations needs the 'efforts' of her heroine just as much as she needs the field.

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- Alison Chapman (ed.), *Elizabeth Gaskell: 'Mary Barton' and 'North and South'*, Icon Books, Cambridge 1999; selective anthology of criticism plus editorial commentary; an extremely useful guide to the changing critical reputation of the novels
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