

# A Study of Elizabeth Gaskell

## —The Femininity in a Social Context in *North and South*—

Kim Sun-hee

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### I. Introduction

Novelists are inevitably involved in their work politically and socially as “all novels are social novels.”<sup>1)</sup> Furthermore, the social-problem novels engage the novelists as novelists and as social beings. It is mostly acknowledged that Victorian novels are about society and that a vast and complex social system became an urgent topic of representation and analysis for the Victorian novelist by the middle of the nineteenth century. The Victorian novels have been written primarily for the English middle class and have performed an important social function explaining the workings of a society in the process of rapid and unprecedented alteration.

Elizabeth Gaskell was in this field remarkably early as *Mary Barton* is often spoken of in the context of social fiction: *Mary Barton* preceded *Hard Times* by six years and though Charles Kingsley's *Yeast* began serial publication in 1848, it only appeared complete in 1851. Of course, there are three novels all interestingly by women before *Mary Barton* that deal with the cotton-manufacturing areas: Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong the Factory Boy* (1839–40), Charlotte Elizabeth's *Helen Fleetwood* (1841), and Elizabeth Stone's *William Langshawe, The Cotton Lord* (1842).

Today, each generation has found something to admire in Elizabeth Gaskell, but no generation has done justice to her total achievement.<sup>2)</sup> And the mood of the twentieth century is far from

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1) Arnold Kettle, “The Early Victorian Social–Problem Novel in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* ed. Boris Ford (Middlesex: Penguin Book, 1982), p. 164.

2) Enid L. Duthie, *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), p. xi.

favourable to her. But it is only recently that critics have come to realize that as a psychological novelist, she anticipated the methods of George Eliot and Henry James in many respects. Lord David Cecil stressed the feminity of Elizabeth Gaskell in noticing her taste, command of detail, freshness of outlook and sense of social values.<sup>3)</sup>

This study is concerned with some of Elizabeth Gaskell's reactions to the women's movement of her time, particularly as the heroine of Motherly fiction. The primary purpose is to examine Elizabeth Gaskell's feminity in a social context in *North and South*. The second is to see how far she is a woman novelist, putting her in relation to the other women novelists in those days.

## II. Elizabeth Gaskell as a Woman Novelist

The industrial novels, for us, as twentieth century readers, provides invaluable depictions of a society in the process of unprecedented and disturbing alteration, and, for readers of the time, offered glimpses of unknown territory.<sup>4)</sup> It is the new kind of fiction first appearing in the troubled 1840's. Disraeli, Kingsley and Dickens are all concerned with the distressing contrast between the lives of the rich and the poor. They are basically class-bound in their whole stance as writers, sharing with a certain pusillanimity the fears as well as the challenges.<sup>5)</sup> Mrs Gaskell also shares the concern of these novelists with the condition of England question. However, unlike them, she tries to handle her subject with the compassionate detachment of the pure novelist.<sup>6)</sup>

Mrs Gaskell avoids the extraordinary, the sensational and the false as a general rule, dealing with real problems, ordinary people and likely situation: her ultimate object of sympathy is the human condition from social reform to the frailty of human life and aspiration. It was her clear intention to relate her fiction to real life so as to make it more meaningful, and that is a positive and conscious achievement.<sup>7)</sup> Therefore, her response to industrialized manufacture was to write a novel and being assailed as a meddling socialist, this eminently bourgeois woman said about herself, "No one can feel more deeply than I how wicked it is to do anything to excite class against class."<sup>8)</sup>

Of course, there has been industrial novels, but none of them has made anything like the impact of *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. They represent a noble response to the social crisis of early Victorian England though they are rare and unconvincing. Mrs Gaskell began her career as a novelist by dealing with the latest and most pressing social problems of the day. Some of her

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3) Arthur Pollard, *Mrs Gaskell* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 7.

4) Deirdre David, *Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), p.5.

5) Arnold Kettle, "The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford(Middlesex: Penguin Book, 1982), p. 165.

6) Miriam Allott, "Elizabeth Gaskell in *British Writers* V. 5 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), p. 4.

7) John McVeagh, *Profiles in Literature Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 2.

8) J. A. Chapple, *Elizabeth Faskell A portrait in Letters* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 39.

importance seems to be that she has presented what had never before been shown in fiction. Thus, wrote G. B. Smith in a *Cornhill Magazine* article in 1974. He listed her qualities as individuality, force, truthfulness and purity. The time has come to test this judgement.<sup>9)</sup>

Until the advent of Mrs Gaskell, women novelists had been prevented from social criticism or comment within the novel both by their own exclusion from the world of work and by their own precarious position as women writers. Furthermore, under the heading domestic realism, womanhood was a vocation in itself<sup>10)</sup>

The woman's novel had moved, despite its restrictions, from Jane Austen to George Eliot, in the direction of all inclusive female realism, a broad, socially informed exploration of the daily lives and values of women within the family and the community.<sup>11)</sup> Women romanticized the reality of the public life that was closed to them aspiring to the representation of reality. Accordingly, the Victorian novel may be seen as the reserve and refuge of women like Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell. The major women novelists focus attention more directly on the female characters who passionately desire a life of their own and who work to achieve it. They push back the boundaries of their sphere and present their profession as one that requires not only freedom of language and thought but also mobility and activity in the world.<sup>12)</sup>

These women novelists made a powerful appeal to the female audience by subverting the traditions of feminine fiction to suit their own imaginative impulses. They made the English heroines be heretical for their own identities. Elizabeth Gaskell was also interested in the Woman Question, a major preoccupation of Victorian society. But, her growing sense of feminine independence never became total or unrestrained. We remember one of her jokes against or with—<sup>13)</sup> She was not unsympathetic to some of the feminist causes of the period. Nevertheless, by and large, her philosophy was not of acceptance rather than of rebellion.<sup>14)</sup>

To their contemporaries, nineteenth century women writers were women first, artists second.<sup>15)</sup> The woman in the home who blossoms exclusively as wife-mother is an ideal. For gifted women, the creative imagination was seen as a threat to domestic responsibilities. The will to write occasioned considerable guilt in many Victorian women: "Work, in the sense of self-development was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal."<sup>16)</sup>

Elizabeth Gaskell always put the family first. She was thankful to her husband that she was a wife and a mother, and so happy in the performance of those family duties. Family duty comes before everything, and literature is a luxury. Though she admired duty, she always gave priority to duty toward human beings, real persons. But, her Unitarian background stimulated a lifelong

9) Arthur Pollard, *Mrs Gaskell* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 1.

10) Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 20.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 29.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 28.

13) Miss Jenkyns in *Cranford* had despised the modern idea of women being equal to men: 'Equal! indeed'. She knew they were superior.

14) Gilbert Phelps, *British Novelist 1600—1900* (London: Pan Books, 1980), p. 330.

15) Eline Showalter, *A Literature of their Own* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 73.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 22.

struggle between her creative and her self-denying instincts though she was grown up in an atmosphere where self-development was considered the height of wickedness and adopted herself early to the life of a busy and delicate wife and mother. As Victorian women support the idea that the highest act women can aspire is self-sacrificial, boundless empathy for the needs and sufferings of others, she shared the Wordsworthian sense of the burden of reality, a profound sympathy toward all who suffer and mourn, and a realization of the tragic bounds of life.<sup>17)</sup> Her heroines, even the youngest who are capable of reconversion, never criticize the injustice and absurdity of the fate which is the lot of old maids. Once the most difficult is accepted—renunciation of the condition of a wife-mother—a life of abnegation and altruism follows naturally.<sup>18)</sup>

Nevertheless, Mrs Gaskell suggested to the aspiring authoress that it might be a good idea to postpone until her children older, emphasizing that maternal experience would enrich any literary talents:

A good writer of fiction must have lived an active & sympathetic life if she wishes her books to have strength & vitality in them. When you are forty, and if you have a gift for being an authoress you will write ten times as good a novel as you could do now, just because you will have gone through so much more of the interests of a wife and a mother.<sup>19)</sup>

Like this, Mrs Gaskell was expressing an idea with which many of her contemporaries concurred. She was very sensitive to the complex movement of the human spirit in time and place. The feminine novelists, in this way, felt a sincere wish to integrate and harmonize the responsibilities of their personal and professional lives. Moreover, they believed that such a reconciliation of opposite would enrich their art and deepen their understanding.

Accordingly, Mrs Gaskell's novels provide a special aesthetic experience as Motherly fiction. With amiability and sweetness, her writings are like the climax of the homely-aesthetic as well as being climax of the homely moral.<sup>20)</sup> When Charlotte Brontë was writing *Shirley*, the wife of a Unitarian minister in Manchester was finding time as a mother and helpmate of a social reformer, to put down in fictional form her sympathy for the lives of Manchester inhabitants in the healthy balance of mind and body. She opens her tales of Manchester life with a country outing, a family row and a tea-party showing the curtains and the crockery.

### III. The Femininity in a Social Context in *North and South*

As the Victorian woman's novel is the inevitably crystallization of femininity as the spontaneous overflow of the womanly emotions,<sup>21)</sup> it is the woman's life that Elizabeth Gaskell studies in the

17) Donald D. Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 136.

18) Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 26.

19) J. A. Chapple, *Elizabeth Gaskell A portrait in Letters* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 124-125.

20) Geoffrey Tilloston, *A View of Victorian Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 226.

21) Eline Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 82-83.

greatest depth.

*North and South* begins in what most middle-class girls of that day would have selected as their natural and most becoming environment, opening with a discussion of love and marriage in a world like the enchanted palace of Sleeping Beauty, sheltered from all the problems of society, and almost dead:

Edith had fallen asleep. She lay curled up on the sofa in the back drawing-room in Harley Street, looking very lovely in her white muslin and blue ribbons. If Titania had been dressed in white muslin and blue ribbons, and had fallen asleep on a crimson damask sofa in a back drawingroom, Edith might have been taken for her. Margaret was struck afresh by her cousin's beauty... but Margaret had never thought about it until the last few days, when the prospect of soon losing her companion seemed to give force every sweet quality and charm which Edith possessed.<sup>22)</sup>

We meet Margaret first in London, in the comfort and ease of her aunt's house, a dependent without cares or responsibilities, at the opening of her adult life, a looker-on at her cousin Edith's wedding. Main considerations of the novel are set down here: aesthetic and sensuous qualities, the emotions, worldly success and honour.

The tone suggests that we are in the world of Jane Austen as does the note that Mrs Shaw's friends are people she happens to dine with more frequently than others. Of course, the overwriting is for ironic purpose, which makes it clear that Margaret is capable of responding to people as people. The artificiality of Harley Street is a strange way to introduce us to the real world of doing and suffering in Helston and later in Milton, but Mrs Gaskell constantly refers us back Harley Street, with considerable effect as Margaret makes her progress through the three worlds of London society, rural Helston and manufacturing Milton.

The conventional elements are superficial. Elizabeth Gaskell is concerned with much more than a love story, and much more than the fortunes of her heroine. Margaret is the medium for experiencing and judging different societies and ways of life and standards. Elizabeth Gaskell establishes Margaret as a perspective young woman able to make decisions, who can perceive Henry Lennox's failings and reject his proposal of marriage, and can also deal with the problems of moving house at a fortnight's notice. Elizabeth Gaskell explores through Margaret more kinds of human relationships than most authors attempt. Thus, subject is Margaret and the process of her enlightenment.

Elizabeth Gaskell exploited her femininity for which we are grateful. The heroine of *North and South* is a fine instance of a weakness turned to a strength.<sup>23)</sup> As the most Victorian heroines are high-minded young women who with dauntless courage act upon the findings of the individual conscience, Margaret Hale, though modest, sensitive and domesticated, is in any crisis prepared to act in defiance of the conventions of her society like Fanny Price, Jane Eyre and Dorothea Brooke.

Margaret is a fastidious, well-bred, Southerner who turns up her nose at trade; nothing in her past has prepared her for life in Milton Northern. The initial impression of Milton is gloomy and

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22) Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and south*, ed. Angus Easson (London: Oxford university Press, 1973), p. 1.

23) John Lucas, "Mrs Gaskell and Brotherhood in *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. David Howard John Lucas Hohn Goode (London: Rotledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 195.

forbidding, promising no new delights with change of season :

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon... all the darker from contrast with the pale gray-blue of the wintry sky... The heavy smoky air hung about her bedroom, which occupied the long narrow projection at the back of the house... It loomed through the fog like a great barrier to hope.<sup>24)</sup>

Against these fixed views of Milton, Elizabeth Gaskell charts the changing perspectives of Margaret and Thornton. Milton is the symbol and embodiment of the industry and of all the social issues between masters and men. It is the catalyst for the working-out of the personal and spiritual progress of Margaret and Thornton. It is a new world in the process of creating itself, but with the power to develop and grow. Thus, Milton is a place of testing for both Margaret and Thornton.<sup>25)</sup>

Gradually, Margaret Hale is brought to realize that there are two sides to the industrial conflict as to any human problem. More important, her low opinion of the Northern character is exposed as prejudice.

It was rather dull for Margaret after dinner. She was glad when the gentlemen came, not merely because she caught her father's eye to brighten her sleepiness up; but because she could listen to something larger and grander than the pretty interest... I am rather weary of this word "gentlemanly" which seems to me to be often inappropriately used, ...that I am induced to class it with the cant of the day.<sup>26)</sup>

Rich and poor, North and South, industrial life and agricultural life, tolerance and prejudice are drawn into a web of multiple parallels in which any judgement about human worth has to be hedged in. It is as if Elizabeth Gaskell wishes to show that absolute judgement are meaningless. The following passage contains the hints of it :

Mr Thornton had not a notion what they were talking about, and disdained to inquire. Mr. Hale politely enlightened him. ...'Yes, enjoyment, ...I don't specify of what, because I trust we should both consider mere pleasure as very poor enjoyment.' ...Now I remember, you were against me this morning, and were quite Miltonian and manufacturing in your preferences.<sup>27)</sup>

However, Elizabeth Gaskell presents the most favorable pictures in Victorian fiction of unions, writers generally showing contempt or hatred. She does not enquire into the economic basis of Manchester misery; she observes, records, attempts resolutions which we find unbelievable, and hopes for the best.<sup>28)</sup> She tries to facilitate an understanding between a geographically and culturally divided England, and resolve a conflict of will between master and worker by the use of Margaret Hale as the central character. Her conscious aim is to advocate the application of

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24) Elizabeth Gaskell, op. cit., pp. 59-66.

25) W. A. Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen & Co, 1975), p. 119.

26) Elizabeth Gaskell, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

27) Ibid., pp. 332-333.

28) Deirde David, *Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), p. 8.

Christian principles and a Wordsworth's healing power<sup>29)</sup> as a means of mediation between the conflicting interests of the classes.

Margaret is involved in the situation as an out-sider, and her learning of it is bound up with her growing knowledge of herself. Women are seen as mediator in the bitter divisions between men. It is women who tie men to the gentle humanities of earth.<sup>30)</sup> In the novel, Margaret transforms the labouring population into a rational human being; she channels its potentially destructive power into a constructive partnership between the working classes and their morally responsible betters. She displays the accustomed masculine characteristics of rationality, strength and moral rectitude.

Moral development was more important than intellectual in Elizabeth Gaskell. As she believed in the dignity of the individual, it was natural that she should be conscious of the influence of education, the factor which can do so much to help the development of the personality. So, the didactic intention is assimilated into the fiction, as in the description of Nicholas Higgins (ch. 17). The demonstration of working-class indignation, the explanation of strikes, the depiction of suffering are made fictionally credible. "God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent,"<sup>31)</sup> Margaret reminds Thornton. Near the end, Thornton proves both in his friendlier relations with his workers and in his marital alliance with the new owner of his mills, Margaret that he recognizes his responsibility as well as his interdependence.

*North and South*, as a didactic work, is not about things but about people, not just about people but about persons.<sup>32)</sup> Margaret Hale is Gaskell's rational and mediating ally and the vehicle of Gaskell's plea to the working class to adopt a course of social reform rather than social destruction. But, she must be educated in the life of the working class before she can emerge as a figure of social unification.

Bessy Higgins is dying of lung disease contracted in the carding tool of a Milton cotton mill. Bessy describes the factory life of the insidious fluff flying off the cotton, and Margaret wonders why these debilitating conditions are not remedied;

Some folk have a great wheel at one end o' their carding-rooms to make a draught, and carry off th'dust; but that wheel costs a deal o' money... so it's but a few of th'masters as will put 'em up; ... at after they'd been used to swallowing fluff, to go without it, and that their wage ought to be raised if they were to work in such places.<sup>33)</sup>

Elizabeth Gaskell here intends her to work in some way as a lesson in humility for Margaret, as an essential part of her education in Northern life.

Better than any writer of the period Elizabeth Gaskell understood that a trade-union was not a mere combination of workers confronting the employers, but a society in which men could find an identifiable place, a society that imposed its own standards of behavior and loyalty.<sup>34)</sup> Though

29) Donald D. Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 134.

30) Eva Figes, *Sex & Subterfuge* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 155.

31) Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Angus Easson (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 122.

32) Authr Pollard, *Mrs Gaskell* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 138.

33) Elizabeth Gaskell, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

34) Coral Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), p. 123.

she is very hedge on how to manage the union issue, it is introduced as a possible means of reducing social conflict. Elizabeth Gaskell acts as a corrective in the affectionate respect between men and masters and what characterizes Elizabeth Gaskell's attitude to society is affection.

The helpmate theory of woman, of equality through difference, served in the history of female emancipation to widen woman's sphere and to justify her education and instruction.<sup>35)</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell's women are more maternal than Charlotte Bronte's and therefore less preoccupied with their position with regard to men than their need to help the helpless of either sex and any age.<sup>36)</sup> Margaret Hale tries to shield Thornton from the mob not because she has a man's courage but because to do so is the woman's prerogative.<sup>37)</sup> Margaret is made of stern stuff; she has some spirit. She perceives no threat to herself. The ominous circumstance is forced upon her notice. She feels intuitively that all would be uproar and even Mr Thornton's life would be unsafe.

She only thought how could save him. She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond... and the sight of that pale, upturned face, with closed eyes, still and sad as marble, though the tears welled out of the long entanglement of eyelashes, and dropped down; and heavier, slower plash than even tears, came the drip of blood from her wound.<sup>38)</sup>

They are moved to rational action by the image of womanly self-sacrifice. Margaret quietly introduces the industrialist Mr Thornton to the feminine values of domestic duty, familiar loyalty and personal affection.

Of all family relationships it was the maternal one which most deeply inspired Elizabeth Gaskell. She believed the birth of the first child was the acme of a woman's life. Self-denying heroic action is apparent in Elizabeth Gaskell's heroines and in herself as the view that women have a monopoly on sympathy and self-denying behaviour on behalf of others was prevalent through the century. The practice of charity was the common denominator in the existence of women. It is the woman who rescues the man; Margaret puts her body where her morality is. Elizabeth Gaskell seeks a means of combining Maurice's self-suppression and Kingsley's heroic tendency.<sup>39)</sup>

Elizabeth Gaskell writes out of her own experience as well as her observation. She considers the family relationships as a fundamental part of the life. Margaret Hale's apprenticeship to duty develops within the family. She feels she has to take over the responsibility when her parents emigrate from the south to the north of England. Repressing all her personal worries, she reacts by creating new obligation. She tries to make herself useful. She can change her role with ease. So, does her increasing maturity. Her adoptability shines. Typically, it is Margaret who must break the news to her mother, and Margaret who must supervise the packing and departure when

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35) Françoise Basch, *Relative Creatures*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 169.

36) Enid L. Duthie, *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), p. 128.

37) *Ibid.*, p. 129

38) Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Angus Easson (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 179-180.

39) Donald D. Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 137.



the Hales move to the north. She is not a woman devoted to family duties alone, the whole reach of society is within her grasp. Thus, by the humanizing influence of Margaret, Elizabeth Gaskell produces a reconciliation of human relation.

Margaret comes to recognize that she is equally ignorant of the North if Mr Thornton does not understand the south. She has to be schooled in the facts of Milton life, as Thornton has to be schooled by her in the demand of the heart. The self-realization in Margaret comes during her visit to Helston for a single day with Mr Bell. Elizabeth Gaskell treats it with the honest and minute fidelity through Margaret's nature vision. Helston has changed. The new clergyman and his wife have altered the vicarage by changing Mr Hale's study into a surgery and unconsciously :

The parsonage was so altered, both inside and out, that the real pain was less than she had anticipated. It was not like the same place. The garden, the grass-plot, formerly so daintily trim that even a stray rose-leaf seemed like a fleck on its exquisite arrangement and propriety, was strewn with children's things; a bag of marbles here, a hoop there; a straw-hat forced down upon a rose-tree as on a peg, to the destruction of a long beautiful tender branch laden with flowers, which in former days would have been trained up tenderly, as if beloved.<sup>40)</sup>

The change may pain Margaret but, after all, she believes that change and education are all to the good.

Understanding is dependent upon circumstance and individual vision. Margaret's visit reconciles her to the natural change which man must accept as a condition of his morality, to the death of her parents. That night she is overwhelmed by a loss of identity, which is a necessary step to her final discovery of herself as a woman ;

A sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment, over powered Margaret. Nothing had been the same ; and this slight, all-pervading instability, had given her greater pain than if all had been too entirely changed for her to recognize it.<sup>41)</sup>

In the morning her awareness of her altered mood, of the capacity of the human psyche to adopt itself, to remain flexible reconciles her to the notion of the change itself. She gives up her moral absolutism, accepts the loss of a grassy wayside as a condition of enlightenment, and sees the reality of Helston is far more beautiful than she had imagined it.

On her return to London, Margaret looks back from the same window where she had sat as a girl wondering about her future with her aunt and cousin.

Margaret still sat watching the beauty of a London sky at such an hour, on such a summer evening; the faint pink reflection of earthly lights on the sofa clouds that float tranquilly into the white moonlight, out of the warm gloom which lies motionless around the horizon... she remembered promising to herself to live as brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read or heard of in romance, a life sans peur et sans reproche... And now she had learnt that not only to will, but

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40) Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Angus Easson (London : Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 392. . .

41) *Ibid.*, p. 400.

also to pray, was a necessary condition in the truly heroic.<sup>42)</sup>

Now she is afresh taught by death what life should be. It is clear that Helston will remain the prettiest spot in the world. But it is evidently in the industrial North that her future life will be spent among factory chimneys and the noise of machinery. Her life in the North gives her fresh insight into the exclusive world which had formed her earlier prejudice.

Finally, Margaret provides Thornton with the necessary funds to attempt an enlightened capitalistic policy. Thanks to her, he is humanized and discovers within himself a knightly and Christian inspiration. Margaret not only tames Thornton but also, in final humiliation, endows him with her legacy so that he can pay off his debts and keep his mill. Though Eline Showalter describes that to get a great deal of money and to give it to a man for his work was the feminine heroine's apotheosis, the ultimate in the power of self-sacrifice,<sup>43)</sup> it is worth noticing that she abandons her pride in renunciation, along with her belief that the only people worth bothering about are those whose occupations have to do with land.

It is interesting to notice how Elizabeth Gaskell's view to some extent corresponds to the accepted Victorian attitude and transcends it. Charlotte Brontë saw women defined by their sex, but Elizabeth Gaskell was aware that women, like men, shares common human responsibilities, and those responsibilities should not be made subject to passion.<sup>44)</sup> Although Margaret is in the common line of heroines who acquires wisdom and triumph in marriage that reaches back to the eighteenth century of Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, she has both a more complicated destiny and more evolved functions than any of their young women.<sup>45)</sup>

The novel ends in the fashionable London house where it began, but Margaret does not belong to that world. The identity of scene at the beginning and end is one means by which Elizabeth shows how far Margaret has moved in the course of the novel. Though the literary convention of the happy end comes to be added to the traditional views of the feminine sphere to allow marriage to triumph as every heroine's destiny, Margaret's marriage to Thornton seems designed to web an otherwise ruthless male energy to a female compassion and sense of social responsibility. Yet, this emphasis upon the power of female compassion and the instinct for self-sacrifice conceals a basic ambivalence—a mixture of wishful thinking, the perception that women do exercise considerable power covertly and a desire to change some of the more destructive features of male power in Victorian culture.<sup>46)</sup>

Margaret will continue to live in the shadow of the mill. The influence of the Jane Austen type of novel is, in this novel, seen in its theme, with Elizabeth Gaskell employing a central heroine as a narrative medium. However, "*North and South* is not a Victorian *Pride and Prejudice*. Instead of looking back to Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy, Margaret and Thornton look forward to the emotional entanglements of a later age when the pattern of society adds new complications to

42) Ibid., pp. 411–412.

43) Eline Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 85.

44) Coral Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), p. 112.

45) Enid L. Duthie, *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), pp. 125–126.

46) Richard Barickman, Susan Mac Donald, and Myra Stark, *Corrupt Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 16.

the relationships between men and women.<sup>47)</sup> Thus, Elizabeth Gaskell knew what she was doing when she wished to call the book 'Margaret'<sup>48)</sup>

#### IV . Conclusion

The work of a novelist in particular is not only an individual creation but comes from within the culture and ideology of a period and the ideology is determined by the economic and social infra-structure. Elizabeth Gaskell's response to the social problems in *North and South* is intuitive, generously Christian, and respectful of individual needs. But, most of the conflicts in the novel are unsolved because she wants to leave the door open for rational social reform.

Elizabeth Gaskell wrote out of her own experience. The experience of marriage and motherhood was a valuable asset when she began her career as a novelist. Work in the sense of self-development was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal. Womanhood was a vocation, but Elizabeth Gaskell's growing sense of feminine independence never became total or unrestrained. She put the family first. She shared the Worsworthian sense of the burden of reality, a profound sympathy toward all who suffer and mourn. Therefore, her novels tell a special aesthetic experience as Motherly fiction.

"*North and South* has the ambivalence of the classic Bildungsroman that governs the most effective and exuberant Victorian fiction.<sup>49)</sup> For Elizabeth Gaskell, we are all frail and the best we can hope for is that we become better person, as Margaret and Thornton do in their respective education in the self and in society. The hope of the novel is that our dealing with each other will be marked by a affectionate understanding.

Margaret Hale is the medium for experiencing and judging different society and ways of life. She is a fine instance a weakness turned to a strength. Her attitude to human relationship is maternal affection and mutual understanding.

Elizabeth Gaskell created so independent and powerful a woman, who can so much overcome her circumstances and exist independently of them. For her a good marriage is a sacrament, an embodiment of a power greater than the individual because it imitates the active resolution of natural discord and the creation of new life.<sup>50)</sup> Accordingly, Elizabeth Gaskell believed that woman's natural fulfilment lay in marriage and motherhood.

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47) Miriam Allott, "Elizabeth Gaskell in *British Writers* V. 5 (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1982), p. 6.

48) *North and South* was an inadequate and misleading title, as Elizabeth Gaskell knew. It was Dicken's title for her novel. She wished to call the work Margaret Hale, and in her letters she referred to it as 'Margaret'.

49) Baruch Hochman, *The Test of Character* (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), p. 27.

50) Robert Kiely, *Beyond Egotism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 127.

國文抄錄

Elizabeth Gaskell에 대한 研究  
—“North and South”에 나타난 Gaskell의 Fertility—

金 仙 姬

Elizabeth Gaskell은 흔히 이류 小說作家로서 경시되어 왔으나 최근의 女性問題에 대한 관심속에서 새로이 再評價되고 있는 주부 女性作家이다.

本 論文은 이와같은 再評價가 이루어지는 현실속에서 主婦 作家로서의 Elizabeth Gaskell과 “North and South”에 나타난 Fertility의 特性에 초점을 두고 研究하였다.

Elizabeth Gaskell은 英國社會의 전통에 순응했던 女性으로서, 그 당시 이미 社會問題의 하나였던 女性問題에 대해서 관심은 갖고 있으면서도 그녀의 反應은 온건한 態度를 보여주고 있었다. 즉 그녀는 가정만이 人間關係의 基本이라고 생각하였으며, 어머니로서의 役割(motherhood)이 바로 女性的 自我實現 및 存在價値에 대한 根本的 段階라는 전통적인 思考方式을 지니고 있었다. 貧富의 두 階級으로 뚜렷이 兩分되어 있던 1850년대의 英國社會는 소설가들이 社會問題에 깊은 관심을 갖고 있던 時代이다. Dickens, Kingsley, Disraeli 등의 소설가들은 社會問題에 대해서 비교적 消極的인 態度로 接近하고 있는 반면에, Elizabeth Gaskell은 여성 특유의 섬세한 感情과 理解로서 社會問題에 대해서는 積極的이면서도 樂觀的인 反應을 보여주고 있으며, 특히 社會속에서 女性에 의한 人和(reconciliation)를 強調하고 있다.

즉 Elizabeth Gaskell은 이 小說에서 “社會속에서 女性役割”의 重要性을 強調하면서 女性에 의한 相互理解와 애정속에서 社會問題가 解決되어가는 과정을 이 小說의 主人公인 Margaret Hale의 모습을 통하여 잘 描寫하고 있다.