AN ANALYSIS OF CONFLICTS IN MRS. GASKELL'S
NORTH AND SOUTH

THESIS

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By

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Both contemporary and modern critics recognize the industrial, regional, and personal conflicts in *North and South*. There are, however, other conflicts which Mrs. Gaskell treats and resolves. This study emphasizes inner struggles resulting from repressive Victorian sexual mores. An examination of conflicts at a deeper level than has previously been attempted clarifies motivations of individual characters, reveals a conscious and unconscious pattern within the novel and gives a fuller appreciation of Mrs. Gaskell's psychological insight. Included for discussion are examples of the Victorian feminine stereotype and the use of religion as sexual sublimation. A major portion of the paper concerns the growth of the heroine, Margaret Hale, from repressed sexuality to an acceptance of womanhood in Victorian society.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Gaskell's first novel, Mary Barton, published in 1848, concerned the misery of the working classes in Manchester during the years of rapid industrialization in England. The novelist wrote in sympathy for the living conditions of the factory operatives and their families, resulting from the laissez-faire attitudes of the manufacturers. The novel was a popular success, but Mrs. Gaskell received criticism for emphasizing the employers' apparent unconcern.

By the year 1854, times and some of Mrs. Gaskell's attitudes had changed. From September 2, 1854, to January 27, 1855, her novel North and South was serialized in Household Words, a magazine edited by Charles Dickens. The novel was published in two volumes in late 1855 by Chapman and Hall. In this book, ostensibly concerned with the same social theme as Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell, an open-minded woman, elicited more sympathy for the manufacturers than previously. Gerald DeWitt Sanders considers several reasons that could account for her shift in emphasis. He points out that although Mrs. Gaskell still felt compassion for the workers, she could look about her and see changes which had been made for their betterment. The "hungry forties" were over. The Corn Laws of 1815 had been repealed in 1846, lifting the burden of high prices
for bread. Irish immigration, a result of the potato famine of 1845, aroused hostility in the English workers. The two groups clashed, depriving the workmen of some of the strong sympathy felt for them by the populace, which had been made aware of their sufferings by writers such as Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, Disraeli, Kingsley, and others.¹

Sanders suggests that Mrs. Gaskell, always sensitive to criticism, might possibly have decided to avert further negative comment by a more balanced approach to the industrial problem in North and South. He feels, however, that the most likely reason for her change in emphasis, though not in basic belief, was that she had listened to her critics. She came to see that the one-sided attitude of Mary Barton did not present the entire picture. Mrs. Gaskell, living in Manchester, could closely observe both sides of the struggle and present a fair analysis of the manufacturers' viewpoint without abandoning her sympathies for the operatives.² Although her attitude became more balanced in North and South, Mrs. Gaskell's solutions were basically the same as in Mary Barton. Annette Hopkins says that Mrs. Gaskell's liberal social views expressed her basic concept of Christianity. The novelist believed in the application of Christian ethics to everyday life, stressing

¹Gerald DeWitt Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell (New Haven, 1929), p. 66.
²Ibid., p. 68.
a spirit of tolerance and acceptance of differing opinions. Although she opposed violence in the workers and the \textit{laissez-faire} attitude of the manufacturers, she did not believe in passivity but in cooperation on both sides of the industrial struggle.\footnote{Annette B. Hopkins, "Liberalism in the Social Teachings of Mrs. Gaskell," \textit{Social Service Review}, 5, No. 1 (1931), 57-73.} According to Yvonne Ffrench Mrs. Gaskell's mission was one of meditation.\footnote{Yvonne Ffrench, \textit{Mrs. Gaskell} (Denver, 1949), p. 28.}

The industrial problem constitutes an important theme in \textit{North and South}, but the book is one of multi-layered conflicts, a fact which sets it apart from the social novels, \textit{Mary Barton} and \textit{Ruth}. Mrs. Gaskell had originally wanted to entitle her novel \textit{Margaret Hale}, but Dickens suggested \textit{North and South}, and she acquiesced. The title reflects a crucial point concerning this novel, for conflict is inherent throughout. The harsh, industrial, northern section of England produced attitudes very different from those of the slower-paced, more rural, aristocratic southern region. The North had the energetic drive for power and aggressive push for industrialization lacking in the South. Fortunes were made quickly and could be lost just as quickly. Men rose to power on their own initiative, as did John Thornton, the hero of \textit{North and South}. The aristocracy of the North was based on money, not inherited social position. With that money came power, which was often not used wisely. Margaret Hale, the
heroine of *North and South*, is from the South with its genteel, traditional culture and inherited privilege. When she comes to the northern industrial city of Milton, she brings with her a snobbish disdain for "shoppy" people who know little or nothing of her world. Milton's ugliness shocks Margaret. Its streets are full of rough mill workers who speak a coarse Lancashire dialect. Helstone, Margaret's Hampshire village, was an Eden in a forest setting of tranquility and softness. She is brought abruptly out of her protected environment into one of conflicting values.

The struggle between "masters and men," the employers and employees in the large northern factories, constitutes another area of conflict within the novel. Although, as previously mentioned, conditions had improved for the operatives in the factories, many injustices still existed. Conditions could, on occasion, become explosive, and much remained to be done to alleviate suffering and bring understanding between the workers and their masters. John Thornton, as one of the masters who believed in the *laissez-faire* philosophy, gradually accepts the fact that only through conciliation and fairness on both sides can life be made better for both employer and employee. His relationship with Margaret and those close to her is pivotal in bringing about the change within him.

The overt conflict between Margaret Hale and John Thornton dominates the novel. It is obvious from the time they meet in the Hales' new home in Milton that an attraction exists.
Although the socio-economic theme and its ramifications concern Mrs. Gaskell, it is the development of her characters that most occupies the novelist in North and South. The characters grow in a convincing, if tortuous, manner. Margaret and Thornton, coming from polar extremes, gradually realize their interdependence, thus paralleling the conciliatory conclusions of the masters and men.

Mrs. Gaskell blends the differing conflicts within the novel with skill. She handles her interweaving of personal and social relations with an aptitude she did not possess when she wrote Mary Barton. Arthur Pollard says of Mrs. Gaskell's achievement: "In North and South Mrs. Gaskell has achieved a coalescence between personal and public stories in the relationship of the two main characters."\(^5\) Edgar Wright says, "If there is any tug between theme and characters, it will be the characters who win; that is inherent in Mrs. Gaskell's outlook."\(^6\)

Beneath the conflicts discussed above lie others not so easily discernible. North and South may be viewed wholly as a typical Victorian novel, written by a typical Victorian novelist, but as in any creative work, other, more subtle dimensions exist. The love story of Margaret and Thornton


is simple and direct on the surface, but underlying their struggle for harmony and eventual completeness in a love relationship is a more dramatic conflict. Mrs. Gaskell delineates the Victorian conflict between men and women in general and shows deeper, repressed sexual conflicts within the individual characters. In the character of Margaret Hale, Mrs. Gaskell presents a Victorian woman who struggles to achieve psychic balance in a patriarchal society. This paper will explore the inner conflicts Margaret suffers in the process of growing from the innocence of Victoriana girlhood to an acceptance of herself as a woman in a man's world.

Most Gaskell critics acknowledge her gift of psychological insight, but they fail to consider the effects of Victorian society upon her unconscious mind. Wright says that Mrs. Gaskell shows a "shrewd discernment of human nature."

J. G. Sharps comments that Mrs. Gaskell has an "observant eye for the psychologically meaningful." These critics and others ignore the influence of Victorian mores on the developing relationship of the two principal characters.

In North and South, Mrs. Gaskell indeed reveals a sensitivity and psychological accuracy that allows her characters to emerge. But although she was broad-minded and educated, Mrs. Gaskell wrote in an era that had not yet confronted

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7 Ibid., p. 224.

unconscious drives. The symptomology existed, but the roots remained unexplored. Thus one must assume that the deepest levels of conflict within the story came from the novelist's unconscious mind. Russell M. Goldfarb says that "whatever the Victorians consciously or unconsciously intended to do, the meaning of Victorian literature is greatly expanded when one pays attention to its sexual dimension."  

In order for one to understand the psychological problems facing the heroine of *North and South*, it is necessary to ascertain what constituted the stereotyped Victorian female and to examine some aspects of Mrs. Gaskell's life and personality. Because of the revival of the feminist movement in recent years, many writers have turned their attention to woman's role throughout history. Martha Vicinus in the introduction to *Suffer and Be Still*, a collection of essays concerning the "woman question" in nineteenth-century England, depicts the ideal of Victorian femininity, showing the evolution of this ideal from the pre-Victorian to the late-Victorian era. She points out that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the ideal woman was the "perfect wife," who served many useful purposes, but most importantly childbearing. In the lower and middle classes, the wife worked diligently, providing care and sometimes, particularly in the lower classes, income for the family. She contributed to her family's welfare

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by her skills in home management, giving her efforts to cooking, sewing, and child care.  

Gradually the ideal of the "perfect wife" gave way to that of the "perfect lady." A girl was reared in innocence, with a total ignorance of sexuality. The "perfect lady" was predominantly a phenomenon of the upper-middle class, but her counterpart existed in all strata of society. Families of "perfect ladies" stressed certain attributes and ignored others. Filial duty, an innate feeling towards motherhood, and religiosity were qualities that were fostered, while a sense of individual identity, in particular sexual identity, was squelched. The female was identified completely by her status within the family--either as her father's daughter, her husband's wife, or hopelessly for her, the unmarried female who existed in a familial limbo. Education was limited to pointless pursuits and "accomplishments" such as doing intricate needlework, taking voice lessons, and playing a musical instrument. No proper Victorian lady expressed opinions on issues that were of any import beyond the family or local sphere. Vicinus says that "In her most perfect form, the lady combined total sexual innocence, conspicuous consumption, and the worship of the family hearth."  


11 Ibid.
The social background, then, against which Mrs. Gaskell was writing taught its women from the cradle onwards to be helpless, childlike, submissive, and domestic. Women did not have civil rights and were treated as generally inferior as regarded their character and constitution.

An example of how Victorians viewed women relative to men is John Ruskin's essay published in 1865, entitled "Of Queens' Gardens." He compares the two sexes:

Now their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest wherever war is just, wherever conquest is necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle--and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. . . . Her great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation.

Ruskin has contradictorily praised women in his manly, chivalrous way, but he has also placed them in a position of passive ineffectiveness. Ruskin's last statement, that they are "protected from all danger and temptation," is crucial to the point being considered.

The protection of the female was of paramount importance to the Victorians. Keeping their daughters in a state of childlike innocence was their goal. Peter Cominos refers to this species of Victorian womanhood as "Innocent Femina

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Sensualis." Her internal conflict as described by Cominos indicates the unconscious plight of heroines in numerous Victorian novels; it is certainly applicable to Mrs. Gaskell's heroine, Margaret Hale.

Innocent Femina Sensualis waged her battle between sensual desire and duty at an unconscious level. Innocence, as the mechanism of sexual repression, played the key role in making the conflict unconscious. Respectable Victorians did not understand the mechanism, but they desired the results. For them, "innocence" or "pure-mindedness" or "inherent purity" was an exalted state of feminine consciousness, a state of unique deficiency or mindlessness in their daughters of that most elementary, but forbidden knowledge of their own sexuality, instincts and desires as well as the knowledge of good and evil. 13

The medical profession contributed to the myth of the almost non-existent sexual nature of the Victorian woman. William Acton, a prominent, highly respected physician, wrote a medical treatise in 1857 entitled The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs. Acton writes of women briefly in this book, presenting a picture of what he thought the typical "modest English woman" to be in terms of her basic sexuality:

I should say that the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally. . . . I admit, of course, the existence of sexual excitement terminating even in nymphomania . . . but with these sad exceptions, there can be no doubt that sexual feeling in the female is in the majority of cases in abeyance . . . and even if aroused (which in many instances it never can

be) is very moderate compared with that of the male. . . . The best mothers, wives, and managers of households know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children, and domestic duties are the only passions they feel. 14

Elizabeth Gaskell, born in 1810 in Chelsea and reared by an aunt in the village of Knutsford, felt the influence of Victorian attitudes towards women. She was a proper though vivacious Victorian lady, fulfilling many of the roles society had assigned to her. In 1832 she married William Gaskell, then the assistant minister of Cross Street Unitarian Chapel in Manchester. Thus she, like her heroine Margaret Hale, left her rural girlhood environment to live in the industrial North. Mrs. Gaskell reared four daughters, seeming fully to enjoy the pleasures of motherhood. 15 As a minister's wife she led an active, often hectic life, and she saw many aspects of living in the grimy city of Manchester. Her compassionate nature found ample avenues for expression in working with the results of an unjust social system principally through charitable activities of her husband's church. Although Mrs. Gaskell appears to have been the idealized Victorian woman, she had elements in her life and personality that set her apart. She was a dutiful wife and mother, but she was also a writer, and, as such, had to struggle with conflicts even


15 Ffrench, p. 38.
more complex than those of the average Victorian woman. As has been mentioned, Mrs. Gaskell had a psychological astuteness that aided her as a writer. This insight enabled her to look at her own conflicts. She wrote her friend, Tottie Fox, in early 1850: "One thing is pretty clear, women must give up an artist's life, if home duties are to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are so small a part of their life."  

She also recognized that she had a multi-faceted personality, which caused some of these conflicts. In another letter to Miss Fox, she observes:

One of my mes is, I do believe, a true Christian . . . another of my mes is a wife and mother . . . now that's my "social" self I suppose. Then again I've another self with a full taste for beauty and convenience which is pleased on its own account. How am I to reconcile all these warring members?  

Mrs. Gaskell was an idealist concerning Christianity. She spoke little on religion but believed very firmly in living by the teachings of Christianity in regard to her fellow man. Although she generally avoided the subject of religion in her personal life, the topic finds its way into her fiction, but rarely in a doctrinaire fashion. It was perhaps through her fiction that she was dealing with some


17 Ibid., p. 108.

18 Ffrench, p. 31.
of her religious conflicts. Her reasoning nature accepted the precepts of Unitarianism, but she loved the ritual of the Anglican and Roman Catholic faiths.\textsuperscript{19} The latter two enter her fiction frequently and are handled without censure.

Mrs. Gaskell was not an overt feminist. She reluctantly signed the Married Women's Property Act in 1856. She remained convinced throughout her life that laws could not change the human heart, and she consciously accepted the traditional view that men were truly the rulers in their homes.\textsuperscript{20} Mrs. Gaskell, aware at some level of consciousness of her conflicts, realized she had to come to terms with being a woman with Victorian boundaries. She chaffed at these boundaries, as the excerpts from her letters indicate, but she was no militant spokeswoman for women's rights and did not defy convention as, for example, George Eliot did. However, throughout her writings, she does exhibit a tendency to handle the man-woman question with a certain underlying hostility that rises quite close to the surface on occasion, then can be glimpsed as only a fleeting suggestion at other times. Some of her motivations in \textit{North and South}, in which she reveals her ambiguous feelings towards Victorian society, will be examined further.

Aspects of the novel that do not seem artistically consistent

\textsuperscript{19} Annette B. Hopkins, \textit{Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work} (New York, 1971), p. 239.

\textsuperscript{20} Aina Rubenius, \textit{The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works} (Upsala, 1950), p. 224.
gain significance when viewed as the product of Mrs. Gaskell's unconscious feelings.

An article by Martin Dodsworth concerns Mrs. Gaskell's handling of her possible unconscious hostilities towards men in her novel, Cranford. Dodsworth traces the story line in the seemingly innocuous tale of Miss Matty and her women friends of Cranford. He points out that Mrs. Gaskell permits Captain Brown to be killed early in the tale, then throughout the remainder of the book seeks expiation for his death in a variety of ways. Several instances of transvestitism are mentioned, as Mrs. Gaskell seeks some sort of psychological recognition of the intertwining of the two sexes and its inevitability. Dodsworth concludes that Mrs. Gaskell shows a healthy acceptance of the fact that the two sexes need one another and that unfortunate consequences result from "attempting to repress sexual needs under the cover of feminism." 21

Although Dodsworth's analysis of Cranford need not be totally accepted, it is difficult to dismiss the thread of conflict, both overt and unconscious, that runs through Mrs. Gaskell's works. The conflicts in North and South represent the complicated feelings of Mrs. Gaskell and her fellow Victorians.

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CHAPTER II

FEMININE CHARACTERIZATIONS IN NORTH AND SOUTH
IN RELATION TO THE VICTORIAN STEREOTYPE

The female characterizations in *North and South* demonstrate various ways in which Victorian women adapted themselves to their male-dominated society. Mrs. Gaskell presents several personality types ranging from weak females who conform to Victorian standards to strong women who do not seem to fit the pattern. In this chapter, six characters will be considered, with emphasis on the outer manifestations of their attempts to cope with their environment. Subsequent chapters will examine the inner conflicts that produced these behavior patterns.

Peter Cominos describes the kind of dependent Victorian female whom Mrs. Gaskell includes in *North and South*. He says that these women had weak egos, which precluded any sense of "I-ness" or separateness. They were brought up believing that their childish behavior would suffice in a life of dependence on others. Victorian girls were encouraged in their passivity and discouraged in pursuits that would allow them to survive on their own. Young women expected, when they married, to become totally dependent on their husbands, living their lives through them and for them. They found whatever identity they could through marriage
and family life. Martha Vicinus refers to women who conformed to this role as "disfunctional and idle." An excellent example of the childish Victorian woman appears in the first pages of North and South in the character of Margaret Hale's cousin, Edith Shaw. Edith plans to be married shortly, but she exhibits no traits of womanly maturity. Mrs. Gaskell describes the young woman as though she were a small child, "looking very lovely in her white muslin and blue ribbons." Talk of weddings, gowns, and keeping Edith's piano in good tune is interrupted by Margaret's discovery that "Edith had rolled herself up into a soft ball of muslin and ribbon and silken curls, and gone off into a peaceful little after dinner nap" (p. 2). Edith fits Cominos's concept of the female with weak ego-strength. Whatever her mother wishes, she assents to, and her pattern of acquiescence will go with her into marriage. Mrs. Gaskell possessed no Freudian terminology, but she grasps the essence of Edith's personality when she comments that "although she was a spoiled child, she was too careless and idle to have a very strong will of her own" (p. 2).

When Edith marries Captain Lennox, she goes with him to Corfu, determined to be a good officer's wife, although she would have preferred a pleasant home in Belgravia. After she has left England, Edith's letters to her cousin Margaret indicate that she is the same "affectionate and inconsequent" girl-woman she was before her marriage. She is pleased by the sunshine, the band music, the picnics, and the antics of her baby boy. Like her mother before her, she complains of her husband, who has become "stout and grumpy," one whom she professes not to love as much as she loves her baby. Responsibility and conscience are alien to Edith's nature; she is uncomfortable about Margaret's father's being a Dissenter and writes to her cousin, "Dear Margaret, if he would like to accompany you and Aunt Hale, we will try and make it pleasant, though I'm rather afraid of anyone who has done something for conscience' sake. You never did, I hope" (278-79). Unlike her cousin, Edith never grows beyond the simple world of girlhood. She never confronts herself as a woman.

Mrs. Shaw is the elder counterpart of her daughter Edith. She suffers from the same lack of individuality, looking backward instead of forward to a marriage made for all the wrong reasons. The General gave her a position in life; he also gave her an excuse to spend her life fretting about a loveless marriage for which she compensates by arranging her daughter's marital match. Mrs. Gaskell gently, but aptly, delineates the character of Margaret's Aunt Shaw:
Now that, the General being gone, she had every
good of life, with as few drawbacks as possible,
she had been rather perplexed to find an anxiety,
if not a sorrow. She had, however, of late settled
upon her own health as a source of apprehension;
she had a nervous little cough whenever she thought
about it; and some complaisant doctor ordered her
just what she desired—a winter in Italy. Mrs.
Shaw had as strong wishes as most people, but she
never liked to do anything from the open and acknow-
ledged motive of her own good will and pleasure; she
preferred being held to gratify herself by some
other person's command or desire. She really did
persuade herself that she was submitting to some
hard external necessity; and thus she was able to
moan and complain in her soft manner, all the time
she was in reality doing just what she liked (p. 11).

Material comfort, petty luxuries, and social amenities are
important to Mrs. Shaw; they seemed to fill an otherwise vapid
life with meaning. She wishes the same kind of life for her
daughter and for her niece, Margaret.

Margaret's mother, Mrs. Hale, is cast in somewhat the
same mold as Mrs. Shaw and Edith. She displays no great
strength of character and manages to dominate in the only way
she knows how—by childlike fussiness and a tendency to whine
about her life; every turn of events is a hardship for her.
Her marriage to Mr. Hale, an Anglican clergyman, brings
little satisfaction because she has come down on the social
scale and must envy her sister, Mrs. Shaw, better situated
in London. She complains of her life in the village of
Helstone, saying, "It is undoubtedly one of the most out-of-
the-way places in England" (p. 17). She feels the bishop is
unfair to Mr. Hale in not giving him a bigger, better parish.
She convinces herself that the trees of the nearby forest
affect her health. Then when the family must move to Milton, the dirty, sunless air becomes a threat to her. When she learns of the impending departure from Helstone, she cannot cope with the problems involved in "removing." Mrs. Gaskell concisely summarizes Mrs. Hale's entire approach to life when she relates how the frail woman reacts in that situation: "Mrs. Hale, overpowered by all the troubles and necessities for immediate household decisions that seemed to come upon her at once, became really ill, and Margaret almost felt it as a relief when her mother fairly took to her bed, and left the management of affairs to her" (p. 54). Throughout the novel Mrs. Hale fails to take an active positive role in the Hale family's trials. In a sense, she finally attains some satisfaction in her fatal illness. "She was gentle and quiet in intense bodily suffering, almost in proportion as she had been restless and depressed when there had been no real cause for grief" (p. 121).

John Thornton's sister, Fanny, is a classic example of the mindlessly insipid female of the Victorian era. She frequently gives in to fainting spells and fits of hysterics. Mrs. Gaskell reveals her attitude towards Fanny and her ilk by stating what the girl's own mother felt for her:

She had an unconscious contempt for a weak character; and Fanny was weak in the very points in which her mother and brother were strong. . . . She felt instinctively that nothing could strengthen Fanny to endure hardships patiently, or face difficulties bravely; and though she winced as she made this acknowledgment to herself about her daughter, it
only gave her a kind of pitying tenderness of manner towards her; much of the same description of demeanor with which mothers are wont to treat their weak and sickly children (p. 109).

Fanny resembles Mrs. Hale in her tendency to ailments, a pattern of behavior that brings the undisguised contempt of her strong-willed brother. Like Edith, Fanny concerns herself with the trappings of ideal young womanhood. On meeting Margaret in the Hales' Milton home, Fanny expresses dismay that the Hales sold their old piano before their move. Her values are obvious as she remarks to Margaret, "I wonder how you can exist without one. It almost seems to me a necessary of life" (p. 112). Later, she speaks disparagingly of Margaret: "And she's not accomplished, mamma. She can't play" (p. 167). Fanny proves to be worthless in a crisis, just as her mother had feared. When the striking mob of workers surrounds the Thornton home, she experiences panic, "screaming upstairs as if pursued at every step" (p. 206). Fanny, choosing to deny the masculine world surrounding her, hates the mills and factories of Milton. She casts her lot on the side of "ideal femininity."

Annette Hopkins takes issue with Mrs. Gaskell's portrayal of weak personalities in North and South. She feels that the author draws these characters with too heavy a hand, making caricatures of them.4 However, in view of the Victorian

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stereotype of acceptable feminine behavior, Mrs. Gaskell had no doubt observed many such characters in her everyday life. If the characters had been presented with more subtlety, Mrs. Gaskell's psychological accuracy would have been blunted.

Mrs. Thornton, unlike her empty-headed daughter and the other weak woman in *North and South*, displays strength and stoicism. She glories in her life as the mother of manufacturer John Thornton, identifying with the masculine world of business and power. She revels in the machinery and the "magnificent warehouses" of Milton. She loves her son with a jealous intensity, which, of course, brings her into conflict with Margaret Hale. Her attachment to her son and his successful business indicates one solution for women in a male-oriented society. According to Aina Rubenius, Mrs. Gaskell did not sympathize with strongly masculine women. Thus, she not only softens Mrs. Thornton with touches of gentleness, but she also makes it clear that Mrs. Thornton is living through her son; being the mother of a strong independent man is a cause for thankfulness. "But her heart gave thanks for him day and night; and she walked proudly among women for his sake" (p. 109).

Mrs. Gaskell reveals the most sympathetic facet of Mrs. Thornton's character when she presents her as the solitary

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5 Aina Rubenius, *The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Work* (Upsala, 1950), n.i., p. 75.
mother awaiting her son's announcement of his engagement. Courageous in the face of personal danger, she reacts typically as the mother of an only son when she fears she is being supplanted by another woman in his life. She waits alone, going through her fine linens in preparation for the change coming in her household.

There was some confusion between what was hers and consequently marked G. H. T. (for George and Hannah Thornton), and what was her son's—bought with his money, marked with his initials. Some of those marked G. H. T. were Dutch damask of the old kind, exquisitely fine; none were like them now. Mrs. Thornton stood looking at them long—they had been her pride when she was first married. Then she knit her brows, and pinched and compressed her lips tight, and carefully unpicked the G. H. She went so far as to search for the Turkey-red marking-thread to put in the new initials; but it was all used—and she had no heart to send for any more just yet (p. 248).

Mrs. Thornton's sternness gives way to melancholy and pain; her customary strength fails her, and she must sit as she contemplates a new mistress in the Thornton household.

Mrs. Gaskell held motherhood in high esteem, feeling in typical Victorian fashion that no woman could be completely fulfilled without it. But being a successful writer, she also felt the tug of existence beyond domesticity as she noted in her letter to Tottie Fox. In Mrs. Thornton, she manages to combine something of both ways of life, although in an oblique manner, because of the vicarious nature of Mrs.  

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6 Ibid., p. 29.
Thornton's power. Ironically, Mrs. Thornton has more in common with her antagonist and future daughter-in-law Margaret Hale than with any other woman in the novel.

Margaret Hale, the heroine of *North and South*, is, as Yvonne Ffrench says, "compounded of contradictory elements." On the surface, Margaret does not conform to the concept of the "ideal lady"; although she has some traits held in high esteem by Victorian society, she exhibits other, less acceptable patterns of behavior. Mrs. Gaskell gives Margaret a less-than-perfect personality, thus creating a complicated young woman who has appeal because of her human qualities. Even Margaret's physical appearance suggests a lack of perfection, but it gives her an attractiveness that transcends ordinary beauty.

Sometimes people wondered that parents so handsome should have a daughter who was so far from regularly beautiful; not beautiful at all, was occasionally said. Her mouth was wide; no rosebud that could only open just enough to let out a "yes" and "no" and "an't please you, sir." But the wide mouth was one soft curve of rich red lips; and the skin, if not white and fair, was of an ivory smoothness and delicacy. If the look on her face was, in general, too dignified and reserved for one so young, now, talking to her father it was bright as the morning--full of dimples and glances that spoke of childish gladness and boundless hope in the future (p. 15).

Mrs. Gaskell refers to Margaret many times in the novel as "queenly," "regal," and an "empress." She has an air of haughtiness about her and an aura of authority and seems to

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be in control of herself and of others in most instances. Margaret does not fit the role of the submissive, Victorian female described by Cominos. She is too strong, too opinionated, too willing to pit her will against anyone, male or female. Yet she is a faithful daughter; she has piety, and she goes among the oppressed with concern.

In handling Margaret's relationship to her parents, Mrs. Gaskell reveals two facets of the girl's character. As a daughter, Margaret shows exemplary traits; she recognizes her responsibilities towards her parents, and her devotion never wavers. In the execution of her filial duties, Margaret's strength contrasts vividly with the weakness of her parents, who lean heavily upon her in a crisis. When Mr. Hale feels he can no longer remain a vicar, he implores Margaret to tell her mother, as he cannot bring himself to do so. Although she dreads the thought of it, Margaret "conquers herself," and assures her father, "It is a painful thing, but it must be done, and I will do it as well as ever I can. You must have many painful things to do" (p. 40). Mrs. Gaskell contrasts the weakness and strength of father and daughter directly:

Before the things were cleared away, Mr. Hale got up; he leaned one hand on the table, as if to support himself--
"I shall not be home until evening . . . I shall be back to tea at seven."
He did not look at either of them, but Margaret knew what he meant. By seven the announcement must be made to her mother. Mr. Hale would have delayed making it till half-past six, but Margaret was of different stuff (p. 47).
In Mrs. Hale's final illness, Margaret cares for her jealously, wishing to minister to her every need. In a single statement she expresses the desire to tend her mother and her contempt for weakness in other women: "Dixon could not give me credit for enough true love--for as much as herself! She thought, I suppose, that I was one of those poor sickly women who like to lie on rose leaves and be fanned all day" (p. 151). When Mrs. Hale dies, Margaret, heartsick and weary, must maintain her strength for the sake of the men in the family. "The father and brother depended upon her; while they were giving way to grief, she must be working, planning, considering. Even the necessary arrangements for the funeral seemed to devolve upon her" (p. 298).

In the course of the novel, many characters besides her parents depend upon Margaret or submit to her in some manner. Interestingly, a number of these characters are men. Nicholas Higgins, the mill-worker whom Margaret befriends, yields to her will when she determines to keep him from leaving his house to find liquor: "But Margaret stood in the doorway, silent yet commanding. He looked up at her defyingly . . . Margaret felt that he acknowledged her power" (260-61). Higgins agrees to ask Thornton for work because of Margaret; he admits that "it's first time in my life as e'er I give way to a woman" (p. 366).

Margaret protects her brother, Frederick, when he comes as a fugitive to see his dying mother. Before Frederick's
arrival, Margaret assures her mother that she will watch over him, and she adheres to her word, even to the point of lying to prevent his apprehension before he can escape England. She also provides him with a good London lawyer, her friend Henry Lennox.

Even the indomitable John Thornton eventually comes under Margaret's care. This powerful man who loves her faces possible financial ruin, but is rescued by Margaret, who has, fortuitously, become wealthy. Thus, before Mrs. Gaskell can give Margaret to Thornton in marriage, he must be humbled.

Mrs. Gaskell's sympathetic portrayal of Margaret indicates the affinity she felt for this kind of woman. Margaret's struggles for reconciliation, both inward and outward, could well have been Mrs. Gaskell's own. The two women, the heroine and her creator, have many similar standards and, therefore, similar conflicts. This is not to say that Margaret is Mrs. Gaskell's alter-ego, for the heroine of North and South possesses her own personality and comes alive through Mrs. Gaskell's skill as a novelist. Margaret's behavior patterns, as well as those of the other women discussed, illustrate the dilemma in which Victorian women found themselves. Weak women sacrificed selfhood for an outwardly imposed code: unconscious conflict was the result. Strong women, like Margaret, who were unwilling to sacrifice selfhood had the double problem of both inner and outer conflict.
CHAPTER III

THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION OF HELSTONE

IN NORTH AND SOUTH

In the Victorian patriarchal society, the female was supposed to be thoroughly in subjection; she knew that her world was to have definite limits. Social mores required that she remain in a state of ignorance of the world, both inside and outside herself. The average young Victorian girl was reared in the cloistered atmosphere of home and family. Although she was expected to carry on the tradition of family life in which she had grown to marriageable age, she came to adulthood with one side of her nature completely repressed. The typical middle- and upper-class Victorian girl was totally unprepared to deal with her sensual nature because she had been forced to remain in a state of innocence that precluded a conscious knowledge of herself as a sexual being.

Annie Besant, a leader in the Theosophist movement in England in the latter part of the nineteenth century, describes and deplores her sheltered Victorian girlhood:

So I married in the winter of 1867 with no more idea of the marriage relation than if I had been four years old instead of twenty. My dreamy life, into which no knowledge of evil had been allowed to penetrate, in which I had been guarded from all pain, shielded from all anxiety, kept innocent on all
questions of sex, was no preparation for married existence and left me defenseless to face a rude awakening. Looking back on it all, I deliberately say that no more fatal blunder can be made than to train a girl to womanhood in ignorance of life's duties and burdens. . . . That "perfect innocence" may be very beautiful, but it is a perilous possession. . . .

From a twentieth-century vantage point, Peter Cominos explains the unconscious battle which was a result of the repression described above:

The components of the conflict were a negative prohibitive conscience and sexual desire. . . . From a very early age, feminine conscience was deeply penetrated with the fear of becoming aware of sensuality, which in itself was bad feminine conscience. . . . So-called innocence was tantamount to good conscience, although it is clear that girls would always be in doubt about the completeness or thoroughness of their innocence, which in turn produced guilt and anxiety. 2

The theme of reconciliation of conflicts in North and South reaches its deepest level in Margaret Hale's unconscious struggle towards sexual maturity. Although Mrs. Gaskell certainly does not handle this level of the novel explicitly, a careful reading reveals an obvious pattern within the author's mind and consequently within the mind of Margaret Hale. A clue to this pattern exists in the function of the village of Helstone within the novel. The title, North and South, implies that there will be some equality of

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treatment concerning the two sections of England. But the bulk of the novel concerns the North, or Milton. The South and Margaret's beloved Helstone enter the story only briefly in actuality and occasionally come into the novel by allusion for the purpose of contrast.

Margaret's personal history indicates the role Helstone played in her life. At the novel's opening, Margaret, eighteen years old, lives in London with her Aunt Shaw. She had come to live there when she was nine after spending her early childhood in Helstone. She returns to Helstone and her parents for a few months before the family moves to Milton, and does not go there again except for one brief visit after the death of both her parents. Margaret speaks of the village throughout the novel, but with decreasing frequency as the story develops. Thus, Helstone exists for Margaret almost entirely in her memory. Arthur Pollard comes near to the significance of Helstone for Margaret when he says that the village recalls to her its physical beauty and "represents the joys of childhood."³ J. G. Sharps comments that "Margaret is, at times, given to idealizing Helstone."⁴

Although Margaret does at times idealize Helstone, as the novel progresses, she becomes more realistic in her attitude

towards the village. She eventually sees and accepts the negative as well as the positive aspects of Helstone and the South. The progression of Margaret's attitudes indicates the deeper level of progression within her personality. As noted, Margaret spends comparatively little time in Helstone. Therefore, the reader wonders why she should cling so lovingly to its memory. Viewed in terms of Margaret's unconscious mind, her attitudes become clearer. To Margaret, Helstone represents the world of innocence; throughout the novel, it brings to her mind visions of the uncomplicated time of her childhood. The soft, green, gentle world of Helstone was one of untroubled relative non-sexuality for Margaret. She lived there during her formative innocent years; because of her Victorian upbringing, she unconsciously clings to her innocence through associations with the village. Margaret's attitude towards Helstone serves as an indicator of her conflicts and her development from repressed sexuality to an acceptance of womanhood.

After living in London for nine years, Margaret returns to Helstone to live with her parents. Here, at the age of eighteen, Margaret is brought abruptly face to face with the adult world of sexuality, and she is unprepared for it. Her idyllic world is shattered in one day by two persons--Henry Lennox and her father.

Lennox, a friend from Margaret's London days, comes to Helstone to spend the day with the Hales. Having an interest
in Margaret, he wishes to see what her life is like in the village she had described so lovingly to him in London. The first instance of Margaret's system of denial occurs on an innocent sketching hike taken by Margaret and Lennox. Lennox puts her into one of his sketches, then tells her how much he likes that particular one because she is in it. Margaret goes to the brook to wash her palette and comes back "rather flushed, but looking perfectly innocent and unconscious" (p. 26). She is strongly resisting any thoughts that something more than a "friendship" could exist between her and Henry Lennox. But her denial cannot last, because later in the day, as she and Lennox are strolling along the terrace walk, she must come face to face with sexual reality. When Lennox's tone of voice tells Margaret that the conversation is taking a dangerous turn, she experiences panic for an instant. "She wished herself back with her mother--her father--anywhere away from him" (p. 29). But she quickly regains her composure, her "strong pride," and is ashamed of herself to be momentarily caught off guard "as if she had not the power to put an end to it with her high maidenly dignity" (p. 29).

When Lennox proposes to her, Margaret is horrified and almost cries from offended innocence, because she had not known that he cared for her "in that way," as she puts it so evasively. The day is ruined for Margaret, and so, too, in a sense, is Helstone, as her haven of innocence.
Margaret's thoughts later that day indicate the dual expectations Victorians placed upon their daughters:

In the first place, Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage; and secondly, she did not know if her father might not be displeased that she had taken upon herself to decline Mr. Lennox's proposal. (p. 34).

Her intense agitation because of a marriage proposal reveals more about Margaret than the fact that she simply does not love Henry Lennox. The girl feels guilt and shame at the thought of her womanhood and its implications. She also has obviously been reared to be obedient and to conform to the natural progression from girlhood to marriage in fulfillment of the requirement of continuation of the "genteel family."

As Margaret muses on the day's events with Henry Lennox, her father interrupts her thoughts with his startling announcement that he can no longer remain a minister because of his religious doubts. He tells her that they will be moving to the industrial city of Milton. Thus, in one day, Margaret is thrust from her protected innocence by a marriage proposal and also faces the prospect of entering the masculine world of Milton.

After the day's upsetting episodes, Margaret spends a restless night, "haunted" by dreams of Henry Lennox. Mrs. Gaskell reveals elementary psychological insight in the telling of one dream about Lennox:

He was climbing up some tree of fabulous height to reach the branch whereon was slung her bonnet: he was falling and she was struggling to save him, but
held back by some invisible powerful hand. He was dead. And yet, with a shifting of the scene, she was once more in the Harley Street drawing room, talking to him as of old, and still with a consciousness all the time that she had seen him killed by that terrible fall (p. 47).

Margaret's repressed daytime thoughts surface in her dream. Lennox's death in a fall seems to be her unconscious attempt to deny his reality as a sexual being. In putting herself high above him in a tree, she denies her own sexuality as well, replacing it with the regal manner she uses in her conscious life.

The language and symbolism of the dream support the Edenic atmosphere that permeates Helstone. The tree and Lennox's fall from it bring an association with the Garden of Eden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and man's fall from his state of innocence. When Margaret wakens the following morning, she thinks about her father's doubts "which were to her temptations of the Evil One" (p. 47). In Margaret's mind the events of the preceding day mingle and produce feelings of sin, guilt, and anxiety. The timing of Mr. Hale's announcement coincides with Margaret's first encounter with adulthood. Now Helstone must become a part of the past; Margaret must go--be expelled, as it were--from her Eden of innocence into the harsh reality of Milton.

Several examples of sexual symbolism in this section of the novel bring into focus the idea that Margaret's world is becoming one of deeper sexual conflicts. Before his proposal,
Lennox is eating pears (an age-old sexual symbol) with Mr. Hale and Margaret. His comments on the ripe fruit are sensual:

"Nothing is so delicious as to set one's teeth into the crisp, juicy fruit, warm and scented by the sun. The worst is, the wasps are impudent enough to dispute it with one, even at the very crisis and summit of enjoyment" (p. 28).

Another example of sexual symbolism appears as Margaret is trying to decide when she will tell her mother of their impending move from Helstone. Her eyes catch on a bee entering a deep-belled flower; she decides that when the bee flies forth, that will be her signal to tell the news.

Two weeks later, walking under the pear-tree wall, Margaret remembers her talk with Lennox and how, when he was proposing to her, her eyes were fixed on a late-blowing rose, like the ones he had picked and handed to her earlier in that fateful day. Now all is damp and dreary at dusk and "turning to decay." In the background, Margaret, hearing the sound of creeping in the forest, knows poachers are out there in the dark. She had, before this night, known that they were nearby, yet "the wild adventurous freedom of their life had taken her fancy; she felt inclined to wish them success; she had no fear of them. But tonight she was afraid, she knew not why" (p. 60). The freedom of the poachers had before held fascination for her, but now other connotations enter into their adventures; Margaret obviously has mingled feelings of fear and fascination. She experiences depression and anxiety at

5 For a discussion of pears and pear trees as sexual symbols see Bruce A. Rosenberg, "The 'Cherry-Tree Carol' and 'The Merchant's Tale,'" Chaucer Review, 5, No. 4 (Spring, 1971), 264-76.
the thought of leaving her childhood home, but because of the nature of her thoughts and associations, her feelings indicate a fear of her entrance into the world of sexuality.

The eating of fruit in the garden has obvious Edenic implications. Mrs. Gaskell knew the Bible well; thus this image would come naturally to her. Her removal of the Hales from their Eden in Helstone could have been a conscious device, but the sexual symbolism almost certainly arose from unconscious associations in Mrs. Gaskell's mind.

Throughout the novel, Helstone is to Margaret a place of beauty and peace, but as she gradually grows into her new life in Milton and into womanhood, with all its ramifications, Helstone recedes bit by bit. Yet when she suffers pain in her gropings through guilt and shame, for a moment a memory of that lost green world sweeps over her. In Milton, after the painful strike episode, she wakens to feel a slight breeze blowing, and "though there were no trees to show the playful tossing movement caused by the wind among the leaves, Margaret knew how, somewhere or another, by wayside, in copses, or in thick green woods, there was a pleasant, murmuring dancing sound--a rushing and falling noise, the very thought of which was an echo of distant gladness in her heart" (p. 228).

Although occasional longings for a return to childhood come over Margaret, she learns in the process of maturing that Helstone and the South are not as idyllic as she had originally maintained. Helstone as an archetypal Paradise
begins to recede in Margaret's mind, and she recognizes some of the more unpleasant aspects of life in the faraway place which once seemed so free of complications. Margaret shows this realization as she attempts to convince Nicholas Higgins that the South would not suit him as a place to work. She recognizes that the poor have a difficult time there, just as they do in the North. She tells him that "those that have lived there all their lives are used to soaking in the stagnant waters. They labour on from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields--never speaking or lifting up their poor, bent, downcast heads" (p. 364).

When Margaret returns to Helstone for a visit after the death of her parents and after having fallen in love with John Thornton, she is saddened to see the changes:

Here and there old trees had been felled the autumn before; or a squatter's roughly-built and decaying cottage had disappeared. Margaret missed them each and all and grieved over them like old friends. They came past the spot where she and Mr. Lennox had sketched. The white, lightning-scarred trunk of the venerable beech . . . was no more; the old man, the inhabitant of the ruinous cottage, was dead; the cottage had been pulled down, and a new one, tidy and respectable, had been built in its stead. There was a small garden on the place where the beech-tree had been.

"I did not think I had been so old," said Margaret after a pause of silence; and she turned away sighing (pp. 463-64).

Margaret realizes that nothing in life can stay the same except Nature and that she cannot remain in perpetual girlhood. Even here though, on the brink of accepting womanhood, she resists the pull of her longings for fulfillment. She
thinks to herself:

"I seek heavenly steadfastness in earthly monotony. If I were a Roman Catholic and could deaden my heart... I might become a nun. But I should pine after my kind; no, not my kind, for love of my species could never fill my heart to the utter exclusion of love for individuals" (p. 478).

Margaret decides that another return trip to Helstone would be painful. She senses that she has "put away childish things" and must plan her future as an adult. She loves a man who she fears does not love her, but she has accepted both these facts and proceeds to control her own destiny for the first time in her life. Thus, Margaret places Helstone in perspective: it will remain in her memory, but she will no longer cling to it as an escape from the real world.

Most of the Gaskell critics mention the author's own childhood village of Knutsford in relation to villages within her novels. Certainly, the biographical fact cannot be ignored, but the psychological significance is clear in North and South, as it is also in Cranford. Helstone was an early childhood world, "untainted" by adult sexuality, just as Cranford was a refuge of repressed sexuality. When North and South was serialized in Household Words, the second Helstone section, or Margaret's visit there with Mr. Bell, did not exist, but Mrs. Gaskell wrote it into the story when the novel was published in two volumes. She felt the Margaret-Thornton ending was too abrupt; the fact that she chose Helstone to work

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6Sharps, p. 217.
Margaret towards that final reconciliation within herself and with Thornton, indicates the meaning Helstone had for the author.
CHAPTER IV

VICTORIAN RELIGION AS SEXUAL SUBLIMATION

Sexually repressed Victorian women had recourse to an outlet which, ironically, was the cause of much of their repression; this source of both denial and release was religion. In *North and South*, Mrs. Gaskell reveals how Victorian religious expression acted as an indicator of inner feelings. Religion enters the novel in a number of manifestations, although not as an integral part of the plot. The treatment of religion is of interest for what it reveals about its role in Victorian life and particularly in the lives of women.

Criticism concerning religion in *North and South* has generally been superficial or beside the point. Most critics confine themselves to discussing the doctrinal theme centered around Mr. Hale's religious doubts. Yvonne Ffrench says that "the religious motive . . . is deliberately given equal importance with the industrial problem."\(^1\) Annette Hopkins calls the doctrinal theme "the weakest in the book because of the entire vagueness with which it is treated."\(^2\) This vagueness may be a flaw in the novel's structure, but it is in consonance with

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Mrs. Gaskell's own religious concepts. As a Unitarian, Mrs. Gaskell was not overly concerned with doctrine. Mr. Hale's religious dilemma as a Dissenter provides the cause of the family's removal from the South to the North, but aside from this function, the conscientious clergyman's doubts do not become pivotal to the novel's development. Mrs. Gaskell's handling of doctrinal differences within the novel merely indicates the consistency of her philosophy of conciliation between people of opposing views. This tolerance for religious differences is expressed succinctly in these two sentences: "Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm" (p. 277).

Although Mrs. Gaskell does not include religion in a didactic manner in *North and South*, she does not ignore it, for to do so would have been to deny a major influence in the lives of her characters. Edgar Wright most nearly approaches a psychologically accurate assessment of the religious function when he says that religion appears as a "counter-balance to self-will."3 He further says that Mrs. Gaskell felt discomfort in dealing with a love theme, and that she interposed religion as a shield against having to face the subject directly.4 Although Wright may be misconstruing Mrs.

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4Ibid., p. 185.
Gaskell's conscious intentions, he inadvertently points out the function of religion for Victorian women.

Peter Cominos says that religion was a major source of sexual sublimation for women of the Victorian era. Men used their work as an outlet, but women, whose lives were restricted within the narrow sphere of family life, turned to piety and charity as the only proper avenues for expressing repressed sexuality. Henry Maudsley, a pathologist, wrote, "Between the instinctive sexual impulses with the emotional feelings that are connected with them and the conventional rules of society which prescribe the strictly modest suppression of them and any display of them, a hard struggle is not infrequently maintained."

One of the most potent religious influences exerted upon the Victorians was Evangelicalism. The Evangelical movement, which was low church and fundamentalist, affected many areas of Victorian life. Its effect upon sexual mores was profound, as Evangelicalism preached a strict adherence to stern laws of morality. John Wesley had been instrumental in condemning passions of many kinds, and his followers in the nineteenth century prohibited any expressions of passion not connected

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5 Peter Cominos, "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict" in Suffer and Be Still, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington, 1972), p. 163.

with religion. One of the characteristics of Evangelicalism was the humanizing of the Christ figure, with the result that he could be worshipped as an ideal. This led to a passionate devotion to Jesus which had distinctly erotic overtones.

Annie Besant, in discussing her Evangelical upbringing, says that in her childhood she first became acquainted with Jesus through emotional religious tales. She wished to live and die for her ideal:

How much easier to be a Christian if one could have a red-cross shield and a white banner and have a real devil to fight with and a beautiful Divine Prince to smile at you when the battle was over.

As I grew older the dreams and fancies grew less fantastic but more tinged with real enthusiasm. I read tales of the early Christian martyrs and passionately regretted I was born so late when no suffering for religion was practicable.

Besant reveals that her training made no provisions for overt earthly feeling:

As my girlhood began to bud towards womanhood, all its deeper currents were set in the direction of religious devotion. My mother did not allow me to read love stories and my daydreams of the future were scarcely touched by any of the ordinary hopes and fears of a girl lifting her eyes toward the world she is shortly to enter.

She continues, citing the nature of her feeling towards the central person in Evangelicalism:

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9 Ibid., p. 52.
Ever the Christ was the figure round which clustered all my hopes and longings, till I often felt that the very passion of my devotion would draw Him down from His throne in heaven visibly in form as I felt Him invisibly in spirit.¹⁰

Although not all Victorian girls had been subjected to the fanatic religious training Besant describes, the general environment was one of repression. Religion of any variety obliquely provided the necessary release of libidinous drives.

In *North and South* religion functions in the lives of the women characters as one of a number of indications of their adaptation to society. Although, as Cominos says, religion was a "major source" for the repression of sexual feelings, the importance of its use as a device for repression varied among individual women. A woman's need for religious sublimation was influenced by several factors, including religious upbringing, placement within a family unit, social status, and basic temperament. Mrs. Gaskell's women represent a broad spectrum of religious expression, ranging from tepid conventionalism to zealous fanaticism.

The shallow world of Margaret's Aunt Shaw and her cousin Edith includes only a conventional acceptance of religion. They find outlet in a life of idle luxury and social amenities. Edith's discomfort concerning Mr. Hale's position as a Dissenter indicates how little she could consider such matters. Her most cogent remark concerning religion reveals something

¹⁰Ibid., p. 57.
of the place its expression held in the vacant round of London social life. In speaking of Margaret, Edith says, "For my part... I am very glad she is a Christian. I know so very few!" (p. 493).

Margaret's mother, Mrs. Hale, exhibits no devoutness beyond her acceptance of the fact that God has ordained that she must soon die. Her most fervent feeling is reserved for her exiled son, Frederick; her preoccupation with him is the consuming passion of her life. She admits that the desire to see Frederick keeps her from praying, even as her life slips away. No words of piety come from her at the end; she is happy only to know that Frederick has arrived to be at her bedside. Her life as a minister's wife and the difficulties arising from her husband's religious doubts have tempered Mrs. Hale's religious inclinations. Her hysterical nature centers on the living and the material, rather than on the spiritual.

Mrs. Thornton and her daughter, Fanny, are further examples of women for whom religion played only a perfunctory role. They had other ways of coping with their lives as Victorian women. Fanny is too empty-headed to deal with abstractions and concerns herself with the superficialities of life as a wealthy young lady with "accomplishments." Her mother, strong and straightforward, has reared her son and daughter in a traditionally Christian manner, but her drives
have been deflected into the vicarious masculine world of her son's business life in Milton.

Religion's sublimating effect can best be seen in the lives of Margaret Hale and her factory-worker friend, Bessy Higgins. Margaret is affiliated with the staid, dignified Anglican faith, while Bessy immerses herself in the emotionalism of the Evangelical. Although the two girls view religion differently, they both use it as a vehicle for confronting their individual dilemmas.

When Margaret moves to Milton, she forms a friendship with the mill-worker Nicholas Higgins and his two daughters, Bessy and Mary. Bessy, who is dying of a lung disease, is extremely religious in the "Methodee" sense, as her father refers to her type of religion. Bessy knows she is dying, and revels in religious ecstasies, seeming to prefer the after-life to this one, and with good reason. She has lived a harsh life as a worker in the mills, daily experiencing the results of poverty. She hates the violence and anger that poverty and poor working conditions spawn, and she longs for the peace of the grave. In her first meeting with Margaret, Bessy, frail and wasted, says simply to her, "I shall have a spring where I'm boun' to, and flowers, and amaranths, and shining robes besides" (p. 83). Bessy's father at times grows impatient with the girl's preoccupation with the after-life. He tells Margaret, "Hoo's so full of th' life to come, hoo cannot think of the present" (p. 155).
Edgar Wright feels that "Bessy Higgins's exaggerated religiosity . . . becomes sentimentalized and melodramatic, almost a caricature of itself." But Bessy's longings serve at least two purposes for her: she can escape from her miserable reality of sickness and poverty, and she can channel the normal erotic feelings of a young woman into acceptable religious emotion.

Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on the next world, appealed to the lower classes who suffered constant deprivation. Bessy's talk reveals her tiredness of the strife between the workers and their employers. She has lived through too much. She tells Margaret, "But it's not for me to get sick and tired o' strikes. This is the last I'll see. Before it's ended I shall be in the Great City--the Holy Jerusalem" (p. 155). Although women turned to religion for solace, the men in Bessy's class frequently turned to drink. She indicates the longing for escape from the monotony of her life by sympathizing with the men's escape into drink. It is clear that she finds the same escape in religion: She admits, "I've longed for to be a man to go spreeing, even if it were only a tramp to some place in search o' work. . . . It's little blame to them if they do go into th' gin-shop for to make their blood flow quicker, and more lively, and see

\[11\] Wright, p. 142.
things they never see at no other time--pictures, and looking-glass, and such like" (p. 161).

According to Paul W. Pruyser, a religious person approaching death turns his thoughts from his own frail, dis-integrating body to a concept of something physically enduring:

He does not have to give up entirely the notion of having a body; the divine example of a resurrection and the participation in a corporate body of greater endurance allow him to continue to believe in his personhood, even when his physical body will give out. If then the imagery is further elaborated into a final rising from the grave, on a far-off day of judgment, there is also an anticipatory investment in the new body, free from decay or limitations, something to be truly proud of, and to be cherished.  

Bessy's visions give her an exalted sense of her worth as a person. Her thoughts of "shining robes" in the next life transform her into something and someone very different from the wretched reality from which she longs to escape. If the genteel classes of women above Bessy felt a lack of individuality and "I-ness," a girl of Bessy's social status and physical condition would naturally view herself as infinitesimally insignificant. One reason for Bessy's attachment to Margaret seems to be the dying girl's need to identify with a healthy, attractive woman who is alive with vitality and youth. Bessy tells Margaret of a recurring dream, supposedly pre-cognitive, in which an angel-like woman appears in brilliant finery such as Margaret will wear to the Thornton's dinner-party:

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"But dun yo' know, I ha' dreamt of yo', long afore ever I seed yo'."

"Nonsense, Bessy!"

"Ay, but I did. Yo'r very face--looking wi' yo'r clear steadfast eyes out o' th' darkness, wi' yo'r hair blown off from yo'r brow, and going out like rays round yo'r forehead, which was just as smooth and straight as it is now--and yo' always came to give me strenth, which I seemed to gather out o' yo'r deep comforting eyes--and yo' were drest in shining raiment--just as yo's going to be drest. So yo' see, it was yo'!"

"Nay, Bessy," said Margaret gently, "it was but a dream."

"And why might na I dream a dream in my affliction as well as others? Did not many a one i' the Bible? Ay, and see visions too! Why, even my father thinks a deal o' dreams! I tell yo' again, I saw yo' as plainly, coming swiftly towards me, wi' yo'r hair blown back wi' the very swiftness of the motion . . . and the white shining dress on yo've gotten to wear. Let me come and see yo' in it. I want to see yo' as in very deed yo' were in my dream."

"My dear Bessy, it is quite a fancy of yours."

"Fancy or no fancy--yo've come, as I knew yo' would, when I saw yo're movement in my dream--and when yo're here about me, I reckon I feel easier in my mind and comforted just as a fire comforts one on a dree day . . . please, God, I'll come and see yo'" (p. 176).

Before Bessy dies, she asks to be buried in someting belonging to Margaret. In so doing, she wishes literally to take a part of Margaret to the grave with her. The angel in Bessy's dream can be seen as the transformed Bessy, in the "New Jerusalem," and she can also represent Bessy's feelings for Margaret as a real person.

While Bessy's religious fancies prepare her for death, they also allow her to sublimate thoughts of earthly love. Her feeling for Margaret, intermingled with religious fervor, constitutes the only intense human devotion Bessy experiences,
except for her love of her father. Never does she mention having a love-interest, even in the time before her sickness. The dream of the angel is religious in nature, but it is also distinctly sensual. Bessy's interest lies in the apocalyptic visions of the Book of Revelations. This part of the Bible has an emotional appeal lacking in Margaret's "clearer parts"; although Margaret tries to dissuade Bessy from dwelling on the emotion-laden prophecies, the dying girl needs the heightened feeling she receives from reading Revelations. She claims that her reading that part of the Bible is "as good as an organ, and as different from everyday, too" (p. 162). Thus she finds there escape from the ordinary, and she also experiences sensuality. She finds her release in her fervent religion.

While Margaret's manner of expressing her religion varies from Bessy's, she too seeks something akin to escape when she turns to religious thoughts and activities. In discussing Margaret's general character, Ffrench comments on her religious nature. She says of Margaret that "her interest in religious matters is strong . . . She is morally precocious." While it is true that Margaret does exhibit piety throughout the novel, critics of North and South fail to examine the implications of the instances in which Margaret reveals her "religious" self.

An attentive reading of *North and South* shows a pattern in Margaret's religious life. When sexuality draws near, Margaret retreats to the safety of piety and religious talk. When she first becomes acquainted with John Thornton, she hides behind a facade of regality and piety. In his presence she sometimes resorts to stilted, pious language. In talking with him about the problems of masters and men, she expresses her feelings in the language of the Bible: "When I see men violent and obstinate in pursuit of their rights, I may safely infer that the master is the same; that he is a little ignorant of that spirit which suffereth long and is kind and seeketh not her own" (p. 144). Margaret knows the Bible well, as did most proper Victorian ladies, but the times she chooses to use its words reveal her unconscious need for it to function as a barrier between her and her repressed feelings. She uses her religion to keep her sensual nature in control.

When Margaret lies to save her brother, then becomes aware that Thornton knows of her lie, she feels disgrace and a sense of shame. She suffers agonies of remorse, and, as is her wont when threatened by conflicting feelings, she turns to her religion. But as she kneels by her bed to pray, she becomes aware that she is equating her fear of God's displeasure with that of John Thornton's displeasure; God and Thornton become intermingled in her feelings. "She caught herself up at this with a miserable tremor; here was she classing his low opinion of her alongside with the displeasure of God" (p. 339).
However, as Margaret grows towards the realization of her true feelings for Thornton, she ceases to confuse her feelings of guilt towards God and those towards Thornton. Her language becomes less laden with pious platitudes; she straightforwardly assesses her situation in relation to him without bringing God into the matter. This is not to imply that Margaret's religious beliefs diminish, but only that she resorts to religion less as a mechanism of repression than in the beginning.

Another manifestation of Margaret's sublimation of her feelings for Thornton is displayed in her relationship with Bessy Higgins. Margaret, in conscious earnestness, flees to comfort Bessy when her repressed feelings for Thornton must be handled. These visits can be seen as symbolic flights from sexual conflict. Margaret must avoid having "those kind of feelings," and she can deny them through acts of mercy. She also knows that when she is with Bessy, the emphasis will be upon religion. After having to entertain Thornton's mother and sister, Margaret runs to visit Bessy "as soon as the visitors were gone" (p. 115). She visits Bessy on the afternoon after she has been trying to decide which gown to wear to the Thorntons' dinner-party, and then again on the day of the party, she goes to see how Bessy is faring. On the morning after the riot at the factory, when Margaret defends Thornton bodily, she hurries to Bessy again. Here Mrs. Gaskell is quite overt as to Margaret's intentions: "She would go and see Bessy Higgins. She would banish all
recolletion of the Thornton family--no need to think of them till they absolutely stood before her in flesh and blood" (p. 228). Finally, after Thornton comes to propose to her and leaves, rejected, Margaret flies out to "go and see Bessy Higgins, of course" (p. 236). She immerses herself in tending to Bessy, comforting her and reading from the scriptures. After she leaves Bessy, she returns home to the filial duties of caring for her dying mother, and all thought of John Thornton is pushed aside--consciously, at least.

Rollo May says of Victorian culture that "when any human function is repressed as sex then was, it seeps out to color every other human activity."\(^{14}\) In *North and South* Mrs. Gaskell's women characters illustrate several Victorian approaches to sexual sublimation. The author's intentions undoubtedly were not conscious, but she provides insight into the phenomenon of repression and sublimation through her accurate psychological rendering of character. Of the various methods of sublimation described, religion is shown to be one of the most effective because of its high emotional content, combined with its respectability.

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CHAPTER V

MARGARET AND FREDERICK

Margaret Hale suffered from the same stifling repression as did other Victorian women. However, as has been noted, her ways of attempting to adjust differ from those of the stereotyped ideal female. Whereas several of the characters in North and South conform to Victorian standards of femininity, Margaret possesses extraordinary strength and will. Will power was a typical Victorian masculine characteristic, but Margaret continually reveals her desire for this attribute in solving her problems. Rollo May says that Victorian will power was used to help one manipulate his surroundings, as well as to manipulate himself. This "will" was opposed to "wish" and was used to deny "wish." Will power was a way of avoiding awareness of sexual urges and impulses that did not conform to the picture of the controlled, well-managed self. ¹ This description of will is applicable to Margaret, yet one wonders why she, more than most of the other females in North and South, has a bent towards masculine dominance and self-control. Part of the answer must lie in Margaret's attitudes towards her brother, Frederick.

Mrs. Gaskell reveals early in the novel that Margaret has a brother living in exile because of his part in a mutiny. As the story develops, characters make allusions to Frederick, arousing interest in him and his misfortunes. Then, when Mrs. Hale is dying, Frederick arrives, summoned by a letter from Margaret. He remains only for a few days, then flees from England to remain in exile in Spain. During his brief visit, Frederick, because of being seen with Margaret at night in a railway station, complicates his sister's relationship with John Thornton. Some critics feel that Frederick is too artificially included in the novel for this one purpose and that his role is an embarrassing slip in Mrs. Gaskell's art. Gerald De Witt Sanders says that "too much is made of Frederick's visit and Margaret's contact with him, from which nothing results. Frederick . . . acts merely a puppet's part . . . and is then shunted off with perfect indifference."² Edgar Wright comments that "the introduction of Frederick is pure plot-spinning."³

Because Frederick has counterparts in other Gaskell novels, the biographical implications cannot be ignored. Mrs. Gaskell's brother, John Stevenson, was a lieutenant in the merchant service and sailed for India when Elizabeth was about twelve years

²Gerald De Witt Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell (New Haven, 1929), p. 69.
old. He never returned, and the true facts of his disappearance were never known. Annette Hopkins says that the family held the tradition that he was captured by pirates; another version of his disappearance was that he arrived in India, at Calcutta, and was never seen again. Arthur Pollard, in discussing Frederick as a character in North and South, says that "the lost loved one was a character with a tremendous appeal for Mrs. Gaskell. . . . It is not extravagant to suggest that Mrs. Gaskell's thoughts about her own lost brother . . . may well have led to her frequent recurrence to this topic."5

Peter Jenkyns in Cranford bears a similarity to Frederick and to Mrs. Gaskell's brother, John. Miss Matty's brother, "poor Peter," returns from India after having run away to sea many years before. In Mary Barton, Will Wilson, a young seaman like Frederick, comes to dreary Manchester with tales of his adventures in distant ports. Although critics emphasize the "lost loved one" aspect of characters such as "poor Peter" and Frederick, who is also, interestingly, referred to as "poor Frederick," the aura of freedom surrounding them is generally overlooked. All these characters serve the purpose of bringing vicarious adventure into the lives of the other


characters in the novels who have not had an opportunity to see the world beyond their narrow sphere.

In discussing Frederick, the critics ignore the psychological importance he holds in his sister's development. Viewed in this manner, Frederick's intrusion into the story constitutes not an artistic misfortune, but a furtherance of the underlying theme of sexual conflict. Frederick plays a part in the development of the story, and his presence also helps Margaret in her attempt to find a balance within herself.

Frederick, as one who has travelled to distant ports, had exotic adventures, and put his life in jeopardy for conscience's sake, is certain to be looked upon by Margaret, his female counterpart, as a person to envy, admire, and emulate. He has freedom of which she can only dream in her restricted world. In addition to these advantages over his sister, Frederick is the first-born child of the family, unconditionally adored by his mother with whom Margaret has shared a less than satisfactory relationship. When Margaret returns to Helstone to live with her parents, she wonders to herself what has become of Frederick; her information concerning him has been negligible. At this point, she knows only that he was involved in a mutiny and is now far away in exile. Frederick's name is seldom mentioned by her parents, making Margaret loath to ask questions concerning him. Her mother's maid, Dixon, had adored "Master Frederick." Although she does no other housekeeping, Dixon weekly dusts her favorite's room "as if he might be
coming home that very evening" (p. 20). Margaret feels intense interest in her brother's fate, but Mrs. Gaskell conveys a sense of wistfulness in the girl as the result of being left out of this very important part of her parents' lives. Margaret vacillates concerning which parent to question:

"When she was with her mother, her father seemed the best person to apply to for information; and when with him, she thought that she could speak more easily to her mother" (p. 19).

Margaret wishes for a close relationship with her mother, but she finds she must compete with the absent Frederick. In Milton, nursing her mother in her final illness, she learns the details of Frederick's life and his part in the mutiny. When Margaret is told of how Frederick led the mutiny in protest against a fatal injustice to a fellow seaman, she expresses pride in her brother's actions. Mrs. Hale pours out the story, apparently oblivious of any jealousy she might arouse in her daughter: "'He was my first baby, Margaret.' Mrs. Hale spoke wistfully, and almost as if apologizing for the yearning, craving wish, as though it were a depreciation of her remaining child" (p. 127). Then Mrs. Gaskell adds that "such an idea never crossed Margaret's mind" (p. 127). Mrs. Hale grows despondent as she thinks of Frederick's fate should he return to England. When Margaret tries to comfort her mother, Mrs. Hale turns her face to the wall and "took her hand out of Margaret's with a little impatient movement, as if she would fain be left alone with the recollection of her son" (p. 127). Perhaps on
a conscious level Margaret did not resent Frederick and did not wish that she too were an unconditionally loved and admired male child, free to see the world as he had done and still retain the love and respect of his parents. However, Mrs. Gaskell comments later that "Margaret was not a ready lover, but where she loved, she loved passionately and with no small degree of jealousy" (p. 146).

As Mrs. Hale's illness progresses, she and Margaret have many long talks, and the mother reminisces about the days when her children were babies. She replies to Margaret's question of what Fred was like when he was a baby: "Why, Margaret, you must not be hurt, but he was much prettier than you were. I remember, when I first saw you in Dixon's arms, I said, 'Dear, what an ugly little thing!' and she said, 'It's not every child that's like Master Fred, bless him'" (p. 241). Margaret has come to care for her mother very much just as she is on the threshold of losing her, and Mrs. Hale's preoccupation with thoughts of Frederick adds to Margaret's feelings of being in second place with her mother. When Dixon thinks to usurp Margaret as chief nurse for her mother, Margaret resents being thought of as weak by Dixon; she then implores her mother: "Let me be in the first place, Mother, I am greedy of that. I used to fancy you would forget me while I was away at Aunt Shaw's" (p. 151). After this direct appeal by her daughter, Mrs. Hale cries out again for Frederick and puts herself into such an emotional state that Dixon must
be recalled to help. Dixon talks of how much Master Frederick means to her also. She tells Margaret how she likes to see her showing a "bit of spirit" and says to her: "When you fire up you're the very image of Master Frederick" (p. 153). Thus, Margaret finds herself continually pitted against the image of her absent brother.

Although Frederick in his absence is both a rival and a model for Margaret, his arrival in Milton allows her to add new dimensions to her personality by loving interaction with a strong male. When Frederick returns surreptitiously to see his mother before her death, Margaret is shown what it is like to be petted and treated in the traditional manner by a male. She feels a sense of pleasure in his masculine strength, as compared with her father's weakness. She is only too happy to relinquish some of the burdens she had carried before his arrival: "She knew then how much responsibility she had had to bear, from the exquisite sensation of relief which she felt in Frederick's presence" (p. 293). Before Frederick's arrival, Margaret tells her mother that she will "watch over him like a lioness over her young (p. 281). However, when Frederick is with the family in Milton, the brother and sister are able to give to one another equally, sharing in their ability to meet one another's needs. Frederick treats Margaret in a gentle, paternal way, and for the first time in the novel she is referred to as something besides a regal queen. Frederick banters with her in a tenderly teasing manner:
"But, Margaret, what a bungler you are! I never saw such a little awkward, good-for-nothing pair of hands. Run away, and wash them, ready to cut bread-and-butter for me, and leave the fire. I'll manage it. Lighting fires is one of my natural accomplishments."

So Margaret went away; and returned; and passed in and out of the room, in a glad restlessness that could not be satisfied with sitting still. The more wants Frederick had, the better she was pleased; and he understood all this by instinct (pp. 291-292).

Margaret, strong and stoical in the face of so many difficulties, allows herself to be soothed and tended by her stalwart brother as their mother lies on her deathbed. She accepts solace from her brother and listens to his words of hope, whereas so often before, without him, she has had to be the strength of the family. His loving admonitions keep her going ahead just when she is ready to give way to despair. Frederick tells her,

"Come, come, come! Let us go upstairs, and do something, rather than waste time that may be so precious. Thinking has, many a time, made me sad, darling; but doing never did in all my life" (p. 295).

When Mrs. Hale dies, Frederick gives way to paroxysms of grief, and Margaret must for a while be the comforter of both her father and brother; but Frederick overcomes his first sorrow and once again cares for Margaret. This reciprocal giving is the first that Margaret has known, and it prepares her way for taking the next step into womanhood.

Thus, in Frederick, Margaret sees the advantages of being a strong male with mother's unconditional love, but she is also shown the benefits of womanhood when her brother treats
her with deference and appeals to that side of her nature she has kept pushed down--the more "feminine" passive side.

Freud would have said that in her relations to her mother and her emulation of her brother, Margaret suffered from penis-envy. The modern psychologist Clara Thompson says that women do not want to be men, but simply envy them their position in society's structure.\(^6\)

Margaret is faced with even more conflicts than the average Victorian woman in that she not only has the patriarchal system to "keep her in her place," but she also has a brother who, by the nature of his life and family relationships, gives her more motivation to be both attracted to and repelled by the masculine world.

Margaret must contend with feelings of guilt and shame about her female sexuality because of the way Victorian females were taught, but she must also struggle to find a balance between the two elements in her sexuality. The assertive masculine side of Margaret's personality never entirely recedes; she knows the value of will and masculine strength. But Margaret also begins, gradually, to accept her giving and taking role as a woman. Frederick helps her to take those first steps towards balance.

CHAPTER VI

MARGARET HALE AND JOHN THORNTON

Throughout *North and South* Margaret Hale encounters the challenge of growing away from restrictive sexual conflicts. Various persons and events affect her reaching towards autonomy, but the most influential force in Margaret's life proves to be John Thornton, the man with whom she falls in love. The process of Margaret's gradual acceptance of her love for Thornton controls the novel. The fact that Margaret's growth to maturity is tortuous reflects Mrs. Gaskell's innate social and psychological awareness. In her delineation of Margaret's relationship with John Thornton, the author faithfully depicts the pressures exerted by Victorian society upon middle-and upper-class young women. Mrs. Gaskell's handling of Margaret's feelings and behavior as opposed to those of Thornton also illustrates the Victorian concept of feminine versus masculine sexuality and its expression.

Fear of sexuality had a strong impact on Victorian life, but society acknowledged the male as a sexual being, although the idea was distasteful. Women, however, with their supposed lack of sexual feeling, served as chaste objects of adoration. Dr. Acton concedes that some women, few indeed, feel a sexual passion exceeding that of men, but his conclusion is that "as a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires
any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her
husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of
maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions."
Accordingly overt expression of sexuality in North and South
comes from the thoughts and observations of John Thornton.
While Margaret continually denies her feelings of attraction
towards him, resorting to hostility, haughtiness, and guilt,
Thornton is quite aware of what her femininity does to him.
He may be alarmed by the fact that Margaret has a strong
power over him, but at least his feelings exist in his con-
scious mind; Margaret must cope unconsciously with her feelings
towards Thornton.

Because many of Margaret's conflicts arise from repres-
sion, criticism concerning North and South focuses on
Thornton's passion for her and ignores the heroine's psycho-
logical dilemma. Arthur Pollard says that "Mrs. Gaskell traces
very delicately the birth and growth of Thornton's passion
for Margaret." Edgar Wright, discussing Mrs. Gaskell's
discomfort in dealing with sexual matters, says that the
existence of passion "had edged into her treatment of Thornton
in North and South. . . . A less hectic, more spiritualized

1William Acton, The Functions and Disorders of the
Reproductive Organs, as quoted by Steven Marcus in The Other

2Arthur Pollard, Mrs. Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer
(Cambridge, 1966), p. 115. Italics are mine.
view of love is certainly the one with which she is more at ease." Wright implies that Mrs. Gaskell's reservations about openly handling passion result from her own repressions and that the matter should be left to psychologists. He fails to note that the author, in her portrayal of a burgeoning Victorian love relationship, has invested her work with psychological accuracy.

From the beginning of the acquaintance between Margaret and Thornton, Mrs. Gaskell allows him the advantage of knowing and expressing to himself Margaret's effect upon him. At their first meeting, Thornton is instantly struck with Margaret's physical beauty:

She sat facing him and facing the light; her full beauty met his eye; her round white flexile throat rising out of the full, yet lithe figure; her lips moving so slightly as she spoke, not breaking the cold serene look of her face with any variation from the one lovely haughty curve; her eyes, with their soft gloom, meeting his with quiet maiden freedom (p. 71).

When Thornton comes to tea for their second meeting, he watches Margaret arranging the tea service; his observation on this occasion is more intimate than on the former visit:

She had a bracelet on one taper arm, which would fall down over her round wrist. Mr. Thornton watched the replacing of this troublesome ornament with far more attention than he listened to her father. It seemed as if it fascinated him to see her push it up impatiently until it tightened her

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4 Ibid., p. 185.
soft flesh; and then to mark the loosening--the fall. He could almost have exclaimed--"There it goes again!" There was so little left to be done after he arrived at the preparation for tea, that he was almost sorry the obligation of eating and drinking came so soon to prevent his watching Margaret (p. 91).

As the story progresses, Thornton's awareness of Margaret increases. When Margaret and her father attend a dinner-party at the Thorntons', the host can hardly make himself aware of anyone except his lovely guest: "He shook hands with Margaret. He knew it was the first time their hands had met, though she was perfectly unconscious of the fact. . . . He was struck anew with her great beauty. He had never seen her in such dress before; and yet now it appeared . . . that she ought to go always thus apparelled" (p. 191). After Margaret shields Thornton bodily from the angry strikers in front of his home, in recalling the event in his mind he remembers only "the touch of her arms around his neck--the soft clinging which made the dark colour come and go in his cheek as he thought of it" (p. 223). Over and over he thinks of her, even after she has rejected his proposal of marriage, and his remembrance is hardly an ethereal one; it is earthy and passionate. He remembers her "beautiful eyes, that half-open sighing mouth, which lay so close to his shoulder only yesterday" (p. 246). He tries, by using his Victorian willpower, to forget her: "He knew how much he had to do--more than his usual work, owing to the commotion of the day before. He had to see his brother magistrates; he had to complete the arrangements,
only half made in the morning, for the comfort and safety of
his newly imported Irish hands" (p. 247). But even this
approach is of no avail. Thornton thinks of Margaret in
every dress she had worn, in every mood, with every expression.
He need not and cannot hide his longing for Margaret from
himself. He need not indulge in all the psychic subterfuge
that she must go through; he is frankly and passionately in
love with her, and he knows it. He feels pain because of his
love and the rejection he encounters, but at least it is a
known pain, a conscious feeling of knowing what he wants and
cannot have. When Thornton feels that his is a lost cause
with Margaret and that she cares for someone else, he stoic-
ally resigns himself to that fact, but he is never in doubt
as to his conscious feelings. Such awareness cannot be for
Margaret.

Peter Cominos says of Victorian women:

Repression removed the sexual instinct from aware-
ess but being irrepressible, not from existence,
and it therefore exercised a profound influence
upon the repressed daughter. She became subject
to motives and desires of which she was not aware.
She acted upon motives unconscious of their origin
and was spared the knowledge of what she was doing. 5

An examination of Margaret's interaction with John
Thornton reveals that she uses many of the unconscious de-
fenses demanded by a repressive upbringing. As mentioned in

5 Peter Cominos, " Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict," in Suffer and Be Still, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloom-
an earlier chapter, Margaret felt the first intrusion of adult sexuality when Henry Lennox proposed to her in Helstone. However, she does not have to face the ultimate test of leaving Victorian girlhood behind until she moves to Milton and meets John Thornton. When the Hales commence their new life in Milton, Margaret begins to associate with people of whom she has heretofore had no knowledge. She becomes acquainted with rough mill workers, factory girls, and powerful, ambitious manufacturers. Margaret's gentle father feels a sense of awe towards the power of the Milton way of life, but Margaret, in fear masked as disdain, goes "less abroad, among machinery and men" (pp. 78-9). She dislikes the "shoppy" people in Milton, but is, from the beginning, impressed, while at the same time repelled, by John Thornton, who, by his independence and strength of will, has become one of the most powerful manufacturers in Milton. Margaret meets Thornton when he comes to be tutored by her father in the Hales' home. From the beginning, she relies upon her "maidenly dignity" to keep herself at a distance from this man who displays qualities of masculinity that she has never before encountered. But Thornton has struck a chord of attraction deep within Margaret, and the remainder of the novel, although one cannot think Mrs. Gaskell consciously meant it to be, is a picture of the struggle within Margaret to accept the fact that she is a woman with a normal woman's feelings. At every step along the way, Margaret tries unconsciously to frustrate these feelings.
Margaret uses a casual disdain as her first defense against recognizing any attraction towards John Thornton. When asked by her mother what he is like, Margaret shows little interest:

"Oh! I hardly know what he is like," said Margaret lazily; too tired to tax her powers of description much. And then rousing herself, she said, "He is a tall, broad-shouldered man, about--how old, papa?"

"I should guess about thirty."

"About thirty--with a face that is neither exactly plain, nor yet handsome, nothing remarkable --not quite a gentlemen; but that was hardly to be expected" (p. 73).

When Thornton is to come to call, Margaret hides her feelings under a cloak of tiredness and one of the bad headaches to which she had lately become susceptible. As the relationship progresses, Margaret becomes aware of the characteristics in Thornton she admires, but a constant verbal badinage exists between the two on the surface. Margaret's "innocent" mind continually turns away to thoughts other than Thornton.

Margaret's greatest inner struggles begin when she defends Thornton from the strikers at his mill. The women in his house see this action as an overt display of interest on Margaret's part, and in her stupor after being hit by a rock thrown by one of the workmen, Margaret is horrified to hear what the women say about her:

"Well, miss, since you will have it--Sarah, you see, was in the best place for seeing, being at the right-hand window; and she says, and said at the very time too, that she saw Miss Hale with her arms about master's neck, hugging him before all the people."
"I don't believe it," said Fanny. "I know she cares for my brother; anyone can see that; and I dare say she'd give her eyes if he'd marry her--which he never will, I can tell her. But I don't believe she'd be so bold and forward as to put her arms round his neck" (p. 217).

Margaret, from a twentieth-century point of view, overreacts to the situation:

"Ah!" said she, clenching her hands together, "It is no wonder those people thought I was in love with him, after disgracing myself in that way, I in love--and with him too!" Her pale cheeks suddenly became one flame of fire; and she covered her face with her hands. When she took them away, her palms were wet with scalding tears (p. 226).

Margaret continues to agonize over her disgrace, then cries out in anguish: "Let them insult my maiden pride as they will--I walk pure before God!" (p. 226). This strong reaction reveals how greatly a Victorian woman valued her reputation as a "modest woman." The loss of her sense of maidenliness was an incredible blow because of the emphasis placed upon modesty and virtue. Walter Houghton, writing of the Victorian exaltation of purity in women, says that women were revered as "creatures more like angels than human beings." ⁶ Any suspicion concerning a woman's motives cast a shadow over her reputation, and the idea that anyone would think her "impure" appalled Margaret.

When she returns home after the strike, Margaret manages to hide her shame from her parents. She stoically conceals

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the pain she feels from the blow on her head, making small talk with her father until her strength fails her. She passes a restless night, seeing many accusing eyes looking at her in shame. The next morning, there is a slight breeze blowing, and it reminds her of green woods and the rushing, falling sounds of water; she somehow feels better—"an echo of distant gladness in her heart" (p. 228). Or perhaps, an echo of times past, a remembrance of innocence, far away from John Thornton. When these thoughts fail to keep Thornton out of her mind, she decides to go see Bessy Higgins, using the device of religious compassion as a denial of sensuality. But before she can carry out this plan to divert her mind, Thornton comes to the house with his avowal of love. As she stands before him in her shame, she "looked like some prisoner, falsely accused of a crime she loathed and despised" (p. 230). When Thornton expresses his gratitude and then, his love, she feels shock and tells him his way of speaking is "blasphemous." She speaks of the "sanctity of her sex" and her woman's "reverenced helplessness" as reasons for her shielding him the day before. She speaks as though she truly felt there were some religious awe connected with being a woman, and in the Victorian sense, there was. The mob obviously would not attack Thornton with a woman standing in front of him. In her shame and indignation that he would think this action was a sign of love for him as an individual, she tells him that she would have done the same for any man. She thus covers
her feelings for him by a statement of general compassion. As noted earlier, general compassion on the part of a woman was a very acceptable Victorian concept--sexual attraction was not.

When Thornton has gone, Margaret contemplates his words of love, and "she shrank and shuddered as under the fascination of some great power, repugnant to her whole previous life" (p. 235). Margaret, feeling her defenses weakened by Thornton's ardent statement of love for her, "disliked him the more for having mastered her inner will" (p. 235). When Thornton's overt talk of love brings her feelings closer to the surface, she experiences panic. Margaret must struggle with that "great power" without actually knowing the basis for the struggle. She cannot face what is going on within her.

Margaret endures another battle of unconscious origin when her brother comes to Milton to see their dying mother. Margaret's deep sense of shame and Thornton's reaction when she tells a lie to save Frederick vividly point out what Victorian men expected of their women and what price women had to pay in misplaced guilt. Frederick is hurriedly leaving Milton by train after Mrs. Hale's death; he and Margaret are standing near the station talking where Thornton sees them as he passes by. Thornton, not knowing about the brother, mistakenly assumes Frederick to be Margaret's lover. Later, when Margaret is questioned by an inspector about a fatal incident that occurred that night, she lies to save Frederick,

7The word "lover" in the Victorian sense means "sweetheart."
reiterating several times "I was not there" (p. 325). At first, Margaret's anguished reaction to her telling of a lie to save her brother from possible death seems strange. Margaret's religiosity could explain her guilt; she consciously feels guilt before God for lying. However, from an unconscious viewpoint, her actions become clearer. Margaret can consciously admit that she feels disturbance because Thornton saw her with Frederick and would assume she was out after nightfall with a lover. This is the real underlying cause of her anxiety, although she punish herself with the thought that Thornton knows she is a liar. Mrs. Gaskell points out that Margaret "never dreamed that he, or anyone else, could find cause for suspicion in what was so natural as her accompanying her brother" (p. 336). This does not make sense; if Margaret were thinking clearly, she would have realized that Thornton had no idea she had a brother. Margaret agonizes alone, not even sharing with her father the "religious" despair at being "humbled before God." Although she and her father have shared griefs before, Margaret cannot bring this burden to him because of the underlying nature of her pain. Margaret prays, but her guilt remains, and she resolves to bear it stoically. But even the mention of John Thornton's name produces a "relapse into the feeling of depressed, pre-occupied exhaustion" (p. 342) that she experiences frequently in this period. She suffers from listlessness and languor, but she is not aware of the entire cause.
Only when Thornton's mother comes to remonstrate with her about the actions at the railway station and to insinuate some kind of wrong-doing on Margaret's part, does it consciously occur to her what Thornton must believe about her. And this all occurs to her after Mrs. Thornton leaves. She thinks of all the implications in Thornton's mistaken notions about her, but she cannot make herself come to complete realization of her feelings:

Then, as a new thought came across her, she pressed her hands tightly together--

"He, too, must take poor Frederick for some lover." (She blushed as the word passed through her mind.) "I see it now. It is not merely that he knows of my falsehood, but he believes that some one else cares for me; and that I--Oh dear! --oh dear! What shall I do? What do I mean? Why do I care what he thinks beyond the mere loss of his good opinion as regards my telling the truth or not? I cannot tell. But I am very miserable. . . . What has happened to make me so morbid to-day? I do not know. I only know I cannot help it. I only know I must give way sometimes. No, I will not though," said she, springing to her feet. "I will not--I will not think of myself and my own position. I won't examine into my own feelings (pp. 383-84).

Margaret's inability to understand her own emotions and her sense of pride prevent her from facing Thornton with the truth about her brother and her lie told to protect him.

When Thornton learns from Nicholas Higgins that Margaret has a brother and that it was he with whom she was standing on that fateful night, his sense of relief is great for two reasons. He now knows that Frederick presents no problem as a rival; relief for this reason is natural in any age.
Thornton's second reason for relief reveals more about Victorian attitudes. Cominos says that "women were classified into polar extremes. They were either sexless ministering angels or sensuously oversexed temptresses of the devil." Thornton obviously did not think of Margaret in either of these two extreme categories, but he was a Victorian and was influenced by the same strict social code that affected Margaret. His doubts about the woman whom he idealized indicate how deeply ingrained his notions were: "How could one so pure have stooped from her decorous and noble manner of bearing! But was it decorous--was it?" (p. 331). Mrs. Thornton voices the same sentiments when she confronts Margaret about her supposed misconduct: "For your mother's sake, I have thought it right to warn you against such improprieties; they must degrade you in the long run in the estimation of the world, even if in fact they do not lead you to positive harm" (p. 376). Thornton feels a burden lifted when he learns the truth: "I knew she could not be unmaidenly: and yet I yearned for conviction. Now I am glad!" (p. 504). Now Thornton could think of Margaret in the way he had before "the lie." His mistrust of Margaret and her psychological trauma point out the strength of the "good woman or whore" philosophy. The idea of Margaret's possibly having been involved in a homicide becomes secondary to the

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8 Cominos, p. 168.
thought that she could have behaved in an unmaidenly way.

Margaret's gradual realization of her love for John Thornton allows her to triumph over the inner conflicts that beset her from the beginning of the novel. She travels a circuitous route from the day in Helstone when she, in offended dignity, refuses Henry Lennox's proposal, to the day in London when she and Thornton openly express their mutual love. Margaret's unconscious denial of herself as a sexual being causes anxiety that to her seems the result of other problems in her life. She did, indeed, face many trials such as the family's leaving their beloved Helstone; her mother's illness and death; concern for her brother, Frederick; the death of her father; and the trials of her factory-worker friends in Milton. Margaret had courage and determination to face outward upheavals and tragedy, but her efforts to repress normal feminine emotions cause reactions both confusing and painful to her.

After the deaths of both her parents, Margaret returns to London to live again with her Aunt Shaw. She and Henry Lennox renew their acquaintance, but her thoughts continually return to John Thornton in Milton. The quiet life she leads in mourning gives her time for contemplation and growth. Margaret's friend and god-father, Mr. Bell, accompanies her on a visit to Helstone, and here she realizes that change is inevitable in life. After having re-visited the home of her
childhood, Margaret resolves never to return again. One senses a step forward for Margaret as she says goodbye to the distant past. However, Margaret's immediate past in Milton remains with her. Resignedly, she thinks that if only Thornton could regain his respect for her, she could face the future without his love.

When Mr. Bell dies, he leaves his fortune to Margaret, thus enabling her to think of arranging her life to suit herself. During a holiday at the seashore, Margaret sits for many hours of each day, gazing at the waves, thinking of her existence:

But all this time for thought enabled Margaret to put events in their right places, as to origin and significance, both as regarded her past life and her future. Those hours by the seaside were not lost, as anyone might have seen who had had the perception to read, or care to understand, the look that Margaret's face was gradually acquiring (p. 495).

Margaret was acquiring maturity; she had grown beyond being the girl who "could not--would not" look at her feelings to a young woman who could accept responsibility for her own life.

The culmination of Margaret's quest for balance occurs when Thornton comes to London. The two see one another again, both having changed and grown in acceptance and understanding of themselves. On the last page of the novel, Helstone is glimpsed again briefly. Thornton shows Margaret some roses he has carried with him for a long time. Margaret, recognizing that they come from Helstone, playfully asks that he give them to her. He replies that he will, but that she must pay
him for them. In the beginning of the novel, when Henry Lennox picked roses for Margaret at Helstone, she accepted them and carried them into the house without giving anything in return. But now Margaret can accept the fact that in order to receive this symbol of womanhood and love, she must give of herself in return. She has grown from a girl burdened with repression and its attendant anxiety to a woman who knows she cares deeply for a man. She has also grown from a girl who fears authority and submission to it to a woman who recognizes that a balance can exist between extremes. Early in the novel, Margaret expresses her views about "masters and men" working together; her words apply to each level of conflict within the novel: "God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent" (p. 143). Mrs. Gaskell's theme of reconciliation of conflicts achieves its final expression in the union of Margaret and Thornton.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

When viewed as a novel of multi-layered conflict, Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South* gives insight into several Victorian areas of concern. The industrial struggle between manufacturers and workers and the cultural divisions between North and South provide the background against which more personal conflicts may be explored. In her presentation of male and female characters, Mrs. Gaskell reveals Victorian attitudes concerning the respective roles of the sexes; at the deepest level of the novel, one can discern the effect of sexual mores upon individual characters. Conflict and the struggle for reconciliation of conflict provide the basic theme at every level of the novel, with Margaret Hale's inner conflicts constituting the major underlying focus.

An attempt to analyze the theme of a literary work involves the problem of authorial intention; this problem exists in any literary era, but the Victorian age presents more difficulties than others because of the repressive nature of the times. Elizabeth Gaskell's intentions in the writing of *North and South* can never be fully ascertained, but there can be no doubt that a thematic pattern exists. David Daiches, discussing structural pattern in literature, says that "pattern
always exists, but it may exist as a by-product of which the creator is unconscious."¹ The theme of conflict and reconciliation follows a pattern throughout North and South, but Mrs. Gaskell's levels of consciousness in presenting the story can only be surmised. Certainly, the industrial and cultural conflicts are consciously worked out, but as the author presents and develops conflicts within the characters, conscious and unconscious motivations become less distinct. One point is clear, however; Mrs. Gaskell wrote truthfully. The twentieth-century reader who is ignorant of Victorian standards may not fully empathize with the actions of Margaret Hale, but when she is placed in her proper context, Margaret's motivations become consistent with reality as she and Mrs. Gaskell knew it. Her responses, though culturally conditioned, are psychologically real. Thus, she and the other characters can be accepted as actualities.

Henry James said of Mrs. Gaskell that "writing was a matter of pure feeling with her."² Indeed, the feeling she had consisted of a keenness of insight that gives a sense of "rightness" to her work.

Mrs. Gaskell's presentation of various personality types in North and South indicates her close scrutiny and understanding


²Henry James, "Wives and Daughters," The Nation, 34, No. 2 (Feb., 1866), 246-247.
of people. With realism she depicts the effects of nineteenth-century England upon her female characters. Women who conform to the stereotype of Victorian femininity are evident throughout, not as caricatures, but as embodiments of a code that Mrs. Gaskell knew well. Although the author never directly comments upon the matter, she allows characters such as Edith Shaw, Mrs. Hale, and Fanny Thornton to give a picture of the way many women adapted to Victorian society. Mrs. Thornton and Margaret Hale serve as examples of alternative methods of coping with femininity in their social structure.

Mrs. Gaskell's handling of religion in *North and South* faithfully reproduces one important phenomenon of Victorianism. Mr. Hale's Dissenter's stance, Margaret's piety, and Bessy Higgins's Methodism all contribute to the overt realism of the novel. The psychological uses of religion within the novel indicate one Victorian outlet for repressed sexuality.

Mrs. Gaskell displays deep psychological insight in the development of the character of Margaret Hale. Margaret's early insistent denial of her love for Thornton and her gradual realization of her feelings constitute an accurate portrayal of the process of growing from repression to the conscious awareness of sexuality. Margaret's various relationships with men in the novel indicate her inner conflicts concerning sexuality. Henry Lennox, Frederick, and John Thornton all contribute to Margaret's growth towards womanhood.
Mrs. Gaskell's development of Margaret from the innocence of her Helstone days to the time of her acceptance of Thornton in London reveals the author's ability to look beneath the surface and discern the reality of psychological conflict.

One hundred one years ago, an article written in The Cornhill Magazine contained the following statement:

Let Mrs. Gaskell's novels be read after the lapse of a hundred years, and one feels that the verdict delivered then would be that they were penned by the hand of a true observer—one who not only studied human nature with a desire, but a capacity, to comprehend it.  

The consensus of modern criticism justifies this prediction. Elizabeth Gaskell's close observation of her fellow Victorians gives insight into her contemporary society. Although many of the problems with which she concerns herself were of particular significance for her era, conflict and the attempt to find reconciliation are basic facts of human existence.

\[3\] George Barnett Smith, "Mrs. Gaskell and Her Novels," The Cornhill Magazine, 29 (Jan., 1874), 212.
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