
Social Inference In The Novel North And South By Elizabeth Gaskell

The novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell represents social inference and complications of citizens of England, the town which is called Milton (originally Manchester). The author used the model of Margaret Hale as women's role and female treatment in that period of time. In the role of main character's mothers, Gaskell exemplified two different women from the North and from the South Mrs. Thornton and Mrs. Hale. This essay is going to briefly examine into two female characters, specifically Hannah Thornton and Maria Hale concerning the representation of female heroines of the novel *North and South* and its adaptation from BBC (2004). Elizabeth Gaskell illustrated the strong power of women against the norms of the Victorian period. According to Balamurugan 'Gaskell again took her powerful weapon feminism to exemplify female autarchy by two female characters named Margaret Hale in South and Mrs. Thornton in North where both of them never lose their autarchy in any situation.' (Balamurugan, 2012). Moreover, Gaskell gives reader opportunity to explore people's features from two different worlds: North and South to clearly examine dissimilar women characters like Mrs. Thornton and Mrs. Hale as two Mothers of main heroes of the novel John and Margaret. 'North and South is the novel which portrays the opposition and segregation of the society into two North and South lines.' (Balamurugan, 2012).

First of all, from the view of Elizabeth Gaskell, Mother of John Thornton – Mrs. Thornton is very proud and arrogant, as the author interprets Mrs. Thornton by the view of Mr. Hale, I fancy Mrs. Thornton is as haughty and proud in her way, as our little Margaret here is in hers, and that she completely ignores that old time of trial, and poverty, and economy, of which he speaks so openly. (Gaskell, 1855, p 140). Furthermore, in Gaskell's novel Mrs. Thornton has the qualities of strong, powerful woman, the features that weak females don't have in the Victorian period of time, she is proud of her son, unlike her daughter, she considers Fanny as "sick child", 'She compares Fanny to a sick child, which makes it clear that she does not expect a lot from her. Mrs. Thornton herself is of the total opposite kind, even her frame is described as strong' (Gaskell, 1855, p 72). Also, heroine shown in the BBC adaptation as Mrs. Thornton is caring woman too, from the John Thornton's line while describing his mother, "Having a mother of such strong will and integrity, and she managed that I could put three shillings aside a week, and I thank her every day for that early training" (*North and South*, 2004) from his story about losing father in early age, Mr. Thornton thanks his mother for bringing him up, 'She protects and leads her family, including her male child. She teaches him to be frugal and to be thoughtful about the future. Because of her sacrifice and deviation from the norm, her son grew up successfully and quite wealthy.' (Gibson, 2015) and, likewise, Kate Bartlett (producer of the adaptation of *North and South* in BBC 2004) interprets the role of solicitous mothers in the scene of the dialogue of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Thornton where Mother of Margaret, Maria asked to 'be friends' with her daughter, Mrs. Thornton didn't reject her, instead she accepted request of looking after her, Hannah said that: " I promise that if Miss Hale should ask me for help, or if I should ever hear of her doing something that I see as wrong, I will counsel her as I would my own daughter. I promise." (*North and South*, 2004). As for the physical appearance, in the adaptation, producers of the film tried to relate the standards of the Victorian era when people from the higher social level wore black colour, females 'had low but pointed waists and bell-shaped skirts. Women wore corsets, which reached up to the knees and layers of petticoats

under their gowns.'(Barber, 1980) From the line of Maria, about Mrs. Thornton's dress 'how exquisite, I haven't seen English point-work quite like that for years" (North and South, 2004) illustrates that Hannah can afford herself exquisite ornaments in her dresses. That's how Mrs. Thornton was represented from the written text of North and South and the BBC (2004) adaptation.

As for Mrs. Hale, Maria was described as a weak and sick woman, she has been suffering the "domestic worries" (Gaskell, 1855, p 83) in the novel and in the adaptation, Maria dies in a while after they leave their tranquil hometown to industrialized Northern city. However she was not always a weak woman, it seems that some circumstances made her sick, for example, injustice towards her son, when she eventually got sick, there was nothing she wanted more in her life than to see her son again, crying, 'Frederick! Frederick! Come to me. I am dying. Little first-born child, come to me once again!' (Gaskell, 1855, p 41). Moving to the Milton, Mrs. Hale's latest hope was to see her son, Frederick one more time before she passed away, however, cannot stand the idea of having him in Milton with a danger of getting arrested. This is possibly why Margaret's Mother is represented as a weak female character since she thought of others more than her own self. Sooner or later, that made her too weak and she passed on. "She has not always been a weak woman, because she also stood up for herself and married below her for love without approval. This shows a strength that Margaret has as well. However, it becomes clear that she cannot handle things as well as Margaret." (Louttit, 2014). Mrs. Hale married for love, but found it difficult to be happy with the low income and somehow alienated life of a priest's wife. She is not happy with that her husband hasn't reached to a more socially sustaining place. From Aunt Shawn's words, 'Married for love, what can dearest Maria have to wish for in this world?' Mrs. Hale, if she spoke the truth, might have answered with a ready-made list, ' a silver-gray glacé silk, a white chip bonnet, oh! Dozens of things....' ' (Gaskell, 1855, p 19). As in the BBC adaptation, Mrs. Hale has shown as a frail and skinny woman who eventually became very pale and weak right before her death because of the illness.

To conclude, this essay examined that Elizabeth Gaskell portrayed two absolutely dissimilar women and constructed their characters comparing to their motherland, for example, Hannah Thornton, strong and powerful woman, very arrogant and proud personifies strong spirit of females in the Victorian era, originated from the North England, industrial town of Milton while Maria Hale was weak and frail woman from tranquil and rural south England city Helstone, who eventually dies from moving to the Milton and also unfair conditions of her son Frederick. The BBC 2004 adaptation produced by Kate Bartlett is written as similar as possible to the written text from Elizabeth Gaskell in 1855. This thesis has described some points in which the series North & South and the novel North and South represent females, their roles and their values. It is clear that the interpretation of two Mothers discussed above in the series have been illustrated in such a way that they appear in the novel.