

North and South Study Guide

North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell

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Plot Summary

North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell is a social novel set in early Victorian times. It tells the story of Margaret Hale and her move from the South of England to the Industrial North. Margaret struggles to adapt to the harder lifestyle of the North, but after a series of tragedies, she finds she is a far stronger and braver person than she ever thought.

The novel begins in London, where Margaret lives with her aunt and cousin Edith. Edith is getting married to Colonel Lennox, which means Margaret has to move back to her parents' home in Helstone. Once back in the countryside she reverts to her old habits of walking and drawing. It is while she is preparing to go outside and draw that her servant announces the arrival of her old friend Henry Lennox. Mr. Lennox tells Margaret he wants to marry her. She declines the offer and soon after Mr. Lennox leaves. In the evening, Mr. Hale calls Margaret into his study. Margaret thinks he wants to talk about Mr. Lennox, but it is something even more important. He tells Margaret they are moving to Milton in the industrial North.

They move to Milton almost immediately and with the help of the local mill owner, John Thornton, they find a suitable house. It does not possess the luxury of their vicarage in Helstone, but suits all their needs with enough room to house their servant Dixon. Margaret and Mr. Hale settle in nicely. Margaret enjoys going out for walks and the attention she receives from both men and women. Mr. Hale loves his work as a private tutor and particularly gets on well with his student John Thornton. One evening Mr. Hale invites Mr. Thornton for dinner. Mr. Thornton and Margaret argue about the differences between the north and south of England. Mr. Thornton says the north is a much tougher life and to prove it tells the story of his rise from poverty.

Margaret makes friends with an ill girl called Bessy Higgins. They are having a serious conversation about religion when Bessy's father Nicholas interrupts. He tells Margaret not to preach to his daughter. Back at the Hale's house, Mrs. Hale tells Margaret that Mrs. Thornton is coming for dinner with her daughter Fanny. Mrs. Thornton is a very proud, northern lady and has already taken a dislike to the southern Hales. However, for her son's sake, she maintains a certain level of politeness. When she leaves the house, she tells Fanny not to form a friendship with Margaret. A few days later Margaret has to see Mrs. Thornton again because her mother needs a doctor. Mrs. Thornton pontificates about the north, ending her harangue by stating the workers are about to go on strike. Later that evening Mr. Hale gives Mr. Thornton a lesson. When they finish, Margaret and Mr. Thornton argue about the strike. Margaret tells Mr. Thornton he has no humanity.

Doctor Donaldson visits Mrs. Hale and diagnoses her with a deadly illness. Margaret decides not to tell her father, as he is likely to blame himself. Margaret visits Bessy and they talk of the impending strike. Bessy says that people down south do not suffer like people up north, but Margaret refutes the statement and tells Bessy about her mother's illness. Back at the Hale's house, Mr. Hale tells Margaret the Thorntons have invited



them to a society dinner. The Hale's are the first to arrive. As the evening progresses, the men and women split up to converse about their different interests. Margaret finds the women's conversation boring and begins to listen to the men. Her presence encourages many admiring comments.

When Margaret and Mr. Hale arrive back home, Dixon exclaims Mrs. Hale has been so ill she thought her dead. Upon Dr. Donaldson's advice, Margaret goes to visit Mrs. Thornton to inquire about a water bed. Margaret's arrival coincides with a strikers' protest. Margaret advises Mr. Thornton go out and speak to them. He does as she suggests, but the crowd act violently towards him, prompting Margaret to run out and help. She shields Mr. Thornton with her body and a stone strikes the side of her head. The next day Mr. Thornton goes to thank her. He presumes Margaret protected him because she loves him, but she acts hurt at such a suggestion, claiming she would have done the same thing for anyone. When Mr. Thornton leaves, Margaret goes to see her mother. Mrs. Hale states the need to see her estranged son, Frederick, and asks Margaret to write him a letter.

Frederick visits from Spain. He has to be very careful because the government wants to put him on trial as a traitor. Everyone is delighted to see him. His mother is especially satisfied, and she passes away during the night. The next day Dixon tells Margaret she met a man from Southampton, who she thinks is trying to capture Frederick. The family decides Frederick has to leave immediately. At the train station, a man approaches Margaret and Frederick. He tries to grab Frederick, but Frederick trips him and jumps onto an approaching train. The next day an inspector comes to visit. He says a man died from a fall yesterday at the train station and a witness saw Margaret there with a companion. Margaret denies everything. Later on, the inspector meets Mr. Thornton and tells him about the case. Mr. Thornton saw Margaret at the station and knows she is lying. He does not say anything to the inspector, but the fact she was with another man sparks his jealousy. Mr. Thornton is a magistrate, and he goes back to the law court to close the investigation.

Nicholas tells Mr. Hale and Margaret he is out of work. He is just cursing his friend Boucher for his role in the strike when six men appear with Boucher's dead body. Boucher has committed suicide and the men ask Margaret to break the news to his wife. Later on, Nicholas visits the Hales to tell them of his guilt. He says he needs a job so he can support Mrs. Boucher and her children. Mr. Hale suggests he goes to see Mr. Thornton. The next day Nicholas waits five hours, only for Mr. Thornton to say cannot provide a union man with a job. Nicholas tells Margaret about his bad luck. She is criticizing Mr. Thornton when he appears in the doorway and offers Nicholas a job.

Mr. Hale visits his friend Mr. Bell in Oxford and Mr. Hale dies in his sleep. Mr. Bell travels to Milton to deliver the sad news to Margaret. He meets Mr. Thornton on the train and tells him everything. Mr. Thornton is particularly upset when he hears Margaret is likely to have to leave Milton for the South. When Margaret hears the news, she cries for days. Mr. Bell stays until her Aunt Shaw comes to take her back to London. Margaret cannot settle in London and she misses both Milton and Helstone.



Mr. Bell passes away and leaves Margaret all his money and property. Meanwhile, in Milton John Thornton is struggling with his business. He decides things are so bad that he has to give it up and takes a train to London to see his lawyer. Margaret is now Mr. Thornton's landlady, and he goes to see her to end their tenancy agreement. Upon seeing each other they realize they are in love.



I-V

I-V Summary

Margaret Hale sits in the back drawing room at her Aunt Shaw's house in Harley Street, London. The narrative explains her cousin Edith is engaged to Captain Lennox and is likely to move to Corfu. Margaret will go back to her parents. She wants to explain her plans for the future, but Edith is sleeping on the sofa. They have just come from a big dinner and at the front of the room, her Aunt Shaw talks to some society ladies about her daughter's impending marriage. She calls over Edith, and Margaret goes over to say she is resting. Aunt Shaw asks Margaret to fetch her cousin's shawls from the servant. On her return, a servant announces Henry Lennox, a good friend of Margaret's. Henry and Margaret talk of Margaret's village in Helstone in the new forest and Margaret describes it as one of the most beautiful places on God's earth. She is rather offended when Mr. Lennox makes fun of her but gets over it enough to invite him to Helstone.

After the wedding Margaret and her father travel back to Helstone. While Margaret and Mr. Hale love Helstone, it becomes apparent that Mrs. Hale hates it. She grew up in London and now she finds herself living in a hamlet, miles from anyone of any significance. Even her son Frederick has gone off to Rio, and her only companion is her faithful servant Dixon. The chapter finishes with the housemaid announcing Mr. Lennox.

Margaret is excited to hear news about Edith and begs Mr. Lennox to tell her everything. Mr. Lennox gives her a letter from Edith and Margaret rushes upstairs to read it. A while later Margaret takes Mr. Lennox out to the forest. They find a squatter's cottage and sit and draw it. On their return to the house, they discuss their paintings with Mr. Hale and eat some dinner. Mr. Hale decides he would like some pears and asks Margaret to gather some from the garden. Mr. Lennox suggests they all go out together. Outside Mr. Lennox takes Margaret for a short walk. He tells her he is love with her, but Margaret is not happy with his outburst. She tells him she does not return the feeling and has always thought of him a friend. The atmosphere soon changes for the worse, and everyone is relieved when Mr. Lennox decides to catch the early train back to London.

Later that evening Mr. Hale asks to speak to his daughter about something important. Margaret wonders how her father could have heard so quickly about Mr. Lennox's proposal, but it turns out it is not about Mr. Lennox at all. Mr. Hale is having religious doubts and has decided he can no longer work as a Reverend. This means the family has to move away from Helstone to the manufacturing town of Milton in the north in Darkshire, where his old friend, Mr. Bell, has found him work as a private tutor. Margaret is not happy about the prospect of moving away from her beloved Helstone, and less so, when her father tells her she must tell her mother the bad news. Margaret is surprised he has not already told Mrs. Hale but agrees to do the deed the next day when her father is out.



Her father is out all day, but rather than wait until the last minute, Margaret decides to tell her mother the bad news as soon as her father leaves the house. Mrs. Hale takes the news badly, asking why her husband could not have told her earlier. Margaret comforts her mother until a dejected Mr. Hale walks into the house. Mrs. Hale asks her husband why he did not speak to her first, and Margaret runs upstairs to cry.

I-V Analysis

Immediately in this section, Gaskell portrays the main protagonist Margaret as a strong character. This portrayal does not so much foreshadow her growth as a person in Milton, but provides proof that she always had the ability to survive anywhere. The story begins in Margaret's Aunt Shaw's house in London. Margaret's cousin is asleep on the sofa and Margaret fulfills her Aunt's request of getting her cousin's shawl with no protest. At the top of the stairs, she meets a servant with her cousin's things and without appearing anything less than friendly, offers to take them off of her hands. Margaret's easy way with people is apparent throughout, and, though Gaskell infers she has airs, these airs are only with people who threaten her need for control, a need that she does not limit to people below her in status. In this chapter, Henry Lennox comes to her house in Helstone and asks Margaret for her hand. She fervently denies it to him, coming across as deeply frightened of the prospect of losing her independence. During a time when society expected women to marry and have children as soon as possible, this reinforces Margaret's uniqueness as a strong woman.

In comparison, Mr. and Mrs. Hale are weak characters, and without Margaret's strength, they would struggle to survive. Considering she is their 19-year-old daughter, this is a strange portrayal of family relations, but one that rarely comes across as anything less than real. Margaret, with her varied family life, has no doubt developed the observer's ability to see where others have gone wrong. In this respect, she can see how her parents have held each other back—the mother bringing her father down with her complaining and the father fueling his wife's neuroticism by setting up home in places she thoroughly dislikes. In this section, Mr. Hale asks Margaret to tell his wife that he has decided to give up his job as a Reverend and move into the harsher environment of the industrial north. Margaret does as her father asks, but there is a feeling she does it out of the type of responsibility adults usually have towards children. When her mother becomes upset, Margaret stays with her all day to provide comfort. Her father's arrival in the evening starts an argument between Mr. and Mrs. Hale that sends Margaret running upstairs in tears. However, the reader wonders if she is crying because she dislikes her parents quarreling or the responsibility she knows she will face in her new life.



VI-X

VI-X Summary

Margaret says goodbye to all her friends, and the Hales set off for their new home. First, though, they stop in London while Mr. Hale visits some friends. Upon seeing the London shops, Mrs. Hale's miserable mood quickly lightens and as she remembers shopping for her wedding dress.

To appease Mrs. Hale they stay at a few nights at the seaside town of Heston, only 20 miles from Milton. Margaret makes a comparison between the south and the north when she spies the Heston shopkeepers working even when there is no one to serve. She says in the south shopkeepers stand outside the shop door and wait for the next customer. While Mrs. Hale stays in Heston, Margaret and Mr. Hale go to Milton to look for a house. They finally decide on one, the only problem being the ghastly wallpaper. Back at their hotel in Milton, they find John Thornton waiting for them. Mr. Thornton is owner of the local mill, and his landlord, Mr. Bell, has asked John Thornton to help the Hales settle in. Mr. Thornton is surprised that Margaret is so old and that a Reverend's daughter could have such airs; in fact, he states a great distaste for her. Mr. Hale says the landlord will not change the ghastly wallpaper in the house, but that they will take it anyway. However, when they move in they find the landlord has painted over the wallpaper on the say so of Mr. Thornton.

The family attempt to settle in Milton. Unfortunately, Mrs. Hale and her servant Dixon immediately pick up a bad cold, and Margaret realizes she needs to find more help around the house. She goes around the shops in Milton asking if anyone needs work but cannot find anyone suitable. Meanwhile her father is doing well as a private tutor. His oldest and best student is John Thornton. The two of them develop a close friendship, which Margaret makes a point to joke about in order to appease her mother's jealousy. Margaret's refined dress sense is getting her noticed around town. The girls all admire the material of her beautiful shawls, and the men all notice her beauty. Margaret states northern men are not so reserved, and strangers will actually comment on someone's beautiful looks as calmly as stating the weather. One day a care-worn man makes a comment that sticks in Margaret's mind. She sees him again as she walks home and decides to talk to him. The man's name is Nicholas Higgins, and with him is his ill daughter, Bessy. Margaret promises to visit them, but Nicholas tells her he does not like strangers visiting his house. The comment surprises Margaret, who is used to visiting people unannounced in Helstone; however, as they leave, Bessy turns tells her she is quite welcome.

Mr. Hale invites Mr. Thornton to tea. Mrs. Hale is not impressed because she has arranged other things, but Margaret eases the situation by saying she can help. Meanwhile, in the Thornton's household, the domineering Mrs. Thornton mends a tablecloth. John walks in and they discuss his invitation to the Hales. Mrs. Thornton warns her son that Margaret may be after his money. Mr. Thornton tells her that



Margaret has shown no interest in him, and, in fact, he found her very rude. When her son leaves Mrs. Thornton curses Margaret for not seeing her boy as the great man he is.

At dinner, Mr. Thornton finds himself admiring Margaret. He is obsessed about her bracelet, which keeps falling down her arm only for Margaret to push it back up again. He has a strong desire to help her with it. Finally, Mr. Hale engages Mr. Thornton in an argument. Mr. Thornton starts to say that southerners have an easy life, raising the temper of Margaret. She tells Mr. Thornton he doesn't know the south and that not only does it have its poor people, but also its good points. In reply Mr. Thornton says she does not know the north, either. At this point, Mrs. Hale states she does not like the dirty air in Milton, a fact Mr. Thornton cannot deny. Mr. Hale quickly changes the conversation to Mr. Thornton's distrust of Parliament. Mr. Thornton thinks the acts that Parliament introduce, are contrary to life in the north. He goes onto to say how people struggle, forcing Margaret to ask how he can possibly talk about struggling when he has lead such a good life. In reply, Mr. Thornton tells the story of his rise from poverty to his present position as mill owner.

VI-X Analysis

It is difficult not to analyze North and South without focusing on Gaskell's deep characterization. In the first section, the reader gets to know almost the entirety of Margaret's early life as well as looking at all the minor characters in unusual depth. In fact, there are few facts about the characters left uncovered. In this section, the reader understands Mrs. Hale's previous life as a member of high-class London society and her love for the seaside. Most telling, though, are the portrayals of the northern characters. For instance, in this section Gaskell shows Thornton as a repressed, proud, stubborn and sharply intelligent mill owner with a close bond with his mother. At the end of the section, Thornton goes into a story about how his mother brought him up and his rise from poverty to relative riches. In fact, the reader finds very little more about him during the remainder of the novel; his character develops only in a way that the reader would expect, through his earlier exchanges with Margaret and Mr. Hale. However, the straightforwardness of the characters gives North and South its tone as a social novel set in the industrial north.

The lack of understanding of each other is a conflict most of the major characters have to resolve. Gaskell symbolizes this theme when Margaret and Mr. Thornton argue stubbornly about the virtues of the north and south of England. It is not until these two character get together that the novel achieves its ideal of social unity. Interestingly, the older characters share a sense of individuality, which Gaskell portrays as selfishness. All these characters, except Mrs. Thornton, die, suggesting they are not equipped to survive in the new Victorian era.



XI-XV

XI-XV Summary

Before they go to bed, the Hales talk about Mr. Thornton. Mr. Hales states his surprise that his daughter did not leave the room when Mr. Thornton started talking about his poorer days. Margaret says she rather liked his tale, as it was unpretentious and refreshingly honest. However, she says she does not like Mr. Thornton as a person. The next day Margaret goes for a walk and meets Bessie. Bessie states her annoyance that Margaret did not come and visit as she promised. However her mood soon brightens when Margaret offers to escort her to Besie's house. Inside the house, Bessie talks about her impending death. Margaret comforts her, talking about religion. Nicolas enters the room and says he does not want his daughter preached to. He says people in Milton do not believe in God, but only in what they can see with their own eyes.

Mr. Thornton persuades his mother to visit the Hale's house. Despite her domineering presence, the narrator describes Mrs. Thornton as a shy woman, who only recently has become part of society. The narrator describes Mrs. Thornton's deep love and respect for her son. Outsider observers may think that she directs her affection towards her daughter, but it is only because Mr. Thornton thinks her daughter weak and knows she needs more attention. In reality, John represents everything Mrs. Thornton admires in a person. When they arrive at the Hales, Mrs. Thornton's daughter, Fanny, talks to Margaret, while Mrs. Thornton talks to Mrs. Hale. Fanny is telling Margaret how her mother loves the town when Mrs. Thornton sharply asks what they are saying about her. Mrs. Thornton continues on to ask Margaret if she has seen the inside of any of Milton's factories. Margaret says she does not care to, which does not please Mrs. Thornton. Mrs. Thornton claims she will not know anything about life until she visits a factory. Upon leaving the Hales, Mrs. Thornton tells her daughter not to form a friendship with Margaret, as she is no good. Fanny says she does not intend to.

Margaret visits Bessy Higgins again. Bessy's sister, Mary, has tidied up and the ill Bessy lies in front of a roaring fire. Bessy asks Margaret to tell her about London and the forest where she used to live. Margaret recalls her time at Helstone in romantic detail, but they soon revert to the topic of death and religion. Bessy tells Margaret that she became ill while working in a cotton factory. In the factory, bits of cotton float in the air and the workers cannot help swallowing it. The cotton wraps around their lungs, and they start to cough blood. Margaret returns home. Mr. Hale says his wife has never looked so well, but Margaret thinks her mother's red cheeks are the first sign of illness.

Margaret and her mother become increasingly close. One day Margaret ventures to ask what happened to her brother Frederick aboard his ship. Her mother says that Frederick and the captain took an instant dislike to each other. The captain was a tyrant and according to Frederick worked his men like rats. One day, one of the Captain's unreasonable orders lead to the death of a sailor, and Frederick lead a mutiny against



the Captain. However, on their return, the government put the sailors on trial and hung as them traitors. Frederick managed to escape to South America.

Mr. Hale worries the air in Milton is killing his wife, and he visits Mrs. Thornton with Margaret. He asks Mrs. Thornton if she knows a good doctor. Mrs. Thornton thinks that Mrs. Hale's illness is nothing more than the fancy of a woman spoiled by the good life. She goes into a harangue about how northern life is better and that the Hale's need to get used to it. Mrs. Thornton states that in Milton, men have no need for books and learning because they are too busy in the factories. She moves onto to say that the men are about to go on strike, which will affect her son's business. She says the men are striking because they have the desire to become masters themselves. At the end of the interview, she gives Margaret a note with Dr. Donaldson's address. Mr. Hale meets Mr. Thornton that evening. Margaret and Mr. Thornton argue about the strike. Mr. Thornton claims Margaret does not know what she is talking about, while Margaret says it is their human right to try for something more than what they already have and Mr. Thornton knows nothing of human rights. Mr. Hale is conscious of her daughter keeping Mr. Thornton from his business, but Mr. Thornton is actually very interested in what Margaret has to say.

XI-XV Analysis

If the younger characters are fighting for a more humane society, Mrs. Thornton personifies an older generation intent on keeping things as they are. Mrs. Thornton sees no problems with having to struggle because she has always had to struggle and sees it as a part of life. Consequently, she distrusts the more comfortable life of the southerners, and in this section, her son has to plead with her to go and see the Hales. When she gets to the Hales, she, like her son, argues with Margaret about the virtues of the north, saying Margaret has not seen life until she has been inside a factory. She implies that southerners are too interested in books, and in Milton they don't have enough time to read as they are too busy living in the real world, a theme reinforced earlier in the section by Nicholas. He catches Margaret talking to his daughter, Bessy, about religion and says he will not allow anyone to preach to his children. He does not believe in God because he only believes in things he sees with his eyes, which in this respect is the same everyday life struggle Mrs. Thornton sees.

Bessy highlights these struggles with stories of poor factory conditions and how because of these conditions she and many others are dying of lung disease. The story about workers swallowing loose cotton is horrific, but Gaskell balances it with a tragic story on the side of the Hales. Frederick, the Hale's son, is banished from England and if he comes back, the government will hang him. Though the tale lacks the punch of Bessy's story, it does show that with higher social standing comes greater responsibility and with greater responsibility comes a higher fall from grace. In this respect, the Hale's move to the North is as big and profound a shock as Bessy's death is to Nicholas. In fact, the move will eventually lead to Mr. and Mrs. Hale's own tragic deaths. Only when the characters realize suffering does not depend on the area they are from can they unite and move on.



XVI-XX

XVI-XX Summary

Dr. Donaldson arrives to see Mrs. Hale. He goes into the bedroom with Dixon in attendance while Margaret waits outside. When he comes out Margaret confronts him. She insists he tells her what is wrong with her mother. The doctor is hesitant, but Margaret is equally persistent knowing a professional would not be so foolish as to promise not to tell anyone. He tells Margaret her mother is suffering from a deadly illness. Gaskell does not name the illness, but it is likely she will die shortly. Margaret goes to see her mother and asks to be her nurse. Mrs. Hale refuses because she has Dixon, and Dixon is a trained nurse. Dixon and Margaret have a short discussion. Margaret says she will not tell her father yet as he will not cope well with the news. When she is by herself, Dixon shows admiration for the strength of mind of Margaret, Frederick and Mrs. Hale, but claims she has no respect for Mr. Hale.

Margaret visits Bessy. Bessy says that she would not be so ill if she lived down south, but Margaret is having none of that attitude. She says the southern people can suffer from the exceptionally cold weather. Nicholas is also there, and he gives Margaret his opinion on the strike. He says that the masters are putting the men's wages down when there are Milton men who can hardly afford to feed their families as it is. Margaret says people down south do not strike, and Nicholas says it is because they do not have any spirit. However, Margaret says they have too much commonsense. Bessy backs her up, claiming her father's previous strikes have come to nothing, apart from hurrying up the death of her mother. Nicholas goes outside to smoke his pipe and Bessy and Margaret chat. Bessy claims, because of her life in Hampshire, Margaret has not suffered and is never likely to suffer. At this point Margaret gets up to leave, saying she has suffered and is suffering now as her mother is dying. Bessy apologizes and Margaret leaves the house.

Mr. Hale questions Margaret about his wife's illness. He says Dixon told him the doctor spoke to her about it. Margaret says he said nothing of any importance and just stated she needed a rest. She tries to take his mind off things by reading aloud a letter from her Aunt Shaw. However, Mr. Hale continues talking about his wife and how she requires another servant. His mind is put at ease when his wife wakes up in good spirits. Mr. Hale reads her a letter from Mrs. Thornton inviting them to tea. Mrs. Hale says she cannot go, but tells Mr. Hale and Margaret they must. At the Thornton's house, Fanny questions why the Hale's would accept the invitation when Mrs. Hale is ill. John scolds her for talking so poorly of Margaret, but this does not stop Mrs. Thornton continuing on similar lines. She states how much she dislikes Margaret and Mr. Thornton says he is not keen on her himself and he certainly does not intend to marry the wench.

Margaret visits Bessy and they talk about Margaret's impending visit to the Thornton's house. Bessy is highly impressed and says only members of parliament and the Major



of Milton get to dine there. Nicholas comes in drunk, and Margaret decides it is best to leave. She comes back later on to see the Higgins's household in a state of agitation. John Boucher is there, telling Nicholas the hardships his family faces, while an unhappy Bessy rocks back and forth. When Boucher leaves, Margaret shows shock at how ill Bessy looks. Bessy says it is nothing and she has just been having bad dreams.

Margaret and Mr. Hale are the first to arrive at Mr. Thornton's dinner party. Mrs. Thornton greets them and they wait for Mr. Thornton. Mr. Hale asks Mrs. Thornton if she finds living in such close proximity to the mill too loud and bothersome. Mrs. Thornton says she is not too proud to live near workers, though her daughter Fanny contradicts her by claiming it is far too loud and they should move. When Mr. Thornton arrives, he is taken aback at how beautiful Margaret looks. He watches Margaret and Fanny talking until he manages to force himself into a conversation with Mr. Hale. The other men arrive, and Mr. Thornton entertains his guests with his intelligent conversation. Margaret listens to him as he talks, noting how authoritative he sounds. After dinner, Margaret is happy when the men rejoin the party as she was getting bored with the women's conversation, and she steps forward to listen to the more lively debates. A few of the men notice her and ask Mr. Thornton who the lovely lady is.

XVI-XX Analysis

In this section, Dixon tells Margaret that like her brother and mother Margaret has a strong mind. Gaskell has not represented Mrs. Hale as a strong person before and this suggests Mr. Hale has pulled all the life from her. In fact, Dixon expresses her dislike of Mr. Hale, naming him as a weak individual. If this is the case then Margaret certainly refuses to go down the same path as either of her parents, and this section shows just how strong she can be. Faced with her mother's death she asks if she can be her mother's nurse rather than Dixon. Though her mother refuses her services, Margaret does not get angry, but goes to Bessy's house, where she says nothing about her troubles until Bessy states Margaret has never suffered. Again, Margaret's response is measured and with no hint of anger.

With such tragic news weighing heavily on her mind, she exchanges the inane chatter of the women for what she feels is the deeper conversation of the men. The decision to move towards the men shows how it is possible for her to make such an impact on Milton society. In such a male-dominated world, a beautiful woman sharing the same will to change things as themselves grabs their attention and without the men feeling either the anger or competitiveness reserved for their male friends and enemies.



XXI-XXV

XXI-XXV Summary

Margaret and her father walk home. They talk about Mr. Thornton, and Margaret admits she is growing to like him. When they reach home, a distressed Dixon meets them at the door. She says Mrs. Hale looked all but dead only hours before and she had to call Dr. Donaldson. She is now better, but it is obvious she is on death row. Mr. Hale asks Margaret why she did not tell him of the severity of his wife's illness, and Dr. Donaldson defends Margaret, saying she did the right thing. Mr. Hale faints from shock and they have to take him upstairs to revive him. Everyone stays up all night and keeps an eye on Mrs. Hale. In the morning, Mrs. Hale is much better, but they decide they need to buy her a water bed. Dr. Donaldson says Mrs. Thornton has a water bed and Margaret goes to visit her. On the walk to the mill house, she hears angry voices in the distance. At Mr. Thornton's house the porter cautiously opens the door and lets her in, but the voices are getting closer and trouble is brewing in the air.

Margaret waits by herself in the drawing room. Finally Fanny comes in to inform her that her mother is running late. She says her brother has hired Irish workers to take over from the striking workers, but it has increased the indignation of his old workers, and they are on their way to protest. Mrs. Thornton comes into the room, followed by her son. At this point, an angry mob appears at the front gates. The Thorntons secure the house and go upstairs, saying soldiers are on their way. Margaret suggests Mr. Thornton reason with the crowd and he agrees. They go back downstairs and Margaret unbolts the door for him. She watches the crowds and hears a hush as they see Mr. Thornton approach. However, from her vantage point she can see some of the younger men are preparing to throw things. Margaret runs outside and puts herself between Mr. Thornton and the mob. Some of the men throw clogs and stones towards them and a stone hits Margaret, knocking her out. The crowd falls silent. Mr. Thornton tells them to look at what they have done and one of the men shout they meant the stone to hit him. Mr. Thornton walks into the crowd and tells them they can beat him death if that is what they desire. The crowd disperses and Mr. Thornton takes Margaret back into the house. Mrs. Thornton fetches a doctor. While Mrs. Thornton is gone, a servant tells Fanny that Margaret flung herself at her brother. When her mother arrives, Fanny beckons her away from the room and repeats the servant's statement. Mrs. Thornton is not impressed and readily accepts Margaret's offer to leave and go home.

Mr. Thornton states his need to see Margaret and thank her for the way she protected him. Mrs. Thornton acts scornfully towards her son. She asks why he suddenly needs a woman to protect him. However, the narrator describes her sharp remarks as jealousy and at the end of the conversation, Mrs. Thornton relaxes and tells her son he must do what he thinks best. Meanwhile, Margaret returns home looking exceptionally pale. Mr. Hale thinks it is because she is worried about her mother and tells her to go to bed. Before she goes, Dixon walks in saying Mr. Thornton has arrived with the water bed and that he is inquiring about Margaret's health. Margaret says she is fine and goes to bed.



The next day Mr. Thornton comes to visit again. Margaret is annoyed that he has come to see her but goes down to greet him anyway. Mr. Thornton thanks Margaret for helping him out the previous day and declares his love. Margaret says any woman would have done the same thing, and she would have done the same thing for any other man. She continues to say that she did not help him because she loved him and takes offense that Mr. Thornton see it from that perspective. When he leaves Margaret feels guilty because she thought she saw a tear in his eye.

Margaret has Mr. Thornton's visit still on her mind and she cannot concentrate on anything. She needs company and goes to visit Bessy. Bessy is full of news about the strike. She says her father has fallen out with Boucher and has even threatened to take him to the police. In her father's opinion, he has given the strikers a bad reputation for unlawfulness. As one of the members on the union board, Nicholas is a law-abiding citizen who wants to go about the strike in the right way. Margaret arrives home to see her mother in good spirits. She says the water bed has done her the world of good. Mr. Hale leaves the room, and Mrs. Hale's countenance changes as she states her desire to her son Frederick one last time. She knows it is selfish and that he will have to risk his life, but she needs to see him. Margaret agrees to write a letter and takes it immediately to the post office. When she comes back, she tells her father about her mother's request and he is not pleased, though accepts his wife's need to see him.

XXI-XXV Analysis

This chapter marks the turning point in the relationship between Mr. Thornton and Margaret. Margaret is impressed with his eloquent behavior at his dinner party and for the first time admits she likes him. This remark foreshadows the events in the remainder of the section. First, Margaret goes to the Thornton's house just as the striking workers are moving in to protest. The workers force themselves into the millhouse yard and surround the Thornton's house. Here Margaret shows her persuasive power, convincing Mr. Thornton to go out and speak to them. Mr. Thornton goes, but as soon as the men attack him, Margaret runs outside and flings herself in front of Mr. Thornton. Again, this shows Margaret's immense strength and bravery, but more interestingly, it shows Mr. Thornton's acknowledgment of her as a person, as well as a woman. He shows no real embarrassment of her protecting him and in fact turns all the shame back on the workers. This is important because, for their relationship to flower, the reader knows enough about Margaret to understand she does not want someone to control her, but a person willing to share an equal relationship.

Mr. Thornton's reaction to her unconscious state has something of a feminine quality, crying over her body and repeating the fact that he loves her. This is also significant because it shows that Margaret is important for a previously selfish and closed man to become more open and humane. In return, Mr. Thornton's discovery of his more human side is important to end the poor relations between the owners and their workers.



XXVI-XXX

XXVI-XXX Summary

Mr. Thornton walks back from Margaret's house with their talk very much on his mind. Back at the Millhouse, Mrs. Thornton waits for news of her son's engagement. She realizes that her time is up and though jealous of her son's love, she thinks Margaret is a good match. If Margaret were from Milton, Mrs. Thornton would positively like her. Mr. Thornton arrives back and immediately his mother can see in his face that things did not go well. She curses Margaret and says how much she hates her; however, Mr. Thornton says he will not hear a bad word said about her. He changes the conversation to the strike, and the narrator explains mother and son lapse into their usual fact-based conversation.

Thornton goes to the court, where he is a magistrate and deals with a case brought against John Boucher. On his way home, he meets Dr. Donaldson, who gives him the latest news on Mrs. Hale. He says she has been craving fruit and soon as he leaves Dr. Donaldson, Mr. Thornton buys a basket of fruit and takes it up to the Hales. Mrs. Hale is very grateful, though Margaret is still annoyed with him. When he leaves, Dixon takes Margaret aside and tells her Bessy has died, and Bessy's sister wants Margaret to see Bessy's dead body. Margaret does not want to see the body, but upon seeing Mary at the front door, she immediately gives in to the request.

When Margaret and Mary arrive at the Higgins's house, Nicholas is drunk. Bessy had made Mary promise not to allow their father to drink and as Nicholas goes to leave for some more alcohol, Mary steps in front of him. Nicholas throws her violently across the room and Margaret stands up. She tells Nicholas of Mary's promise to Bessy. This settles Nicholas down and he asks for Margaret to take him to see Mr. Hale. Margaret does not think it is a good idea, but realizing it is better than him drinking, she takes Nicholas to her house. The two men soon partake in a lively but polite conversation. Nicholas tells them that though the strike has ended, he still has no job. Mr. Hale says the strike was never going to end well and has a book that proves his point. Mr. Hale asks Nicholas if he wants to hear the passage, but Nicholas is distrustful of books and says he believes only in what he sees. At the end of the chapter, Mr. Hale invites Higgins to say prayers.

On her son's request, Mrs. Thornton goes to see Mrs. Hale. Mrs. Hale asks Mrs. Thornton to look after her daughter, as she will need a mother. Mrs. Thornton's reply is very honest. She says she will do what she can and will correct any of Margaret's wrong doing as well as protecting her from people that do wrong to her. However, she refuses to make any promises, knowing her dislike of Margaret means any promises will be empty. Later on, Margaret hears the doorbell. She opens the door to her brother Frederick. They are delighted to see each other after such a long time, and Margaret runs off to fetch father. Her father is not happy because he knows it could mean his



son's death. However, the family all spend a happy evening together. During the night Mrs. Hale dies.

XXVI-XXX Analysis

Stubbornness is the one attribute that links the main characters, and it is precisely this that prevents them from becoming themselves. It would be a mistake, for example, to think Margaret teaches Mr. Thornton how to become more humane because he has shown humanity in flashes in the earlier sections. In the second section, he persuaded the landlord to change the Hale's hideous wallpaper. However, it is not until he realized his love for Margaret that he began to understand that he had to let go of his pretense. In this section, he goes to the Hales house with a basket of fruit for the ill Mrs. Hale and then persuades his mother to visit her. Similarly, Nicholas says he does not believe in anything he cannot see and therefore he does not believe in God. However, he is so insistent that he is nothing more than an infidel, his views come across as false and spoken for no other reason than to punish himself. In this section, Margaret takes him to her house. Nicholas goes on his normal harangue of not believing in anything he does not see, but still joins Mr. Hale in saying prayers. In the closing chapters, a far happier Nicholas accepts Margaret's offer of her father's prayer book. Margaret's stubbornness is her refusal to fall in love. At the end of this section, her brother Frederick knocks on the door. Her open display of emotion and her loyalty to him in proceeding chapters makes her realize she is capable of falling for someone.



XXXI-XXXV

XXXI-XXXV Summary

Margaret asks her father about the funeral arrangements and he tells her to write to Mr. Bell. Dixon comes to Margaret in a state of panic. The previous day she met an acquaintance from Southampton named Leonards. Leonards served with Frederick in the navy, and there is a possibility he has come to Milton to arrest him. They decide Frederick needs to leave the town at once. Frederick says that Margaret and Mr. Hale should come and live with him and his fiancé in Spain, but Mr. Hale says it will be too much of an upheaval. Instead, Margaret suggests Frederick hire a London lawyer to clear his name, and she writes him an introductory letter for Henry Lennox.

On her father's request, Margaret escorts her brother to the railway station. While they wait for the train, a drunk Leonards approaches them and tries to grab Frederick. Frederick is too quick and trips Leonards. Fortunately, Frederick's train approaches and he manages to make his escape.

An inspector comes to see Margaret. He tells her yesterday at the train station a man took a bad fall and died later that night. The grocer said he had seen Margaret at the station with a young man and he had come to verify his statement. Without knowing where Frederick is, Margaret knows she has to lie. She denies that she was there, and it must be a case of mistaken identity. As the conversation continues, Margaret's tired demeanor raises the inspector's suspicions and he says he may need to speak to her again. When the inspector leaves, Margaret faints.

Mr. Thornton goes to see Mr. Hale. He thinks about the previous evening when he saw Margaret with another man at the train station and presumes he was her lover. When he leaves the Hale's house, he sees the inspector climbing off an omnibus. The inspector recognizes him as the magistrate who took down Leonards' statement and he talks to Mr. Thornton about the case. Mr. Thornton knows Margaret's denial is a lie but does not say anything. Later on, he goes to the magistrate's court and writes a note to stop the inquest, saying there is insufficient medical evidence. The inspector visits Margaret to tell her Mr. Thornton has closed the case. Margaret realizes that Mr. Thornton must have seen her at the station but refuses to give him any credit for helping her out. The inspector leaves and Dixon comes in with a letter from Frederick. He had been to see Mr. Lennox and is now about to make his way to Spain.

XXXI-XXXV Analysis

It is not difficult to see why Margaret distrusts falling for another man when her father is so difficult to respect. He takes little responsibility for anything and lets other people do the hard and dangerous work, particularly his young daughter. With Mrs. Hale dead, Margaret asks her father about the funeral arrangements. Mr. Hale tells her he has left



everything to Mr. Bell. In the wake of dealing so poorly with his wife's sickness, it comes across as another example of his weak character. Even worse is to come. Dixon tells them about the man she saw from Southampton who she thinks is after Frederick. Immediately Mr. Hale decides that his son should go home and gives Margaret the responsibility of escorting him to the station. Margaret, as usual, agrees to help; however, the reader cannot help feeling Mr. Hale is knowingly putting his daughter in great danger. The readers' expectations are confirmed when Leonards approaches Frederick on the railway platform and tries to arrest him. The resulting scuffle leads to Leonards' death, and again Margaret is left to sort it out.

However, if her father is not a great role model, Margaret can afford to look upon Frederick with great respect. Not only did Frederick risk his life by leading a mutiny against a high-ranking officer, but also he risks it again to come and see his dying mother. In this section, Frederick does not shirk responsibility either. First, he wards off the challenge of Leonards and then he prolongs his life threatening stay by visiting a lawyer in London, and then only for the benefit of his family. If Frederick learned his sister had almost gotten into trouble with the inspector, no doubt he would do his best to save her. His fleeting presence in the story proves to Margaret that the responsibility of loving someone can come from both sides.



XXXVI-XL

XXXVI-XL Summary

Margaret and Mr. Hale meet Nicholas on the street. He tells them he is still out of work. Margaret asks if it is because of the strike, and he says the strike is over and he has not looked for anymore work. The conversation turns to the union and Nicholas' dislike of Boucher. As he is talking, six men walk past carrying a dead man on an unhinged door. The man is Boucher. One of the men asks Nicholas if Nicholas will break the news to Boucher's wife, but Nicholas says he is not up to the task. Margaret says she will tell her and heads for the widow's house. Upon hearing the news, Mrs. Boucher faints. The Hales go back to Nicholas' house and he refuses to let them in, saying he needs time on his own.

Margaret states a need to see Mr. Thornton. She wants to know how he views her after she lied to the inspector. As she is thinking about it, Higgins knocks at the door and Mr. Hale leads him into his study. Nicholas tells Mr. Hale and Margaret about his guilt at John Boucher's death and that he is going to take it upon himself to look after Mrs. Boucher and her children. He thinks the best thing to do is to move down south where in his words the food is cheaper and the life easier. Margaret tells him not to go and that he will hate it there. She suggests that he goes to see Mr. Thornton and ask him if he can work at the mill. Nicholas is not so sure, but Mr. Hale writes him a reference, and Nicholas promises to go and see Mr. Thornton the next day.

Mr. Thornton admits to his mother that Margaret was at the train station when Leonard died. He is angry with Margaret because she was with another man who he thinks was her lover. Mrs. Thornton says she should not be gallivanting around with other men at night and feels she should keep to her word and go and talk to Margaret. At the Hale's house, Mrs. Thornton accuses Margaret of seeing other men and making herself look like too much of a free spirit. Margaret refuses to say anything and Mrs. Thornton says she comes in the name of Mrs. Hale and for her mother's sake, Margaret must give a reply. Margaret says she has completely misunderstood the situation and though she knows she means well, it is best she left. Meanwhile Nicholas catches up with Mr. Thornton, asking for work. Mr. Thornton does not want such a powerful union man in his company, but Nicholas tells him how he needs money to look after Boucher's family and will even take less pay. Mr. Thornton still refuses him and Nicholas leaves. Mr. Thornton asks his porter how long Nicholas was waiting and he says five hours. The answer leaves Mr. Thornton strangely fearful.

Mr. Hale tells Margaret that Mrs. Boucher has taken ill and Nicholas has called her a doctor. Margaret goes to visit Nicholas, who is looking after the Boucher children. Nicholas tells her that Mr. Thornton did not give him a job, and Margaret apologizes for sending him on a false errand. She is in the middle of criticizing Mr. Thornton when he appears in the doorway. He tells Nicholas he has come to offer him a job. Nicholas accepts and the two men seal the deal with a handshake. On Margaret's return to her



house, she receives news that Mr. Bell is coming to visit and that her Aunt Shaw is thinking of coming back to England.

XXXVI-XL Analysis

In this section the three most important characters, Nicholas, Margaret and Mr. Thornton get together for the first time. Nicholas and Margaret meet on the street. Nicholas says he is out of work and she persuades him to ask Mr. Thornton for a job. Initially, Mr. Thornton refuses him, but later in the presence of Margaret, Mr. Thornton visits Nicholas and gives him work. This moment marks Nicholas and Mr. Thornton's true discovery of themselves as people, both setting aside their pride to move forward in their lives. In many ways, the death of some of the weaker characters has given them freedom to move on, as they no longer have the responsibility to look after and think about the welfare of others. In Nicholas' case his daughter Bessy and his dependent friend Mr. Boucher have both passed away. He is upset about both losses, but now with the ability to think more about himself he realizes where he has gone wrong.



XLI-XLV

XLI-XLV Summary

After the tragedies, events in Milton calm down. Margaret begins to teach the Boucher children; Frederick denounces England and decides to stay in Spain; Fanny marries and Nicholas settles back into work. After the winter, Mr. Hale decides to visit his friend, Mr. Bell, in Oxford. Mr. Hale does not feel his best and complains of extreme tiredness. Mr. Bell tries to raise his spirits, but the next morning Mr. Hale is dead. Mr. Bell travels up to Milton to deliver the sad news. On the train, he meets Mr. Thornton. Mr. Thornton is sad about Mr. Hale's death, but he is more upset to hear that Margaret will probably move back down south and marry Henry Lennox. To prevent further conversation, Mr. Thornton hides behind his newspaper.

Margaret is distraught and spends her days crying. Mr. Bell sends for her Aunt Shaw, who immediately makes her way up from London to Milton. When she arrives, Margaret embraces her and cries on her shoulder. Mr. Bell leaves this scene and goes to Mr. Hale's study. While he is reading some of his old friends most beloved books, Mr. Thornton visits to inquire about Margaret. Mr. Bell asks if he has an interest in Margaret as more than just a friend. Mr. Thornton says no and the conversation continues on to her brother Frederick. Mr. Thornton had no idea she had a brother and asks if he visited at the time of Mrs. Hale's death, thinking Frederick may have been the man he saw Margaret with at the station. Mr. Bell says it is impossible for Frederick to have visited and the man he saw must have been Henry Lennox. Mr. Thornton changes the conversation to his work. He tells Mr. Bell he is building a dining room for his workers so they can enjoy good meals.

Back in London Margaret tries to settle down into a lazier and easier life, but longs for her homes in Milton and Helstone. Mr. Bell arrives in London and tells Margaret of all the help Mr. Thornton has given Dixon. He says Margaret should inquire about him and she does, but under her breath. Mr. Bell and Margaret go to a party where the Lennox's and Shaw's are also present. Margaret thanks Henry Lennox for helping out his brother. Henry regrets he could not do any more and says Frederick was in London two months ago. Before he can finish the sentence, Margaret shows her surprise he never got in contact with her. Henry says Frederick was worried that someone would find him again, and already since he has left, Henry has had an inquiry about whether Frederick was in the country at the time of Mrs. Hale's death. Margaret guesses that the inquiry was made by Mr. Thornton.

Back in Oxford, Mr. Bell writes Margaret a letter explaining that he has arranged for her to stay with the Lennox family. He hopes she is not upset about him helping her without her say so, but he has only her interests at heart. Margaret gets ready to leave. She organizes her father's belongings, sending most of his books to Mr. Bell and one book to Mr. Thornton, accompanied with a note. She visits Nicholas and Mary for the last time. Mary gives Margaret Bessy's drinking cup to remember her by, and Margaret gives the



family her father's Bible. Margaret and Mrs. Shaw make a last visit to Mrs. Thornton. Mrs. Thornton is sorry to see Margaret leave but makes out she is giving up. Margaret accepts her opinion and thanks Mrs. Thornton for all her help, apologizing for any rudeness she has shown. On their way out, they meet Mr. Thornton. Mr. Thornton can hardly face Margaret and turns away as soon as he can.

XLI-XLV Analysis

In this section, Margaret becomes the character in need. Mr. Hale dies while at his friend's home in Oxford and she becomes depressed, spending days lying on the drawing room sofa, crying. In the recent past, the likes of Nicholas and Mr. Thornton would have suffered without Margaret's help, but they are now stronger and nicer people. For example, Mr. Thornton decides to build his workmen a dining room where they can sit and eat good food. He says the idea came to him when he saw Nicholas eating a paltry supper. Mr. Thornton's plans for the dining room show how his views have expanded beyond just making money and being a master. Mr. Thornton and Nicholas have a disagreement about the dining room idea, but rather than the disagreement splitting them apart, it brings them together and the idea becomes a reality. Meanwhile the tragedies in Margaret's life are finally taking their toll, and she seems to be going the same way as her parents. Mr. Bell deals with everything and Margaret is happy she can go back to London and see her Aunt Shaw and cousin Edith. In London, Mr. Bell tells Margaret of all the help Mr. Thornton has given her and that she should send him her thanks. Margaret thanks him under her breath, showing she still has an obstacle to overcome. Later on when she talks to Henry Lennox and guesses that it is Mr. Thornton that inquired about the whereabouts of Frederick, the reader can see she is becoming aware that the obstacle is Mr. Thornton.



XLVI-LII

XLVI-LII Summary

Mr. Bell decides to cheer Margaret by taking her on a visit to Helstone. Margaret delights at the idea and they immediately take a train. Margaret visits all her old friends and the new parson at the vicarage. Everyone in the village remembers her fondly and for the first time in a while, she feels alive. At the end of the day, Mr. Bell takes her for a cup of tea and asks her about the man she was seen with at the station. Margaret admits it was Frederick and describes exactly what happened that night. Mr Bell says he would have done exactly the same thing, but he thinks Mr. Thornton has developed a bad opinion of Margaret because he thought she was with a lover. Margaret is distraught Mr. Thornton thinks of her so negatively.

Dixon returns from Milton. Margaret is happy to have a connection from her old town and insists on hearing all the gossip. Apparently, Fanny is now married, but there is little news of either Mr. Thornton or Nicholas. Mr. Bell's letters are getting increasingly bitter. Margaret writes back suggesting he sees a doctor, but his curt reply stops her from sending any more advice.

Mr. Bell's servant sends Margaret a letter saying Mr. Bell is on his deathbed and he is expected to die at any moment. Margaret visits Oxford in the company of Mr. Lennox, but Mr. Bell dies before they arrive. Margaret is the heiress to his fortune, but this news does not put her in a good mood. She feels she has lost her last connection to her old life and falls into a listless depression. Seeing his chance, Henry Lennox tries to win her hand again. Without so much fight in her, Margaret is a fair easier catch, and Mr. Lennox takes her to the seaside. On her return, she looks and feels much healthier.

Back in Milton, John Thornton is struggling to keep his business. He has spent so much money on new equipment that it looks likely he will not survive the current economic crisis, stretching across the whole of industrial Britain. He meets Nicholas in the street and Nicholas asks after Margaret. John Thornton knows little about her new life apart from that she is now his landlady, but the mention of her name starts him thinking. Back at home, he tells his mother he has to give up his business.

Mr. Thornton visits London to see his lawyer. Mr. Lennox and Mr. Thornton arrange to visit Margaret to put an end to Mr. Thornton's tenancy agreement; however, Mr. Lennox does not turn up, and Margaret and Mr. Thornton find themselves alone. They both declare their love for each other and the book finishes with the two of them embracing.

XLVI-LII Analysis

In this final section, Mr. Thornton and Margaret finally realize they are in love with each other. However, it is not until they see everything they had has not only disappeared, but is gone forever, that they understand how much they mean to each other. Mr. Bell dies,



leaving Margaret feeling as if she has lost all her connections to her old life. At this point, it seems she has no more fight left in her and allows Henry Lennox to get closer. This is not necessarily a good match, and it is likely Margaret would have to repress her true self to be with him. In fact, near the end Lennox is happy Margaret is learning to depend on him, when the reader knows how much she values her independence. John Thornton's life in Milton is proving no easier. With economic problems throughout the industrial North, he realizes he has to give up his business and goes to London to see his lawyer and landlady. When Margaret and Mr. Thornton are alone, they suddenly see all their struggles will come to nothing if they continue along the same path. Only by declaring their true feeling for each other can they save themselves.



Characters

Margaret

Margaret is the main character of the story and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hale. The narrator describes her as pretty, but often the other characters hint that her looks are disappointing in comparison to both her parents. Nevertheless, she gets a lot of male attention. First, Henry Lennox asks for her hand and then later she wins the admiration of many of the men in Milton, and eventually the love of John Thornton. The main reason for her popularity is her cheerful and spirited demeanor.

Margaret had a privileged upbringing. In her early years, she lived near the New Forest in a village called Helstone with her brother Frederick, her Reverend father, Richard, her high society mother, Maria and a collection of servants. When she was old enough, Margaret moved to London to live with her Aunt Shaw and cousin Edith.

So given her upbringing it is a shock when she has to move to the industrial town of Milton. However, Margaret shows her strength by dealing with it very well. In fact, she is probably the strongest character in the book. Many of the people of Milton find it difficult to accept her, but Margaret never lets this get in her way. She tries to make friends and help everyone she sees in a poorer position than herself. Sometimes people view her humane spirit negatively. Mrs. Thornton thinks Margaret presumes she is better and for that reason she will not marry her son John.

In some ways, Mrs. Thornton is right and Margaret's upbringing has conditioned her to think she is better. However, often it is merely a misunderstanding between the north and south cultures. For example, John Thornton thinks Margaret feels she is too good to shake his hand, when in reality it is something she has never done before.

People seem to accept Margaret more when a tragedy occurs in her life. First, her mother dies. This brings her closer to the Higgins family, and increasingly they ask her for advice. Eventually she finds Nicholas Higgins a job and helps him look after the Boucher children. However, the tragedies also distance her from John Thornton. At times, it feels she has become too Northern for him and has lost the foreignness he once loved. However, the more Margaret assimilates with the culture, the more she feels for John. By the end of the novel, both their feelings become so confused they can hardly bear speak to each other. This has a lot to do with their mutual stubbornness and only when John and Margaret meet in London, a place neither of them can call home, can they finally get together.

John Thornton

His father's death forced John to quit school early and work in a factory. With a strong mother figure in Mrs. Thornton, he worked his way up, earning enough money to become a master and run the mill house.



Within the story, John has a close relationship with the Hales and visits Mr. Hale to learn about the classics. Despite his lack of education, Mr. Hale describes John as unusually intelligent. He can certainly hold his own in an argument, as he often proves with Margaret; however, he is also a good listener. For example, when Margaret accuses Mr. Thornton of being inhuman, he lets her have her say. Equally, he listens to Nicholas Higgins when he asks for work. Initially John decides against offering him a position, but changes his mind when he hears Nicholas was waiting to see him for 5 hours.

John's humanity is not always apparent. When the reader first meets him he comes across as aloof, with an interest only in improving his business, intelligence and social standing. Other people come second and particularly the men working for him. It is not until John's men strike that he learns about humanity. For example, when his men try to attack him, Margaret shields him from a stone. From here on in John realizes he is in love with Margaret and tries desperately to win her hand. At first, she refuses him, and John, though upset, tries to become a better person for her sake. He brings Mrs. Hale fruit and at the end builds a dining room for his men so they can eat proper meals. He becomes so unselfish and spends so much money on improving the mill's facilities, that by the end of the novel he cannot afford to keep his business. However, his change of character brings him closer to the person Margaret needs and the book finishes with the two characters embracing.

Richard Hale

Richard Hale begins the novel as Reverend of Helstone. Unfortunately, his religious doubts forces him to move his family away from their beloved New Forest home and to the harsher climes of the industrial North. Here Mr. Hale finds a job as a private tutor, teaching mostly young boys. However, his favorite and brightest student is 30-year-old John Thornton.

Gaskell presents Richard Hale as a weak person who finds it difficult to face up to life. This is initially apparent when he asks his daughter to break the news to his wife about moving to Milton. Later Nicholas asks Mr. Hale to break the news of Boucher's death to his wife, but again he hands the responsibility over to his daughter. When Mrs. Hale passes away, Mr. Hale quickly goes down hill, dying while visiting his friend in Oxford.

Maria Hale

Maria Hale is the wife of Richard and the mother of Margaret. Gaskell describes her as a beautiful woman who once played a major role in the London social scene. Her ideal would have been to stay in London, but she had to move with her husband to Helstone. Though she dislikes Helstone, it is nothing to the hatred she has for Milton.

Like Mr. Hale, Gaskell represents her as a weak person and almost immediately, she picks up a deadly illness, probably from the Milton air. However, while she is ill her character comes across more loving and perhaps stronger than it did before. She becomes closer to her daughter and calls Mrs. Thornton to ask her to look after



Margaret when she is gone. Before she dies, she also insists that she sees her beloved son Frederick. It is not until she sets eyes on him that she finally passes away.

Mrs. Thornton

Mrs. Thornton is John Thornton's mother. She likes to come across as a strong figure in appearance and personality. When a stone hits Margaret in the head, Mrs. Thornton braves the angry crowds to fetch a doctor. Yet this act is not necessarily done out of pure kindness and actually she hates Margaret for both for turning down her son's love and because she originates from the south. At one stage, Gaskell claims Mrs. Thornton would have liked Margaret if she had originated from Milton.

Nicholas Higgins

Nicholas Higgins is Bessy and Mary's father. He is an important member of the worker's union and heavily involved in the strike. During the novel, Nicholas goes through two tragedies that bring him closer to the Hale family. First, Bessy dies from consumption and then his friend, Boucher, commits suicide, a death he blames on himself. Amid the tragedy, Nicholas shows his human side and takes the Boucher children into his care.

Dixon

Dixon is the Hale's loyal servant, but Gaskell states that to Mrs. Hale, she is more of a friend. In contrast, Dixon has little feeling for Mr. Hale.

Bessy Higgins

Bessy is the 18-year-old daughter of Nicholas Hale. She befriends Margaret, but quickly falls sick with lung disease.

Mr. Bell

Mr. Bell is Mr. Hale's good friend, Margaret's Godfather and Mr. Thornton's landlord. He is a native to Milton, but moved to Oxford to study and stayed on as a Don. Mr. Bell becomes a prominent character after Mrs. Hale's death. When Mr. Hale dies during a visit to Oxford, Mr. Bell personally travels to Milton to deliver the sad news. Mr. Bell dies near the end of the novel and leaves all his money and property to Margaret.

Frederick Hale

Frederick is Margaret's brother. The British government want to hang Frederick for leading a mutiny on a British ship and he cannot come back to the country. Leonards



almost catches him when Frederick risks his life to see his dying mother, but he manages to escape back to his wife, Delores, in Spain. Towards the end of the novel, Henry Lennox tells Margaret that Frederick visited him in London for a second time.

Edith

Edith is Margaret's beloved cousin in London.

Aunt Shaw

Aunt Shaw is Margaret's Aunt and mother to Edith. When Mr. Hale dies, Aunt Shaw comes to Milton to take Margaret back to London.

Henry Lennox

Henry is one of Margaret's suitors. Margaret initially turns down his marriage proposal, but near the end of the book they come close to getting married. Henry is a lawyer and tries to help Frederick get off his mutiny charges, but to no avail.



Objects/Places

Helstone

The Hales move from the New Forest village of Helstone in Southern England to the Northern town of Milton.

Milton

An industrial town in Northern England. The majority of the book is set here.

Harley Street, London

Margaret lived with her Aunt Shaw and cousin Edith in Harley Street as a teenager. She goes back to Harley Street when both her mother and father die.

Marlborough Street

Mr. Hale claims claims Marlborough street is the foremost street in Milton. Mr. Thornton's mill house is situated at the end of the road.

The Mill House

Mr Thornton and his mother and sister live in a cottage next door to the mill house. Workers break through the mill house gates to confront Mr. Thornton.

The Higgins' house

The Higgins' live in a small and often cold house. Here Margaret visits Bessy and later on Nicholas.

Oxford

Mr. Hale dies in Oxford whilst visiting Mr. Bell.

The Railway Station

Leonards confronts Frederick at Milton railway station. Leonards subsequent fall leads to his death.



The Hale's house in Helstone

The Hale's have a huge house in Helstone that comfortably fits the family and a healthy collection of servants. In the back garden they have pear trees.

The Hale's house in Milton

The Hale's house in Milton is smaller and they only have room for themselves and one servant.



Themes

The Difference Between the North and South of England

The perceived difference between the north and South of England is the main theme of the novel. Margaret is from the South of England, where her life is easy and free in the countryside of Helstone. When she moves to the industrial town of Milton, she finds people treat her differently because they presume she has had an easy life. This is partly true, but in some characters the dislike of the north is mere prejudice based on no real foundation. This is certainly true of the domineering Mrs. Thornton, whose mistrust of southerners has little foundation as she has never traveled away from the northern regions. At one point Mrs. Thornton states that if Margaret was a Milton girl, she would be the perfect match for her son, but because she is not Mrs. Thornton presumes she does not have any character. Her negative opinion stretches to Margaret's mother. She thinks Mrs. Hale's illness is just the neurotic fancy of a society woman. The prejudice is not only on the northern side. Mrs. Hale thinks people in the North are common and does not want anything to do with them. For example, she criticizes Margaret for picking up Northern slang, which she says is vulgar.

However, it is only once the characters get beyond stereotypes that they find they begin to learn from each other and develop as people. Margaret learns about the harshness of life in northern factories and in return, she teaches people such as Nicholas Higgins and John Thornton the virtues of humanity. As the characters develop an understanding of each other, they drop their pretensions and life becomes easier. Towards the end of the novel, the characters stop mentioning each other's differences and begin working towards the same goal.

Sickness and Death

One reason Milton is such a hard place to survive is that everywhere you look there is either death or sickness. The characters blame it on the air and factory conditions, but there is also an element of only the strongest will survive. This is certainly something Mrs. Thornton believes in and she instills a strong attitude into her son John. At one point she tells Margaret that John is rarely ill and even when he is, he continues working. Gaskell presents this as a positive and needed attitude. In comparison, Gaskell represents characters such as Bessy, Mrs. Hale, Mr. Hale and the Bouchers as weak, all of them dying before their time. In fact, the complaining Mrs. Hale contracts an illness almost immediately upon her arrival to Milton. When she dies, her husband allows his misery to get the better of him and he passes away soon after.

Mr. Hale's weak character is set out from the beginning when he asks Margaret to talk to his wife about moving to Milton. The fact that he cannot do it himself and later on, in a similar circumstance, gives his young daughter the responsibility of telling Mrs. Boucher



about her husband's death, shows he is not right for the environment of Milton. In comparison, the character's that survive and flourish in Milton all let tragedy motivate them onto better things. For example, when Mrs. Thornton's husband died she had to take her son John out of school and put him to work. John worked himself and the family from poverty to his position as a mill owner.

Gaskell reasons that these characters survive because they direct their energies into helping others. In comparison, Mr. Hale is selfish and both his move to Helstone and Milton were against his wife's wishes, serving only to help him. His daughter is constantly helping people, keeping her mind off her own problems.

Masters and Men

Gaskell names one of her chapters "Masters and Men," referring to the strike and the struggle between the factory owners and the workers. However, one reason why the strike does not work is because the situation is far more complex; the factory owners actually having their own masters and those masters having people above them as well.

In this respect someone like John Thornton is not necessarily the controlling presence that Nicholas Higgins presumes he is. Mr. Thornton knows what it is like to suffer poverty and refuses to go back. His struggle is to keep hold of his position in society, and he does this by treading on the people below him. Yet, Gaskell represents this as part of life, and actually, Nicholas takes his anger out on the people directly below him who are the more menial workers such as Boucher. In fact, Nicholas blames Boucher's suicide on himself because of the blame he put on Boucher for the failure of the strike.

Above John Thornton are the Hales, above the Hales are Mr. Bell and the Shaws and above them is parliament. Therefore Masters and Men refers to the order in society, needed for industrialism to work and for Britain to grow powerful as a country. When the men's strike threatens this order, problems occur. Bessy, Mrs. Hale and Mr. and Mrs. Boucher all die during this poverty-stricken period, and it is only when the characters begin to accept that they have to be ruled by someone that everything gets better. Mr. Thornton accepts he has to have strong, union men work for him; Nicholas accepts that work has to come at a sacrifice to his freedom, and Margaret accepts that her role in life is to help others. With order restored, life becomes clearer and easier for all the characters.



Style

Point of View

Margaret is the main character of the novel, but the point of view is in the third person objective. However, Gaskell's point of view is not always reliable. *North and South* is written as a social novel, but Gaskell only represents the feelings of either the strong characters or the characters who hold a good position in society. Even Nicholas Higgins is a union representative, who at one stage Margaret says has a reputation for one of the best workers in the country. In fact, Gaskell hardly mentions the genuinely poor people. She does talk about the Boucher's, yet they are minor characters that she represents through people such as Nicholas, who actually holds a low opinion of them. Gaskell reinforces this negative point of view towards the workers at the strike. In this part of the novel, the workers gather like a mob outside John Thornton's mill, throwing objects and intent on causing havoc. Such a scene may be realistic, but with none of the workers given a main role, the reader can only see such action in a negative light.

Setting

The contrast between the two main settings, Helstone and Milton, is one of the most important elements of the book. Helstone is a village in Hampshire in the South of England. Margaret grew up there as a child and at the beginning of the novel moves back there from London. The village is the open countryside of the New Forest. The air is fresh and if they want to go anywhere, they have to walk for miles down country lanes. Their cottage in Helstone is big enough to house a number of servants and in their large garden they grow fruit and vegetables. In general, Helstone symbolizes a healthy and relaxed lifestyle.

However, Milton is its opposite. It is as a industrial town in the North of England, full of factories which churn out smoke and pollute the air. Unlike Helstone, where Gaskell represents everyone's life as free, the people of Milton are stuck working in factories, and if they are not working, it is usually because they are deathly ill from the factory conditions. For example, Bessy states she became sick from inadvertently inhaling the cotton that floated through her factory air.

Consequently, Gaskell paints Milton as a place where only the strongest survive. She personifies this strength in the character of Mrs. Thornton. Mrs. Thornton is exceptionally proud of being from Milton and that her son John has risen from the lowest ranks to become owner of the mill. She now thinks she has lived life and nothing can shock or harm her.

Such views do not allow for outsiders, and initially Margaret struggles to fit in; however, Margaret is a strong person herself and rises to the challenge. She helps the workers,



shows immense bravery during the strike and overcomes numerous tragedies. In comparison, her parents fail to adapt to the new environment and both die of illness.

Interestingly though, the harsher climes of Milton do not change any of the Hale's personalities, but instead accentuates the strong or weak points of their characters. For example in Helstone Margaret is the one who has to break the news to her mother about moving away and Margaret brings this sense of responsibility to Milton. By the end of the book, despite her sadness over her parent's death, she continues to help others. In contrast, her mother is always complaining about being in Helstone without ever doing anything about it. As soon as she arrives in Milton, she contracts an illness and eventually dies.

Language and Meaning

Gaskell uses northern and southern dialect to show the language differences between the two areas of England. Unfortunately, the reader may find the Northern dialogue difficult to read and rarely does a northern accent get into the reader's head, rather it sounds clunky and suffers perhaps from being too realistic. This can be a problem in some of the longer political speeches, which can be difficult to follow. In comparison, the southern dialects work for both the educated characters and the servants.

In general, Gaskell drives the novel forward with dialogue and the thoughts of all major characters, keeping the descriptive passages to a minimum. This works to give the novel meaning as a social statement as she does not impair the reader's judgment of a person or situation with the thoughts of only one character. Instead, the reader can see how it is the poverty and depression of Milton that creates the real problems.

To communicate a realistic and impoverished setting, Gaskell uses relatively short sentences. Similarly, the language outside the dialogue is quite simple with few words the reader will not understand. Occasionally there is an odd-sounding phrase or word, which is obviously of its time; for example, Gaskell uses *sate* instead of *sat*, but in general, most readers will follow the story without too much trouble.

Structure

North and South is a social novel. Like many social novels, it looks at working class conditions in the wake of the industrial revolution. Its one difference is rather than detailing a rise from poverty to great riches, such as in *Oliver Twist*, it examines the cultural differences between the south and the industrial north. The goal of the main protagonist Margaret is to learn and cope with the harsh realities of living in Milton, and by doing so proving the only way to move forward as a society is to accept the opinions and differences of others.

Consequently, the *North and South* is character driven as Gaskell examines the inner thoughts of all the main characters. Initially these thoughts are very selfish, too selfish for such a close-knit community and only when they learn a more humane way of living,

do they come together. The obvious example is the relationship between Margaret and John Thornton. Initially they cannot stand each other, but as they learn each other's way of life and adapt it into their character, they become increasingly close and eventually the beginning of a romance blossoms. However, it is not just Margaret and Mr. Thornton who come together. By the end, all the remaining characters start working for the good of each other. Nicholas starts working for Mr. Thornton; Margaret helps Nicholas look after the Boucher children, and Mr. Thornton improves his workers' facilities.

The plot is conventional. A woman from southern England moves to the north, overcomes people's prejudices and eventually falls in love. In between there are a number of tragedies, which serve to increase Margaret's strength as a person. However, because Gaskell involves the thoughts and feelings of a number of characters, it pushes the novel away from what could become a generic cliché and into an objective character study.



Quotes

"Margaret's face was lightened up into an honest, open brightness. By-and-by he came. She received him with a smile which had not a tinge of shyness or self-consciousness in it."

P.7

"He thought it a pretty sight to see the two cousins so busy in their little arrangement about the table. Edith chose to do most herself. She was in a humour to enjoy showing her lover how well she could behave as a soldiers wife."

P.12

"No! I call mine a very comprehensive taste; I like all people whose occupations have to do with land; I like soldiers and sailors, and the three learned professions, as they call them. I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers."

P.18

"Margaret could not help her looks; but the short curled upper lip, the round, massive, upturned chin, the manner of carrying her head, her movements, full of a soft feminine defiance, always gave strangers the impression of haughtiness."

P.70

"I believe what I see, and no more. That's what I believe young woman. I don't believe all I hear- no!"

P.105

"Ay! Thornton o' Marlborough Mill, as we call him.

He's one of the masters you are striving with, is he not? What sort of master is he? Did yo' ever see a bulldog? Set a bulldog on hind legs, and dress him up in coat and breeches, and yo'n just gotten John Thornton"

P.159

"Far away in time, far away in space, seemed all the interests of past days. Not more than thirty-six hours ago, she cared for Bessy Higgins and her father, and her heart was wrung for Boucher; now, that was all like a dreaming memory of some former life;- everything that had passed out of doors seemed dissevered from her mother, and therefore unreal."

p.201

"If salvation, and life to come, and what not, was true-not in men's words, but in men's hearts' core-dun yo' not think they'd din us wi't as they do wi' political 'conomy?"

P.268

"Mr. Thornton would rather have heard that she was suffering the natural sorrow. In the first place, there was selfishness enough in him to have taken pleasure in the idea that



his great love might come in to comfort and console her; much the same kind of strange passionate pleasure which comes stinging through a mother's heart, when her drooping infant nestles close to her, and is dependent upon her for everything."

P.319

"God help 'em! North an' South have each gotten their own troubles. If work's sure and steady theer labour's paid at starvation prices; while here we'n rucks o'money coming in one quarter, and ne'er a farthing the' next. For sure. the' world is in a confusion that passes me or any other man to understand; it needs fettling, and who's to fettle it, if it's as yon folks say, and there's nought but what we see?"

365

"That night Mr. Hale laid his head down on the pillow on which it never more should stir with life."

P.417

"Neither the loss of father, nor loss of mother, dear as she was to Mr. Thornton, could have poisoned the remembrance of the weeks, the days, the hours, when a walk of two miles, every step of which was pleasant, as it brought him nearer to her, took him to her sweet presence- every step of which was rich, as each recurring moment bore him away from her made him recall some fresh grace in her demeanor, or pleasant pungency in her character."

P.427



Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Gaskell represents the older characters so negatively?

How do the differences between north and south culture affect relationships in Milton?

North and South is a social novel, but few of the characters are actual workers. Does this take away from the novel's impact?

Why does Gaskell portray Mr. Thornton and Margaret as such a necessary match?

An important theme in the book is the poor relations between the masters and men. What does Gaskell present as the solution for the problem and how does she communicate this through the relationships between the main characters?

Examine the importance of the Victorian setting. Does Margaret's want for independence go against Victorian values? Is the older generation holding back this new era?

Why is it important the north and south of England come together as a society?