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ESTUDOS ANGLO-AMERICANOS

“Looking out of myself...”
A study of empathy in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*

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Dissertação realizada no âmbito do Mestrado em Estudos Anglo-Americanos orientada
pelo Professor Doutor Jorge Miguel Pereira Bastos da Silva

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

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Aos meus pais, Albertina e Álvaro.

Table of Contents

Declaração de honra	3
Agradecimentos	4
Resumo.....	5
Abstract	6
List of Figures	7
Introduction	8
1.The Hierarchy of Empathy	18
2.Margaret Hale	30
3. John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins.....	42
Conclusion: Elizabeth Gaskell and Character-building	56
Works Cited.....	60

Declaração de honra

Declaro que a presente dissertação é de minha autoria e não foi utilizada previamente noutro curso ou unidade curricular, desta ou de outra instituição. As referências a outros autores (afirmações, ideias, pensamentos) respeitam escrupulosamente as regras da atribuição, e encontram-se devidamente indicadas no texto e nas referências bibliográficas, de acordo com as normas de referenciação. Tenho consciência de que a prática de plágio e autoplágio constitui um ilícito académico.

Porto, 27 de setembro de 2021

Tânia Cristina Domingues Almeida

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Resumo

Ao lidar com o romance *North and South* (1854) de Elizabeth Gaskell, muitos leitores vêm-se incapazes de identificar adequadamente a solução que é oferecida para questões como a lutas de classes e a mudança social em geral. Muitos sugerem que a resposta pode estar em uma leitura centrada na questão da discriminação de classe, enquanto outros têm apontado para o papel das mulheres no romance. Embora essas ideias sejam valiosas, esta dissertação visa estabelecer a empatia como a solução oferecida para os problemas representados em *North and South*. Desse modo, a presente dissertação trata de conceitos como simpatia, empatia e identificação imaginativa e do modo como eles moldam o romance e os seus personagens. Adicionalmente, a ideia de que Elizabeth Gaskell poderia ter pretendido estender tais soluções ao mundo real é explorada na tentativa de identificar o efeito duradouro do romance.

Palavras-chave: empatia, identificação imaginativa, romance social, Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*

Abstract

When concerned with Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South* (1854), many readers find themselves unable to properly place the solution it offers to issues of class struggles and overall social change. Many have suggested that the answer may be in a reading focussing on the issue of classism while others have pointed towards the role of women in the novel. While these ideas are valuable, this dissertation aims to establish empathy as the offered solution to the troubles represented in *North and South*. To achieve this, the present dissertation deals with concepts such as sympathy, empathy, and imaginative identification, and with the way they shape the novel and its characters. Furthermore, the idea that Elizabeth Gaskell might have intended to extend such solutions to the real world is explored to identify the lasting effect of the novel.

Keywords: empathy, imaginative identification, social-problem novel, Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*

List of Figures

FIG. 1 THE HIERARCHY OF EMPATHY	25
FIG. 2 THE EFFECT OF THE HIERARCHY ON THE READER	27

Introduction

In 1850, two years after the publication of *Mary Barton*, Elizabeth Gaskell could have never guessed that what she expressed in a letter to Eliza Fox, a painter and close friend, as her many “Mes” (qtd. in Chapple 47) would hint at what were to become the two main currents in the criticism of her body of work. In the letter, she explains:

...thats [sic] the haunting thought to me; at least to one of my ‘Mes’, for I have a great number, and that’s the plague. One of my mes is, I do believe, a true Christian – (only people call her socialist and communist), another of my mes is a wife and mother, and highly delighted at the delight of everyone else in the house... (47)

In the light of this quotation, two distinct facets of Elizabeth Gaskell appear. The self that was concerned with the wellbeing of others outside the home, in her community, either through her Christian and Unitarian beliefs or through what others considered “socialist and communist” (47), and the other self that was a wife and mother, but most importantly as a woman, whose preoccupations are limited to what lay within the walls of her own house.

These two ways of reading Gaskell’s *œuvre* have gained and lost popularity in the last hundred and seventy years but they remain significant as they shape much of the way that we still see Elizabeth Gaskell as an author and as an individual.

In the Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, Jill L. Matus makes notice that “Gaskell criticism has been very engaged with debating her rank among the great Victorian novelists and finding reasons for the slump and subsequent rise in Gaskell’s reputation during the twentieth century” (Matus 1). Until very recently, most works of criticism mentioning Gaskell always read her in comparison to other authors looking for that place amongst her peers; it is worth noticing that the

debate that looks for a place for Elizabeth Gaskell within the canon of Victorian novelists is the same debate that plummeted and then saved Gaskell's reputation.

In 1934, Lord David Cecil dedicated a chapter to Elizabeth Gaskell in his book *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*. Lord Cecil's reading became responsible for solidifying the image that many had of Gaskell through the nineteenth century and the early half of the twentieth century: that of the traditional Victorian wife. This persists, even if only in a context where many disagree with it. Lord Cecil writes:

Charlotte Brontë's admirers do not think of her as Mrs. Nichols; George Eliot's admirers would wonder whom one meant if one referred to her as Mrs. Cross. But Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson is known to the world as Mrs. Gaskell. This is just as it should be. There is a great difference between her and her famous rivals: and this difference is fitly symbolized in the different form of name under which she elected to write. The outstanding fact about Mrs. Gaskell is her femininity. (Cecil 197)

In this contrast between Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot on the one hand, and Elizabeth Gaskell on the other, Lord Cecil makes of the former "eagles", giving them attributes such as "ugly" or "childless" (197), while Mrs Gaskell is compared to a "dove" who had had several children and was perfect according to the standards of the age (198). In no way is this comparison flattering for any of the parts involved, except in one sense: Lord Cecil believes Brontë and Eliot to be better writers, while Gaskell's writing was "wholly lacking in virile qualities" (199).

Other statements from Cecil's *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* paint Elizabeth Gaskell as less intelligent and accomplished due to her gender: "Her emotional capacity is no less than her intellectual" (200). And despite "limitations [not being] defects" (202), Cecil is sure to point out that "Mrs. Gaskell's femininity imposed a more serious limit on her achievements" (201). In the eyes of Lord David Cecil, Elizabeth Gaskell could only go as far as writing versions of Charles Dickens's *David*

Copperfield or Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, watered down by her feminine sensibility (199).

In this way, Cecil is one of the authors responsible for a layer of interpretation that asks us to believe that Elizabeth Gaskell was a traditional Victorian wife, someone who is assumed to engage in literary activities only to entertain herself and others. What comes across in his critique of Gaskell's work is Cecil's belief that writing that embraces femininity, and other attributes related to women, is weaker. And although worthy of some attention, it is always subpar when compared to male authors. And by doing this, he is automatically playing into what Elaine Showalter calls the Double Critical Standard, by which works by men and women were differently read and categorized, in accordance with desired attributes that had more to do with gender expectations and roles than with writing style. Showalter indicates which characteristics were expected of each gender:

If we break down the categories that are the staple of Victorian periodical reviewing, we find that women writers were acknowledged to possess sentiment, refinement, tact, observation, domestic expertise, high moral tone, and knowledge of female character; and thought to lack originality, intellectual training, abstract intelligence, humor, self-control, and knowledge of male character. Male writers had most of the desirable qualities: power, breadth, distinctness, clarity, learning, abstract intelligence, shrewdness, experience, humor, knowledge of everyone's character, and open-mindedness. (Showalter 90)

To further add to the display of the effects of this Double Critical Standard, it is appropriate to point out a fact mentioned by Patsy Stoneman in her study *Elizabeth Gaskell*. Quoting Dale Spender, who in his turn is quoting Anna Walters: after Elizabeth Gaskell, a woman, was identified as the author of *Mary Barton*, "she was praised for her ability to move her readers to sympathy" (Stoneman 2), instead of being taken a bit

more seriously, having her novel considered “forcible and fair” (2) as it was before her gender was revealed. Stoneman goes further by explaining that “[Gaskell’s] originality, her intellectual achievement, all are to be veiled by ‘feminine accomplishment’” (2). This is an excellent example of how the Double Critical Standard works, as the identity of the author changed the reception of the novel.

Another excellent point Stoneman makes is that Gaskell's work has suffered a shift in interest due to this highlighting of her seemingly lesser qualities. Initially, upon publication, works such as *Mary Barton*, *Ruth* and *North and South* were the most discussed. As Stoneman puts it:

This transformation affected not only the general evaluation of Elizabeth Gaskell’s works, but which novels were most valued. As they appeared, *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853) and *North and South* (1854) provoked lengthy debates on the social issues they raised, but as the ‘feminine’ image of ‘Mrs Gaskell’ gained hold, these works fell from favour and the more domestic content of *Cranford* (1851) came to be preferred. (Stoneman 3)

It might be argued that that criticism moved towards content that was less threatening to the patriarchal, capitalist *status quo*, but this would be a disservice to the “domestic” portion of Gaskell’s work. *Cranford*, as Kate Flint points out, “presents a quaint picture of provincial life; a gynocentric life since, we are told in the first sentence, it is a society of ‘Amazons’” (Flint 31). And in *Wives and Daughters*, gossip, something normally seen as petty due to its social association with women, “acts as a counterpoint to the ‘grand narratives’ of public history” (57).¹

In the 1950s, Elizabeth Gaskell’s reputation was somewhat restored by those interested in what was perceived as “socialist and communist” (Chapple 47) in her work.

¹ *Cranford* also features gossip, as Mary Smith is kept aware of events through correspondence. Yet, as Flint puts it: “Gossip, in *Wives and Daughters*, takes on a far more sinister and potentially damaging force than in *Cranford*” (57).

Most famously, critics such as Raymond Williams and Arnold Kettle restored Gaskell's place among other authors of "industrial novels" (Williams 94), like Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Kingsley, or George Eliot.

These novels, referred to by Williams as "industrial", are usually grouped under the term "Condition of England novels" and they "engage directly with the contemporary social and political issues with a focus on the representation of class, gender, and labour relations, as well as on social unrest and the growing antagonism between the rich and the poor in England" (Diniejko, 'Condition-of-England Novels').

The term "Condition of England" was first used by Thomas Carlyle in *Chartism*, in the title of its first chapter, "Condition-of-England Question" (Diniejko, 'Thomas Carlyle'). Carlyle was concerned with "the rights" and "the might of the discontented Working Classes in England at this epoch" (Carlyle 8) and this preoccupation moved into the world of literary production, inspiring authors to write novels concerning the working classes and their struggles.

These novels are also called "social-problem [novels]" (Kettle 169) but, according to Arnold Kettle's explanation, that is a wider term. A "social-problem novel" deals with what "we have come to recognize as a social problem" but does not contribute to "the Condition-of-England Question", as "the Condition-of-England Question" (179) is specific to "the condition and disposition of the Working Classes" (Carlyle 5) under a new, post-Industrial Revolution, factory-setting. In the case of Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, *Mary Barton* and *North and South* can be read as "social-problem novels", but only *Mary Barton* and *North and South* are "Condition-of-England novels", read in association "with Industrial Manchester" (Sanders 409) and its people.

Considering that the famous statement "[t]he history of all hitherto society is the history of class struggles" (Marx 219), coming from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, and the notion that "literature, in both form and content, is profoundly influenced by historical, economic, and social forces" (Drabble 626) are central to the readings of Williams and Kettle, it is clear that the interest in the work of Elizabeth Gaskell would have peaked and her novels would naturally have been re-read

in the light of her representation of class struggles, especially given the fact that she depicts the inner lives of the lower classes and as part of a period in which we see great political tension and the birth of “new hideous industrial centres of the North and the Midlands” (Kettle 171).

It is precisely the inclusion of the lives of the working classes that is praised by Raymond Williams when dealing with *Mary Barton* in chapter five of *Culture and Society*, “The Industrial Novels”: “*Mary Barton*, particularly in its early chapters, is the most moving response in literature to the industrial suffering of the 1840s. The really impressive thing about the book is the intensity of the effort to record, in its own terms, the feel of everyday life in the working-class homes” (Williams 94).

The expression “in its own terms” reminds us that although Williams expresses approval of the novel and its depiction of the lives of the lower classes, he can see moments where it is lacking, for instance when the author’s social standing peaks through the writing. His discussion on *North and South* shows this more clearly as he points out that Margaret Hale is, like Elizabeth Gaskell, a middle-class Christian woman. He says: “She takes up here her actual position, as a sympathetic observer” (98). And according to Williams, this gives the novel more authenticity since “this is largely Mrs Gaskell’s own situation” (99).

Yet again, the concept of sympathy is brought up. This time, however, the seemingly feminine attribute of “sympathy” is not as harshly perceived as it was by strongly misogynistic readers. Raymond Williams believes it as a strength in her work, as it helps the reader connect with the lives of the characters through “imaginative identification” and “sympathetic observation” (95).²

² It is crucial to pause and focus on the concept of “imaginative identification” (Williams 95) for a moment as it can be used to set Elizabeth Gaskell apart from other social-problem novelists. In *Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel*, D. Rae Greiner explains: “sympathy (...) denies what empathy most highly prizes, namely the fusion of self with other” (418). This being stated, it can be argued that Elizabeth Gaskell focuses on empathy through “imaginative identification” with the other. Regarding other authors writing in the same period and about some of the same subjects, Greiner provides Charles Dickens and George Eliot as examples. In my opinion, they should be praised for their sympathy instead, as it is not their main goal to motivate this process of identification. The use of empathy in Gaskell’s writing and its effect on the reader will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Arnold Kettle, much like Raymond Williams, shows a fair amount of enthusiasm when describing *Mary Barton* but holds back when discussing *North and South*, because of its middle-class focus. Kettle describes *Mary Barton* as “without rival among the novels of the time”, “an accurate and humane picture of working-class life in a large industrial town in the forties” (Kettle 179). Specifically, he praises Elizabeth Gaskell for “[writing] about the factory workers”, while the other novelists did not (171).

But, as suggested before, Kettle is very much aware of the inevitable middle-class preconceptions in the novels. He does not doubt that novelists like Gaskell, concerned with the “Condition-of-England question”, would be joyous “if sections of the working class should happen to read their books” (Kettle 171) but he knows that these works were not written with them in mind. “It was to the conscience — not to mention the downright factual ignorance - of the middle class that they addressed themselves” (171). Still, this does not seem to make him think highly of *North and South*: “*North and South* is an interesting social document, but it lacks the passion which, almost willy-nilly, informs *Mary Barton*” (183).

Despite these readings becoming “the new orthodoxy” (Stoneman 3), they seem to share the same opinion: that Elizabeth Gaskell is perceived as “offering personal rather than systemic solutions to class conflict” (Matus 2) because her solutions are focused on charity, solidarity, and kindness.

Another school of thought sharing the notion that Elizabeth Gaskell does not offer proper solutions to the issues at hand is that of feminism. It is thought that Gaskell was a conventional woman, who did very little towards the collapse of patriarchy, despite “[learning] to give more rein to her basic feminism” (Chapple xiv) as the rights of women became a more important topic as the nineteenth century developed.

Feminist critics seem to have found Gaskell a difficult figure to deal directly with, as she was not a radical to the extent of other women of her time, “[offering] nothing as promising as the Brontë novels or George Eliot” (Stoneman 5). Yet, it is impossible to ignore her friendship and acquaintance with several progressive women of the nineteenth century, such as Harriet Martineau, Mary Howitt, and Anna Jameson, of an

older generation, and Bessie Parkes, Barbara Leigh Smith, Adelaide Procter, Anna Mary Howitt and Miranda and Octavia Hill (Uglow 310-1), of her daughters' generation, and the inevitable contact with their ideas.

It is also wrong to ignore the efforts Elizabeth Gaskell put into a more faithful representation of women in her whole body of work, exploring the lives of women of various walks of life in her novels and short stories.

These aspects do not make her work feminist, but they can certainly contribute to readings that attempt to highlight "her basic feminism" (Chapple xiv) as it is certainly present.

Patsy Stoneman noticed this lack of attention: "Of all the enormous output of feminist literary criticism [before 1987], none has been concerned to any major extent with Elizabeth Gaskell" (Stoneman 5). Although that changed with Stoneman's study, as she provided "a feminist approach focussing on the interaction of class and gender" (ix), this remains somewhat true, as feminist works dealing exclusively with Elizabeth Gaskell and her work are rare.

In 2007, in "Gaskell then and now", a chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, Susan Hamilton points towards three studies in feminist critical thinking (Jenni Calder's *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* and Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women*) concerning Elizabeth Gaskell (Hamilton 185), but closer inspection makes it easy to notice that these do not exclusively examine Gaskell or her work. The same happens with Patsy Stoneman's "Feminist Alternatives" (Stoneman 5); Stoneman lists works of feminist theory that can be used as viable sources and frameworks for new readings of Elizabeth Gaskell. This shows that many important scholars have pointed ways in which analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's work can become part of mainstream feminist literary criticism, but few have followed their lead.

In more recent years, however, studies in the form of theses and dissertations, such as Anna Algotsson's *Transgression and Tradition: Redefining Gender Roles in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South* (2014) and Erica van de Hoef's *From Travelling*

Heroine to Social Explorer: Discourses of Gender and the Process of self-realisation in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South (2016) have been reading the work of Elizabeth Gaskell, in these cases, *North and South*, from a clear feminist perspective.

Set against the background of such studies, and working alongside them, the present dissertation intends to gain an understanding of how empathy can be used as a device within the fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell, more specifically in *North and South* (1854), for the development of both characters and, through them, the readers.

By showing how Elizabeth Gaskell uses identification to arouse empathy in her readership and even, her characters, this dissertation proposes that the author does not seek a revolution of the Marxist or feminist kind but a revolution in the understanding amongst people.

As the complexity of human beings, their emotions and experiences become a focus of *North and South*, the solution offered by Elizabeth Gaskell is empathy, that is, willingly placing oneself in another's place and learning what it is like being them.

The first chapter of this dissertation accordingly deals with the process of imaginative identification and how and where it works within the novel. It specifies some of the moments in which this happens and how these moments work within the narrative and their effect outside, more specifically on the reading public.

The following chapters focus on the characters that accompany the reader through the process of imaginative identification. First, Margaret Hale, the protagonist of the story; then John Thornton, the representation of the industrial middle-class along with Nicholas Higgins, the working-class man.

John Thornton becomes the middle point of the reader's journey and is the focus of the second character-focused chapter. Similarly, to Margaret Hale's analysis, firstly it is important to identify who John Thornton is within his society and his role in it. As Margaret learns empathy towards him and then asks him to extend that feeling towards his workers (here typified by Nicholas Higgins) the discussion of the worker's rights and master's duties is put in terms of empathy and moral obligations. It is in his character

and family that the commercial class sees played out all their faults, virtues, and the lack of true Christian values.

Last, but not least, Nicholas Higgins could easily be ignored as a stock character, yet his role in *North and South* is much more interesting than that. In the chapter devoted to Higgins, there will be a discussion of how he becomes a face in a crowd, without representing the whole crowd. His character provides an accurate yet individual portrait of his class, showing through his struggle with understanding Thornton and his motives, that even the working class could use a lesson in empathy. Such a lesson focuses on the mutual understanding between two humans and the growth that can come out of it.

The conclusion of this dissertation will review the levels in which empathy and imaginative identification work and go deeper into their significance and application to the reader's own life, whether the mid-Victorian that got to enjoy *North and South* on its release, but also the meaning it can carry to the early twenty-first century, as the tension between masters and men, capital and morals, empathy and sympathy are still relevant.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to provide a new perspective into Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and on how one reads Victorian women's work. It also intends to bring attention to the value of seemingly feminine characteristics and how they can enrich a narrative, without making it lose its value against other works of the same period.

1. The Hierarchy of Empathy

As stated in the Introduction, criticism directed at Elizabeth Gaskell's work often points out the lack of truly revolutionary content in her *oeuvre*, mostly focussing on her "ideological confusion" (Matus 2) as she does not fit the preconceived image of a revolutionary and appears to shy away from anything that could tarnish her conventionality. This has, as shown, led to a lukewarm welcome from the Marxists and a very hesitant embrace from the feminist movement.

As Patsy Stoneman pointed out (Stoneman 5) Gaskell was hardly a favourite in the late twentieth century and this pushed her work to the side-lines of the canon. She is not usually the main figure of a work of critical reading, but a secondary and a strange one at that, whose status required some "restoration" (Matus 1).

Having to share both the image of the respectful and feminine Mrs Gaskell and that of a revolutionary woman writer of the nineteenth century seems nearly impossible, and it is without surprise that critics take on one of the images, that seems more suitable to the purpose at hand.

Yet, I would like to propose that the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Gaskell, like any other human being, led a complex, busy life, managing to be both the housewife and the socially aware author, as her letters, such as the one to Eliza Fox (Chapple 47), reveal. In this specific letter, Elizabeth Gaskell shows a deep awareness of her complexity by finding it challenging "to reconcile all these [facets]" (47).

This same approach should be taken into the study of her characters. Her characters are complex beings, with complex feelings and often recognize this about each other. Just as Patsy Stoneman called for a reading of Gaskell's work "which [made] sense of her whole output" (Stoneman xi), and one could add, the multiple facets of herself, her multiple "mes" (Chapple 47), this same approach should be applied to the study of her characters.

Accordingly, this dissertation attempts an analysis of *North and South's* three main characters, Margaret Hale, John Thornton, and Nicholas Higgins, and how Elizabeth

Gaskell constructed these characters to persuade her readership to develop their understanding and empathy towards those they would not be likely to directly interact within their day-to-day lives. Elizabeth Gaskell's character building is certainly the most important tool that promotes the reader's identification with her characters, allowing for a sense of growth that the readers can become privy to and learn from.

This is, of course, not a new idea. Before Elizabeth Gaskell, many other authors were working in the direction of changing their readers' outlook on life and society.

In *A Resolução do Romance Social de Elizabeth Gaskell (1848-1855)*, Paula Alexandra Guimarães establishes two traditions that precede the work of Elizabeth Gaskell: political novels, "[Romances] de Índole Política" (Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 9), and didactic novels, "[Romances] de Índole Didáctica" (15).

According to Guimarães, the purpose of political novels "era o de produzir nos seus leitores uma revolução moral profunda" (10) and is associated with authors such as Thomas Holcroft, William Godwin, Robert Bage, and Elizabeth Inchbald (9). Inspired by Empiricism, Republicanism and the Enlightenment (9), some of these authors believed that "o principal objectivo do romance, como género, era tentar dar resposta à questão de como o homem poderia mudar para melhor e como a perfeição poderia ser alcançada" (12). As for didactic novels, as the name implies, "a sua importância reside essencialmente no facto de terem iniciado o processo de "educação" social dos leitores de romances das classes média e alta" (20).

These two approaches may seem at odds or even unrelated, but as Paula Alexandra Guimarães shows, they are essential to what Elizabeth Gaskell would write. Kate Flint also explains the way these two traditions may have influenced Elizabeth Gaskell in her work:

In turn, her writing both demands from the reader a rational response, as the workings of industrial society or of family dynamics are laid bare in front of us with a good deal of convincing circumstantial detail, and deliberately plays on

the reader's emotion, often employing conspicuously fictional devices of melodrama and coincidence to this end. (Flint 3)

By demanding a "rational response" (3), Elizabeth Gaskell is attempting to "produzir nos seus leitores uma revolução moral profunda" (Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 10). She is setting the scene so that her readers can "mudar para melhor" (12) by thinking through these situations.

Adding to this effect, there's the didactic approach, in which Gaskell uses devices that use the readers' emotional response, and thus deepening their involvement in the narrative. Didactic novels are what Arnold Kettle would define as "social-problem [novels]" (169), dealing with issues like "o impressionante fosso entre ricos e pobres, a desumanidade das novas fábricas e asilos, o abandono das "fallen women" e a exploração do trabalho das costureiras" (Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 17).

At this point, it is essential to establish a distinction between "sympathy" and "empathy". According to D. Rae Greiner, "sympathy had for some time been considered a complex formal process, a mental exercise but not an emotion" (418). This mental exercise focuses on the process of responding to something, mostly to a situation that is negative or pitiable. One can only feel negatively if one is to sympathize. As John Gibson explains, "[s]ympathy is felt (...) for the *suffering* and *misfortune* of others" (235). There is a sense of distance, of moral superiority even, when sympathy is at play. If one were to share the emotion of another, be momentarily in the place of another, that would become empathy, and that is Elizabeth Gaskell's goal. Empathy is necessary to make anything matter.

As an author of social-problem novels, Elizabeth Gaskell gets nothing from solely engaging her readership on an intellectual level, to show an issue that must be solved through a "revolução moral profunda" (Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 10) only. The emotional response is necessary if the readers are to be impacted by the

narrative in a way that forces them to rethink their society and their place within it and truly act on it; empathy becomes a call to action.

Raymond Williams declared Gaskell to be “a sympathetic observer” and despite mentioning “imaginative identification” (98), he failed to recognize that she is not sympathetic but empathetic and asks the reader to do the same. Emotional involvement is necessary for empathy and consequently “imaginative identification”.

The concept of “imaginative identification”, along with its association with empathy, was briefly touched on in the Introduction, and it must be further discussed.

Sophie-Grace Chappell defines imaginative identification as “understanding, getting a feel for, learning vicariously and fictively to inhabit not only [one’s own] point of view, but other people’s points of view too” (Chappell). This adds to Chinua Achebe’s definition of imaginative identification as “the opposite of indifference; it is human connectedness as its most intimate” (Achebe 151)³, as we momentarily become the person we are trying to empathize with, we “feel not just *for* another but *as* another” (Gibson 234).

John Gibson further explains empathy “as a form of imaginative, and essentially other-directed perspective-taking” (234). This can be perfectly matched by Kate Flint’s suggestion that “Gaskell’s communicative model for successful human relations involves dialogue; the sharing of perspectives” (7).

The key to Elizabeth Gaskell’s work, in the specific case of this dissertation, *North and South*, is empathy.

But how does empathy work here? And are we, as readers, to empathize with Gaskell herself, with her characters, and/or with the people they represent?

³ Both Achebe and Chappell mention Matthew 7:12 (“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”), along with their discussion of imaginative identification. They refer to it as part of the concept known as the Golden Rule. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines the Golden Rule as “[a]ny form of the dictum, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ In some form this is found in almost all religions and ethical systems” (Blackburn 154). There is then, a clear link between imaginative identification and a call for empathy that seems to be epitomized in Matthew 7:12 and in the concept of the Golden Rule.

It is the argument of this dissertation that the characters and the empathy they arouse in the reader are the essential tools of Gaskell's arsenal. Through the characters in her novel, Elizabeth Gaskell appeals to the reader's imaginative identification and their empathy so they can experience hardships and challenges they normally would not as middle- and upper-class individuals.

As explained by Garry L. Hagberg:

[T]he imaginative identification with literary characters very unlike ourselves expands the reach and scope of our human understanding and our imaginative grasp of other ways of living, other patterns of self-defining words and deeds. And our own character is expanded, and deepened, accordingly. (Hagberg 227)

This is essential to Gaskell's *North and South*, as the reader is led to experience the lives of various characters and understand the path of their lives. It becomes even more important when the characters themselves are taught empathy along with the reader, which is the case of *North and South*.

Many elements make up a novel and usually, one of them takes centre stage. Many authors focus on the plot as the main element of their narrative. In this situation, the characters are carefully crafted and work within the narrative to fit the plot. But this is not the case in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. In this novel, the plot is often something that promotes character development. The characters are meant to go from point A to point B, bringing the reader with them. Gaskell hopes that the reader can accompany her characters' growth and even grow alongside them, in a parallel manner.

For a better understanding of how this applies to *North and South*, I suggest a hierarchy of empathy, a multiple level system of immersion in the narrative, which allows the reader to further develop their imaginative identification with characters and their specific situations.

The entry-level of this system is, of course, the protagonist: Margaret Hale. The novel begins in an upper-class setting, represented by London and Aunt Shaw's house where Margaret has spent the last few years. Both Margaret and the reader are quickly taken to her family's home in Helstone⁴.

Through Margaret's memories of Helstone, the readers are led to believe that the village is like something out of "one of Tennyson's poems" (Gaskell, *North* 14), but this quickly changes as Margaret, and thus the reader, are faced with family life "of habitual distress and depression" (18), in which Mr Hale uproots the family to Milton⁵ due to religious doubts⁶.

But before this occurs in the aptly named third chapter, "Doubts and Difficulties", we are allowed a glimpse into Margaret Hale's untrained empathy. In the second chapter, "Roses and Thorns"⁷, Margaret states her dislike for "shoppy people" (20), showing a preference for "cottagers and labourers" (20) as they are "without pretence" (20).

This shows how comfortable Margaret is in a position where she shows sympathy, rather than empathy. The "cottagers and labourers" (20), belonging to a lesser social standing, are easier for her to understand, as she thinks of them as less fortunate and hardworking, while the middle-class families, like the Gormans, are in the

⁴ In naming Margaret's home Helstone, Elizabeth Gaskell makes a clear reference to Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*. One of the novel's central characters is Caroline Helstone, who has a clergyman as a father figure and a mill owner for a romantic interest.

⁵ The name of the northern town appears to be a direct reference to John Milton and *Paradise Lost*, as the move to Milton is to Margaret the loss of paradise, as represented by Helstone. This is an interesting detail, as one is aware that Helstone is nowhere as idyllic as the protagonist remembers it and Milton truly becomes her home by the end of the novel.

⁶ Although Mr. Hale's doubts are not a focus of the novel, they are seemingly related to "the Thirty-Nine Articles (...) and therefore the institutions and doctrines specifically of the Church of England" (Easson 3).

⁷ Roses and thorns are important in the novel as they often represent the romantic conflict between Margaret Hale and John Thornton. There are several references to the native roses of Helstone, which here appear to stand in for Margaret Hale and her southern way, while John's own surname contains the word "thorn", displaying his rougher attitude and the harsher ways of the north. This can point the reader towards the conflict and eventual reconciliation between characters. After all, roses have thorns, and those thorns are an essential part of their existence.

same social setting, but not genteel enough to “associate” (20) with her intellectual father.

This lack of empathy shows her prejudices, and her attitude does not change until further in the novel as she continues to be disdainful of “tradesmen” (65), epitomized in the novel by John Thornton. She even tries to continue her charity-based relationship with the lower-classes, as she makes acquaintance with the Higginses (73-4) in Chapter VIII, “Home Sickness”⁸.

After Margaret Hale meets with the Higginses, she begins a relationship with the family and learns the hardships of industrial work. This is possible because she already feels sympathy towards the lower classes. Margaret moves towards empathy and begins to stand up for the workers, as the conflict between herself and John Thornton is fuelled by her belief that he lacks sympathy and/or empathy towards his workers.

Her perspective on John Thornton changes as Margaret learns his tragic past in Chapter XI, “First Impressions”⁹. She feels sympathy for him, and eventually, empathy¹⁰.

Now that Margaret has found “human interest” (75) in Milton, she is ready to leave her preconceived notions behind and learn from each side. This splits the following level of the hierarchy of empathy in two. The second level of this hierarchy has John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins side by side, ready for Margaret to learn each of their opinions and points of view on the social conflict being discussed in the novel.

⁸ There is an interesting foreshadowing of Mrs. Hale’s illness and death in the title of this chapter. By naming the chapter “Home Sickness”, Elizabeth Gaskell indicates that sickness is to come to the Hale home as they move to Milton. This becomes even more noticeable with Dixon’s statement that “I’m sure [Milton] will be your death before long” (66) and Mr. Hale’s concerns about Milton being “an unhealthy place” (67). Furthermore, one can extend this sense of impending illness to Bessy Higgins, whom Margaret meets at the end of the chapter and is one of the characters in the novel whose illness ends up in death.

⁹ The title of this specific chapter is curious in the sense that this is obviously not the first time Margaret Hale meets John Thornton, as that happened in chapter seven, “New Scenes and Faces”. Also, it is not the chapter in which Thornton tells his life story to the Hales. Yet, it is the chapter in which Margaret reviews her first impression of Thornton and his ways. Margaret now admires Thornton’s character and his ability in improving himself, but still points out that he should be responsible for allowing his workers to improve themselves in the same manner. More importantly, this is the chapter where Margaret truly shows empathy towards John Thornton and takes another step in the process of imaginative identification.

¹⁰ In “First Impressions”, Margaret states that she admires John Thornton but “personally [does not] like him at all” (88).

This happens in chapters XV, “Masters and Men”, and XVII, “What is a Strike?”, where Margaret is given insight into why mill-owners and millworkers cannot find a middle ground that allows for a more stable and balanced relationship.

As Margaret has learned to admire and understand both men separately, she becomes the link between them, and throughout the novel, she functions as the mediator between them, and therefore between social classes.

It is after learning about each of them, with awareness of the limitations that make the men unable to find a solution on their own, that her intervention will allow them to imaginatively identify with one another so the social conflict staged in *North and South* can be solved. Additionally, they must actively find this solution together, resulting in the third level, where Margaret’s intervention bears fruit in measures such as the building of a dining-room “for the men” (352), discussed by Thornton in Chapter XLII, “Alone! Alone!”.

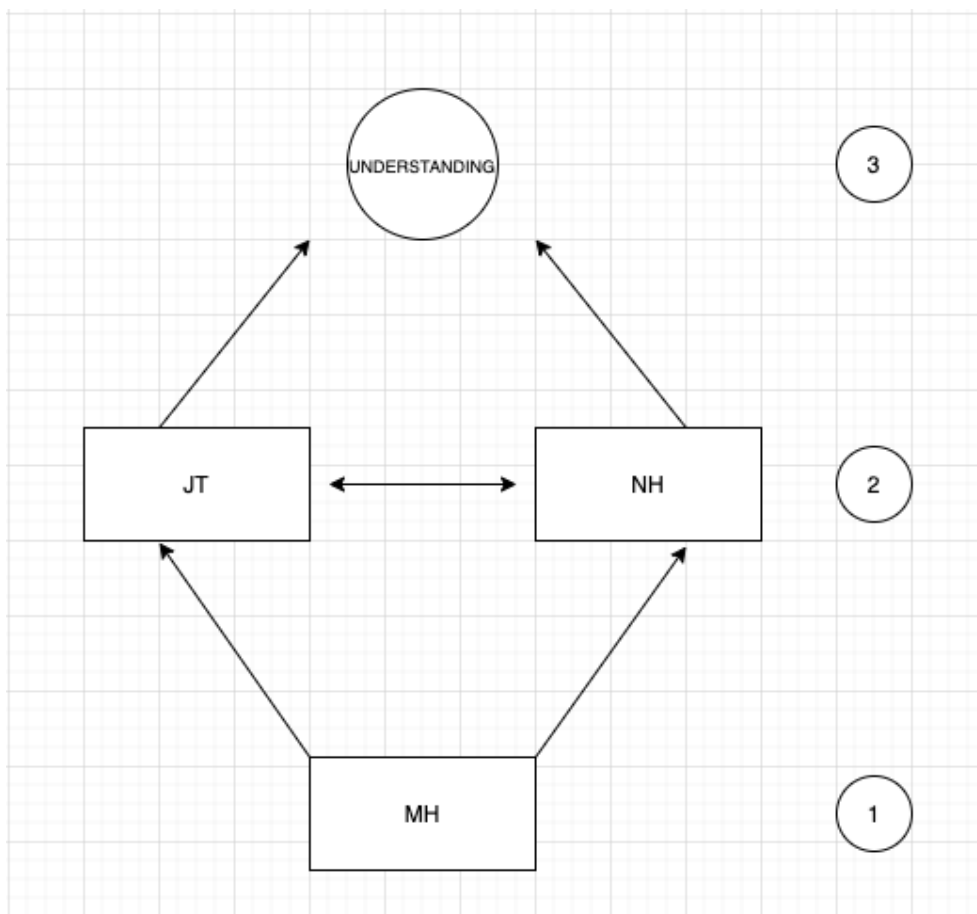


Fig. 1 The hierarchy of empathy

However, there are separate planes of this structure of empathy.

One that is previously discussed and illustrated by Figure 1, working within the narrative. Here, we can verify that the first level concerns Margaret and her journey towards maturity. Then, the second level is on the transformation of sympathy for the working class and the learning of their conditions with the Higginses, particularly with Nicholas. It also concerns Margaret and her newly gained understanding of the trading classes, which is deepened by the romantic subplot of the novel. This all adds up to the process in which Nicholas Higgins and John Thornton find a common ground. The third and final level concerns the understanding between the two men, facilitated by Margaret herself. This understanding, born out of empathy, is the promise that carries *North and South* in its final moments.

Then, there is the parallel integration of the reader and the learning of Margaret's lessons. The entry-level concerns Margaret and the reader. The readers imagine themselves as Margaret and feel her pain and distress, her prejudices, and shortcomings. Becoming aware of this need for growth and improvement within the novel, the reader is led to question their own need for growth. In this first level, the innovation of Elizabeth Gaskell's style comes into play. The reader is now going to learn and develop their empathy alongside Margaret. Not only are they going to put themselves in Margaret's place, but they are going to partake in Margaret Hale's own exercise in imaginative identification, as she learns about the Thorntons and the Higginses. The second level concerns the reader and their reading of the understanding between John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins. Along with Margaret and her realisation that we must understand other people better, the lesson expands towards others, in this case, Higgins and Thornton, as an understanding is established between the two men. The third level is, simply, the use of these lessons in the reader's own life. After being fictitiously faced with the situations in the novel, the reader has a better

understanding of how these situations work and how to better manage them in real life, although he/she always remains free to act according to his/her conscience.

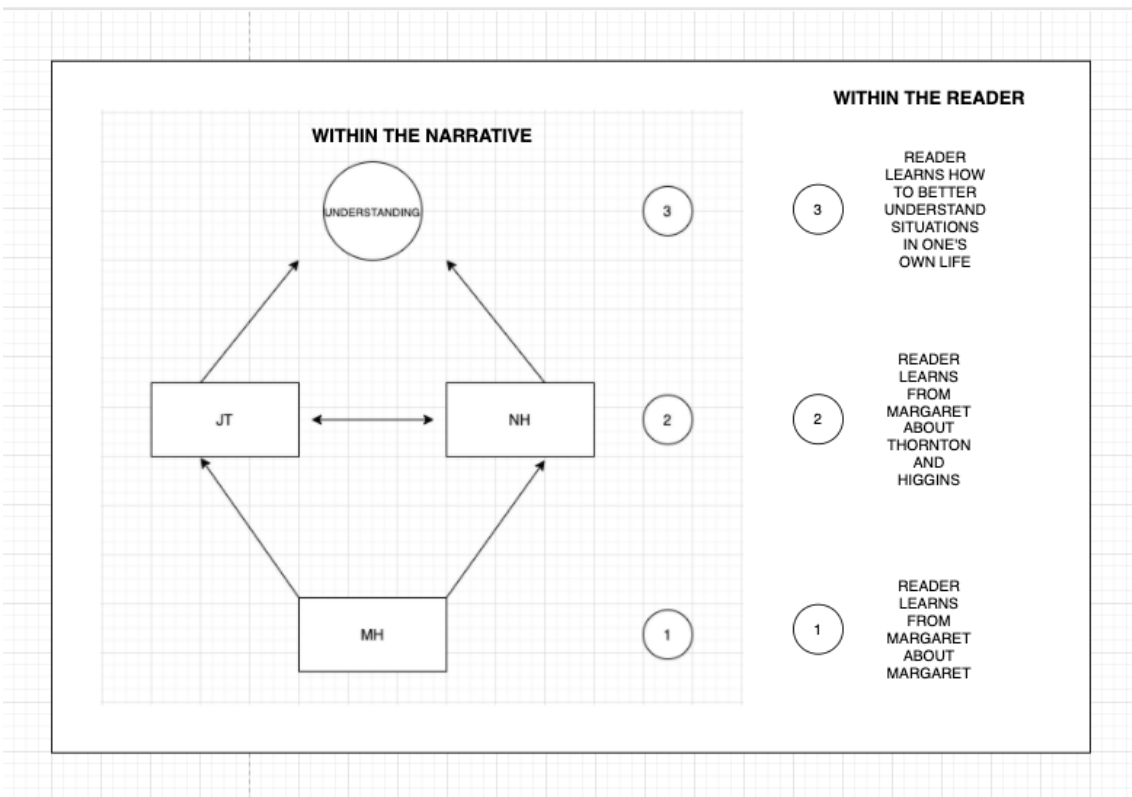


Fig. 2 The effect of the hierarchy on the reader

Some elements of the hierarchy of empathy and its effect on the readers have been hinted at by other scholars whose work is cited in this dissertation.

In the conclusion to the previously mentioned *A Resolução do Romance Social de Elizabeth Gaskell (1848-1855)*, Paula Alexandra Guimarães also found that “sentimento e emoção” (Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 125) are tools used by Gaskell to achieve resolution of conflict in her novels.

[Elizabeth Gaskell p]rocurou usar uma heroína que funcionasse como observadora ‘objectiva’ da cena social e projectasse algumas das suas atitudes e convicções pessoais. Procurou, igualmente, sugerir uma resolução das diferenças e desentendimentos, não só através do impulso da *caritas* mas também da

influência sentimental. (...) O impulso de moderação e de compromisso está presente no romance precisamente através do sentimento e da emoção. (...) [S]ão estes, e não a razão, que triunfam sobre o conflito, que reconciliam as atitudes do patrão e do trabalhador, do norte e do sul, do homem e da mulher. (Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 125)

Guimarães notices some of the elements highlighted in this dissertation. The use of Margaret Hale as an “observadora ‘objectiva’” (125) that influences those around her, as well as the idea that “[o] impulso de moderação e de compromisso está presente no romance precisamente através do sentimento e da emoção” (125), are echoed in this dissertation through the defence of Margaret Hale as the guide to other characters (and the reader) in this complex exercise of imaginative identification, to achieve an understanding between the opposing sides of the narrative, represented by John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins.

Concerning the reader, Kate Flint proposes the following at the end of “The Life of Elizabeth Gaskell”, the first chapter to her book, part of the Northcote House series “Writers and their Works”, *Elizabeth Gaskell*:

One cannot prove whether such uncertainty mirrors Gaskell’s unease, or is a strategy employed to develop a relationship of equality and intimacy with the reader. What may confidently be stated is that Gaskell never seizes the opportunity to adopt a fully authoritative stance towards her readers. Although she may guide in certain interpretive directions, she leaves it up to her readers to draw judgements, assessments, conclusions from the events she puts before them. The ultimate authority, in Gaskell’s work, is that which readers are invited to develop for themselves. (Flint 10)

Here, Flint suggests that Elizabeth Gaskell never fully conducts her readers, but frees them to draw their conclusions. Her role as a “guide” (Flint 10) is important, despite *North and South* having its own guide within the text, Margaret Hale, who can be read as a way for Gaskell to introduce her ideas into the text (Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 125). This idea is present in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, where, in a reflection about women and writing as a profession, Gaskell states that “[one must not hide one’s gift] in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others”¹¹ (259). Elizabeth Gaskell valued her role as a guide, looking to fulfil her work as an author, but without overstepping the line that separates herself and her reader.

In conclusion, these ideas are not exactly new but have yet to find their way into a solid proposal concerning the work of Elizabeth Gaskell, which is what this dissertation sets itself to accomplish.

The construction of her characters as an attempt to persuade her readership to work on the development of their understanding and empathy towards others becomes even more important when set against what Gaskell herself believed to be the mission of an author, to use one’s gift for “the service of others” (259), or as the author this dissertation suggests, the education of others.

¹¹ This quotation also caught Kate Flint’s attention, as can be seen on page 2 of *Elizabeth Gaskell*.

2. Margaret Hale

One might wonder where Margaret Hale fits within the hierarchy proposed in the previous chapter. That is what the present chapter will attempt to answer by placing *North and South's* protagonist within the narrative, explaining her role there and her function in the reader's introduction to imaginative identification.

By accompanying Margaret's steps throughout the novel, one can observe the shift in her perspective and in how she sees others, independently of their social standing. Some of the early steps have been pointed out in the previous chapter and will be reviewed here, as it is important for the integrity and coherence of the chapter.

Margaret Hale's story begins in London, where she has spent approximately the last decade living with Aunt Shaw and her cousin, Edith, in an upper-class neighbourhood. Margaret's move from her father's parish of Helstone to the capital seems an effort to make her into a typical society lady as she shares Edith's education (Gaskell, *North* 10), but it is made very clear that this has not worked. There is a clear contrast between Margaret and Edith, and the differences between them are even implied in the way both are described throughout Chapter I, "Haste to the Wedding", as Edith is referred to as a "child" (8, 9)¹² and is less active than her cousin in the preparations of her wedding.

Yet, there are moments in which a sense of ingenuity, or at least hints towards a view of life that is still undeveloped, can be observed in Margaret Hale. This becomes ever so apparent in her description of Helstone as "a village in a poem" (14), which Henry Lennox quickly identifies as a "picture" (13), showing how thoroughly idealized her

¹² Establishing the difference between Margaret and other young women in the novel is very important to Elizabeth Gaskell. While Edith and Fanny Thornton are often associated with childishness and frivolity and a style of education that aims to make wives out of women, Margaret is shown to align with Elizabeth Gaskell's own perspective more closely as she shows courage, determination, and independence. Patsy Stoneman states that: "Elizabeth Gaskell's ideas on the education and social role of women lies [in] the tradition of rational feminism as expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft" (28) and thus, showing a preference for Margaret is an obvious sign of what Elizabeth Gaskell found more valuable in a young woman.

perception of home is. Another indication of this is her overall attitude towards “shoppy people” (20).¹³

Her prejudice towards those working in trade is first introduced in Chapter II, “Roses and Thorns” while having a conversation with her mother:

“Gormans,” said Margaret, “Are those the Gormans who made their fortunes in trade at Southampton? Oh! I’m glad we don’t visit them. I don’t like shoppy people. I think we are far better off, knowing only cottagers and labourers, and people without pretence.” (...) I’m sure you don’t want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers, do you, mamma?” (Gaskell, *North* 20)

Here, Margaret not only shows her ignorant perspective on the lives of others but also plays into her romanticization of Helstone, its people and the labour done by them. And adding to her “sentimental view” (Harman 362) of country living, “she condemns the spirit of commerce without knowing anything about it, and dismisses the work of the industrial bourgeoisie as all being selfishly motivated” (Cazamian 228).

Her attitude affects the way she interacts with others outside of her usual acquaintances and preconceived order of things. Other moments may indicate so, but the most obvious is her *faux-pas* when meeting the Higginses by expecting their relationship to follow the model of her charity-based visits to the Helstone labourers.

Her prejudices could be attributed to her education in London as they seem to fit Edith’s description better than hers, but she has inherited this sort of prejudices from Mrs Hale, who dreads the idea of living among “factory people” (Gaskell, *North* 46) in Milton.

¹³ In the notes to the edition of *North and South* cited throughout this dissertation, Patricia Ingham explains that shoppy is “a pejorative term originating in the nineteenth-century for those engaged in retail trade” (427).

This moment in Chapter V, “Decision”, continues the conversation introduced with the judgement of the Gormans, as Margaret points out that they “have been in trade just as much as these Milton-Northern people” (47). It is shown that despite wishing to maintain a relationship with the Gormans in Helstone, Mrs Hale is now appalled by the perspective of having the same type of relationship with northern traders.

And despite pointing out her mother’s hypocrisy, Margaret has still not redeemed herself, as she says: “Well, mamma, I give up the cotton-spinners¹⁴; I am not standing up for them, any more than for any other trades-people” (47).

It will take a bit more character development until we can read a slight change of attitude in Margaret.

After arriving in Milton, the Hales are looking to employ a servant but Margaret finds the people of Milton are proud and prefer “the better wages and greater independence of working in a mill” (71). Margaret is confused by this attitude, as she imagined that these people would prefer the respectability of working for a genteel family, in a *quasi*-feudal model¹⁵. She dislikes these people because they “[question] her back” and show “doubts and fears of their own” (71). But most of all, Margaret dislikes their manners and impertinence (71).

This takes place in Chapter VIII, “Home Sickness”, and it is in this chapter that the reader can notice a change in Margaret’s attitude.

As she must venture into the city alone, she finds herself amongst the workers (72) as they go to and leave the mills. Despite Margaret’s initial fear and the impression, she had earlier in the chapter, she begins to understand these people as just that, people. She notices that underneath their roughness there is a certain friendliness and

¹⁴ Interestingly, Margaret refers to the mill-owners as “cotton-spinners”, but the reality is that they do not spin any cotton themselves, the workers they hire do. However, at this point, Margaret does not even think of them.

¹⁵ The paragraph that describes this situation even features an allusion to Louis XIV of France and describes the manners of Milton’s habitants as “uncourtly” (71), highlighting the expected reverence the Hales were counting on.

innocence, as women admire her dress and men admire her beauty (72). Her description of these people is still not very positive, as Margaret sees them as “streams” and “disorderly” (72) and thinks of the encounter as “unfortunate” (72).

At the end of the same chapter, there is a noticeable change in attitude, in her introduction to the Higginses. She meets her “humble friends” (73) in a field where Margaret has seen Bessy and Nicholas Higgins walking on Sundays. She had noticed Nicholas before because he stood out to her as he had complimented her looks and “a silent recognition was established between them whenever the chances of the day brought them across each other’s paths” (73).

She offers Bessy the flowers she had gathered, and this impulsive act of kindness sparks conversation between them.

Of course, Margaret’s prejudices are still present in this conversation. She regards Bessy and Nicholas with “pity” (73) and offers to visit them even as she recognizes the impertinence of her offer (74), “a gesture of sympathetic condescension from a well-bred lady to a sickly working-class girl” (van de Hoef 41)¹⁶. Even so, what makes this encounter significant is how Margaret does not feel aggravated by their manners and unwillingness to have a stranger come into their home, she has finally “found a human interest”, making Milton “a brighter place to her” (Gaskell, *North* 75).

This “human interest” (75) is the starting point to her journey, displaying a clear “sinal da vontade crescente que Margaret tem de se misturar” (Guimarães, *Resolução de North and South* 6). Furthermore, “Margaret’s dehumanizing perception of ‘the masses’ is transformed through personal contact with Nicholas Higgins” (Harrison 182) and this very same contact allows for the growth that is to come further in the novel.

Here, her sympathy begins to become empathy. In due time, she will not be interested in the Higginses as a charity case, and thus it is not correct when Dorice

¹⁶ Erica van de Hoef correctly assesses that at this point in the novel, Margaret is still mostly motivated by sympathy rather than empathy. Yet, throughout her thesis, she still uses the term “sympathy”, or “sympathetic” rather than “empathy”/“empathetic”; therefore, I do not think the difference has been established between the two terms in van de Hoef’s work.

Williams Elliott comments that this change of attitude¹⁷ is an adaptation of “her charitable practices to fit the new social circumstances she encounters in the industrial north” (*Angel* 145). A change in her method of charity would involve other tactics, mostly related to sympathy, as her “sympathetic connection without requiring the knowledge or exchange of others’ feelings” (Greiner 419). But she knows their feelings and tries to understand them, she can even recognize when she oversteps her boundaries. Her visit to the Higgins home in Chapter XI, “First Impressions”, haunts her later on, “so oppressed was she by” it (Gaskell, *North* 93). She is so concerned with Bessy and her condition that she does not care for Mrs Thornton’s call, trying to figure out how to fit a visit in her day (93).

A more accurate depiction of Margaret’s sympathy is directed at John Thornton. Margaret does not like Thornton, pointing out his lack of empathy, his unwillingness to understand others and their lack of success “in raising themselves in the world, from whatever cause” (84-5). This is the provocation that prompts him to share his life story. Thornton’s explanation of his father’s death under miserable circumstances that forced him to find work in a draper’s shop to support his family with his small earnings makes Margaret a bit more understanding of his opinions but does not earn him her full empathy.

She confesses to having “really liked that account of himself better than anything else he said. Everything else revolted [her], from its hardness” (87). Her mother¹⁸ is confused, stating her surprise at Margaret’s reaction but never without stating her

¹⁷ Although I do not agree with Elliott in this sense, in the notes to *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* an excellent point is made when discussing Margaret as the female visitor in Victorian fiction: “Margaret Hale, unlike Mrs. Pardiggle [in *Bleak House*], always treats the Higginses with respect, courtesy, and gentle friendliness, always fearing to intrude and never prying or pushing advice on them. Margaret’s interactions with the Higginses are always exemplary, and her character serves as an antidote to Dickens’s negative caricature of the female visitor” (*Angel* 242).

¹⁸ Mrs. Hale never leaves her prejudices behind. In chapter twenty-nine, “A Ray of Sunshine”, she reproaches Margaret for using “factory slang” (233), equating such language with “vulgarity” (234). Her prejudices are inherited by her children. As we have seen, Margaret displays them earlier in the novel, but Frederick also shows them. He thinks that John Thornton is a “shopman” in chapter thirty-one, “Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot?” because “[h]e looked like someone of that kind” (252).

prejudices, saying that Mr Hale should not have introduced Thornton to the family without letting them know in advance that he had been a shop boy.

Margaret has changed her mind towards him being “shoppy” but maintains her assessment of his lack of sympathy towards others and their condition: “That really is fine (...) What a pity such a nature should be tainted by his position as a Milton manufacturer (...) testing everything by the standard of wealth” (88). She ends her judgement of Thornton by saying: “Papa, I do think Mr. Thornton a very remarkable man; but personally I don’t like him at all” (88).

It is hard to pinpoint the moment in which Margaret shifts from a sympathetic to an empathetic outlook on John Thornton, as the shift in the way she perceives him is more subtle than how it comes to happen with the Higginses. It is that way mostly because the human interest she finds in Thornton comes from the romantic subplot.

Of course, the fact that Margaret gains romantic interest in Thornton and therefore becomes empathetic towards him does not make the shift in attitude less compelling, or less important. Arguing that this makes it so is wrong for several reasons. Firstly, because of Elaine Showalter’s Double Critical Standard, which was discussed in the Introduction. If love is the element moving Margaret towards empathy, her actions are seen as motivated by “sentiment” (Showalter 90). Rather than something that most human beings experience and men can write about and make a focus of their characters’ development, under the Double Critical Standard, love becomes a lesser motivation, reserved for women’s writing, making their work less valuable. Secondly, there is not much to empathize with when it comes to John Thornton. We must not forget that he represents the oppressor, and he lacks the need for concern that Nicholas and his daughters evoke in Margaret. Finally, Margaret’s initial interest in Nicholas Higgins was just as shallow. She saw him on the street, he told her she had a “bonny face” (Gaskell, *North* 72) and that made her remember him.

Margaret herself does not understand her feelings towards Thornton for most of the novel, and it is only after the misunderstanding involving her brother, Frederick, she notices she cares about Thornton’s opinion of her. And even then, she seems to care

more about being seen as respectable, maidenly even, rather than being seen as romantically unavailable (315).

There is an important discussion of justice and oppression that is coded into the small plot that concerns Frederick. In Chapter XIV, "The Meeting", Mrs Hale expresses pride in her son "standing up against injustice" (109) rather than conforming and just being "a good officer" (109). Margaret agrees: "Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used—not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless" (109). This shows Margaret's convictions and beliefs and readies the reader for the next chapter, "Masters and Men", in which Hales and Thorntons discuss the masters' approach to their workers.

If "Masters and Men", Chapter XV, is a glimpse into the masters' mindset, chapter seventeen, "What is a Strike?", is its counterpart, featuring the men's side of the conversation. In this chapter, Margaret looks to understand the men's motivation to strike, but she sees Higgins' explanation (133-5) like Thornton's, as both find that masters and men are unable to reach an understanding.

The tension between masters and men comes to its climax in Chapter XXII, "A Blow and Its Consequences". Here, Margaret is at her most empathic state, as she feels "only an intense sympathy – intense to painfulness – in the interests of the moment" (173).

The word used by Elizabeth Gaskell is "sympathy" and while I have been arguing for the use of "empathy" instead, it is important to keep in mind that "empathy" entered the vocabulary later than the mid-nineteenth century, in 1909 (Greiner 417). D. Rae Greiner's explanation of sympathy as a "process rather than a feeling", "a mental exercise but not an emotion" (418) solidifies my argument, as Margaret is overtaken by her emotions, in her identification with the striking men, the family that is under direct threat and the Irish workers that have been caught in between.

She "forget[s] herself" (Gaskell, *North* 173) and this is what leads her to put herself between John Thornton and the crowd that is trying to hurt him. At this point in

the narrative, this cannot be attributed to her feelings for him, but it is a sign of her deep empathy towards others, even those she finds herself not “lik[ing] at all” (88).

Margaret even tries to get Thornton to talk to his men:

“Mr. Thornton,” said Margaret, shaking all over with her passion, “go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don’t let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. I see one there who is. If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man!” (175)

It may not be obvious at first, but from the very beginning, Margaret is trying to make Thornton realize that he is just the same as his men. Often, she appeals to his identification with them. In Chapter XV, she tries to tell him what his workers think (119), surely allowing him to put himself in their place. In Chapter X, “Wrought Iron and Gold”, she tells him that he holds everyone to a standard that may not be attainable (84-5). But her biggest call to his sense of identification with them happens in the cited portion of Chapter XXII, “A Blow and its Consequences”, as she appeals to his humanity and kindness. She urges him to speak from “man to man” (175), as equals capable of mutual understanding.

This is echoed at the end of Chapter XXXVII, “Looking South”, while Margaret explains to her father her frustrations with the two men’s unwillingness to put themselves in each other’s shoes: “If he and Mr. Thornton would speak out together as man to man— if Higgins would forget that Mr. Thornton was a master, and speak to him as he does to us—and if Mr. Thornton would be patient enough to listen to him with his human heart, not with his master’s ears—” (301). Despite Margaret’s best efforts, this only happens in the fittingly named Chapter XXXIX, “Making Friends”¹⁹.

¹⁹ The following chapter in this dissertation will deal more closely with the understanding achieved between Thornton and Higgins.

Margaret's growth does not go unnoticed by those around her. Mr Bell, her father's friend and the person who establishes acquaintance between Hales and Thorntons, playfully calls her a "socialist" due to her defence of "the progress of commerce" in Chapter XL, "Out of Tune": "Hear this daughter of yours, Hale! Her residence in Milton has quite corrupted her. She's a democrat, a red republican, a member of the Peace Society, a socialist—" (322).

Her change in the understanding of others even moves out of the borders of Milton. As she moves back to London in the latter portion of the novel, her awareness of the hardships faced by the lower classes makes her think of the "toilers and moilers" (364) of the capital. Margaret's family is clearly against it, but she ventures into the streets of London and tries to effect positive change in the lives of others, rather than standing idly, passively as she did earlier in the novel.

The greatest example of Margaret's new outlook on life is shown in Chapter XLVI, "Once and Now": "Looking out of myself and my own painful sense of change, the progress of all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others if I wish to have a right judgment, or a hopeful trustful heart" (391). This is the proposed solution to the conflict that takes place in *North and South*. Looking out of oneself to think of others and how they feel, to imaginatively identify with their hardships, no matter how painful that may be. This process is necessary as it amounts to uncovering the potential "human interest" to be found in our relationships with everyone around us.

Margaret Hale is Elizabeth Gaskell's most persuasive tool. As Kate Flint puts it, "Margaret functions as a tool for the reader's education" (Flint 39), aiding the said reader in the process of "[r]e-viewing social conditions" (39). A "strong woman" (Stoneman 84) from the beginning, Margaret is the perfect character to inform the readers of lives around them that they would not necessarily know about.²⁰ She is respectable, representing "the feminine moral influence" (Bossche 92), as she is a

²⁰ This will be dealt with more closely in the conclusion.

middle-class woman, and uses the privileges of her social position to help others. This is clear in instances such as when she puts herself between the crowd and Thornton in Chapter XXII, thinking the people would not try to attack a woman (Gaskell, *North* 177).

Margaret is thus an unconventional Victorian heroine, who uses her conventionality and her privileges in her favour. According to Anna Algotsson: “Gaskell’s heroine embodies both the traditional feminine virtues of nurturing and selflessness while transgressing the Victorian gender norms with her traditionally masculine qualities of independence and action” (5).

The strongest element of the novel is indeed its protagonist as she is a perfectly balanced character, fulfilling all possible expectations. The readers can then imagine themselves as Margaret and, through her, feel her growing pains, and are led to question their own need for change, no matter who they are or where they come from, whether they are more conservative or progressive.

The question left is how does a fictional character, such as Margaret Hale, produce such an effect on real people and in their real lives? How is it possible that Elizabeth Gaskell might have thought of changing the way her readership perceived the world outside through a character that is part of a complex work of fiction?

Some aspects that answer the second question have been reviewed in the previous chapter. Paula Alexandra Guimarães explains that even before Elizabeth Gaskell, authors understood the potential of literature to effect changes in the readers, their morality (10) and their social awareness (17, 20). And adding to Guimarães’s statements, Kate Flint points in the same direction by stating that Gaskell’s fiction demands a response from her readers (3), and this is where the readers’ emotional involvement and the consequent imaginative identification comes into play. But other elements, especially when answering the first question, can be added to this.

Garry L. Hagberg identifies reading as an experience in character building in his entry on “Character” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*.

The experience of literature offers a place to reflect upon what is character and what constitutes character (223) as the reader is faced with experiences that are or are not,

part of their daily lives. According to Hagberg: “Making sense of others in literary experience—seeing into character and coming to understand what makes a character tick—is a way of making ourselves” (227-8) and this happens because complex systems and mental processes are happening when we read a work of fiction.

Partly due to language, we experience literature and these challenging fictional situations in the same way in which we process our thoughts and actions, and thus we are allowed to cultivate our character, creating a new self out of this “transformative experience of reading” (223). Hagberg sums this point in this manner: “there may be two worlds, one real and one literary, but there is only one world of language that they both share” (225).

In this way, *North and South* offers the reader the opportunity to vicariously experience Margaret Hale’s life as if it were their own through language, making it even easier to relate to Margaret, her growth, and her changing worldview. What further allows us to do so is the process of imaginative identification discussed in the previous chapter.

If “empathy makes possible an especially intimate and powerful form of *identification*” (Gibson 234) it is essential that the reader feels empathy towards Margaret. Still, what if one does not identify enough with Margaret to arouse such empathy? Let us imagine a reader that is very different from Margaret Hale; someone who is not in any way, shape, or form, like Margaret, and so, someone who is not going to easily understand Margaret, her experiences, and motivations. Garry L. Hagberg offers the solution to this in what he calls “meta-understanding”:

We might, for the moment, thus distinguish between what we could call understanding and meta-understanding: we can, in understanding a character in literature, agree with that character to the extent that we actually do in life what they do in literature; or we might in understanding such a character, agree in hypothetical form, i.e. agree that we would and will do what they do, if we were ever in those circumstances. But, in a case of meta-understanding, we understand the characterological and experiential teleology that led this

character to do what they do, and so are able to make sense of what they do and why they do it, while at the same time objecting, perhaps strenuously and completely, to what they do. (Hagberg 227)

This meta-understanding does not equate to sympathy. It is still essential that emotion is felt, even if imaginatively, to make this empathy. As “sympathy [is] a process rather than a feeling” (Greiner 418), “an awareness that the other *is* other: not me” (419), empathy requires “the imaginative identification with literary characters very unlike ourselves [to expand] the reach and scope of our human understanding and our imaginative grasp of other ways of living, other patterns of self-defining words and deeds” (Hagberg 227).

Meta-understanding is part of this process that allows Margaret to take the lead in *North and South*. It is what happens when simple understanding is not enough to convince a sceptic reader to imaginatively identify with a character. And it is also what happens when two very different characters are put face to face, as in the novel, Nicholas Higgins and John Thornton find a middle ground that is facilitated by Margaret, and she tries her best to show the two men that they have a lot to learn from each other.

Margaret Hale is “Gaskell's agent of reconciliation” (Spencer 88), being able to transform her world (89) and, I argue, the reader's world.

3. John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins

According to Dorice Williams Elliott: "To read *North and South* is to read a series of debates, of contrasting scenes, of alternated speeches. Each chapter of dialogue between Margaret and Thornton is placed next to a dialogue between Margaret and Higgins" (*Female* 42). This shows how carefully Elizabeth Gaskell crafted her novel and its protagonist, Margaret. And while the previous chapter in this dissertation have dealt with Margaret and the next will deal with Elizabeth Gaskell and what one could deduce about her intentions with *North and South*, the present chapter intends to deal with the two men who are mediated by Margaret, what they represent and how empathy and imaginative identification works for them.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I proposed a system that outlines the flow of empathy in the novel. The first level deals with Margaret Hale and her newfound interest in those around her. Parallel to this, there is the reader's acquisition of a new understanding of people, in the case of this novel, the working and industrial classes, through Margaret. But here, we are concerned with the second level and its path towards the final, third level.

This is where we explicitly see what Elliott describes. The contrast is achieved by having Margaret moving from Nicholas to John and back to display both of their opinions, and to set up a possible understanding between them. It is important to go over how this understanding is achieved, what the conditions are under which it happens, both sides of the argument and what each entails.

The first of the two men that Margaret meets is John Thornton. Their first encounter occurs in Chapter VII, "New Scenes and Faces", and the language used to describe the scene immediately establishes Margaret's capacity to influence Mr Thornton's humour as her presence makes him calm, "rule[s] over him", makes him do "her bidding" (Gaskell, *North* 63) as if spellbound. This is an indication of the romantic plot that is to come but also a sign that Margaret has the power to change him in relation to his authoritarian ways.

Despite this hinting towards the plasticity of Thornton's perspectives, it is important to notice that he still has not been influenced enough by Margaret, who initially describes him as "not quite a gentleman" (65), to show understanding and empathy towards others.

There are noticeable prejudices in John Thornton's attitudes. In the same manner that Margaret rebukes the industrial classes, Thornton often paints the Hales, and the genteel middle-class they represent, in an unfavourable light. This is most obvious in Chapter X, "Wrought Iron and Gold", as Thornton states:

I won't deny that I am proud of belonging to a town—or perhaps I should rather say a district—the necessities of which give birth to such grandeur of conception. I would rather be a man toiling, suffering—nay, failing and unsuccessful—here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease. (82)

Here he manages to establish two lines of separation between himself and the Hales. Firstly, he distinguishes himself as a northerner. Then, as a member of the industrial classes. He drives his point home by saying that he would rather be a working northerner, like his own workers, I may add, rather than an aristocratic southerner, whose days are filled with leisure.²¹

Like her son, Mrs Thornton shows "a *nouveau-riche* resentment of the gentry" (David 22), highlighting the fighting spirit of Milton's people in contrast with southern meekness: "South country people are often frightened by what our Darkshire men and women only call living and struggling" (Gaskell, *North* 116). She even rejects her son's attempt at improving his education by employing Mr Hale as his tutor:

²¹ This could also potentially indicate John Thornton's predisposition when first meeting the Hales and particularly Margaret. There are hints throughout the novel that Thornton and his mother, Mrs Thornton, are not too fond of the Hales. Early in the novel, in Chapter VII, "New Scenes and Faces", when John first meets Margaret, her manners make him feel insecure, "a great rough fellow, with not a grace or a refinement about him" (Gaskell, *North* 64). And in Chapter XII, "Morning Calls", Mrs Thornton is described as not having a favourable inclination (96) towards the Hales.

I have no doubt that classics are very desirable for people who have leisure. But I confess, it was against my judgment that my son renewed his study of them. The time and place in which he lives, seem to me to require all his energy and attention. Classics may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the country or in colleges; but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of to-day. (113)

The focus the Thorntons place on struggle and fight as something that defines northerners appears to agree with theories proposed by Charles Darwin²² and even Thomas Robert Malthus (Martin 95), as fighting for existence is essential to both. Thornton's own path in life is defined by his ability to overcome "the struggle for bread" (Gaskell, *North* 86), and pushing forward in an attempt to become what his mother deems most valuable: someone who "[holds] and [maintains] a high, honourable place among the merchants of his country" (114).

Aligned with this idea of raising himself above his struggles, Thornton distances himself from his workers. Chapter XV, "Masters and Men", displays the contrast between them in the title but it is in Chapter X, "Wrought Iron and Gold", that John Thornton explains that he finds this class mobility accessible to all who work hard enough, as "[i]t is one of the great beauties of [their] system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour" (84).

The Hales are quick to notice that this is just Thornton's opinion and not something as general as he seems to believe. Margaret shows suspicion of his statement, by questioning him "in a clear, cold voice" (85). Gertrude Himmelfarb also notices this hesitation: "If this is a myth, as [Margaret] suspects, it is an eminently democratic and

²² Elizabeth Gaskell knew Charles Darwin as they were both related to the Wedgwoods (Uglow 219). Darwin was interested in "her and her work" (Martin 94), once travelling "fifteen miles simply to dine with her" (94). The interest seemed mutual as Darwin is credited as the inspiration for Roger Hamley's scientific career in *Wives and Daughters* (Duthie 32).

agreeable one, for it makes success depend on virtues such as 'prudent wisdom and good conduct,' [Gaskell, *North* 84] which are available to everyone, unlike breeding and cultivation, the characteristic virtues of the south, which are not" (Himmelfarb 512).

In addition to this, Mr Hale also shows that Thornton possesses some "breeding and cultivation" (512) by pointing out that he has been familiar with Homer before his tutoring, something that John Thornton attests as true, as he had studied the classics at school (Gaskell, *North* 85-6).

The following chapter, "First Impressions", is a strong reminder of Dorice Williams Elliott and her "contrasting scenes" (*Female* 42). Despite a discussion of Thornton and his past, the focus of this chapter is the scene at the Higginses. If anything, the fact that Bessy Higgins is dying from a disease she contracted while working at a mill should create enough of a contrast to convince the reader that not everyone could raise themselves from poverty and misery in the same way Thornton did.

In "Masters and Men", the fifteenth chapter of *North and South*, not much has changed. Thornton and his mother still believe southerners to be made of lesser stuff and his striking workers to be "a pack of ungrateful hounds" (Gaskell, *North* 113-6). And while this chapter contains very important moments, such as the "'paternalism' debate" (Stoneman 82), the moment that is most relevant for the purpose of this dissertation takes place at the end of the chapter, as Margaret questions how Thornton "[reconciles his] admiration of despotism with [his] respect for other men's independence of character" (Gaskell, *North* 123).

I argue this is the moment in which Margaret is struck by his lack of empathy. Margaret has established the necessity for a place for imaginative identification in John Thornton's life if she is to believe he is a truly good man. Sophie Grace Chappell connects imaginative identification with ethics and establishes that to do the right thing, the moral thing, one must for a moment try on the other's shoes. If people do "the right things for the right reasons" (Chappell), imaginative identification is an integral part of this process and Margaret cannot recognize it in Thornton's attitude towards his workers, who strike for a chance at better wages (Gaskell, *North* 134-5).

What triggers John Thornton's change in attitude, for better or for worse, is his newfound romantic interest in Margaret. In Chapter XXII, "A Blow and Its Consequences", as Margaret is injured Thornton realizes his feelings for her, he gains a sense "of what she was to him" (179), uttering: "Oh, my Margaret—my Margaret! no one can tell what you are to me! Dead—cold as you lie there, you are the only woman I ever loved! Oh, Margaret—Margaret!" (179).

Many dislike that Gaskell uses the romantic subplot to shift Thornton's stance on the treatment of his workers as "Thornton é levado a perder a autoridade através do amor" (Guimarães, *Resolução de North and South* 7). Valerie Wainwright mentions Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Margaret Ganz, and Catherine Gallagher as some of those who find it challenging to "[recover] precise or consistent moral convictions or commitments" (85-6) when dealing with the romantic entanglement between Margaret and Thornton as the solution for social conflict. Yet, as I have argued in the previous chapter, this romantic subplot is not the proposed solution. Empathy and imaginative identification are. The romantic subplot "is the sensation that binds Thornton to Margaret, and ultimately binds the public and personal" (Gallagher 173), showing that even private feelings can effect change in other areas of life, that love is an adequate motivation for this change, but it is not the offered solution.

Indications of this change in John Thornton are present in chapters such as "Fruit-piece", the twenty-seventh chapter of the novel. Even after being rejected, Thornton, who did not have a predisposition for "general benevolence" or "universal philanthropy" (Gaskell, *North* 211), takes a basket of fruit to the ill Mrs. Hale, wanting to do a good deed because he thought it "simply right" (211).

Furthermore, in Chapter XXXV, "Expiation", Thornton willingly uses his power to protect Margaret, whom he knows to be lying to protect her brother, whom Thornton believes to be her lover. His love for Margaret makes him dismiss further investigation upon Leonards' death, as he wishes to "[keep] her from shame" (274)²³.

²³ In the previous chapter there's a mention of Frederick and his "standing up against injustice" (Gaskell, *North* 109) by becoming engaged in a mutiny designed to overthrow the ship's captain. Between Frederick and Leonards there seems to be a similar relationship to that of Higgins and Boucher, who will be discussed further in the present chapter. Despite Frederick's actions being in the name of the crew (109),

These moments indicate a change in Thornton's perspective, but they are yet to point towards a change in the way he perceives his workers and their plight. This of course only happens through Margaret's suggestion that Nicholas Higgins should ask John Thornton for a job at Marlborough Mills, in Chapter XXXVII, "Looking South".

Margaret's suggestion is impossible earlier in the novel, as even Nicholas Higgins must go through Margaret's moral influence so that she can mediate between both men in the novel.

As previously mentioned, Nicholas Higgins and his daughter Bessy become what sparks "human interest" (75) in Chapter VIII, "Home Sickness", and it is important to outline the path that Nicholas Higgins took towards the possibility of an understanding in the same way John Thornton's path has been traced.

In *North and South*, the Higginses are the working-class family the reader becomes more acquainted with. Unlike *Mary Barton*, published in 1848, the reader is not given direct access to the inner lives of a working-class family and instead has it transmitted through Margaret. Yet, this does not take away from the portrayal of the Higginses.

Throughout the novel, Margaret's relationship with the Higginses is mostly focused on Bessy as Margaret often visits Bessy due to her illness²⁴, but these visits often end up featuring conversations between Margaret and Nicholas, where Margaret can learn about the worker's perspective.

Unsurprisingly, there is a certain symmetry between Higgins and Thornton. This goes beyond the strategy of alternating dialogue noticed by Dorice Williams Elliott and can be attributed to Elizabeth Gaskell's artistry as she makes sure that characters and situations are mirrored, reinforcing the sense of symmetry. Moreover, this is observable in certain moments of the novel.

During Chapter XI, "First Impressions", Higgins calls for a life of action and practicality in the present moment while his daughter longs for the afterlife. He criticizes the

he ends up suffering greater consequences than the others. Something similar happens to Nicholas Higgins, as he enforces the strike for the good of all (154) but ends up out of work, providing for several people on his own, while other workers renounce the Union to maintain their work.

²⁴ Bessy contracted byssinosis, the "result of inhaling cotton dust" (Harrison 177) while working "in a carding-room" where "the fluff got into [her] lungs, and poisoned [her]" (Gaskell, *North* 102).

“leaving undone [of] all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand” (92). And in Chapter XIII, Bessy says her father “were always liking to buy books, and go to lectures o’ one kind and another” (103). This is not reminiscent of someone who has no desire to “[raise] themselves in the world” or lacking “prudent wisdom and good conduct”, unwilling to combat “ignorance and improvidence” (84). This is more closely aligned with a man who has what it takes to, like Thornton, improve his life through his own means, but has not been able to do so due to life’s circumstances.

Nicholas Higgins is not immune to prejudices against the southerners neither. He describes southerner workers as “spiritless” and “down-trodden”, unable to fight for their rights, and just like Thornton ignores that social classes are very much similar despite different geographical locations.

The mirroring does not stop here. Higgins and the Union seem like Thornton and his mother²⁵ in some respects. Very much like the Thorntons, Higgins and the Union favour those who have the strength to persist, whether that be by working harder and achieving economic success in the “struggle for bread” (86) or by enduring hardship for the sake of a group of unionized workers. Both ignore that some may not be able to raise themselves about their conditions for numerous reasons. If Thornton shows lack of empathy and an unwillingness to imaginatively identify with his workers, the same happens with Higgins and his unwillingness to understand that Boucher cannot afford to stop working for the sake of the Union, as shown in the climax of Chapter XIX, “Angel Visits”:

“Yo’ know well, that a worser tyrant than e’er th’ masters were says, ‘Clem to death, and see ‘em a’ clem to death, ere yo’ dare go again th’ Union.’ Yo’ know it well, Nicholas, for a’ yo’re one on e’m. Yo’ may be kind hearts, each separate; but once banded together, yo’ve no more pity for a man than a wild hunger-maddened wolf.”

²⁵ It can be argued that both Mrs. Thornton and the Union represent the evil of each side of the divide. Mrs. Thornton does not learn any kind of empathy throughout the novel, and things done in the name of the Union often ignore the need to consider each of the workers, instead of thinking of them as one and the same.

Nicholas had his hand on the lock of the door—he stopped and turned round on Boucher, close following:

“So help me God! man alive—if I think not I’m doing best for thee, and for all on us. If I’m going wrong when I think I’m going right, it’s their sin, who ha’ left me where I am, in my ignorance. I ha’ thought till my brains ached,—Beli’ me, John, I have. An’ I say again, there’s no help for us but having faith i’ th’ Union. They’ll win the day, see if they dunnot!” (Gaskell, *North* 154)

And while Nicholas seems moved, he attributes the hardness of his ways and the need to trust in the Union to the masters. If Thornton is “as dour as a door-nail; an obstinate chap, every inch on him” (135), Nicholas as his fellow men must be just as so, for it to be a fair fight. But there is a glimpse into a different side of Nicholas Higgins right at this moment that is hinted through his own words and his daughter’s.

This happens when Higgins states that he is doing what he thinks best for everyone, and he says so to John Boucher: “I’m doing best for thee, and for all on us” (154). This is replicated in Bessy’s: “if neighbours doesn’t see after neighbours, I dunno who will” (155). There is a clear willingness to think communally, to sympathize with his fellow men, but he faults when it comes to true empathy.

Remembering D. Rae Greiner and the explanation that “sympathy (...) denies what empathy most highly prizes, namely the fusion of self with other” (418) may seem wrong. Yet, one must be reminded that in this situation that Nicholas does not think of his fellow workers in an individual sense; he does not care for the variables in each of their lives and wants all of them to put in the same effort. He can sympathize with them as he recognizes that all workers live under difficult conditions, but he cannot empathize as he still does not think of each of the workers’ conditions and variables that may make it impossible to put in the same effort as he does for the sake of the Union.

Just as with Margaret and Thornton, there is a moment that initiates Nicholas’ change in perspective. The hardships of working life are intertwined with his crisis when his

daughter Bessy dies due to an occupational disease, and Boucher commits suicide after struggling with poverty and the pressure caused by the Union.

The news of Bessy's death is delivered to Margaret at the end of Chapter XXVII, "Fruit-piece", but Margaret meets Higgins right after, in the aptly named twenty-eighth chapter, "Comfort in Sorrow". Nicholas Higgins is stopped by Margaret when trying to make his way to a gin-shop, using alcohol as a coping mechanism to handle the death of his daughter, and is instead invited to join the Hales for tea.

The discussion of religion in this chapter is probably one of the most important moments of the novel, but for the purposes of this dissertation, the discussion of the Union as an oppressor of those it tries to defend is the most important.

Yet again, as in Thornton's case, father and daughter point out the hypocrisy in both men's opinions. While with Thornton, Margaret showed distrust of what he proposed to be available to everyone and her father added to this by showing that Thornton had an advantage in relation to the common man; with Higgins, Margaret points out the tyrannical nature of the Union and Mr Hale highlights its failed mission.

Margaret condemns the inhumane treatment ununionized workers get:

"Why! [W]hat tyranny this is! Nay, Higgins, I don't care one straw for your anger. I know you can't be angry with me if you would, and I must tell you the truth: that I never read, in all the history I have read, of a more slow, lingering torture than this. And you belong to the Union! And you talk of the tyranny of the masters!" (Gaskell, *North* 229)

The torture she speaks of is the ostracization of ununionized workers: contact and friendship are withheld from them, meaning that they will be met with silence and ignored for ten hours a day while already working in what are already very harsh conditions (228-9).

Mr Hale, although agreeing with Margaret, appears to be moved by the potential of what the Union could have become: "[Y]our Union in itself would be beautiful,

glorious—it would be Christianity itself—if it were but for an end which affected the good of all, instead of that of merely one class as opposed to another” (229). This is an important comment coming from a clergyman; someone who rejected the Church of England, the institutional representation of Christian values in the novel, Mr Hale sees the potential of real Christian values in a more informal group such as a union.

Elizabeth Gaskell repeated a very similar formula for the next death. In the once again, appropriately named Chapter XXXVI, “Union not always Strength”, the Hales “set out on their walk to see Nicholas Higgins” (283), who was not only grieving the death of his eldest daughter, but also out of work. In their conversation, Margaret highlights the Union as an oppressor again: “[Y]ou’ve made Boucher what he is, by driving him into the Union against his will—without his heart going with it. You have made him what he is!” (287). Shortly after this exchange, it is revealed that John Boucher has committed suicide by drowning himself in a shallow brook.

If the conversation the Hales and Higgins were having before the news of Boucher’s suicide was not a convincing indication that his thoughts were somehow changing, his reaction, of locking himself inside his home, refusing to talk to Margaret and her father, shows that the reality of the actions of the Union has finally struck him.

Here, Mr Hale’s religious stance fails to meet the reality of the moment. When the grief-stricken widow, Mrs Boucher, moans that she is now alone to provide for six children, Mr Hale, seemingly unable to read the room, insists that God “had promised to be a father to the fatherless” (292), ignoring the need for a practical answer to Mrs Boucher’s plight.

In the following chapter, “Looking South”, Nicholas Higgins is “seeking work” (298) to support the Boucher children all the while Mrs Boucher “[looked] upon it as it affected herself”, counting the “great army of personal enemies, whose fault it was that she was now a helpless widow” (294). Nicholas makes it clear that he sees the Boucher children as his responsibility, as he feels that he failed their father. This is expressed in his recognition that his actions may have moved Boucher closer to his fate: “I reckon, I would ha guided Boucher to a better end; but I set him off o’ th’ road, and so I mun answer for him” (298).

Now that the events of *North and South* have changed Nicholas and Margaret's influence on him has taken place, the protagonist can finally suggest the joining of the two sides she has been mediating. "Higgins, have you been to Marlborough Mills to seek for work?" (300) is the starting point of the relationship between John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins. Her only hope is that "Mr Thornton would be patient enough to listen to him with his human heart, not with his master's ears" (302).

Higgins's answer is an outstanding proof of Margaret's influence:

"It would tax my pride above a bit; if it were for mysel', I could stand a deal o' clemming first; I'd sooner knock him down than ask a favour from him. I'd a deal sooner be flogged mysel'; but yo're not a common wench, axing yo'r pardon, nor yet have yo' common ways about yo'. I'll e'en make a wry face, and go at it to-morrow. Dunna yo' think that he'll do it. That man has it in him to be burnt at the stake afore he'll give in. I'll do it for yo'r sake, Miss Hale, and it's first time in my life as e'er I give way to a woman. Neither my wife nor Bess could e'er say that much again me." (Gaskell, *North* 301)

In this passage he admits that he would do it simply because Margaret asks him. Of his own accord, he would rather face violence and hardship than go back to Marlborough Mills and ask Thornton for work. He goes even further and admits that his late daughter and wife could have not gotten him to do this.

And so, Higgins does. Even "though every moment added to his repugnance, his pride, and his sullenness of temper", he waits, "hour after hour" (311) for John Thornton.

It is not a surprise when Thornton's initial answer is a resounding no. But it is also not surprising when Thornton cannot help but feel a certain admiration for how long Higgins stood waiting for him (314), as Thornton has shown admiration for those who show determination and a strong will throughout the novel. This makes him visit Higgins the next day and not only express his admiration for Higgins as "[he] could not have taken care of another man's children [himself], if he had acted towards [him] as [he heard]

Boucher did towards [Higgins]" (318), but also subsequently apologize, asking Higgins to come work at his mill.

The following exchange establishes the tone that marks their initial relationship:

"Yo've called me impudent, and a liar, and a mischief-maker, and yo' might ha' said wi' some truth, as I were now and then given to drink. An', I ha' called you a tyrant, an' an oud bull dog, and a hard, cruel master; that's where it stands. But for th' childer, Measter, do yo' think we can e'er get on together?"

"Well!" said Mr. Thornton, half-laughing, "it was not my proposal that we should go together. But there's one comfort on your own showing. We neither of us can think much worse of the other than we do now."

"That's true," said Higgins, reflectively. "I've been thinking ever sin' I saw you, what a marcy it were yo' did na take me on, for that I ne'er saw a man whom I could less abide. But that's maybe been a hasty judgment; and work's work to such as me. So, measter, I'll come; and what's more, I thank yo'; and that's a deal fro' me," said he, more frankly, suddenly turning round and facing Mr. Thornton fully for the first time.

"And this is a deal from me," said Mr. Thornton, giving Higgins's hand a good grip. (Gaskell, *North* 319)

Firstly, there is an admittance of their disliking of each other. Secondly, the awareness that they are not the ones in charge of the suggestion of their relationship; Thornton may not realize that Margaret is the one behind this but Higgins, and most importantly, the reader, do. And thirdly, both men seem to agree (Higgins in this excerpt, Thornton a bit earlier) that they have misjudged one another. This is the moment in which they fuse with the other, to use D. Rae Greiner's terms, and discover "human interest" (75) to solidify their relationship.

I have previously mentioned that John Thornton, the master, is a force of socio-economic oppression in the novel and that must not be forgotten. Although Nicholas

Higgins and even Margaret Hale must go through transformations, ultimately, the most important transformation for the novel's social-problem theme is Thornton's.

Later in the novel, in Chapter XLII, "Alone! Alone!", Thornton recognizes that his motivation to build a dining room for the men comes from his "[acquaintance] with a strange kind of chap" (352), of course, "[his] friend Higgins" (353). Thornton even goes as far as putting some of the Boucher children in school, allowing them to better provide for themselves in "the [future] struggle for bread" (86).

This shift from animosity to friendship is clearly stated in Chapter L, "Changes at Milton", as Thornton "lost all sense of resentment in wonder how it was, or could be, that two men like himself and Higgins, living by the same trade, working in their different ways at the same object, could look upon each other's position and duties in so strangely different a way" (410). It becomes clear to him that he is the same as Nicholas Higgins, and this is a "specially powerful [moment] of identification" (Gibson 239) that allows for empathy to be felt.

Thornton's relationship with his workers becomes progressively more amicable, and he describes to Mr Bell a closer relationship between them, open to communication and the genuine desire to continue things in this manner, not wanting it "to fall into a charity" (354). His change in attitude goes beyond philanthropy and sympathy, it solidifies itself in the realm of empathy.

Thornton even goes as far as going against his mother's wishes, something that would be unthinkable earlier in the novel. Mrs Thornton "disapproves of the whole plan" (Gaskell, *North* 353) while Thornton breaks bread with his workers, providing meat from his "own family butcher" (353).

The summary of Thornton's new perspective can be found in Chapter LI, "Meeting Again", as he explains his theory and his practice to Mr Colthurst, a Member of Parliament:

"I have arrived at the conviction that no mere institutions, however wise (...) can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such

institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life. (...) I would take an idea, the working out of which would necessitate personal intercourse; it might not go well at first, but at every hitch interest would be felt by an increasing number of men, and at last its success in working come to be desired by all, as all had borne a part in the formation of the plan; and even then I am sure that it would lose its vitality, cease to be living, as soon as it was no longer carried on by that sort of common interest which invariably makes people find means and ways of seeing each other, and becoming acquainted with each others' characters and persons (...) We should understand each other better, and I'll venture to say we should like each other more." (Gaskell, *North* 421)

Allowing the reader to observe "the way personal experiences with individual cases teach one to modify strongly argued theoretical views" (Bodenheimer 291) is essential to Elizabeth Gaskell's mission as an author. Thus, the greatest realization to be achieved by Thornton, or any other character, but especially by the reader, should be that: "Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him, and (take notice) out of the character of master and workman, in the first instance, they had each begun to recognise that 'we have all of us one human heart'" (Gaskell, *North* 409).

Conclusion: Elizabeth Gaskell and Character-building

As highlighted in the first chapter of this dissertation, others before me have pointed towards Elizabeth Gaskell's willingness to guide (Flint 10) the reader through the novel by using feeling and emotion (e.g. Guimarães, *A Resolução do Romance Social* 125) and the use of what I named the hierarchy of empathy, a system that creates the reader's immersion in *North and South* using imaginative identification.

The chapters following that have attempted to further develop the hierarchy of empathy introduced in the first chapter. Chapter 2 concerns Margaret Hale, her place in the hierarchy, and the moments in which she learns to move from sympathy to empathy. At the end of the chapter there also is a distinction between understanding and meta-understanding, using Garry L. Hagberg's terms, when dealing with fictional characters. In succession, Chapter 3 focuses on the men she mediates, John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins and their own understanding, and the effect this understanding produces in their lives. This conclusion is based on the points made above in order to show how Elizabeth Gaskell guides her readers, to produce effect in their own lives through these characters, the final level, and the goal of the hierarchy.

The recognition of the value of "human interest" (Gaskell, *North* 75) is essential to Elizabeth Gaskell's and her role as a guide that has been previously mentioned, but one aspect of this has not been analysed: Can a literary work truly change its reader?

The concept of "literary cognitivism" may be the answer to this as it "is the claim that fictions *can* yield non-trivial knowledge or understanding of extra-fictional reality" (Davies 377); "the idea is that we can acquire knowledge from reading literature" (Harold 382). It is rather difficult to produce a complete and clear overview of the types of knowledge that literature can produce, but for the purpose of this dissertation, I would like to focus on affective knowledge (Davies 377). This is "knowledge of 'what it would be like' to be in circumstances that readers rarely if ever encounter in ordinary life (...) that heightens the capacity for moral agency by providing insights into how others might be affected by our actions" (377-8).

This concept is, of course, no stranger to us, even if we had not a name for it before. If Plato was unsure that literature could corrupt its audience, Aristotle was trying to highlight the potential in its inspiration of morality (Eaton 435). But if Plato and Aristotle are too distant from Elizabeth Gaskell, one just needs return to Paula Alexandra Guimarães and her *A Resolução do Romance Social de Elizabeth Gaskell (1848-1855)*, in which she identifies two traditions that, as we have seen, are essential to Elizabeth Gaskell's writing as they are the direct ancestors of her work. Both political (9) and didactic (15) novelists believed in the idea that readers acquire affective knowledge through literature, and this belief was essential to their works, otherwise there would be no point in wondering how one could change for the better (12) or educate the middle and upper classes (20).

Were it not for Charles Dickens, *North and South* could have been titled *Margaret Hale* instead (Collin 75). This attests to Elizabeth Gaskell's character-focused thinking when it came to this specific novel. *North and South* is a novel that aims to make the reader rethink the surrounding reality through imaginative identification. In other words, the novel and therefore, Elizabeth Gaskell, attempt to make the reader build his/her own character, "expanding" and "deepening" (Hagberg 227) along with the characters she has provided and carefully built.

Imaginatively engaging is sparing a second thought to the character or to the situation depicted. One may wonder if they would have done the same, know they would have done it in the exact same manner or completely disagree with the character's course of action. Yet, there is a preparedness that comes from this vicarious learning, a "making sense of [fictional] others" (Hagberg 227-8), that can make an impression on the reader.

With Margaret, the reader is moved to assess growing pains and what it truly means to be charitable. With John Thornton, to maintain a humble spirit and to value things beyond material gain. And with Nicholas Higgins, to set pride aside and to step into the responsibility life places before us. Most importantly, I argue that Elizabeth Gaskell intends the reader to watch these characters and be inspired by them.

Valerie Wainwright points out that "[w]hat matters to Gaskell is that an individual should be not only self-reliant, but intellectually vigorous and argumentative, open-

minded or sensitive to other points of view. Such qualities serve to counteract the distorting perspectives of hegemonic social groups and promote the introduction of practical reforms” (27).

The last question is: Has Elizabeth Gaskell achieved her goal? Have her novels created impressions that effected change in the real world?

I argue that they have. Despite the lack of evidence specifically concerning *North and South*, there is evidence that other of her novels produced positive change in her world. *Mary Barton* seemed to cause a stir in 1848. According to Gaskell herself: “Half the masters here are bitterly angry with me - half (and the best half) are buying it to give to their work-people's libraries” (qtd. in Spencer 12). Furthermore, the idea that reflection can be triggered by emotion is even present in Leigh Hunt’s assessment of the novel as it “gave [him] emotions that required, more and more, the consideration of good which [progress] must do” (Hunt 529).

Additionally, *Ruth*, published in 1853, can be noticed for “its didactic effect” (Flint 22), as Josephine Butler notes in her autobiography the impact it had in Oxford upon publication (22). And even if *Ruth* was not the direct cause of the Contagious Disease Act of 1886, it certainly kept the issue alive as it was “the first major piece of Victorian fiction to treat the theme of the ‘fallen woman’ not just with full compassion and sympathy, but through suggesting that she may be integrated into an English community” (23).

And in spite the lack of evidence relating to *North and South* there is still something that must be pointed out. In the last sixty years, *North and South* has been adapted to television three times; first in 1966 (directed by Hugh David), then 1975 (directed by Rodney Bennett) and most recently in 2004 (directed by Brian Percival). This means there is still an interest in the telling of Margaret Hale’s story, and her main lesson can find a home in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

North and South carries within its pages lessons and advice that were relevant in 1854, and that in 2021, at the writing of this dissertation, maintain their importance. An everchanging world and the consequent progress bring forth difficult challenges and require solutions that demand “experiments” (Gaskell, *North* 420) so an understanding

between people can be achieved. More importantly, open-mindedness and sensitivity (Wainwright 27) are qualities one must acquire to continue these experiences, and to learn from others. Learning from others can be connected to imaginative identification and empathy, which I have credited as the solution to the novel's social-problem theme, but can also be applied to more personal situations, as a lens for conduct and an effort towards kindness.

In the latter portion of the novel, Margaret Hale seems to notice this need to look out of oneself towards what others may be going through, in a world that cannot stop for herself or for others: "If the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt (...) Looking out of myself and my own painful sense of change, the progress of all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others, if I wish to have a right judgment, or a hopeful trustful heart" (Gaskell, *North* 391).

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