

The representation of the position of women and their values
in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*
and the BBC series *North & South*

Inger Visschers 4116100

Dr. Chris Louttit

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Abstract and keywords

This thesis will discuss the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell published in 1855 and the BBC series from 2004 of that novel called *North & South*. The novel and the series will both be analysed while looking at the representation of the position of women and their values. It will become clear that they both represent a number of Victorian women, but the main character Margaret cannot be called Victorian in everything that she does. She is presented as a stronger and more independent woman in both the novel and the series, but the series emphasises this even more than the novel does. This difference represents the way in which the nineteenth century and the twenty-first century look different at the women and their position. It shows a change that has happened in the century in between, because the position of women in the twenty-first century is much higher than before. By comparing the novel and the series, that has definitely become clear.

North and South – Elizabeth Gaskell – the position of women – difference – Victorian – strong and independent

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Introduction

Elizabeth Gaskell has grown to be an important figure in Victorian literary studies. In her writings she has experimented with several styles; she did not only write novels and short stories, but she also wrote a biography, namely *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857). Next to being experimental in her writing style, within those stories, she also touches upon various themes. “This is evident in her early fiction in the treatment of the problems working-class life and prostitution as well as in her last novel’s magisterial representation of provincial life in the context of changing social structures and gender and class relations” (Matus 1).

Because Gaskell’s widespread writing it would be expected that she also had a wide readership in her time. She was definitely well-respected and even looked up to (Matus 1), but after her death her popularity decreased extremely quickly. Critics then said that she only had little talent and did not belong with the great Victorian novelists. These critics also touched a lot upon the fact that Gaskell was a woman and they emphasised that in a bad way. In Lord David Cecil’s *Early Victorian Novelists* (1934) he even said that “she was all a woman was expected to be; gentle, domestic, tactful, unintellectual, prone to tears, and easily shocked” (qtd. in Matus 2). In other words, he emphasises her feminine characteristics and later points out that that is evidence enough for her being a ‘minor novelist’. These critics mostly complained about the industrial novels that Gaskell wrote, because they thought she was more suited as a domestic novelist (Harris 65).

In later years this criticism changed again and in the 1950s Gaskell’s industrial novels gained praise again. However, these again focus on personal problems and also immediately refer to the feminine character of this. Her status as a female writer recurs frequently in criticism, not only in her own time but also in studies of today. About being a female writer, Gaskell herself said that “a woman’s principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. [...] She must not hide her gift in a napkin” (qtd. in Flint 2). So being a wife or mother did not mean that that was the only duty in a woman’s life and it was obvious to her that her other duties in life, other than writing, would be visible in her work, which was not obvious for a man.

These opinions about being a woman writer were also a subject of Gaskell’s correspondence with other female writers in her time. This means that she was definitely conscious about contributing to the literary world as well as being a woman and what that meant. Gaskell developed strong friendships with for example Mary Howitt, Harriet Martineau, Anna Jameson and George Eliot (Flint 6). Of course, her most interesting

friendship was with Charlotte Brontë of whom she also wrote a biography. In this biography Gaskell also tends to emphasise Charlotte's domesticity and her womanliness (Flint 7). It is clear now that these aspects are very important for Gaskell, which is why that is visible throughout her work. About this, she said herself that "experiencing the interest of a wife and a mother will enable one to bring understanding and compassion – both very necessary virtues – to one's novels" (qtd. in Flint 9). Therefore, it is evident that Gaskell uses her femininity in her writing for a reason and makes it one of her strengths.

The question now is how this femininity is overtly represented in her work. One of her novels is called *North and South* and was first published in 1855 in two volumes. The novel portrays the story of the protagonist Margaret Hale in her young adulthood. As in most of Gaskell's novels, this novel offers a record of certain aspect of the daily life in her life in a detailed and clear way (McVeagh 1). "Her material is the ordinary life of the time, her characters normal and typical nineteenth-century individuals [...]; she is interested in them as individuals, and the main content of each novel is simply the description and the exploration of the texture and feel, pressures and demands of their day-to-day existence" (McVeagh 1). Because of this, we can assume that Gaskell's portrayal of Margaret goes for this description as well and thus is a trustworthy depiction of a young Victorian woman. Margaret is not the only woman in the novel, because a lot of attention also goes to Margaret's mother, her niece Edith, aunt Shaw, Miss Dixie, her friend Bessy and of course Mrs Thornton. These women are all very different, not only the classes that they represent but also the way they look at their life and the life of other women. It would be interesting to look at how these different women all represent the Victorian woman and how Gaskell gave life to them. Next to that there are of course also the important men in the story, Margaret's father, her brother Frederick, Mr Thornton, Mr Higgins, and Mr Bell. They all respond differently to the women they encounter and it might be interesting to see how a woman wrote these male characters and whether that is visible in her writing or not.

The novel *North and South* has also been made into a TV series by the BBC in 2004. It had already been adapted once before, also by the BBC in a four episode series in 1975. The 2004 *North & South* series was directed by Brian Percival and the script was written by Sandy Welsh (Harris 65). The 2004 BBC production was actually very successful and extremely popular. It was voted 'Best Drama' of the year by a BBC poll, by 49.43% of the votes (Harris 65). The series consists of four hour-long episodes and the script sticks quite closely to the text of the novel. Therefore, it is regarded as a traditional adaptation of the novel in which almost none of the characters are drastically changed and there are no

enormous alternations in the plot. Of course, when adapting a novel there is no chance that the result is an exact representation of that novel, so there are always little alterations. In this series, a lot of the scenes of the novel have made the screen simply because the series is quite long and therefore has time to show details of the novel. However, there are, as mentioned, always a few changes, so this is also true for the BBC series of *North and South*. It will be interesting to see what these changes are and whether they might change the reception of the story.

I will be looking at both the novel and the series separately in how they portray the Victorian woman and her values, and I will also compare them in not only that aspect but also how they both represent the time in which they were published and broadcast. Before it is possible to discuss this, it is important to establish who Victorian women actually were and discuss their social and cultural position in the nineteenth century. Of course, the Victorian Era was quite long, as Queen Victoria's reign lasted sixty-four years, namely from 1837 until 1901. As Wilson argues about Victorians; "theirs was the period of the most radical transformation ever seen by the world" (1). Therefore it is quite difficult to grasp their identity in one definition. To the question to whom the term Victorian woman can be applied, Duncan Crow says that

if the word were to be used only in its non-temporal colours the answer [...] would be either a doll-like, bread-and-butter miss swooning on a sofa, or a sickly mother dying under the strain of a dozen births, or a strait-laced, thin-lipped, middle-calls prude hidden in an over-ornamented pyramid of bombazine, who bullied her servants and looked her nose at her neighbours. The accent, perhaps, would be on prudery.(13)

However, in his answer it also becomes clear that there are so many women that do not fit this description and those were Victorian women as well. Every class represented different women, and within those classes there were differences as well. For example, the women in the lower classes had to work but in higher classes this was unacceptable. The opportunities for employment open to middle-class women were very limited (Crow 158). The fact that there were women who were active in trying to improve the position of their sex meant that not all of them were happy about this certain position. It was normal to think that women were inferior to men and this was also visible in the legal status of women (Crow 146). As Crow states; "wives were classed with minors and idiots and had no responsibility under the law" (147). Education was only possible for the women of the middle and higher classes and only in the later Victorian age women could be admitted to college (Crow 153). It is clear now that the position of Victorian women was a changing position and because of the huge

gap between them and the Victorian men it was certain that many were unhappy in that position. It would be interesting to see this position becoming clear in the novel and the adaptation.

I will start with analysing the novel after which I will continue doing the same with the BBC series and then compare them. My research question therefore will be as follows: how does the adaptation deal with the novel's response to the position of Victorian women? To answer this question I will be looking at how the novel and the adaptation fit in the time it was written in. When looking at the BBC adaptation of this novel from 2004, how do values concerning women change and do they still fit the time in which it was filmed? What is the influence of early 21st century culture on this? And also, can this partly explain the great popularity of the series? Next to that, I will also briefly look further into the discussion about Elizabeth Gaskell herself and conclude how I think she is a women writer.

Chapter 1

The novel *North & South* can be seen as a novel about values concerning women. The protagonist of the novel is a woman called Margaret Hale, whose father changed his mind about his profession and the whole family had to move from a little village called Hellstone in the south to an industrial city called Milton in the north. This means that Margaret, a young woman who is 19 years old, has to adapt to a new city and new surroundings after spending her youth with her aunt in London. Not only does she live with her parents again, she also has to live a less comfortable life with less money than before. All these changes in her life will show the changes that Margaret has to make in her character and also in her opinion about certain matters. This makes the novel a novel about values concerning women, because these values are highlighted by showing them in different situations. Kanwit argues that “Gaskell was more interested in household details than in political change” (190). By saying this, he suggests that indeed the novel is more involved with the businesses that occupy women than with the ‘bigger’ issues, in this case political issues. Dorice Elliott mentions this as well when she says that “Gaskell’s novel attempts to construct a social sphere that casts a ‘woman’s plot’ as one of the ‘larger plots’”(24) (the ‘larger plots’ here meaning plots as social conversation and industrial debate). She basically says that Gaskell enhances the issues and therefore the values of a woman to be one of the bigger issues in her novel. Not only has there been argued for that, but also that Gaskell shows contentment in her novels towards the position of women in her time. As Deanna Davis comments; “Many nineteenth-century women writers [...] accepted their society’s most fundamental ideas about women. Gaskell [...] has fallen victim to this predicament” (514). In other words, she argues that Gaskell does the women of her time right and presents them as her society would like to see them. The question now is how exactly has Gaskell presented the women and their position in her novel? And next to that, which values concerning the women are the ones that are highlighted and what does this say about the time the novel was written in and set in?

Not only the protagonist of the novel is a woman, but when counting the gender of the other main characters it becomes clear that the women are definitely in advantage. Next to Margaret, the other women in the novel are Margaret’s mother, her niece Edith, aunt Shaw, Miss Dixie, her friend Betsy and Mrs. Thornton. The important men in the novel are Margaret’s father, her brother Frederick, Mr Thornton, Mr Higgins, and Mr Bell. Thus, from the beginning of the novel it is clear that the story is more involved with women than with men. This does not mean that the men are not important in the story, quite the opposite, but

the women are definitely more present. This means that there will be paid much more attention to the feelings and interests of a woman than that of men. Therefore the novel could be more appealing to women. Next to that, these women all have very different characters and therefore all respond differently to the many events of the story. It would be interesting to see how all these women are different from each other and how they are defined as a Victorian woman. Also, by looking at the men and their opinions about women, this different view of those women will help to see how they are presented.

One of the first things that come to mind when starting to read the novel is that Mrs. Shaw has a strong opinion about marrying and a woman's choice in that. Normally in the Victorian Era mothers would have been happy with any suitor for their daughters if they had money or a status of some kind. Mrs. Shaw actually states that "her only daughter should marry for love" (Gaskell 7). This is striking as it is different from many other opinions about marriage and with this statement she leaves her daughter the choice of marriage. In her case, she might not have said this when her daughter's fiancé was of a lower class as he is in fact a General, but still many people had expressed that it was below expectation (Gaskell 6). Therefore it is safe to assume that she really meant for her daughter to have more power than usual. In other words, from the beginning of the novel, the women are definitely not presented as if they were inferior to men in their choice of marriage.

As the book then continues, it becomes evident that the main character Margaret has a strong will of her own as well and also wants to make her own choices in life. When her friend Henry Lennox proposes to her, she is astonished and refuses him immediately. She trusts her immediate instinct that she had to refuse him (Gaskell 29). However, this might also come from the idea that she is not yet a fully mature woman at that point in her life. After the proposal, she "feels guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage" (Gaskell 30). Then maybe she did not react that strongly because of the fact that she wants to make her own choices in her life, but also because of the shock that she is no longer looked upon as a child while she stills believes she is a child. Pearl Brown argues for this as well when she says that "her response to his proposal would seem more appropriate from an "asexual, innocent being", a child-woman who has given no thought to leaving the safety of her family and the duties of a daughter rather than from a maturing young woman capable of passion or discernment"(348). By saying this, she means that she has not yet gained maturity and therefore Margaret cannot see herself making changes in her life already. She does seem to be very mature to other people though, because when her father makes the decision to change his life and move out of Hellstone, he first tells Margaret

because he thinks that she can handle it best. She then has to tell her mother, because her father says he is a “poor coward” (Gaskell 34) and he thinks her mother cannot handle it as well as Margaret. This shows that in their family, Margaret has to tell and deal with important issues and can therefore be seen as a mature family member. She has to take care of her father when he makes this big decision and also of her mother when she informs her about it. This makes her taking care of her parents and therefore the most mature person in the family. Not only her parents, but also their help, Miss Dixon, thinks strongly of Margaret. When thinking about her, she says that she “liked to feel herself ruled by a powerful and decided nature” (Gaskell 45). This means that Margaret may think of herself as not yet mature and still more of a child, but most other people such as Henry Lennox, Miss Dixon and her father and mother think the opposite. From that, it can be concluded that Margaret may not be sure of herself yet, but she definitely has a different attitude because the rest of the people think different of her.

While in the beginning of the novel Margaret’s character is still dubious and not yet fully evolved, the rest of the novel shows a certain development in her character. At the start, Margaret only wants to help and think about others before herself. She helped her niece prepare for her marriage and during that part of her life she has always stayed in the background. After that she helps her father and mother deal with the move to Milton and she cannot think about herself either. When in Milton, she thinks about the poor and constantly wants to give them money or bring them a basket. This shows that she wants to take care of everyone and acts like a mature woman. As Newton argues; “Margaret's power, is allowed to stand without apology or disguise, for all is done in the name of self-sacrificing influence” (qtd. in Davis 516). This means that she actually does so many things for others, but she does not really think about herself in the beginning of the novel. She makes a friend, called Bessy, who worked in one of the mills but is now sick, and with her father she talks a lot about the working life of all the men in this industry. She is interested in everything and wants to help to make their life better. She does not realise that she might not know enough about the life of the manufacturers and their hands to take part in a discussion about it and because of that she is also sometimes looked at as someone who does not understand how it really works. This frustrates Margaret and therefore makes her eager to understand as fully as possible. This means that she is eager to learn and does not want to make any mistakes. Therefore, while the novel continues, her knowledge about for example the work in the mills changes and she will react different to discussions about that later on in the novel compared to the beginning.

Not making any mistakes is something that recurs frequently throughout the novel. Margaret wants to do everything right, even if it takes too much from her. She wants to be there for the poor, for her family, and for everyone else, but she does not simply want to be good. She wants to stand up for them, because she believes she has the power to do so. This is clear in other family members as well, because her brother Frederick rebelled against his Captain. About that, Margaret says that she is “prouder of Frederick standing up against injustice than, than if he had simply been a good officer” (Gaskell 102). This makes clear that Margaret really is a fighter for justice and believes that standing up for others and for yourself is a good thing. This is also what she does in the rest of the novel. If someone has a different opinion than she has, she is not afraid to say so. Because of this, Margaret is also looked at by people as haughty and proud, which is not agreeable. Only when they get to know Margaret more personally they can see through that. Being a fighter for justice and standing up for others also makes Margaret brave, or at least braver than the other people in the novel. This becomes clear when she jumps in front of Thornton during the mob and tries to conciliate between the crowd and Thornton. “She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond” (Gaskell 167). In this extract it becomes clear how brave she is and how willing she is to protect others. In this part, she uses her femininity to protect others. She thinks that her being a woman can protect Thornton, but she is wrong. He thinks to himself “If she thought her sex would be a protection – she was wrong” (Gaskell 167). This turns out to be true, because she gets struck anyway. She did not think that it would be dangerous and maybe that is why she tried to protect him. After this, Margaret does not regret this act, but is proud of it. She said that “if I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise be have been committed, I did a woman’s work” (Gaskell 177). Here again she mentions her femininity as a duty and as something that gives her the power to do something. It becomes clear that Margaret definitely is a strong woman, although she might not see herself like that. She has a power that becomes more clear during the progress of the novel, not only to the reader but to the main character herself as well. This also becomes more clear when she is successful. Because of her, the masters and the men are more productive together in the end and her care for others make things possible.

However, Margaret has her weak moments as well in the novel. It starts in the beginning when Lennox proposes to her and she is in complete shock. After that, she cries herself to sleep when her father tells her that they are going to move. Another moment of weakness is when she faints after the inspector asks her questions about her whereabouts after the death of an acquaintance of the family called Leonards (Gaskell 254). In all of these cases,

there is one thing that comes to mind that is the same, namely that she keeps it to herself. She never lets anyone know when she thinks she cannot handle something because she might think other people think of her as weak. She will never show her weakness to others, because she believes she has to help others and they will not let her do that if they know she has a weakness too. This is why the other people in the novel, such as her father, let her do things and handle things that are quite tough. They simply do not know that she could not be able to do it. After she has these moments of weakness, Margaret still shows strength and returns to her strong self. She takes a lot of responsibilities and sometimes she has done too much which is why she has these moments to herself. Another example of taking responsibility over her father is when she has to tell Boucher's wife of his death. There is no one else who wants to do this and when she sees her father cannot handle it, she offers to tell her herself when she actually did not want to do this. It can therefore be concluded that Margaret definitely has weakness inside her, but she simply does not show it to others. She can more easily bear up than others do and she feels more of a duty to do them. Another example of this is at her mother's funeral. While Dixon "sobbed aloud" and Mr Hale "is terribly broke down", of Margaret is said that she "bears up better than likely" (Gaskell 249). Again, she lets the outer world see that she is a strong woman, but she herself has a quite a tough time because her thoughts are different:

The 'bearing up better than likely' was a terrible strain upon Margaret. Sometimes she thought she must give way, and cry out with pain as the sudden sharp thought came across her [...] that she had no longer a mother (Gaskell 250).

This again shows that she is not as strong as her outer appearance displays and that she sometimes, too, wants to break down but she will not let anyone see that. This suits with the former discussion about Margaret not thinking of herself as a mature person, while the rest of the people obviously do. She simply does not show her feelings which is why she is perceived by others to be a strong but sometimes also a distant woman.

The other women in the novel are either described as either strong or weak women. Margaret's mother dies not so long after their move to Milton and she is sure of it that the move is the exact reason of her illness. From the start of the novel, she is described as a weak and sickly woman. She suffers from the "domestic worries" (Gaskell 83) she has gained since moving to Milton and this eventually kills her. She has not always been a weak woman, because she also stood up for herself and married below her for love without approval. This shows a strength that Margaret has as well. However, it becomes clear that she cannot handle things as well as Margaret. She cannot forget the injustice that was done to her son and almost

goes down with it. Her last wish is to see him again before she dies, but cannot bear the thought of having him in England with an enormous risk of getting caught. This is probably why she is presented as a weak woman, because she does only think of others and never of herself. Eventually, that makes her too weak and dies. In the beginning Margaret seems to think only about others as well, but she stands up for herself which makes her stronger than her mother. Another weak woman in the novel is Fanny, Mr. Thornton's little sister. She is only consumed with fashion and marriage and faints for the tiniest things. She is not considered really smart, always seems to be tired and cannot bear any hardship because of her delicateness. When Mrs. Thornton thinks of her daughter's weakness, she thinks that "it only gave her a kind of pitying tenderness of manner towards her; much of the same description of demeanour with which mothers are wont to treat their weak and sickly children" (Gaskell 89). She compares Fanny to a sick child, which makes it clear that she does not expect a lot from her. Mrs. Thornton herself is of the total opposite kind, even her frame is described as strong (Gaskell 72). She is a "firm, severe, dignified woman" (Gaskell 72) who is extremely proud of her son and is much alike him in character. She does not care for the little things Fanny or Mrs. Hale care for and it seems that being strong makes her survive every hardship she has to go through. It is clear now that the strong women in the novel such as Mrs. Thornton and Margaret herself have a certain braveness in them that the weaker women lack. They find a reason to struggle through difficult times for others, while Mrs. Hale and Fanny cannot even think of it and refuse to do something. Mrs. Thornton and Margaret are both proud and strong women who use their womanhood to support others.

The men all have different opinions of the women, mostly Margaret, as well. Margaret's father sees most strength and intelligence in his daughter and seems extremely proud of her. He also relies a lot on her, which again implies her strength. From the start of the novel, it immediately becomes clear that Mr Lennox only thinks of Margaret in a superficial way, because he almost solely focuses on her beauty and femininity. He does not think seriously of the women in the novel, which becomes clear when he says "I suppose you are all in depths of business – ladies' business I mean. Very different to my business, which is the real true law business" (Gaskell 10). He makes it clear that he does not take their business seriously and that they are below him. The rest of the novel, this view does not seem to change and therefore Margaret does not change her mind about him. Mr Thornton seems to have made the same start with Margaret, as he only cares for her because of her appearance as well. At one point, after Margaret refuses his proposal, he even says "I believe women are at the bottom of every plague in this world" (Gaskell 297). This does not only show his

resentment towards Margaret at that point, but also being superficial about all women being the same. However, when the novel proceeds it has become clear to him that Margaret is so much more complex than that. Because of this change, Margaret starts to see him in a different light as well. Mr Bell certainly thinks high of Margaret, because he leaves her all his money which makes Margaret an incredibly powerful woman. It has become clear now that all men who think highly of Margaret get the same recognition from her. The exception to this is Mr Lennox, who thinks of her highly only in beauty and in candidate to marry, but Margaret returns this by thinking highly of him in his profession and using that for herself as well.

Eventually, the men are the ones that are most important to Margaret in the end. While she seemed very independent through the whole novel, the ending says a different thing. After both her parents have died and she moves back to her aunt in London, she has no role anymore as caretaker for anyone and she does not really know what to do. While the rest of the novel, Margaret has had very strong opinion about everything and could not be doing nothing, now she seems to have lost that articulateness and is silent on in which direction her life will go. When she goes to live with her aunt, a decision not taken by herself, they go on a holiday by the sea and there she has time to think of her future.

She had learnt, in those solemn hours of thought, that she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it; and she tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much must be set apart for freedom in working (Gaskell 385).

After thinking about this, she wants to find herself some duties in her life and that is all she knows of her future. However, she is not the one to determine her future herself, as there are the three men that do. As Brown states; :

Her guardian, Adam Bell, provides the legacy and attempts to determined where she will live and how she will pay for her keep; one suitor, Henry Lennox, makes the appropriate legal arrangements to invest some of her inheritance in a third man's enterprise, and the third man, her other suitor, John Thornton, not only profits from her inheritance but settles her future with the second proposal of marriage (350).

So, her future is not decided by herself but by the men in her life. It can therefore be concluded that even when a woman can be as independent as Margaret, she still needs men in her life to give her life a certain direction and add duties in it.

It has become clear now that there are several values in the novel that are highlighted that concern Victorian women. There is not one type of Victorian woman that is presented in this novel, but several kinds. There is a strict divide between the weaker and the stronger women; the weaker portrayed by Mrs Hale and Fanny respectively, and the stronger by Margaret and Mrs Thornton. The things that keep the weaker women busy and what seems most important to them is their weakness itself. They cannot think further than what is surrounding them and therefore seem to be consumed with themselves. The stronger women are not like this at all and know that they cannot always think about themselves but actually more about others. They know that that is the only way to change something and therefore use their womanhood in such a way to do that.

Chapter 2

The novel *North and South* has now been explained in the light of how the women are presented and how that representation shows the certain values concerning them. The question now is how the 2004 BBC series of Brian Percival's direction, called *North & South*, does that same thing. It is of course an adaptation of Gaskell's novel, but the way of telling the story and showing all the themes and values must be totally different because of them using a different medium. Linda Hutcheon argues that "technical constraints of different media will inevitably highlight different aspects of [the] story" (10). This means that even though the series has four episodes of an hour and therefore quite enough time to cope with almost every part of the story, at least more than a film adaptation would cover, it will still make changes to how to tell and show the story. The view on adaptations has often been quite a negative one, because they could never live up to the original text. Also, in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing adaptations have often been put down as secondary and derivative (Hutcheon 2). Thus, there has always been this negative view, but adaptations are still enormously popular because 95% of the miniseries are adaptations, 70% of all the TV movies of the week that win Emmy Awards and a huge percentage of Oscar winning movies as well (Hutcheon 4). This means that there must be something interesting and appealing to adaptations and this is visible in the popularity of the series *North & South* as well. It might have something to do with the way they deal with the original work, because adaptations have to simplify, but they also extend and add to its original. As Hutcheon argues; "they amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on" (3). In other words, they are never the same as the original and this is not always a negative thing because therefore they stand on their own as well. Hutcheon concludes from this that "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic" (9). This means that the work is definitely its own and it forms its own document, text or whatever medium it is. This is then of course also true for *North & South* and it will be interesting to see how the series has worked with what the novel deals with. The different medium will give a different interpretation of the novel and of course the reading of the women will be different as well. So, how then is the novel *North and South* read in the twenty-first century by this adaptation and how does it present the women, their position and their values?

In the first episode of the series, we see Margaret in a dark dress looking quite sad out of the window of a train while travelling to the north (which will become clear later on).

Then there is a flashback to her life in London two months before and we see her again in a bright dress. This immediately makes it seem as if she was happier here than in the train. The topic of conversation is about love from the start of the series, and thus presents the series as if about a romantic plot. However, one of the first things she says is that she is too grown up for all the ornaments etc that a wedding bring and after Mr Lennox proposal she says “I am not to marry anyone”. So from the beginning it is already clear how Margaret thinks of weddings and how she sees herself. She sees herself as a grown up, but does not want to be married. This is quite remarkable as the series starts because the setting first seemed to be totally different. This might already be an indication of the rest of the story and how that view is going to change. The first episode clearly establishes Margaret as a grown up woman, because when they arrive in Milton Margaret will directly come to action to find a house for her family. Already, her urge to help others is visible in everything that she does. An example of this is when she says she will help Dixon in the house when she cannot find help and is thus willing to do work that is actually below her. She is presented as a curious, confident and resolute woman, and the many times the camera zooms in on her face, it shows little emotion. This changes when the first encounter with Thornton is presented, because now there is definitely emotion in her face. They have now used a technique that is used quite often in the series, namely that we see her expression first and only after that we can see what she was seeing. This means that we are already biased by her emotions and expressions and we automatically assume that what she thinks is right. As Margaret Harris states; “It is also a tactic that transposes such narrative strategies as free indirect speech to the visual medium, giving a scene in terms of a particular character’s perception of it” (69). In other words, it has transformed a technique used in the novel to a different technique while having the same results for the audience. We also see her face often when someone else is speaking, so that her reaction to that will be immediately visible. However, not only Margaret’s view is emphasised by this technique, it is also used for other people. The camera only zooms in on the faces of the people that are important and sometimes also on the things that they are watching. An example of this is when Margaret pours tea in Thornton’s cup and the focus lies on her hand and bracelet that Thornton is very intensely watching. This shows Thornton’s interest and his focus on her beauty instead of what she is saying, because only at these times we can see him smile. Because of this technique, Margaret gets of course almost all the attention and it is very clearly stated what she thinks and how she feels about things. The other women are not elaborated on this much. What strikes in the first episode is that Mrs Hale and Dixon are almost always negative and wear dark clothes, which may present their mood. Fanny is

dressed in an extremely coloured dress and petticoat which highlights the darkness of the north surrounding them. She looks absurd next to everyone else and it makes it even more clear that she is a superficial and not a very strong woman. She is viewed from the window out of which Margaret is looking, and therefore we are again looking from Margaret's point of view. In this way, the first episode focuses a lot on Margaret and her perceptions by using different techniques, such as zooming in on certain things or faces while the story continues.

The second episode continues this in the same way, but it focuses more on the other women and how they think as well. It starts with Mrs Thornton and it shows that she is an important factor in running the mill next to Mr Thornton. This part is an addition to the novel and it shows Mrs Thornton's concern for a sick child working in the mill. It implicates that she does not only care for the mill but also for the workers and shows a different side of her, because she was only affectionate for her son before and did not seem to care for others. She is also seen helping Mr Thornton with his plans for the mill during the strike, which again shows her dedication to the mill and her harshness when she wants to take strict measures and urges for the Irish to come. During the strike, she is the only one to be brave enough to go through the rioters to fetch a doctor and her facial expression is quite annoyed when she notices that she is on her own again. Fanny is again showed as a weak woman, she even says of herself that she is "very delicate". During the riot she faints and panics and thinks more about herself than about others. Mrs Hale is also again presented as weak, but now with the reason that she is ill and there is often focused on her coughing and lying in bed to make this clear. Margaret, on the other hand, is again presented as a strong and responsible woman. When she is at Marlborough Mills during the strike, she says "I am not afraid", and urges Thornton to "go face them", them being the crowd of angry strikers. Again, she shows her will to help and urges others to do what she thinks is the right thing. When she goes outside herself to help Thornton, she says "they will not hurt a woman". In other words, here she is using her femininity to help others and she expects other to respect that. This is not what happens though and she gets hurt, but after she wakes up again her strength is back and she wants to go home immediately instead of rest. After that, Mrs Thornton and Mr Thornton talk about this and they are sure that Margaret has proven her feelings for Mr Thornton. This is, just as in the novel, a misleading act because as Harman argues; "on one reading she reverses the conventional understanding of gender relations (in which men take public stands on behalf of women, not women on behalf of men) and on the other she reinstates it (women convert even political events into romantic ones, public events into private ones)" (368). In other words, Margaret normally should have been protected by Thornton instead of the other way

around, but she also gets her femininity involved with political matters and shows it to the rest of the world. In the series, there is more emphasis on this last argument, as the camera solely focuses on Margaret and Thornton and the way they touch and look at each other. In this way, the series romanticises the happening and makes it seem as if this is indeed a confession of Margaret in that scene. However, just before this happens, the viewers see Margaret getting frustrated when she watches Thornton outside and we know that she does not act out of love, but out of protection and help. When Thornton proposes to her after this has all happened, she refuses and feels as if he thinks it is a duty to “rescue her reputation”. This means that she knows herself as well that she has acted in a way that other people may talk about as her showing her feelings. Not only that, she also talks of marriage as a possession. Still, she is rejecting the idea of marriage, which shows she has not yet changed since the beginning of the series.

This change becomes more evident in the third and fourth episode of the series. While Margaret is still very stubborn and resolute, she has more to suffer and more to deal with. Her friend Bessy, her mother and her father die in the third and fourth episode, which lead to a long time of mourning. This is expected from her, but she needs this time as well. This shows that she knows when she needs to rest and to take care of herself. In other words, she does sometimes think of herself as well and she understands that she is the one who needs taking care of at these moments. At one point in the novel she has to lie when her brother Frederick needs protection, which she would always do for him because it feels like justice to her but she hates it that Mr Thornton knows about the lie. This means that she thinks that it is very important that people do not think bad of her and thus that she cares for the opinion of other people. After her father’s death she cannot stay alone in Milton anymore and she has to take responsibility for her life. At one point in the series, she says “I do not know what I want”, which implies that she is still lost after her parents death and the camera then focuses a lot in these episodes on her sad face. When Mr Bell leaves her all his money and properties as well, there is a turning point in her life. At once, she wears colourful dresses again and the sun shines again in the series. This is to emphasise the change that she has to make in her life and her niece Edith notices immediately. She says; “Margaret is about to tell us something and we cannot argue”. This means that the old Margaret is back and she knows what she wants again. What she says herself then is that “it is time for me to take responsibility for my own life”, and by saying this she seems to rebel a bit. Her aunt Shaw’s response then is; “Margaret, you sound a little revolutionary”. In other words, she does not sound like a woman from the Victorian period, because she does things the ‘normal’ Victorian woman would not do. As

said before, the Victorian woman was seen as inferior to men and barely had any rights in the law and education. To take responsibility of her own life as a woman therefore sounds revolutionary. However, when she goes back to Milton for a business proposition for Thornton, she still says that she needs Mr Lennox to explain everything. Thus, while she said she had to take responsibility for her own life, she actually meant that she needed other people to help her instead of doing it herself. This is the first time that she lets someone else take responsibility and make choices for her, which is a huge difference from the beginning. As David Kelly mentions: "As time passes, Margaret will come to respond to those aspects of scene and people that are initially beyond her view, and this will be a measure of her maturing personality" (91). So, here she has finally matured in the way of judging other people but also of herself.

The ending of the series is quite radical. When Margaret returns from Milton, where she could not find Mr Thornton for her business proposal, she runs into him halfway back to London when he is halfway back to Milton. She steps off the train waiting for a northern bound train to pass, when she immediately sees him looking out of the window of his train. As Margaret Harris argues; "There is something brilliantly Victorian about hero and heroine almost heading off into opposite directions, and a particular appropriateness that they should meet on what is in a sense neutral ground" (77). She means here that they both have no advantage of being in their home or not and they seem to be on the same level here. This could also be showing that they are now also on the same level of how they think about each other. However, not everything in this end is so Victorian as there are some features that would definitely not be accepted in the Victorian era. As Harris argues: "No gentleman would travel with his shirt open at the neck" (77). Not only this, but also the kiss that happens next would not have been allowed for an unmarried couple in public. Also, when they have declared their love for each other, Margaret immediately travels along with Mr Thornton to Milton, while she still lives with her aunt in London. Hence, this ending is quite liberal and shows Margaret as a very free woman who does not seem to think her decisions through after finding love. This also shows that in the end, her life is in hands of men and she does not care about it. When she speaks to Thornton about the business proposition, she wants to make it extremely clear that it is just business, which makes it almost seem as if she thinks of marriage as a business matter. This links back to when her aunt Shaw says right at the start of the series that the wedding of her daughter has been quite a business and when Margaret herself talks of possession when Thornton first proposes. The wedding and business theme seems to be constantly evident in the series and are also constantly confused with each other.

Something else that keeps coming back in the series is the focus on hands. At the end, Margaret first kisses Thornton's hand when he reaches for her hands before kissing him. This links back to when he was intrigued by her hands pouring in tea for him, her refusing to shake hands at their second meeting and her learning Milton ways when she does shake his hand at the dinner party. These are both small symbols for the marriage that is to happen at the ending of the series and shows that the series are definitely about a romance plot.

It has become clear now that *North & South* is definitely a traditional adaptation to the novel, mostly because the script works very closely to the text of the novel and it transposes a good deal of it as dialogue (Harris 70). However, it also uses many techniques to try to bring certain themes and symbols to the screen. One of these is showing a lot of Margaret's opinions through showing her emotions and expressions the most. Next to that, the dresses and the surroundings say a lot about the personalities and moods of the characters as well. In the series, it has become clear that Margaret cares a lot about others and wants to help them as well and while she seemed to be too stubborn at the beginning she is slowly loosening a bit and lets others help her as well. She cares a lot about justice and honour and is very proud of her being a woman, which she all uses to help others. This gives her a certain strength and braveness that only Mrs Thornton has as well. The other women in the series are definitely much weaker and that is shown in the way that the camera solely focuses on them being unhappy, sickly or sad. The adaptation also adds a few moments to make certain values and themes more evident. One of these is the scene at the Great Exhibition, which makes it easy for modern viewers to connect the series with the Victorian Age and also shows how times were different then. The ending however, does not feel Victorian at all, but it was the favourite moment of the series rated by BBC viewers (Harris 77). In this way, the series has established itself and does not feel like secondary to the novel, because it adds concepts of the twenty-first century as well as that it incorporates the nineteenth century.

Chapter 3

Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South* and the BBC series *North & South* have now both been discussed separately concerning women and how they are presented. It is interesting to see how they both represent the Victorian woman and in which ways this is different. As the concept of the 'Victorian woman' is quite broad, it is easier to just focus on the Victorian women in the time of when the novel and the series take place, which is the mid nineteenth century. There will of course be a difference between the two representations in the novel and the series, as has become clear in the previous chapters, but what do these differences precisely mean and how does that give us an idea of how the novel is read in two different centuries, namely the nineteenth and the twenty-first century?

As has already been discussed, in the novel and in the series as well there are two types of women, namely the stronger and the weaker, which of course both have exceptions. The stronger ones, Margaret and Mrs Thornton, are the ones who are brave and stand up for themselves and others. The weaker ones are just consumed with themselves or what influence other people have on them and thus with what is about to happen to them, such as Fanny and Mrs Hale. These are the women that seem less intelligent and not really having a mind of their own. According to Duncan Crow, this last type of woman is more what a Victorian woman should be than the stronger type. As he argues a book of morals written in the nineteen forties, he says that "it is euphemistically reminding woman that it is her place to be an unintelligent, subjected soother, that and nothing more" (24). In other words, women should not use their intelligence and just be their for others. They could not be as strong as a man because "it was the accepted belief that [the woman] was both mentally and physically inferior to man" (Crow 146). In the case of Fanny and Mrs Hale, this is definitely true, and they do try to place themselves next to men. They just accept that this is their place and even call themselves too weak to do or hear certain things. Something else that was necessary to be a 'good' woman in Victorian standards was that "a woman's object in domestic life should be the promotion of the happiness of others, [...] she was the guardian angel of the citadel of respectability" (Crow 52). This is something that is immediately recognised in Margaret's behaviour, but also in the behaviour of the other women in the story. It seems that Margaret's sole purpose in her life is that she wants to help other people, even if she sometimes has to ask too much of herself. Only looking at this aspect, Margaret is the embodiment of a Victorian woman. Other characteristics of a Victorian woman are for example that they should constantly be in wonder of how their romantic future would be and their only goal in life would be to get married and

give a man children. An addition to this is that “although young ladies might dream of love it was not considered to be a necessary prerequisite of marriage” (Crow 38). This is visible in Fanny when she marries a much older man but rich business man, who she knows she will not fall in love with but certainly is a good match for her and her family. That is more important for her than marrying a man that she loves. A big difference between the novel and the series is that in the series, Margaret seems to think of marriage more as a business as well. It is repeated quite often that marriage and business relate to each other. In the novel, this is less present. However, in Margaret’s case, it is important to know that she is completely averse to this kind of marriage, or actually any kind of marriage at all. In both the novel and the series she is quite convinced of the fact that she will never get married, although this is more properly pronounced in the series. Concluding from this, it seems that Margaret does not think of marriage in a Victorian way, as she is not at all consumed with it and does not think that “marriage is the goal” (Crow 63).

Not only marriage, but also the other characteristics that have been named (except for helping others) do not quite fit Margaret. She does not think that she is less intelligent than men, because she actively contributes in discussion. She is not scared to show what she is thinking of and therefore is quite a rebel in the Victorian society. This means that she is not presented as a woman that the society approves of and because of that she must be a woman that has characteristics that are not the usual in the Victorian era. Still, what she believes is most important is helping others and it appears that she does not care how that is to be done because she believes in the greater good. She helps others not in the way that most other Victorian women did, such as taking care of their family and others at home, but she stands up for others by using her intelligence. She does not only do that for her family, but also for the factory workers, whom she soon calls her friends. She does not like people when they do harm to others and that is when she wants to help. This is a bit more clear in the series, for instance when she first meets Thornton. She sees him in the cotton mill, firing and beating up a man for smoking and she is completely outraged by the violence he uses. Because of this she loathes him from the start of their acquaintance. We see all of this from Margaret’s point of view and therefore the viewer sympathises with her. In the novel, their first meeting is at the Hale’s home and this is viewed more from Thornton’s view and how he thinks she acts a bit conceited. This is a totally different viewpoint and their meeting therefore gets a totally different meaning. The series presumably needed something of more violence to shock the audience, which is why they have added this part and created much more of a heroin than the novel did.

This change is not the only one that makes Margaret look stronger than in the novel. After the riot, Margaret goes back home and when she is told that her friend Bessy has asked for her she simply says “I am tired, I cannot go” (Gaskell 177). She admits that she has no strength and cannot handle this after the riot. However, in the series, Bessy asks for her and she goes with her immediately. This shows that even though she has just witnessed a riot and got wounded, she still has the strength and goes to her friend who wants her to come. This shows that Margaret is definitely stronger at this point in the series. Another point in the series where she is portrayed stronger is when Frederick’s story is told. In the novel, she does not know what really happened to him, because she then lived with her aunt in London. However, in the series she already knows everything and this gives her a much more grown-up look. It seems that her parents thought that she was strong enough to tell her everything. There are not only these instances when she acts more mature or stronger than in the novel, but there are also other ways in which the series shows this. An example of this is already mentioned, namely the first meeting between Margaret and Thornton. The way they show this meeting more from her point of view and with her immediately standing up against him shows that she is not to be considered lower than him. This is not only shown in this moment, but also at other, a bit less obvious, times. One of these ways to show that Margaret and Thornton are not to be seen on a different level from each other is for example the way the series closes. Just as the start of the series, this is in a train. They meet at a train station, or in other words, somewhere where they both do not belong, halfway their destinations. This reminds of a neutral ground, where none of them is in advantage and they are at the same level. The most obvious ways in which the BBC series shows that they have Margaret a stronger and more independent character is also at the end. What happens is that Margaret and Thornton have declared their love for each other in a public space and the next moment Margaret gets on the train with Thornton to Milton. This could definitely have happened in the twenty-first century, but a man and woman could not live together unless they were married in the Victorian era.

It is obvious now that the BBC series have added some moments or altered them to a result of showing Margaret as a stronger and more independent woman. The way that Crow describes a Victorian woman does not really match with the appearance that both the novel and the series give. However, the series emphasises this on a lot more occasions and in some moments dramatises events. The way that the series presents Margaret is thus a representation of how she is read now in the twenty-first century. This means that because women are more independent now, Margaret has become more independent as well because that makes her easier to relate to in the series for viewers now. In other words, the series has altered the

character slightly to make the series more appealing to the twenty-first century. The other women are not changed quite as much as the series does with Margaret and also Thornton. This is of course logical as they are the most important characters in the story. The other women are portrayed more or like the same as in the novel, also with only Mrs Thornton striking as one of the other stronger women. She also does not always fit with the descriptions that Crow gives on account of the Victorian woman. She is a very important factor in Marlborough Mills and shows a lot of her intelligence. She does not act like she is inferior to the men that she encounters and is proud of the woman that she is. The other women all fit the term Victorian woman more than she and Margaret do, even though they are not extreme rebels either. They have in common that they care about others and want to do everything they can for the people that they love. They use their femininity in such a way that they can help others and show a strength that men cannot have.

Conclusion

This thesis has discussed the ways in which the series *North & South* and the novel *North and South* portray women, their position and their values. It has become clear that the portrayal of especially Margaret in the series has been altered in such a way that she seems more a heroine than in the novel. She shows more strength in the series and not just that, she is also shown more on the same level with Mr Thornton than in the novel. So the only question that has not yet been answered is how these differences show us how the novel is read in the nineteenth century and the twenty-first century. Do the changes that the series has made to the novel, as making Margaret stronger and more independent, show how we think of women and their values now? And can the changes account for the popularity of the series?

Thus far, there has been a focus on what a 'traditional and ideal' Victorian woman should be like and it has been concluded that neither the novel and the series represent Margaret as such a woman. Margaret definitely has the role of the heroine and therefore she is more of a rebel and seems quite radical at some points. The ending however shows that she needs the help of men and eventually also wants to marry, something of which she said at the start of the story that she would never do. This has all been made a bit more exaggerated in the series than in the novel. Why Margaret has changed to an even more independent and stronger woman in the series could be explained by how the ideas about the position of women in society have changed since the nineteenth century. Of course, there has been a change in how people think of that position now next to the people in the nineteenth century, and as mentioned before there were already changes that enhanced the position of women during the Victorian era. After the Victorian era there happened a lot in aspect as well. As Nicholson argues; "Something has happened in the 1960s way of thinking about gender that continues to shape public and private life" (1). This means that something then has started that concerns the way we think of women now and it has not stopped changing yet. This movement was called Second Wave Feminism and it is still often used as a basis for feminist critique. However, since the beginning of that movement, there have been changes as well. As Nicholson mentions; "We have reached a point in history where genital differences need no longer matter culturally" (8). This means that we now do not think of the difference between men and women anymore as a difference that has influence on their positions. In our culture now, those differences can be neglected. This must then also be visible in television and for example series such as *North & South*, because the perception of women has changed in every aspect of culture. "Much of the current entertainment output of television features strong women, single mothers, female friends and lovers – that is, female types who are

integral to feminist critique and culture” (Brundson, Spigel 1). They say that the women that are shown on television are also influenced by the feminist critique of the last century. This is also the case for Margaret, because even though she is often presented as a woman of the Victorian era, she is often stronger and more independent. This is because the women can now be presented like that as their position has changed over the years. Because of the feminist critique, television now changes the view of earlier ages as well, because a stronger and more independent woman is much more common and therefore easier to relate to and easier to accept.

The way that the Victorian women are portrayed, especially Margaret, seem to match with the view that Gaskell herself had. As mentioned in the introduction, she did not seem to think that being a woman or mother is the only duty that a woman has in her life. She believed that next to that, women should show what they were worth and they should definitely not hide their talent. In the novel and the series this is most evident in Margaret and Mrs Thornton. They both help other people and use their intelligence and femininity in that. Mrs Thornton is a very important figure in running the mill with her son and that does not impede her duty as a mother. In fact, it actually emphasises that she wants her son to be successful and helps him with that. Margaret also does not hide behind others but she stands up for herself, especially after she has become an orphan and she lives with her aunt again. She knows that she has to take responsibility for her own life and that is what Elizabeth Gaskell also meant when she said that she did not want women to hide behind their duties.

It has now been discussed how and in what way both the centuries present the women and their values via the different media. For further research it would be interesting to see how not only the women but also the men have changed, which has already been touched upon for a little bit. Not only that, but also compared to other novels from the nineteenth century and series from the twenty-first century. It would be interesting to see whether the results would be the same. An example for this would even be one of Gaskell’s other novels, namely *Cranford* and the BBC series from 2007. Not only would this be the same writer, but also the same broadcasting company which makes it interesting to look at the differences in portraying certain matters. Something else that would seem an interesting research is to compare the *North & South* series of 2004 with the previous BBC series of the same novel from 1975.

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nor colluded in its production.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Visschers', written over a horizontal line.

Name of student: Inger Visschers

Student number: 4116100