

## Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855)

- Seminar: “Self and Society in the Victorian Novel” (Proseminar / University Mannheim / Stella Butter)
- These “Topics and Tasks” were given to the students as a study guide in the previous session (cf. Study Guide in the database). Students were asked to prepare one of the topics at home. In the next session, they were then allocated into groups according to the topic they had chosen.

### **Topic 1: The idea of the gentleman**

- Identify key passages that deal with this topic.
- Why does Margaret at first not consider Mr. Thornton to be a gentleman?
- What makes her change her mind?
- Read the excerpt from Robin Gilmour’s *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (8 pages; cf. DOTLRn: Further Reading).
- What connections can you draw between the idea of the gentleman as negotiated in *North and South* and Robin Gilmour’s observations? What connections can you draw to Samuel Smiles’s comments on the gentleman? (cf. Reader)

### **Topic 2: Portrayal of the working classes**

- Identify key passages relevant for this topic.
- Compare and contrast Nicholas Higgins and Boucher.
- How are the Unions depicted? Are they presented in a positive/negative light?
- Browse the Victorian Web (Social History) and choose a link which you find informative on the situation of the industrial workers in Victorian England. What connections can you draw to Gaskell’s *North and South*?

### **Topic 3: Master-Worker relationship**

- Identify key passages that deal with this topic.
- What are Thornton’s views on the master-worker relationship? What Margaret’s? In what ways and why do their positions change in the course of events?
- How would you characterise the ‘ideal’ master-worker relationship advocated in the novel?

### **Topic 4: North and South**

- Identify key passages relevant for this topic.
  - Compare and contrast:
    - Milton and Helstone
    - Milton and London
- ➔ In what ways is the (at first seemingly stark) dichotomy between North and South to some extent undermined in the course of the novel?

## Study Guide: Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855)

### I.) Introduction

Both of the interrelated plot lines of Gaskell's *North and South* focus on a central conflict and on possible means of reconciliation. In the first plot, the love story of Thornton and Margaret, the conflict between North and South is played out. The second plot draws attention to the master-worker relationship (cf. the conflict between John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins). While reading the novel, it is worthwhile to take note of how these two plot lines interact. When interpreting the novel, you may also find it helpful to think about the different kinds of contrasts which are established throughout the novel (e.g. character contrasts or 'foils': 'Thornton – Henry Lennox', 'Margaret – Edith'; religious views: 'Margaret – Bessy', etc.).

### II.) Topics and Tasks

Please choose **one** of the following topics and send me your comments by **Friday noon (10<sup>th</sup> Oct.)**. I will upload all of the comments sent to me by Friday afternoon. (You needn't write a full-length text – bullet-points are also perfectly fine.) **Please print out the student feedback sheet and the minutes and read through both before class.**

#### Topic 1: The idea of the gentleman

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#### Topic 2: Portrayal of the working classes

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- Compare and contrast Nicholas Higgins and Boucher.
- How are the Unions depicted? Are they presented in a positive/negative light?
- Browse the Victorian Web (Social History) and choose a link which you find informative on the situation of the industrial workers in Victorian England. What connections can you draw to Gaskell's *North and South*?

#### Topic 3: Master-Worker relationship

- Identify key passages that deal with this topic.
- What are Thornton's views on the master-worker relationship? What Margaret's? In what ways and why do their positions change in the course of events?
- How would you characterise the 'ideal' master-worker relationship advocated in the novel?

#### Topic 4: North and South

- Identify key passages relevant for this topic.
- Compare and contrast:
  - Milton and Helstone
  - Milton and London

→ In what ways is the (at first seemingly stark) dichotomy between North and South to some extent undermined in the course of the novel?

Dr. Stella Butter

## Topics for Term Papers

**Please note:** If you want to write a term paper on a topic not listed below, you are welcome to do so provided you confer with me first.

Further topics will be added during the semester.

- Memory and Identity in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*
- Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* as a *Bildungsroman*
- Dickens's techniques of characterisation in *David Copperfield* (→ analysis of form and its implications / contextualization (e.g. serial publication, Terry Eagleton: urban experience etc.))
- Masculinity and/or Femininity in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*
- Class in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*
- Negotiating the ethics of self-help in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and/or Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*
- The idea of the gentleman in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and/or Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*
- The portrayal of the working-classes in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and/or Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*
- Class conflicts in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*
- The city and the country in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and/or Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (recommended reading: Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*)
- Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and Tragedy
- The Semantics of Space in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*
- Politics of Gender in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*