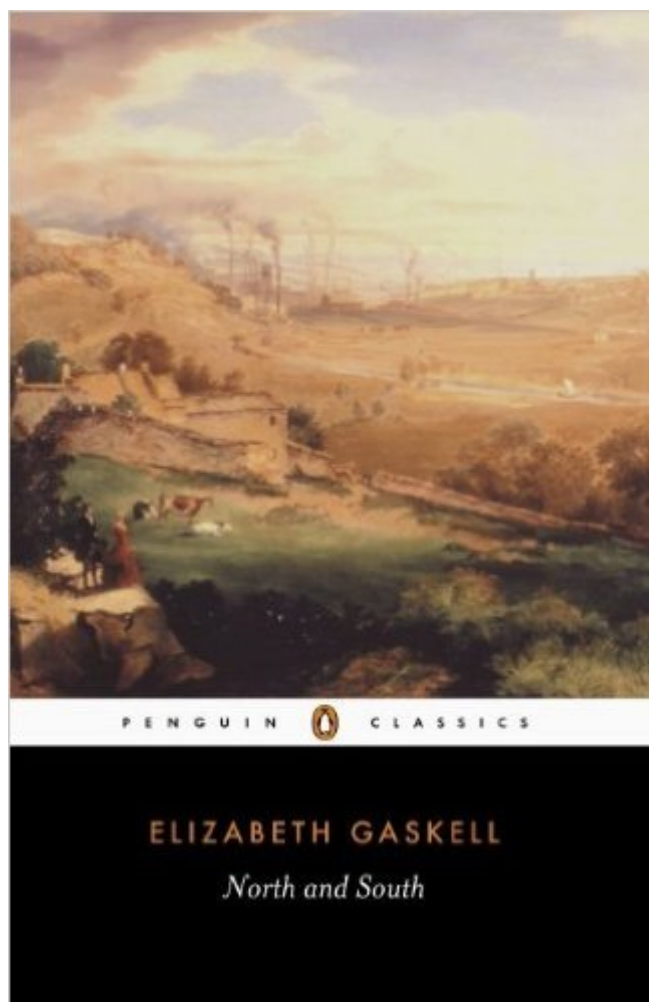


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North And South (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

As relevant now as when it was first published, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* skilfully weaves a compelling love story into a clash between the pursuit of profit and humanitarian ideals. This Penguin Classics edition is edited with an introduction by Patricia Ingham. When her father leaves the Church in a crisis of conscience, Margaret Hale is uprooted from her comfortable home in Hampshire to move with her family to the North of England. Initially repulsed by the ugliness of her new surroundings in the industrial town of Milton, Margaret becomes aware of the poverty and suffering of local mill workers and develops a passionate sense of social justice. This is intensified by her tempestuous relationship with the mill-owner and self-made man John Thornton, as their fierce opposition over his treatment of his employees masks a deeper attraction. In *North and South* Gaskell skilfully fused individual feeling with social concern, and in Margaret Hale created one of the most original heroines of Victorian literature. In her introduction Patricia Ingham examines Elizabeth Gaskell's treatment of geographical, economic and class differences, and the male and female roles portrayed in the novel. This edition also includes further reading, notes and a useful glossary.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65) was born in London, but grew up in the north of England in the village of Knutsford. In 1832 she married the Reverend William Gaskell and had four daughters, and one son who died in infancy. Her first novel, *Mary Barton*, was published in 1848, winning the attention of Charles Dickens, and most of her later work was published in his journals, including *Cranford* (1853), serialised in Dickens's *Household Words*. She was also a lifelong friend of Charlotte Brontë, whose biography she wrote. If you enjoyed *North and South*, you might like Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, also available in Penguin Classics. '[An] admirable story ... full of character and power'

Charles Dickens

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Customer Reviews

It'd been a long time (a decade or so) since I read this Elizabeth Gaskell classic before I watched the BBC adaptation on DVD and loved it. Rereading this novel was the best decision I could have made because I hadn't appreciated it then the way I did now. *North and South* captures the social divide and how the manufacturing and trading industries were revolutionizing in the 1850s. Margaret Hale, the daughter of a respectable clergyman, and her family move from the south of England to the industrialized northern town of Milton after her father leaves the church because of his conscience. Margaret is appalled with Milton and the vulgar, uncouth ways of tradesmen and merchants, whom she also sees as uncivilized and cruel. However, will she change her mind after she meets and gets to know the dashing Mr. John Thornton? There are many twists throughout the novel. I was able to appreciate the romance and building of tension between Margaret and Mr. Thornton now, especially after having watched the BBC miniseries and the wonderful Richard Armitage playing Thornton. Right now, to me, there are four memorable classic literary heroes -- Mr. Darcy, Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester and now Mr. Thornton. He is gentler and not as brooding here as he is portrayed in the miniseries, but he is as compelling as I had remembered him. The last few pages are my favorite, especially this line: "While she sought for this paper, her very heart-pulse was arrested by the tone in which Mr. Thornton spoke. His voice was hoarse, and trembling with tender passion, as he said: 'Margaret.' " What a romantic line and I wish it had been added to the miniseries.

I read the book, like many other reviewers here, after I had watched the brilliant BBC miniseries starring Richard Armitage and Daniela Denby-Ashe. I definitely agree with the comments of many reviewers here that you somehow seem to develop a finer appreciation of the nuances of both after doing that. A lot of reviewers have covered the ground admirably on the story itself, so I won't go into too much detail on that. In addition to the fine development of plot and characters alike, what I found refreshing about the novel were:

- a. Unlike a few other writers of her time, Elizabeth Gaskell focuses a lot more on the thought processes and feelings of the male characters in the novel. For example, you don't get to hear a lot of what Darcy or Edward Ferrars are thinking in *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Sense and Sensibility*, except almost tangentially. In sharp contrast, Mrs. Gaskell gives quite a

detailed peep into what John Thornton and Richard Hale are thinking, throughout the novel. As someone who is always interested in the differences in thought processes between the sexes, I found this to be refreshingly different from other novels of the time. b. Being in business, it was quite a new experience to read about John Thornton's evolution first as a business owner and then as a "leader", to use that overused term of today. Mrs. Gaskell appears to have a remarkably sophisticated understanding of both management and labor issues.

I agree with a lot that is written in the previous reviews here. Yes, there is a very slow start to this novel. I wonder whether that's because it was first serialized by Dickens, and Mrs. Gaskell was paid by the word. And, yes, the ending is rather abrupt, especially preceded by the last few slow chapters. Maybe Dickens lost his patience. In so many ways, though, this novel is a treasure. It's not easy to write a political novel with a strong love story and good characterizations. Gaskell takes on quite a bit and mostly succeeds in her task of describing the changes industrialization brought to England. She balances her sympathy for the workers in the factories with the dilemmas posed to the mill owners by new machinery, competition from abroad, and the threats of potential workers' strikes. She contrasts very effectively the excitement of this new way of life against the nostalgia for the agrarian past. These were new concepts in Victorian England, but they are not so foreign today that we cannot readily understand their significance. She gives us a sympathetic and spirited heroine in Margaret Hale, who is wise beyond her years. Another colorful character is Nicholas Higgins. I found myself looking forward to his scenes because he provides the humor in an almost-humorless book. (It is funny at the end, though, and I would have liked to have seen more of this tone.) Mr. Thornton is a character we can readily identify with--someone who triumphs over adversity and seeks to constantly better himself. Someone with high standards, yet none higher than he holds himself to. Margaret is his match in every way. I did see many plot similarities with "Pride and Prejudice" in the love story.

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