Abstract

The central aim of this thesis is to explore the impact of material conditions on the manifold manifestations of moral conduct depicted by Elizabeth Gaskell in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. The thesis utilizes Althusser’s notion of ideology as a system of imaginary as well as constitutive representations of reality with respect to the pivotal themes of the thesis: class and morality. Althusser’s axioms are to serve as bases for the theoretical examination of the role of ideology in a class society, as well as the conceptual framework for the practical analysis of the aforementioned novels. Gaskell’s concern for the polarising classes with reference to her life and her place in the literary canon is also addressed. The practical part analyses the significance of material conditions for one of the key ideological state apparatuses that determines moral conduct – religion, portraying how it provides the means for social classes to be established and reproduced as well as endured and criticised.

Keywords

Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton, North & South, Althusser, social novel, material conditions, moral conduct