Charles University in Prague
Faculty of Education

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BACHELOR THESIS

Women and Social Class in Elizabeth Gaskell's Novels, *Mary Barton* and *North and South*

Ženy a sociální třída v románech Elizabeth Gaskellové *Mary Bartonová* a *Sever a Jih*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written this bachelor thesis by myself and that I have not used any sources other than those listed in the Works cited section. I further declare that this thesis was not used to obtain another academic title.

Prague, 26th November 2018

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

This thesis deals with the position and characteristics of women in the Victorian period and explores how this topic is reflected in the novels Mary Barton and North and South written by Elizabeth Gaskell. The theoretical part focuses on social class and the situation in relation to women in the nineteenth century. The practical part analyses Gaskell's female characters and describes how they reflect society at the time.

Keywords

Victorian era, female characters, social class, social novel, Elizabeth Gaskell

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá pozicí a vlastnostmi žen ve Viktoriánském období a rozebírá, jak je toto téma zobrazeno v románech Mary Bartonová a Sever a Jih od spisovatelky Elizabeth Gaskellové. Teoretická část se zaměřuje je na sociální třídu a společenskou situaci ve vztahu k ženám v devatenáctém století. Praktická část analyzuje ženské postavy Elizabeth Gaskell a popisuje, jak odrážejí společnost v tehdejší době.

Klíčová slova

Viktoriánské období, ženské postavy, sociální třída, společenský román, Elizabeth Gaskell

Table of contents

1. Introduction

This thesis examines two novels written by Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, who was a prominent and widely read author of the Victorian Period. Her writing career lasted from the 1840s to the 1860s and during that time she succeeded in dealing with a variety of different topics connected mainly to the wide changes in society brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Gaskell was particularly associated with the area of Northern England, which was not only her home but mainly a source of writing inspiration.

Mary Barton (1848) and *North and South* (1855) both belong to the genre of the social problem novel and feature a number of similar themes. Gaskell pays a lot of attention to the depiction of the working class, its hardship and social conflict between them and the masters. Her aim was to show her middle-class readers the workers as worthy of sympathy and draw attention to their situation. However, as a woman Gaskell also provides an interesting take on female characters. She touches upon the notion of the 'Angel in the House' but also the opposite 'Fallen Woman'. In connection to her two main heroines Gaskell contemplates mainly their role and power in Victorian society as young women belonging to two different social classes.

The theoretical part of this thesis is concerned with the description of historical and social aspects of the Victorian period. Light will be shed on changes in society caused by the industrialisation, urbanisation and rise of the middle class. There will be outlined values of the Victorian society and differences between individual social classes. Particular attention will be paid to working-class people, their everyday lives and working conditions. The following chapter will examine the position, role and rights of Victorian women, including the concept of the 'Angel in the House', the 'Fallen Woman' and the 'New Woman'. A short section will also be dedicated to Victorian fiction, namely the genre of the industrial novel and some of its representative authors. The last chapter of the theoretical part will provide a short summary of Elizabeth Gaskell's life in the context of her works.

The practical part of this thesis is divided into three main chapters in which will be examined Gaskell's storylines and characters in relation to women and social class. The first part is concerned with the author's debut novel *Mary Barton*. Analysed will be the protagonist Mary in terms of her youthful pride, motivations and heroic actions, as well as the character of Esther, who represents the trope of the 'Fallen Woman'. Next the portrayal of the upper-middle and working class in the novel will be explored, mainly the descriptions of their homes, ethical systems and the connection between financial matters and morality.

The second chapter of the practical part examines Gaskell's second industrial novel *North and South*. It will focus on the analysis of the main heroine Margaret, her character traits associated with the 'Angel in the House' model, her role of dutiful daughter and mediator in the conflict of the novel, as well as her inner conflict associated with moral and sexual shame. Further will be explored the depiction of the working class, several of its members, the sense of communality and the revolt against the masters featured in the story. The portrayal of the middle class will also be examined, including the descriptions of homes, the characters of the upper-middle class daughters and the master Thornton.

The third chapter of the practical part will notice similarities and differences between the two novels. Firstly, the life of the working class will be depicted, namely the sense of community among its members and its hardship. Then there will be studied the middle class and the characters of mill-owners Carson and Thornton. One part is also dedicated to the masters and workers, the notion of paternalism, the conflict between the two groups and the solution as proposed by Gaskell. In more detail there are further examined mothers along with other motherly figures and their role. The last part contrasts the two main heroines, Mary and Margaret, the similarities in their character, different ways in which they acquire power and the end of their journeys.

On the whole, the aim of this thesis is to examine two selected novels by Elizabeth Gaskell with regard to the sociohistorical background of the Victorian period. It will provide an analysis of the topic of social class and women as understood and portrayed by the author.

Theoretical Part

2. The Victorian period

Elizabeth Gaskell's novels portray England and its society during the Victorian era. This period gained its name after Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) and in Britain it was associated with rapid industrialisation and social changes.

The beginning of this era was influenced by the effects of the Industrial Revolution, during which England's agricultural economy transformed into "one based on manufacturing" (Mitchell 2) and led to rapid urbanisation. People moved to cities in order to find employment however, the end of the Napoleonic Wars caused unemployment followed by a growth of prices (McDowall 132). Mitchell explains that the 1840s, also called the 'Hungry Forties', was a time of dire conditions, owing to the high cost of food, poverty, depression and criminality (5).

Nonetheless, the nineteenth century brought positive aspects into the lives of people as well. McDowall calls attention to the fact that due to the industrial development, Britain was known as "the "workshop" of the world" (131). The construction of the railway network facilitated the mobility of people and further boosted coal and iron production (Mitchell 6). McDowall points out that the development of trade and industry also caused the rise of the middle class, its importance and influence on social and political life (131). When the domestic economic situation improved in the 1850s, wages began to rise and so did the standard of living. The Great Exhibition in 1851 was a celebration of technological progress and, according to R. J. White, also "an exhibition of the growing respectability of the working-class world" (252), which was essential for industry.

This turbulent era had its impact on literature as well. Writers found inspiration in the world around them and reading became a popular leisure time activity throughout all social classes. Some of the principal novelists at that time, such as Charles Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell, portrayed in their works the unfortunate living conditions and misery of the lower classes and hereby drew attention of the wider public to these issues.

2.1 Victorian society

The form of the English society was fundamentally changed by the Industrial Revolution. The landed gentry was gradually losing its power, which was transferring into the hands of industrialists and factory owners. Technical progress brought new inventions, which changed the way of life of the whole nation, while scientific progress changed the way people viewed the world around them and how they perceived religion. They shaped personal and work lives, created new opportunities and contributed to the transformation of the society. As Mitchell mentions, the royal family and the

queen's morality became a model for the Victorians (145). Strict ethics and rules were characteristic for the era, however, not everyone could meet them. The head of the family and the provider was traditionally the father or the husband. While women were gradually gaining more independence, due to urbanisation and being employed, their primary occupation remained the house and the family.

2.1.1 Changes in society

At the beginning of the 19th century people started leaving the countryside in big numbers, as a result of newly emerged work opportunities. Mitchell explains that even whole families moved from villages to towns, where they hoped to find better employment in local manufactories (28). Urbanisation caused industrial cities, such as Manchester, Liverpool or Leeds, to expand rapidly, unlike the standard of life inside of them. McDowall addresses the point that cities and towns were overpopulated, unhealthy, and living conditions there were miserable, especially for the lower classes (140).

The industrialisation simultaneously correlated with an immense growth of population. Mitchell claims that one of the reasons behind this may have been better job availability with a decent salary, which allowed "workers to marry younger" (13). Another one might be a larger variety of diet and its positive effects (Mitchell 13). The increase in population additionally led to the expansion and the rise of the middle class. A large number of first generation factory owners and industrialists were people from a poor background who succeeded through their own effort. Their acquired wealth then allowed their offspring to pursue a middle-class career in banking or commerce. McDowall mentions that the most fortunate ones were even rewarded with a knighthood and became members of the upper class (140).

The rise of the middle class further caused a shift in political power. As pointed out by Mitchell, when the Reform Bill of 1832 was accepted, the number of men who were allowed to vote doubled (1). Apart from the members of the upper classes, it for the first time included middle-class men as well (Mitchell 3). McDowall points out that a number of English industrial cities newly had their representatives in the parliament as well (134). However, it was not until 1867, when the second Reform Bill was passed, that at least some of working-class men gained the right to vote (Mitchell 10). Nevertheless, as Mitchell suggests, it was the third Reform Bill in 1884 that eventually brought the biggest change (14). It allowed most of the working-class men to vote and for the first time to be elected (Mitchell 14).

2.1.2 Morality

In terms of morality, the Victorian Era was a time of contradictions and double standards. While the Victorians acclaimed strict rules and high morals many people simultaneously lived in poverty, small children worked in dangerous conditions and prostitution was a common sight. The values of the society were mostly set by the middle class, whose influence and power was on the rise.

2.1.2.1 Hard work

As Mitchell mentions, due to evangelicalism one of the pillars of nineteenth-century society became hard work (263). The expansion of business enabled social mobility, which was not possible in the past. Through effort and self reliance a man could raise himself above his station and gain achievement in the form of higher wages and social standing. The majority of people perceived hard work as a virtue and prosperity as a "recognition of the man's virtue" (Mitchell 263).

2.1.2.2 Family

Another significant aspect of Victorian morality was an emphasis on family. Mitchell brings up the point that changes in the society and subsequently in people's wages allowed Victorians to have more leisure time, which they could spend with their family (145). As a result, family relationships could "develop more fully" than in the past and people had "more space for shared activities" (Mitchell 145). All of this was once again most prominent among the members of the middle class, whose families became the representative image of the era. Family represented the virtues professed by the Victorians, such as integrity and security, and for that reason it was put on a pedestal. McDowall claims that the Queen and her husband and children were the model of an ideal family with pure morality, which promoted the notion (144). The people were for the first time in history allowed a glimpse of "the private life of the monarch" (McDowall 144) as the Queen even published her own diary. The delighted public followed the publicised virtuous example of the royal family and shared its moral and religious values (McDowall 144).

2.1.2.3 Respectability

All of the values mentioned above were ultimately interconnected with one general quality, to which the Victorians attributed a great significance, and that was the concept of respectability. As Mitchell expresses even among lower classes, respectability served as a means to uphold "self-respect and public reputation" (264). Respectability involved a number of beliefs and conduct both allowed and prohibited. For an individual or a family to be respectable naturally involved having good manners and sufficient wages, being chaste and honest (264). However, outward appearance, such as tidy attire and household, was equally important to one's reputation and being accepted in society. In relation to diligence, it was additionally unthinkable for a respectable person to take

loans or to buy goods on credit, as the Victorians believed that what one could not afford, one could get by without (Mitchell 264).

2.1.3 Social classes

The last fundamental feature of 19th century British society that is to be mentioned was the system of social classes. The stratification of people into groups according to their status was reflected in all aspects of life and ingrained into the social structure. Mitchell points out that while legally there were only two classes, nobility and commoners, the majority of Victorians perceived society to be divided into three main groups (18) based on factors such as birth, wealth and occupation.

All three classes, upper, middle and lower, differed in their prominence, standing and daily life. People belonging to a certain class were expected to adhere to its rules, have a common set of standards and behave accordingly. However, despite this rigorous division, social mobility was to a certain amount possible. The members of the lower class, also called the working class, might through hard work become part of the middle class. Their offspring, then could by means of education, wealth and connections continue to climb the social ladder and eventually even in rare cases marry into the upper class. Nevertheless, according to C. Williams, self-improvement such as this was hardly common for the majority of commoners and the possibility of losing one's fortune and position was a more likely scenario during the Victorian era (310).

2.1.3.1 The upper class

The upper class consisted of the traditional hereditary aristocracy and landed gentry. They were all further subdivided into more or less prominent categories as with the other two social classes. Mitchell mentions that for their income the upper class primarily relied on the rent from its property and on the whole the members distinguished themselves from the rest by not working (21). The nobility had special privileges in relation to the law and still held strong political influence over the whole period. C. Williams claims that the upper class controlled the House of Commons until the 1870s, other cabinets until the beginning of the 20th century and it handed over power to other classes only grudgingly (313).

2.1.3.2 The middle class

According to Mitchell, at the beginning of the Victorian era, approximately fifteen per cent of inhabitants belonged to the middle class and by the end of the century this number rose up twenty-five percent (19). Wealth did not play "the determining factor" in being classified among this group (Mitchell 19), even though on average its members were more well-off than most members of the working class. Everyone who did not belong to the nobility and did not earn their living by physical

labour was considered to be middle class. This part of the society therefore included a large variety of professions, regardless of the size of their income, such as rich bankers or factory owners but also impoverished clerks, shopkeepers or clergy (19). Mitchell mentions that even though middle-class members differed in their status, they valued a common set of principles (20). These included orientation on family, resentment of upper-class idleness and admiration of hard work, which then became the representative standards of the period (Mitchell 20).

2.1.3.3 The lower class

The most numerous group of the Victorian society was formed by the lower class. This approximately seventy percent of inhabitants was often also called the working class. The large and diverse group included everyone from farmers and domestic servants to factory workers or artisans (Mitchell 18). Similarly to the middle class, incomes and status of the members were not equal. Nevertheless, as Mitchell underlines, the majority did not earn more than the cost of their living, which they could easily lose by misfortune (18). The characteristics and circumstances of the working class are developed in more detail in the following chapter.

2.2 The working class

Picard states that members of the lower class could be subdivided into labourers, often called 'hands', artisans and educated workers. However, the earnings and subsequently living standard of each profession differed and therefore this distinction was not "so tidily demarcated" (Picard).

2.2.1 Living conditions

The Industrial Revolution brought many labourers from the country to the cities, which were quickly expanding because of this migration. Mitchell mentions that developers were constructing cheap and plain homes in large numbers to accommodate the workers and their families (28). There was no running water, each building was composed of two rooms and one fireplace which served as a source of heat and cooking medium (28). These terraced houses were built close to one another and families in them were crowded. Even though rural areas had similar living conditions, in cities this was combined with overcrowding and "the lack of fresh air and sanitation" (29). As McDowall points out, the miserable environment resulted in health problems such as the cholera outbreak in 1832 (140). Mitchell notes that the situation only started to gradually improve during the second half of the century due to the improvement in housing, implementation of sewers, water pipes and health regulations (29).

According to Mitchell, an ordinary factory worker would make scarcely enough money to pay for his living and feed his family, which was about £40 to £50 per year (33). However, highly skilled workers could even have an income ranging between £150 and £300, which was a more

substantial amount than some members of the lower middle class had, who struggled to maintain the living standard appropriate to their social standing (33). The living and working conditions in the lower class were in the majority of cases very dire. C. Williams states that at the end of the era approximately one-third to one-quarter of British inhabitants still remained in poverty (310) and that is even despite the many improvements which were implemented and the increased standard of living.

The financial situation of the majority of lower-class families was fragile and could be easily disrupted by a layoff, an unexpected illness or an accident (C. Williams 259). Cautious budgeting was an essential skill, which was in the competence of the mother, while the father's role was being the main wage earner of the household (259). The fundamental item that was to be paid under all circumstances was always the rent and in case of misfortune "food was the first item to be cut" (259). Moneylenders were considered to be "a strategy of last resort" as they imposed excessive interest rates (259).

2.2.1 Working conditions

Britain's rapidly developing industry was offering numerous areas of employment for members of the working class. In the middle of the century, a quarter of all working men were employed in the field of agriculture however, this number decreased by half by the end of the period (Mitchell 46). The workforce more and more opted for positions in one of the cities north of London, which were centres of several specialised productions. C. Williams mentions that significant manufacturing cities and areas were for instance, Birmingham, known for the metal business, Newcastle, an area of coal and engineering, or Manchester and Lancashire, important cotton processors (225). Work in the industry was often equally as physically demanding as work in the agriculture yet, it was more alluring as it offered several advantages. Hands in factories earned more money than those on farms, they were under less supervision than shopkeepers or domestic servants and had more independence (58-57). While their shifts were lengthy, usually twelve hours, their days were simultaneously strictly outlined and therefore their leisure time "was entirely their own" (Mitchell 57).

Nevertheless, employment in industry equally presented a significant number of perils to the health of workers (Mitchell 57). Whether it was "cotton dust or metal fragments in the air", "chemicals such as the lead in pottery works and the sulfur in matchmaking" or just tedious mechanical movements and long work time, the environment in factories hurt the employees (Mitchell 57). Unlike the difficulties of hard agricultural work, the issues in industry were more "seen and publicized" (Mitchell 57) and therefore the government was compelled to issue some regulations in the form of the so-called Factory Acts.

2.2.3 Legislation

The first significant change came in 1833, when the parliament prohibited factory owners from employing children under nine years of age, regulated the number of work hours for children up to the age of sixteen and demanded two hours of elementary education for them. More importantly, for the first time there was established a system of inspectors that were to enforce the Act. In 1844, another Factory Act appointed safety regulations in terms of machinery and further restrained the length of the work day for children and women. During the second part of the century, the government approved more Acts, which served to improve safety and limit the employment of children and women.

2.2.4 Child labour

Child labour and its cruelty were frequently publicised during the Victorian era by reformers, who raised concern for them and achieved the significant legislation changes mentioned above (Mitchell 41). However, despite the brutal and dangerous conditions under which the children had to work, for example as chimney sweeps (43) or mine ventilation openers (42), their labour was necessary for the budget and often the survival of the working-class families. Cody points out that both boys and girls had to start working very young to help to support the family and due to this they had a minimum of education. Only in 1870 was elementary education made available to all children (Mitchell X) and not until 1891 was it made free (Mitchell XI).

2.2.5 Workhouses

In 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act established workhouses. Mitchell states that when a family or an individual was thrown into poverty and could no longer "care for themselves" they were to be placed there (92). These institutions were meant to provide shelter and food in exchange for work (92). However, McDowall points out that instead of offering support they were "feared and hated" (132). In workhouses the sick were not treated, families were separated, children did not receive education and people often starved (132). Mitchell brings up the point that these difficult conditions were intentionally meant to dissuade the poor from seeking help from the government and to make them rather chose even minimum wage employment (93).

2.2.6 Trade unions and Chartism

Improvement of working conditions was the objective of trade unions. McDowall mentions that since 1824 workers were officially allowed to unite in these associations (134). However, throughout the first half of the 19th century they were not very successful in achieving their goals (134). They demanded primarily "reasonable wages" for employees, nevertheless, as the early unions were only small and not well organised they could be effortlessly overpowered by the

employers (134). According to McDowall, strikes or meetings were dispersed, often in a violent manner, and hands were compelled to return to their work (135).

As McDowall states, the first significant united movement emerged in 1838 as political radicals, trade unions and workers introduced the People's Charter (135). The movement became known as Chartism and it was a result of general dissatisfaction with the unequal political situation, dire working conditions, economic problems at that time, hunger and desperation. Chartists called for a reform of the voting system and principally the right to vote for all men (135). Their demands were declined by the government, which led to frustration and violent protests over the next decade. The movement separated into several fractions and as the economic situation in the country began to improve, Chartism "slowly died" (McDowall 136).

Nevertheless, despite the inability to accomplish changes in the legislation, Chartism did have a significant impact on the working class. Merriman and Winter suggest that among its followers Chartism popularised politics and "created a popular political culture" (417). The generation which followed, then slowly became involved in politics first at the local level and later even at the national as it helped shape and spread democracy in Britain (Merriman and Winter 418). According to Bloy, in 1871 unions were legally recognised by the Trade Union Act, which allowed them to possess property, funds and organise strikes ("Victorian Legislation"). The unions then could start achieving more improvements for the workers, such as the Factory Act of 1874 which restricted the working day to ten hours and eventually also the already mentioned Third Reform Bill of 1884, which, however, applied to men only.

2.3 Victorian women

Throughout the nineteenth century the world witnessed many changes in nearly all possible domains and woman's position was one of them as well. Stern morality, proper behaviour, the notion of respectability and strictly determined gender roles were ideals which governed the Victorian era. Woman's position became more delineated as it gradually adapted to the new industrial society, its expectations but also the emerged opportunities. The roles and duties of mothers, wives and daughters differed across the social classes, but in the centre of it all was always the family and the domestic sphere. As for rights and liberties, women were for the most part of the century still constrained by the beliefs of the society and their condition started to advance only at the end of the period.

2.3.1 The Angel in the House

A number of texts were created during the Victorian period, including essays and conduct books, concerned with the topic of woman's delicate nature and her role in the society (Mitchell 266).

Gradually the public adopted an unreachable ideal of the perfect female, which women were to attain and uphold, following the example set by the Queen. This notion was also sometimes denominated the 'Angel in the House' after the title of an extensive poem by Coventry Patmore, where he depicts joyous family life and the conventional image of "the perfect Victorian woman" (Mitchell 266). Virtuousness, purity, chastity, obedience, domesticity were the qualities that society valued in females above all other traits.

According to Cunningham, the ultimate aim of a woman's life was to achieve a favourable marriage and her "highest duty" was to take care of her husband and children (2). Generally, men were designated to be the providers and protectors of the family, while women were meant to tend the household, manage the budget and ensure the family happiness. Mitchell suggests that domesticity was regarded as a part of the feminine nature and the house was the place where the fragile women were protected from the outside world and where their gentle personality could flourish (267).

2.3.2 The fallen woman

According to C. Williams, the Victorian society recognised two general groups of women regardless of the class classification (432). Those who were deemed 'respectable' and met with the virtuous ideal of the 'Angel in the House' and the unchaste women who strayed from it (432). The latter were labeled as 'fallen' no matter the cause of their downfall. Some lower-class women used prostitution as a means to earn their living regularly, while others had to occasionally resort to it in order to feed their children. C. Williams points out that the 'fallen' included not only adulteresses, but also women who were seduced, often under the promise of marriage, or the victims of rape (433).

However, it was prostitution which became one of the main issues of the Victorian era as well as an example of its double moral standard. While publicly the society endorsed the values of chastity and marital fidelity, at the same time prostitution became a widespread phenomenon in the urbanised world. Tucker points out that prostitution itself was not illegal, but it caused the spreading of sexual diseases especially among the members of British army (132), who were not allowed to marry. 'The Great Social Evil', as prostitution was also called, therefore became a concern of the public and subsequently an official matter of the government during the 1860s. In order to combat it a series of controversial Contagious Diseases Acts was issued (C. Williams 436).

As Tucker states "Under the acts, (…), women suspected of prostitution were subject to forced medical examination and detention without trial for up to three (subsequently six) months" (132). These inspections were humiliating and supposedly happened even to respectable women from the

lower classes on the grounds of their appearance (133). Due to this the Acts coused a wave of aversion and newly emerged feminist movements demanded their repeal claiming they deprived women of their fundamental civil liberties. They eventually succeeded in their efforts in 1886 (Tucker 132).

2.3.3 Women of the upper class

Despite the common ideal of the 'Angel in the House' which was endorsed by the public, the reality was different in each social class. Ladies from the upper class did not have the necessity to occupy themselves with housework, which was done by the servants, or raise their children, which was handled by the governess. Mitchell points out that it was equally unacceptable for them to do "any paid work", which was in contradiction with the concept of respectability (266). The richer ones could spend their days by paying calls, shopping or entertaining. Many of these women found their self-realisation in charitable work as it drew on the "traditional womanly skills" and served them as a form of occupation (Mitchell 258).

The situation in the upper-middle class was similar, since the women belonging to it had the means to attempt to approach the nobility, their ways and life of leisure. To fulfil the newly emerged role of domestic goddess, even the young middle-class women had to receive an education which had previously been reserved for the aristocracy. Mitchell claims that the so-called accomplishments were skills, such as drawing, music or languages, which were essential to woman's social life and her ability to gain a husband (183). Yet, for the less wealthy members of the middle class it was not easy to uphold the standards of society, for instance keep servants, pursue leisure activities, maintain an entertaining social life or avoid manual work. According to the census in 1851, mentioned by Tucker, only a very small percentage of middle-class women worked and for the most part they were governesses, artists or writers (31).

2.3.4 Women of the lower class

The circumstances and lives of the lower-class women were entirely different. The Industrial Revolution created new job opportunities, especially in factories, but the urban society needed also shop workers or seamstresses and the rising middle class required more domestic servants than in the past. Mitchell states that with the invention of machines, which "supplied the strength", women could perform even physically demanding labour and in many industries they were in fact the majority of the work force (45). The 'factory girls' were frequently considered by society to be "rough and disreputable" (56). The reason for this may have been their increased independence secured by fairly high wages compared to the rest of the middle class (Mitchell 56).

The higher the income the working woman had, the later she married as she was able to support herself. A young single girl was expected to remain with her parents or to aid her siblings with the household and children. According to Tucker, an unmarried woman was dependent on her father or brother and after the wedding this reliance was transferred to her husband (31). Mitchell states that even though the working-class members married slightly earlier then those of other classes, the average age of a woman during her first marriage was 25 years (146). However, before even considering settling down and starting a family, the couple first needed to save enough money, and it was deemed improper for a man to court a woman without having the means to provide for her in the foreseeable future (Mitchell 159).

Sonce money was a big issue for the lower class, many women "worked even harder during pregnancy" in order to set aside some money for the child and compensate the deficit in the family budget (C. Williams 259). Married women were legally and economically reliant on their husband, but as "managers of household resources" they gained a measure of power (259). Nevertheless, mothers were to first prioritise their husbands and then their children (259). Therefore, in time of financial difficulties this influence came at the cost of "self-exploitation" (259).

2.3.5 Women's rights

Because trade unions and political movements were dominated by men, they likewise prioritised their interests (C. Williams 177). The demands of women, such as suffrage, were omitted from the campaigns to allegedly "secure the vote for working men" (177). Trade unions in their efforts to secure better wages for the workers upheld the middle-class ideal of a male provider and the concept of a joint "family wage" (177). They asserted gender restrictive practices, advocated the reduction of working hours for women or even aimed to completely prohibit them from working so that they "could fulfil their duties as wife and mother" (C. Williams 177).

According to C. Williams, the opinions on the woman question were divided among the Chartist movement (177). While some members argued in favour of the exclusion of women from the workplace in order to protect them, others supported a more equal family system (177). A more progressive stance on the topic was adopted by the Unitarian church. The foundation of their doctrine emphasised self-government and independence of mind. They therefore supported the education of both genders and women were given "more freedom of action" (Matus 134).

Tucker states that in terms of the law, the husband was responsible for his wife's actions, controlled all her property, almost till the end of the century she was legitimately his possession and had no legal standing on her own (31). As Krueger mentions the first substantial change in legislation came in 1839 in the form of the Infants and Child Custody Act, which allowed women

from broken marriages to demand the custody of children younger than seven and maintain contact with children under sixteen years of age (259). This act was passed owing to the endeavour of Caroline Norton, who was unjustly deprived of contact with her children by her husband (Krueger 259). After this accomplishment she continued to campaign for marital and divorce laws and fought for legal equality. As C. Williams points out, Caroline Norton succeeded in 1857 when the Matrimonial Causes Act was passed, which enabled divorces in the civil courts (268). In 1870 and 1882 the Married Women's Property Acts allowed wives to retain their earnings and property acquired both before and during the marriage (268).

2.3.6 The New Woman

At the end of the Victorian period there emerged a new type of woman, which presented an anti-pole to the 'Angel in the House' domestic ideal. Diniejko indicates that the term 'New Woman' was created by the writer Sarah Grand and it became the epitome of an unmarried, educated, employed, self-sufficient and above all independent woman ("The New Woman Fiction"). The late Victorian fiction genre, which carried the same name, subsequently encouraged discussions on women's autonomy, education and mainly suffrage, which was not however, achieved till the 20th century.

3. Industrial fiction

The popularity of the novel and the culture of reading was on the rise during the Victorian era as the amount of literate inhabitants was steadily increasing (Mitchell 237). Literature became a popular leisure activity often shared with the whole family or friends. Even working-class families gathered in the evenings to listen to reading aloud, while the women knitted or sewed and the father rested (238). However, as Mitchell points out, new bound books were expensive and only upper-class and rich middle-class members could afford to purchase them (238). Due to this, publishers and writers came up with a different way to reach the readers. It was customary to divide novels into several, usually monthly, instalments, in order to "spread out" the cost (238). Mitchell states that novels were equally serialised for publication in magazines, which could be bought for a penny per weekly instalment (238). As a result of this practice authors often ended their chapters on cliffhangers, which made the readers keen to obtain the following part and to discuss the story with others (238).

3.1 The genre of the industrial novel

The rise of the novel and its popularity enabled the development of new genres, which focused on specific groups of readers. Among children's literature, domestic chronicles or tales of military heroism and others (Mitchell 239), industrial fiction also gained its audience and was sometimes called the 'social problem novel' or the 'Condition of England novel'. Guy mentions that this genre developed during the Hungry Forties and revolved around the social and political issues at that time (3). It aimed to tackle topics related to the social changes in the industrial society, the tension between the classes, especially workers and masters, but also gender and social turmoil. Writers aspired to educate about the conditions of the working class, class struggle and simultaneously rouse the reader's compassion (Guy 4). Though popular throughout the 40s and 50s, by the next decade the genre of the industrial novel slowly ceased to be published. Tucker suggests that the reasons behind this might have been the slow improvement of the living conditions or perhaps the industrial world no longer surprised the people because they had become accustomed to it (261).

3.2 Representative authors and novels

The first significant fiction classified as an industrial novel was Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845). As Krueger states, it depicts the life of an aristocrat who became aware of the severe division of the nation into the rich and the poor as he inspected the lives of factory workers and their miserable living conditions (89). In 1849 another story focusing on the hardship of the working class was published, which, however, discussed both the class and gender divide. *Shirley* by Charlotte Brontë unfolded on the background of the social turmoil during the Luddite riots. The

novel featured two contrasting female heroines struggling to find self-realisation in a world where their possibilities were limited due to their gender (Krueger 89). The stories of Charles Dickens gained substantial popularity during the Victorian period, several of which equally belonged to the social problem novel genre. According to Krueger, *Hard Times* (1854) is frequently designated as his most forthright and political novel, where he reveals the appalling living conditions in factory towns and the dehumanisation of workers (89). The last prominent author of this genre was Elizabeth Gaskell and her novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), in which she portrays the arduous lives of the working class in the area of Manchester. In both stories the author finds a solution to the class divide within Christian charity and compassion (Krueger 89).

4. Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth Gaskell's works were substantially influenced by her own background, especially family life and religious belief. Spencer mentions that after her mother's death Gaskell was raised by her loving aunt in a village near Manchester which later served as a source of inspiration for some of her non-industrial novels (8). Being the daughter of a Unitarian minister and journalist, she received a more liberal education than was usual. Her faith stressed the importance of independent thinking, kindness, tolerance and care for social welfare (Spencer 7). After her marriage to a Unitarian minister, William Gaskell, in 1832, her life moved entirely to Manchester. Krueger notes that there, apart from running her household Gaskell educated poor children in the Sunday school and cared for the sick (139). This first-hand experience only deepened her sympathies for the working class (Krueger 139).

Matus observes that what distinguished Gaskell from other prominent female authors of the Victorian era, such as George Elliot or the Brontë sisters, was her family situation (132). Her novels were publicised under the title 'Mrs. Gaskell' denoting "her domestic status", which to an extent also influenced the reception of her writing (Matus 132). As a mother of four daughters and devoted Christian she believed that "motherhood is one of the "greatest & highest" duties of women's life" (132).

Being a successful and recognised writer during her time, Mrs Gaskell captured a number of different topics in her stories, not only the working class and its struggle. Spencer mentions for instance the novel *Ruth* (1853) which raised a lot of controversy as it dealt with the topic of an unmarried mother (13). It called for the better treatment of others like her, based on the religious values professed by the society (Spencer 13). According to Krueger, *Cranford* (1853) was a much lighter novel, which was inspired by her childhood (139). Gaskell in it humorously depicted a village community of women dealing with poverty caused by restraints in schooling and work opportunities (Krueger 139). Among her other works are, for instance, the historical novel *Sylvia's Lovers* (1858), the domestic novel *Wives and Daughters* (1866) and the biography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) (Krueger 140).

Practical Part

5. *Mary Barton*

Mary Barton was published anonymously in 1848 as Elizabeth Gaskell's first novel. It addressed the social unrest and dire conditions of the working class, which emerged during the 'Hungry Forties' as a result of layoffs and economical instability. Subtitled 'A Tale of Manchester Life', the story drew upon Gaskell's own experience with the circumstances and people in one of Britain's most prominent industrial cities. As Spencer points out, the author's aim was to capture the suffering of the labourers as she hoped to draw the attention of the public to the severity of the situation and appeal to their Christian compassion (32). While the novel brought Gaskell success with readers and secured her the recognition of major editors, including Charles Dickens (Krueger 139), it also raised a wave of controversy. Spencer states that some factory owners in the Manchester area felt unjustly represented in the story and some criticised the author for neglecting the hardship of failed manufacturers (32). They perceived the emphasis on the hardship of the working class and its sympathetic portrayal as biased. However, as Foster suggests, this displeased response might equally be perceived as a proof of the impact the novel had (34).

The main focus of the story is on the life and suffering of the factory hand John Barton and his daughter Mary. They both play main role in two different plot lines, which eventually interconnect and culminate together. John, who is a devoted member of a trade union, believes in its ability to improve the dire conditions of the working class. Nevertheless, when the factory owners dismiss the demands of the labourers without any satisfaction, in midst of anger they call for the murder of a son of a wealthy manufacturer Harry Carson, who happens to be involved with Mary. As the young woman attempts to prove the innocence of her sweetheart Jem Wilson, she discovers her father to be the real murderer.

A major influence on Elizabeth Gaskell while writing *Mary Barton*, was her own grief from the death of her infant son. The motif of sadness and parental love appears in the novel at several points, but it was primarily contained in the character of John Barton, who is turned bitter by his agony. According to Spencer, Gaskell originally intended him to be the principal titular and tragic hero of the story (33). However, as Raymond notes, the publishers persuaded Gaskell to change the name of the novel and to focus more on Mary and the romantic subplot (96), most likely with the intention to appeal better to her readers.

5.1 Women

In *Mary Barton* Elizabeth Gaskell has a variety of female characters. As the novel means to portray the working class within the familial and friendship relations, the reader encounters women who are primarily defined by their roles as daughters or mothers. There are two characters who will be studied more closely in the following chapters. The first one is the main heroine, Mary herself, and the second one is her aunt Esther.

5.1.1 Mary as the protagonist

The titular heroine Mary Barton is a young woman who is from childhood confronted with the hardship and suffering of the working class as she is a witness to her mother and brother's deaths. At the beginning of the novel, Mary is motivated by her desire to escape the difficult life of the working class and she comes dangerously close to becoming a fallen woman. However, in the second part of the novel when she is confronted with her father's crime, Mary becomes the saviour of the novel as she takes matters into her own hands even at the cost of her own health.

5.1.1.1 Youthful vanity and pride in beauty

Mary's life lacks motherly guidance and as Beer points out, it is simultaneously being influenced by an idealised memory of her absent aunt (136). Young Mary sees herself in the frivolous Esther, who she thinks has run away to lead a better life far away from the working-class misery. Mary takes pride in her own beauty and thinks to use it as way to raise herself above her station: "she had early determined that her beauty should make her a lady" (*MB* 27).

Stoneman shows that John Barton rejects the prospect of Mary working in a factory, as Esther did, due to the high salaries, which would give her more freedom and the means to spend on luxuries (51):

> They can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves any how. My Mary shall never work in a factory, that I'm determined on. You see Esther spent her money in dress, thinking to set off her pretty face (*MB* 6)

In order to remove her from this prospect he secures her the position of a dressmaker's apprentice, which paradoxically only deepens Mary's youthful vanity and pride.

> a dressmaker's apprentice must (or so Mary thought) be always dressed with a certain regard to appearance; must never soil her hands, and need never redden or dirty her face with hard labour (*MB* 27)

5.1.1.2 Mary's love interest

Due to her position as a dressmaker's apprentice Mary also catches the eye of Henry Carson. Flattered by his attention, driven by the desire to follow Esther's example and to secure herself a brighter future, Mary believes she is in love with Henry. Being a working-class woman, she finds herself in a different position than women of the middle class who "play the marriage market" (Stoneman 50). Stoneman points out that by taking the risk of attempting to gain a wealthy husband, Mary might succeed as Mrs Carson did, or on the contrary, end up as a fallen woman like Esther (50). Mary's inclination to superficial things and material desires might also have a symbolic meaning. According to Stoneman, it could be perceived as the estrangement of the unfeeling market ideology from the compassionate and caring principles the working-class community stands on (51).

However, Mary's motivations, though understandable, are not utterly selfish. She wishes to share the comfort of her envisioned future with her father: "she would surround him with every comfort she could devise (of course, he was to live with them)" (*MB* 93), but also with others she cares about: "Every one who had shown her kindness in her low estate should then be repaid a hundred-fold" (*MB* 93). She equally senses that her flirtation with Henry is deceptive and unethical, which causes her an inner conflict. Malcolm suggests that Mary is torn between being a good respectable daughter and achieving the marriage which would save not only herself but her loved ones as well.

The first change in Mary's conscience, which allows her to truly understand her feelings and open her eyes, occurs after she turns down Jem's proposal. She realises that she has made a proud mistake in refusing him and desires only to redeem herself in his eyes. However, the true test of Mary's character and moral principles occurs when Jem is to stand trial for the murder committed by her father.

5.1.1.3 Assuming the role of the heroine

The discovery of her father's guilt puts Mary into an impossible situation, which forces her to choose between her father and her beloved. The knowledge agonises her, makes her doubt her own identity and feel abandoned:

> with a still stronger sense of anxiety, and a still clearer conviction of how much rested upon her unassisted and friendless self, alone with her terrible knowledge, in the hard, cold, populous world. (*MB* 294)

However, as Stoneman points out, despite her troubled thoughts, Mary quickly finds the determination to remedy the crime by finding a way to have Jem acquitted, but without accusing her father (53). Malcom observes that from the moment of her decision Mary assumes the role of the

heroine of the story. Driven by her willpower, she pours all her strength into taking an action even at the cost of her own health and sanity. When standing witness at the trial she is still being weighed down by her father's crime. Nevertheless, according to Spencer, despite this guilt and her underprivileged status as a working-class woman, Mary eventually finds a way to use the brief moment of being heard to express the truth about her love, rather than condemn someone as the court intends (47).

As a result of her physical and mental exertion Mary collapses in the court and is temporarily reduced to "a poor gibbering maniac" (*MB* 406). Beer states that this melodramatic device was favoured by Victorian writers as an expression of "feminine delicacy" (165). However, it does not seem plausible to comprehend this moment as a fragility of Mary's character, while knowing what preceded it. According to Beer, had she been "so feeble", she would not have bravely saved Jem and withheld the truth about her father's crime in order to protect him (165).

5.1.2 Esther the fallen woman

Esther's character plays a crucial role in Mary's story and it is one of the principal themes of the novel. Young Esther makes a foolish choice to follow her soldier lover and gives birth to an illegitimate daughter. After a brief period of happiness, her lover abandons her to fend for herself. Esther in her immaturity is not careful with money, which she previously earned so easily by her work as a factory girl. When a misfortune strikes, desperation drives her to make a drastic decision. Spencer calls attention to the fact that it is Esther's motherly love for her ill daughter which causes her turn to prostitution in a futile effort to save her life (34): "I could not bear to see her suffer, and forgot how much better it would be for us to die together" (*MB* 191). Despite her noble motive she dooms herself in the eyes of God and society as she becomes a fallen woman.

According to Beer, in her first novel Elizabeth Gaskell addressed the issue of prostitution more directly that other writers who preceded her (134). The author uses the words "prostitute" (*MB* 187) or even "street-walker" (*MB* 6) to refer to Esther. As Beer puts it, there is no "attempt to glamourise the profession" and the portrayal of Esther's suffering and life are realistically sorrowful (134).

5.1.2.1 Mary's guardian angel

Even in her hardship and addiction, Esther is driven by her love for Mary and perhaps the memory of her dead daughter as well. She wishes to protect her niece from the same fate and she secretly watches over her. At first Esther dreads approaching Mary directly due to her shame and self-loathing. According to Beer, she does not want to hurt her with her fallen character (137): "And yet I won't pray for her; sinner that I am! Can my prayers be heard? No! they'll only do harm" (*MB* 147).

Nevertheless, after Jem's arrest when there is no other option left, Esther comes to Mary despite the fear and pain it causes her: "She had felt as if some holy spell would prevent her (…) from crossing the threshold of that home of her early innocence" (*MB* 282). Esther herself believes to be cursed by her sins, yet she comes to Mary in the moment when her niece needs a "mother's guidance" (Spencer 36) the most. According to Spencer, by bringing a vital piece of evidence, Esther allows Mary to save Jem (47). Later she reacts in shock to the prospect of Mary kissing her cheek, considering herself damned: "Not me. You must never kiss me. You!" (*MB* 288).

5.1.2.2 The redemption of a fallen woman

Beer notices that throughout the novel Gaskell contemplates Esther's salvation in implications (141). Despite his hatred of Esther, John Barton inquires: "if there was power in the religion he had often heard of, to turn her from her ways" (*MB* 149). Jem sincerely wishes to help her without hesitation and so does Mary later. This demonstrates Gaskell's advocated sense of Christian charity. However, their efforts to save her are in vain as Esther comes to her childhood home dying (Beer 141). She is then buried alongside John in a grave with an inscription that says: "For He will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger for ever (*MB* 473)" indicating that while she was not granted redemption during her life on earth, God will be merciful to her.

5.2 Social class

As was already mentioned in the chapter introducing *Mary Barton*, the main focus of Elizabeth Gaskell was to provide a genuine but compassionate image of the working class and its everyday life. The author did not dwell much on the middle class and its portrayal can be considered stereotyped. However, the reason behind this is that Gaskell's aim was to offer an insight into reconciling the two groups and draw attention to living conditions of the working class.

5.2.1 Portrayal of the working class

When depicting the working class, Gaskell paid special attention to descriptions of various homes and close relationships in the community. She focused on a faithful and moving depiction of the suffering brought about by poverty and hopelessness. At the same time, the story emphasises the importance of paternal love, neighbourly compassion and kindness among the workers.

5.2.1.1 Working-class homes and living conditions

Descriptions of various working-class homes in the spirit of realism are a significant part of the novel. Throughout the story Gaskell introduces to the reader many different families, whose characterisation is largely developed through the depiction of their environment. The most obvious example of this can be seen in the Barton household. As Tucker mentions, at the very beginning of the novel the reader encounters their house and family during a period of prosperity and happiness

(453). The detailed description of the ordinary working-class home lists items such as "blue-and-white check curtains", "two geraniums", "a cupboard, apparently full of plates and dishes, cups and saucers", "a table, which I should call a Pembroke" or "a bright green japanned tea-tray" (*MB* 13) which seem insignificant at the first sight. However, all of these objects not only create an amiable domestic atmosphere, but more importantly they represent small luxuries indicating the current financial situation and well being of the Bartons (Tucker 453).

The situation changes after the death Mrs Barton and the infant son. The fortune of the family begins to decline and it is again reflected in the state of their household. Guy observes that one of the reasons why Mary prefers to spend time with Carson is the estrangement of the family (156) and the "dingy, dreary-looking home; her father still out, the fire extinguished" (*MB* 184). This sombre and empty environment is pointed out multiple times and it is a stark contrast to the joyful and sociable image of the tea-party in the first chapter.

The dwelling of the family of William Davenport, who is a sick factory hand John Barton and George Wilson come to visit, is even more dreary. Tucker notes that the one-room cellar home is cold, damp and so dark that the two men cannot even tell how many children are there at first (454):

> they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fire-place was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's lair, and cried in the dank loneliness (*MB* 68)

Throughout the following scenes the detailed description of the desolate ambiance of the place echoes the desperation, hunger and poverty of the family itself.

Immediately afterwards there follows a shocking contrast and an example of disparity between the classes. The story moves into the household of the upper-middle class Carson and the hungry Wilson finds himself surrounded by an extravagant environment, so different from the cellar he left moments ago. Yet, despite all his wealth, Carson lacks the warmth and compassion the working-class members show to each other. He remains ignorant of their suffering and shows little sympathy for Davenport (Munjal) as is examined in more detail later.

5.2.1.2 Sense of community

A sense of communality and kindness is one the of defining traits of the working class as depicted by Gaskell. In the first chapter, the Bartons host the Wilsons for a tea-party. They have to cautiously count the money which is to be spent on the small joy of a shared meal. Yet, in spite of this the ambiance is nothing but hospitable and cheerful. Spencer brings attention to the fact that in

order to allow the Bartons to keep their pride the guests pretend not to notice the financial dealings and at the same time they intend to compensate this generosity some time in the future (39):

> Then came a long whispering, and chinking of money, to which Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were too polite to attend; knowing, as they did full well, that it all related to the preparations for hospitality; hospitality that, in their turn, they should have such pleasure in offering. (*MB* 14)

Later on in the novel John Barton does not hesitate to give the little money he has and even pawn some of his belongings in order to aid the starving and freezing Davenport family (Spencer 39). Poor Alice Wilson, who lives in a humble cellar room, is delighted when Mary Barton is to come to visit her and makes attentive preparations even though: "Half an ounce of tea and a quarter of a pound of butter went far to absorb her morning's wages" (*MB* 31). After Margaret Jennings begins to receive good wages thanks to her singing, she readily offers the money to those who need it. As Spencer mentions, Margaret hands out: "a sovereign to Mary Barton, some to Mrs Davenport as payment for nursing Alice Wilson" (39).

5.2.1.3 Improvidence in financial matters

All the working-class generosity, though undoubtedly a sign of kindness and Christian charity, is often done impetuously without regard to the possible consequences. The author suggests a sort of shortsightedness of the working class when it comes to money matters. Instead of saving up during the times of plenty, they spend their money almost carelessly and suffer during the times of need (Spencer 39). John Barton is described as someone who: "spent all he got with the confidence (you may also call it improvidence) of one who was willing" (*MB* 25). Spencer remarks that when Mrs Barton dies shortly after the joyous yet frivolous tea-party, "the extravagance of the past night would leave them short of money" (*MB* 22) only adding up to the troubles of the widower (39).

Despite the fact that it might seem like Gaskell criticises the shortsighted spending of money on either food or charity, the narrative equally aims to show a more sympathetic point of view. According to Spencer, it does not seem entirely possible to blame the working-class characters for wanting to enjoy "the simple pleasures, a necessary part of social existence" which are however, "enough to prevent people so poor from saving" (39).

5.2.1.4 The correlation between finances and morality

The character of young Jem Wilson, who is an example of the new working-class generation, represents a different attitude to the impetuous management of finances. Guy points out that as an inventor and an employee of a foundry, he finds himself in better and more secure position than the other factory hands working in the mills (156). Jem invests the money he receives as a reward for

his invention. He purchases an income for his mother and aunt, in order to secure their living. The amount of "twenty pound a year" (*MB* 171) would even be enough to provide "the best o' schooling" and "belly-fulls o' food" (*MB* 171) to his little twin brothers, who unfortunately did not live to see these more fortunate times (Guy 156). At the end of the novel, Jem's experience and education also allows him to easily find new employment in Canada. Stoneman refers to him as a "worker of the future when workers will be 'educated. . ., not mere machines of ignorant men'" and adds that "Jem the inventor is the real source of technological progress" (55).

Yet, even in Jem's case the motivation behind obtaining an income remains the care for his loved ones. The working-class characters extend their help selflessly, but this applies only to those who can afford it. Guy expresses the idea that in *Mary Barton* there is a correlation between a good financial situation and morality (156). People need to be able to afford generous and selfless behaviour and "Christian brotherhood appears to have a price" (Guy 156). In connection with Jane Wilson, it is remarked that: "her prosperity had made her gentler" (MB 171-172). Job Legh and his granddaughter Margaret represent both moral and financial support for Mary during the whole of the novel. However, they are never put into a situation when they would be threatened by poverty (Guy 156).

Throughout the novel, the reader is constantly reminded of the cost of basic necessities such as food or coal, the lack of which results in suffering and death. Guy mentions that even the positive outcome of Jem's trial is endangered by the lack of financial resources which are meant to pay for the lawyer's wages and Mary's journey (153). Nevertheless, in the end it is the communality and joined effort of both friends and strangers that save him.

5.2.2 Portrayal of the middle class

Mary Barton was not meant to focus on the lives and living conditions of the middle class and therefore its characters are given only little space in the narrative. Moreover, it is rather the upper-middle class that is depicted. The sole representatives are the members of the rich mill-owning Carson family, who live in comfort and luxury despite the poverty and suffering of their employees. At first, the murdered son Henry and then later his avenging father equally serve as the main antagonists of the story. According to Bloom, the limited depiction of the Carsons is considered to be "unflatteringly stereotyped" (58). However, there is a reason behind this lack of attention. Spencer points out that by neglecting the portrayal of the upper-middle class Gaskell gave the readers no other option but to direct their focus on the working class, as was her intention (40).

5.2.2.1 Change of ethics and values

Stoneman speaks of two different ethical systems which are captured in the novel (45). The one of the working class is "based on caring and co-operation" as discussed in the previous chapter, whereas "that of the middle class, [is] based on ownership, authority and the law" (Stoneman 45).

Despite being rich, Mr and Mrs Carson come from a working-class background. However, the advancement of their situation caused a decline in their values. The generosity and communality, which the reader observes in the working-class families, has disappeared in the behaviour of the Carsons. This can be best observed on the example of the already mentioned scene in which Wilson visits the extravagant household to ask for an infirmary order to help Davenport. The author describes in detail the gloss and opulence of the place. Carson's daughter Amy demands a rose for "half-a-guinea" and the narrative states that: "Life was not worth having without flowers" (*MB* 79). Remarks such as this make the whole conversation sound both foolish and meaningless, because the reader still remembers the desperation and suffering of the Davenports, which preceded it.

5.2.2.2 The moral shortcomings of Mr Carson

Upon greeting Wilson, Mr Carson does not even think to show him some kind of hospitality, or offer the starving man some of the breakfast his family is just having and neither do the domestic servants. Carson also casually states that: "I don't pretend to know the names of the men I employ" (*MB* 80). Wright calls attention to the crowning moment of the family's ignorance when the young Henry casually takes out five shillings from his pocket and gifts them to Wilson for the "poor fellow" (*MB* 80) Davenport (23). It is the exact same amount of money John Barton manages to gain for the same cause after pawning his own possessions.

The shortcomings of Mr Carson's morality are further captured during the fire in his mill. He does not think about the consequences for his factory hands, who will suffer from it the most. He is rather pleased by the "excellent opportunity" for "refitting their factory with first-rate improvements, for which the insurance money would amply pay" (MB 65) and the fact that he will save money on wages. According to Matus, along with the change of his fortune, Mr Carson has lost "the old sense of responsibility toward the poor" (156) and he seems to be driven by the desire to amass even more capital.

When pursuing the murderer of his son, Mr Carson uses his wealth and status to achieve revenge rather than justice. As Guy mentions, the ample reward offered by Mr Carson ensures the capture of Jem and his money allows him to hire "attorneys skilled in criminal practice" (*MB* 262) and "celebrated barristers" (*MB* 262) (153). He has the law and all its servants, such as the police or the court, on his side only by virtue of having resources and a respectable position. It does not matter

that his desire is only vengeance. Stoneman points out that this is frequently emphasised, for instance by expressions like a "craving thirst for blood" (*MB* 262) or "the fangs of justice" (*MB* 399) (50). Yet, despite all his anger, Mr Carson is during the trial likened to the god Jupiter, which symbolises not just his great power but also his noble appearance, so unlike his actions (Stoneman 50).

5.2.2.3 Solution to the class conflict

Ultimately, it is Mr Carson's grief and desperation which lead him to act without any regard to moral principals or Christian compassion and these are also the same emotions which lead to John Barton's actions. Only at the very end does Carson open his eyes and forgive the murderer of his son. When he witnesses a random scene of forgiveness on a street he is reminded of his youth and former poverty, so different from the one his workers face:

> it was honest, decent poverty; not the grinding squalid misery he had remarked in every part of John Barton's house, and which contrasted strangely with the pompous sumptuousness of the room in which he now sat (*MB* 444)

Spencer observes that the death of Carson's son makes him relive the same suffering as that of the working-class people who lost their children, including John Barton (34). Mr Carson's forgiveness, intention to listen to his workers and willingness to improve their dire conditions is what redeems his previous actions. According to Guy, this seemingly idealised or perhaps even naive ending can be perceived either as an "assertion of Christian optimism" or as "the power of moral benevolence (…) to overcome social discord" between the two social classes (149).

6. *North and South*

North and South was at first printed in Dickens's *Household Words* between the years 1854 and 1855 in twenty-two instalments. Foster mentions that the serialised form required changes to the story in order to be more gripping for the readers and not so lengthy for the journal medium (66-67). Gaskell's originally proposed titles, *Margaret Hale* or *Death and Variations*, were also dismissed by Dickens and substituted with the title that is known today (Foster 67). As a result, the author herself was not entirely satisfied with the final version of the novel, which ended up being more compressed than she would have liked. According to Foster, Gaskell's writing style was "meditative in approach" and "with cumulative rather than instantaneous effects" (67) and therefore was not well suited for the popular serialised form. Nevertheless, during the period the author did not have other opportunities to reach a wide audience, due to the prices of bound books. This left Gaskell with no other way to profitably publish her novels (Foster 68). In 1855 the success of the novel allowed her to publish it twice in book form and make at least some changes to the extensively abbreviated ending (Foster 110).

The protagonist of *North and South* is a young middle-class woman, Margaret Hale, who along with her parents moves from the picturesque countryside in the South of England into the industrial city of Milton in the North. The novel is partially a social condition novel and a bildungsroman. It follows Margaret's new urban life as she observes the rising tension between masters and workers during an unsure economical situation. Upon meeting and befriending some of the suffering factory hands, she acquires deep sympathy for them as well as a sense of social justice. Her relationship with a mill owner, John Thornton, slowly develops from antagonism to mutual understanding as "she converts Thornton to her principles of Christian charity" (Krueger 141).

Similarly as in the case of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell drew from her own life experiences while writing *North and South*. Foster mentions namely Gaskell's childhood in the countryside, moving to an industrial city and personal contact with workers (108). Though a success with readers, the novel attracted less attention from the critics than her first attempt on a similar topic. Guy suggests that the reason behind this was the central romance and "the heterogeneity of its themes" (161). However, Foster points out that it was criticised by some for "factual errors" related to the Lancashire area and cotton trade (112). These complaints can be disputed by stating Gaskell's intentions for writing the novel. The author was not primarily interested in recording a precise account of the industrial North, but to rather offer her view on the complicated situation between masters and workers. *North and South* expresses the idea of their mutual responsibility (Foster 112)

and the necessity of "moral re-education" which are vital to finding a solution and understanding (Guy 162).

As the title suggests, *North and South* also contemplates differences between the industrial and rural parts of England and its people. Margaret mourns the loss of the idyllic countryside and recalls its loveliness throughout the novel. The people are described as less burdened and carefree than the toiling workers in Milton. Nevertheless, when Margaret returns to Helstone at the end of the book she is horrified by the story of a cat being roasted alive for a pagan ritual. This draws another angle to the contrast between the North and the South. While the latter is "pretty but decadent and backward" (Foster 110), the former is full of "energy", "power", "courage", "lurid vividness" (*N&S* 505) and represents progress (Ingham 73).

6.1 Margaret as the protagonist

Margaret Hale is similar to Mary Barton in her age and inner strength but her character development and journey lies elsewhere. Margaret has to come to terms with the change of her situation, social standing and loss of envisioned future. As she gains understanding of social conditions and sympathy for people of a lower class she becomes an arbitrator in the conflict of the novel. According to Spencer, Gaskell expresses through Margaret's character the necessity of "dialogue instead of violence" as a solution to the class conflict (92). At the end, an inheritance and all the acquired knowledge grant Margaret the freedom to govern her own future and power to do good in the Milton community.

6.1.1 The roles of dutiful daughter and strong angel

Margaret is portrayed as a strong character already from the first chapters of the novel. Despite growing up in an upper-middle class home in London, she is unlike her cousin Edith who idly falls asleep during a party. As Stoneman points out, Margaret seems rather removed from the fuss revolving around wedding and dresses (84) as she sinks "more into the background" (*N&S* 7). Contrarily, she eagerly anticipates the return to her picturesque childhood home of Helstone where she will be "at hand to comfort" (*N&S* 15) her parents. When she is presented with her father's decision to leave for Milton, she is distressed by the sudden change in the course of her life:

> She felt that it was a great weight suddenly thrown upon her shoulders. Four months
> ago, all the decisions she needed to make were what dress she would wear for dinner,
> and to help Edith to draw out the lists of who should take down whom in the dinner
> parties at home. (N&S 56)

Her mother is sunken by the situation and also permanently ill, while her father has an almost overly gentle nature lacking resolve. Therefore, Margaret despite her inner disquiet, puts herself in

charge of the moving arrangements and steps into the role of the "quiet authority" (*N&S* 56) of the household (Stoneman 84). Matus mentions another moment later on in the novel when Margaret demonstrates her strength of character (43). When the dead body of Boucher is discovered, Margaret is the one to cover his face with her handkerchief and she undertakes the difficult task of informing his wife about the man's suicide (Matus 43). As Wright observes, Margaret exhibits her "inward strength and well-composedness" throughout the story, as she deals with household affairs, her mother's passing and also takes part in industrial discussions (104).

Due to the upbringing with her aunt Shaw, Margaret possesses gentle manners and grace which impress Thornton. Ingham claims that Margaret represents "the model of middle-class womanhood" (71), but there are equally details in her description that set her apart from it. Remarks in the early chapters, such as "soft feminine defiance" (*N&S* 71), a face "too dignified and reserved for one so young" (*N&S* 15) or a mouth which is "no rosebud that could only open just enough to let out a 'yes' and 'no,' and 'an't please you, sir" (*N&S* 15) imply Margaret's strength of character, courage and maturity. These traits later in the story enable her to stand up to Thornton and engage in an argument with him on behalf of the workers. Therefore, Stoneman suggests that despite embodying many of the 'Angel in the House' qualities, Margaret represents more of a "strong angel" (*N&S* 301) throughout the story (84).

6.1.2 Stepping out of the domestic sphere

When removed from her peaceful rural life, Margaret struggles to adjust the vision of her future. She took pride in "the important post of only daughter in Helstone parsonage" (*N&S* 2), where it would be her duty as a lady to care for the poor villagers (Spencer 91). However, when her father leaves the church to become a tutor she loses that social standing and domestic future she envisioned. In Milton she does find herself in charge of the household, but at the same time she explores the industrial world outside of it.

Margaret gradually acquires understanding and sympathy for the inhabitants as she forms a friendship with the Higginses. She leaves behind the role of the 'Angel in the House' and a pleasing lady such as Edith. Her compassion induces her to engage in debates with Thornton on behalf of the workers and stand up to him. When the economic situation in Milton causes a strike, Margaret goes even further and uses her influence on Thornton to take direct action. She appeals to Thornton's conscience in attempting to disperse the situation and protect the workers from the police.

However, when Thornton's attempt to speak to the enraged crowd fails, Margaret impulsively throws herself around his neck to protect him. As Beer points out, Margaret's expression of courage is partially rooted in a "guilty conscience", because she was the one to make him face the workers,

but also in the conviction that "the mob will not hurt a woman" (166). Ingham points out that in this moment Margaret steps out of the domestic sphere assigned to women into the public one (67). Nevertheless, her bold move is not understood as an act of courage but rather as a woman's declaration of love.

6.1.3 Sexual and moral shame

Margaret then goes through an inner conflict, because of the way her actions during the riot are understood by the public. Thornton even feels compelled to propose to her in order to preserve her honour. However, the proposal only strengthens her sense of shame and she feels as if she was: "some prisoner, falsely accused of a crime that she loathed and despised" (*N&S* 234). Out loud Margaret claims that: "Any woman, worthy of the name of woman, would come forward to shield (…) a man in danger from the violence of numbers" (N&S 236). Yet, on the inside she feels "a sense of sexual guilt" (Ingham 68). Ingham further suggests that Margaret denies to herself that the reason behind protecting Thornton might be her attraction to him rather than a just a sense of womanly duty (69). According to Stoneman, such motivation would be in contradiction to the ethos "of the virtuous woman" professed by the middle class (85).

Later, Margaret finds herself in another difficult situation when she tells another, this time conscious, lie in order to allow her brother to escape the country. This moral sin burdens her more than the aftermath of protecting Thornton. Soneman observes that as a result Margaret is reduced: "to something like a conventional Victorian lady" (86). She loses consciousness, is feeble and silent up to the point that the family servant claims that she is "more dead than alive" (*N&S* 339). When Thornton confronts her about her truthfulness, Margaret does not stand up to him to defend herself as she would have done in the past, but she remains in "reproachful sadness" (*N&S* 406) and silent.

Spencer expresses the idea that these two moral dilemmas are the result of Gaskell's effort "to create a heroic woman within the ideological constraints of sexually pure Victorian femininity" (93). By her courageous protection of Thornton, Margaret is confronted with feelings which she tries to repress in order to protect her dignity. By protecting Frederick, she faces the divergence between male and female honour, the former being truthfulness and the latter chastity. While Margaret is distressed by lying, Thornton is preoccupied by the though that she acted "unmaidenly" (*N&S* 514) and discovery of the truth alone is enough for him to forgive her (Spencer 93).

6.1.4 Liberation from daughterly duties and seizing power

The death of her mother makes Margaret "weary of this continual call (…) for strength" (*N&S* 390). She has to not only take care of the father, but also at the same time face the consequences of her lie. She comes to desire "the relief of solitude" (*N&S* 348) and even when her father passes

away she feels "entirely free from any responsibility" (*N&S* 416). Margaret, who was up to that moment required to provide others with her strength, is suddenly relieved of that duty. As Ingham points out, the heroine is thus allowed to "reclaim her own selfhood" and is liberated to change herself (73).

When, at the end of the novel, Margaret inherits from Mr Bell, the resources grant her another form of freedom and power. Unusually, she does not "sit back decoratively and wait for a husband" (Beer 168) as it would be expected of a middle-class woman during the period. Instead she takes "her life into her own hands" (*N&S* 506) and Edith even worries that her cousin will become "strong-minded" (*N&S* 506). Not only does the money grant Margaret financial security and independence, more importantly it allows her to provide aid to Thornton on behalf of the workers in Milton, which became dear to her. Stoneman makes the point that by gaining control of capital Margaret seizes "masculine power" (90). However, as Spencer points out, by agreeing to marry Thornton she then trades it for "a spiritual and moral authority" (95). It is a position more in accord with the womanly domestic sphere customary to Victorian novels and a role in which she may better employ the "values of love and compassion" (Spencer 95).

6.2 Social class

Mary Barton was criticised for neglecting the viewpoint of the middle class and therefore one of Gaskell's reasons behind writing *North and South* was to correct this imbalance. The majority of the narrative is told from the viewpoint of Margaret or Mr Thornton and therefore it is considerably less focused on detailed description of the suffering and living conditions of the poor. The story introduces only a handful of more detailed working-class characters, but simultaneously the portrayal of the middle-class masters is nowhere near as stereotyped as in *Mary Barton*.

6.2.1 Portrayal of the working class

Using a middle-class character as a protagonist allowed Gaskell to incorporate into the story not only her own experience, but also the view of the working class as she came to know it during her life. Along with descriptions of the industrial town and community of workers, the author made use of her knowledge of the local dialect. In the direct speech of the workers are featured words such as "hoo" for "she" or "clem" for "starve" which are meant to provide a more realistic impression. The novel features the three main working-class characters who are depicted in more depth. The characters of John Boucher, Nicholas and Bessy Higgins serve to show the hardship, communality, and shortcomings but also the intelligence of the working class.

6.2.1.1 Margaret's attitude to the working class

At the beginning of the novel, upon moving to Milton Margaret is at first startled by the brash manners and outspokenness of the factory workers all around her. They are described "with bold, fearless faces, and loud laughs and jests" (*N&S* 82) and their "carelessness of all common rules of street politeness" (*N&S* 82) intimidates her at first. Yet, she soon learns to answer to the factory girls who "with their rough, but not unfriendly freedom" remark on her dress or even touch to feel it. She is more flustered by the male workers who comment "on her looks, in the same open fearless manner" (*N&S* 82).

When Margaret is exploring Milton with its "fogs, evidence of poverty and suffering" (Foster 108) she encounters Nicholas Higgins and his daughter Bessy. She is "half-amused, half-nettled" (*N&S* 85) by their manners, but pleased to have found "a human interest" (*N&S* 85) Milton becomes "a brighter place to her" (*N&S* 85). As she would do in the South, Margaret invites herself for a visit to their home. Guy notes that though Margaret is led by seemingly charitable motivations, Higgins is rightfully distrustful of her (164). He perceives that her concern is not entirely genuine and "partly selfish, born of a mixture of curiosity and conscience rather than real sympathy" (Guy 164).

As Margaret becomes closer to the Higginses, she also becomes more aware of the difficult lives of the working class in Milton. Bessy's poor health weighs down upon her and the visits to their home open her eyes towards the town itself: "As she went along the crowded narrow streets, she felt how much of interest they had gained by the simple fact of her having learnt to care for a dweller in them" (*N&S* 117). Her polite interest and curiosity gradually change into genuine sympathy as she establishes friendship with the Higgenses and even visits the Bouchers. Guy indicates that Margaret gradually comes to understand that simply "moral guidance" (165) is not sufficient in friendship. It is financial support that can provide real help to the poor workers and their children.

> How was she ever to go away into comfort and forget that man's voice, with the tone of unutterable agony, telling more by far than his words of what he had to suffer? She took out her purse; she had not much in it of what she could call her own, but what she had she put into Bessy's hand without speaking. (N&S 187)

6.2.1.1 Communality and hospitality

As was already mentioned in the previous chapter, Gaskell's depiction of the working class points out the communality and hospitality among its members. When Margaret comes to the Higginses for a visit, young Mary uses a generous amount of coal to make a fire. In working-class homes coal has the same value as food and this act is a "a sign of hospitable welcome" (*N&S* 118),

which Margaret does not realise. Guy observes that when the Bouchers are short of money during the strike, Bessy assures Margaret that they will be provided for no matter what (165). Bessy seems "almost afraid" (*N&S* 187) that Margaret would assume that the lack of resources on the part of the Higginses would prevent them from taking care of those in need (Guy 165). As Guy mentions, Bessy explains to Margaret what is considered only natural in the working-class community: "if neighbours doesn't see after neighbours, I dunno who will" (*N&S* 187) (165). Later on Margaret even compares the selflessness and care of the working class to a "wild bird, that can feed her young with her very heart's blood" (*N&S* 183).

6.2.1.2 Class conflict

Despite the fact that the depiction of the working-class suffering is given less space in *North and South* than in *Mary Barton*, it is still a significant part of the novel. The impact of industrialisation also takes more specific shape. The strike and violence are no longer an abstract threat, resulting from the lack of communication between the masters and their hands. The workers struggle to provide for their families with already low wages and due to the bad situation on the market their income is to be even lower (Spencer 90). It is their desperation which drives them to participate in the riot:

> they were like Boucher, with starving children at home—relying on ultimate success in
> their efforts to get higher wages, and enraged beyond measure at discovering that
> Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of bread (*N&S* 214)

However, as Spencer points out, when Margaret, a young woman, is injured, the sight of her blood is enough to waken the angered rioters from "their trance of passion" (*N&S* 217) and tame their wrath (92).

6.2.1.3 Hardship and deaths caused by industrial exploitation

Glasser calls attention to the point that Bessy and Margaret are in fact the same age, but their lives could not be more different. Despite her youth, Bessy is already depleted by the factory work. She is slowly dying as a result of inhaling cotton "fluff" (124) in a mill, because its owner did not care to install ventilators, as it would bring him no additional profit (Glasser). She has known only hardship and harbours no illusions about her prospects for the future. She is resigned about her fate and serenely claims "spring nor summer will do me good" (*N&S* 84) or "in a week or a fortnight I may be dead and buried" (*N&S* 122).

John Boucher, who has a wife and eight children, struggles to provide for them. Bessy describes him as "a weak kind o' chap" (N&S 187) who is not wise enough to take care of his family. As Stoneman points out, despite the help Boucher receives from the Union, he regards it as "a worser

tyrant than e'er th' masters" (*N&S* 186) (82). It is his "dissident fraction" which later causes the riot scene, undermining the otherwise non-violent intention of the other strikers (Stoneman 83). As a punishment for participating, Boucher is denied employment by the masters. In his desperate state, this is the last straw that brings him to committing suicide. He is found with "his skin (…) stained by the water in the brook, which had been used for dyeing purposes" (*N&S* 355). Ingham suggests that his death is "the direct result of industrial exploitation" in the same way as that of Bessy (60).

6.2.1.4 Intelligence of the workers depicted in the character of Nicholas Higgins

Nicholas Higgins represents the polar opposite to Boucher. Foster indicates that he is removed from the violence of the riot (109), despite otherwise being a committed and active member of the Union. When he loses his employment, he persists in his efforts and acts on Margaret's advice even at the price of his pride. The depth of his character and intelligence is further expressed by his ability to lead rational and calm discussions with Mr Hale or Mr Thornton. As Foster points out, this was meant to demonstrate the intellect of the working class equal to that of the middle class, which was lacking in *Mary Barton* (109).

In one conversation Higgins points out that many workers in Milton "don't believe i' the Bible" (*N&S* 272) because they are "real folk" (*N&S* 272). He asks Mr Hale why a poor worker should occupy himself with trying to earn his place in the "eternal life" (*N&S* 272), when his day has to be spent by earning money for bread and "real things" (*N&S* 272). Only the masters, with their fortune and leisure time, have the luxury to spend their days with things which are essentially useless to the everyday lives of workers.

6.2.2 Portrayal of the middle class

North and South depicts two different groups of people belonging to the middle class. The first are the rich Milton manufacturers, who gained their fortune fairly recently and are considered rather coarse due to their manners and connection to trade. The second group, represented by the Hales and their London family, embody the traditional refined values and standards associated with the middle class.

6.2.2.1 Middle-class homes

In the same way that Margaret is amazed by Milton and its inhabitants, John Thornton is captivated by her southern beauty and by her family's elegantly middle-class household (Ingham 58-59). The drawing room of the Hales is less luxurious than his own, but more tasteful. It has "a warm, sober breadth of colouring" (*N&S* 91-92), there are "pretty baskets of work" (N&S 92) deposited around the room as well as "books, not cared for on account of their binding solely"

(N&S 92) which "lay on one table, as if recently put down" (*N&S* 92). The atmosphere of the place is comfortable and in its own way effortlessly elegant.

In contrast, Thornton's house is "twenty times as fine" (*N&S* 91) reflecting the higher social status and wealth of his family, but at the same time it is described as "ponderous" (*N&S* 91) and "not one quarter as comfortable" (*N&S* 91). When visiting it for the first time, Margaret is unpleasantly impressed by the contrived opulence. The furniture is "bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava" (*N&S* 133). The carpet is covered by a "linen drugget, glazed and colourless" (*N&S* 133) and the chandelier is wrapped in protective cloth. Books are "arranged at regular intervals" (*N&S* 133) appearing "like gaily-coloured spokes of a wheel" (*N&S* 134) and serving only as a decoration. According to Ingham, the whole space appears disagreeable and tasteless by the southern middle-class standards (59) and it is showing "evidence of care and labour (…) solely to ornament, and then to preserve ornament from dirt or destruction" (*N&S* 134).

6.2.2.2 The upper-middle class daughters Fanny and Edith

Another contrast the novel calls attention to is between Margaret and Fanny Thornton, but also between Margaret and her cousin Edith. Milton-born Fanny is described as having "second-rate airs and graces" (*N&S* 434). Her "restless" (*N&S* 194) manner and "wandering eyes" (*N&S* 194) are compared to Margaret's steady and graceful posture. Fanny seems quite shallow and vain, lacking the strength and Milton pride her brother and mother possess. She complains of her "lilac silk" which "was utterly ruined" (*N&S* 116) on a visit to the factory and she is easily distracted by "the pleasant excitement of seeing the effect of a new bonnet in the looking-glass" (*N&S* 113). This brings to mind a moment when Edith makes "a black mark on her muslin gown" from handling a tea-kettle and behaves "just like a hurt child" (*N&S* 12) about it. Stoneman observes that Edith is even likened to "Titania, the Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella" (84) waiting to be rescued by a prince. Both young ladies live a sheltered life due to the privilege of their upper-middle class family's wealth.

6.2.2.3 Pride and sternness of character in Mr Thornton and his mother

Mrs Thornton, on the other hand, is more like her son and she retains a fierce pride from the days she belonged to the working class. She speaks of Milton and her son's accomplishments only in superlatives and her ego is easily wounded on their account. She has "quick judgment and firm resolution" (*N&S* 111) and her commands are "sharply-cut and decided" (*N&S* 226). The same character traits are largely displayed in Mr Thornton, who is "proud of belonging to a town" (*N&S* 94). He is described to be "as iron a chap as any in Milton" (*N&S* 196) who earned his success through "the sweat of his brow" (*N&S* 175) and "self-denial" (*N&S* 99) learned from his mother.

However, Thornton's firmness of character is also accompanied by a lack of sympathy for the working class. Even though his mills are equipped with wheels to ventilate the "fluff" (*N&S* 120) and altered chimneys to produce less smoke, it is all done for bigger profit. Thornton equally shares the same attitude to the workers as the rest of the Milton manufacturers. He declares: "I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character" (*N&S* 99) as he believes that their suffering is the result of their own indulgence. The masters, including Thornton, disdain the hands for their lack of intellect. As Ingham points out, one of them declares that in case of ruination he will be better off than the workers because "he had head as well as hands, while they had only hands" (*N&S* 175) (64).

As R. Williams says, Thornton's rigid beliefs and "unfeeling" (*N&S* 200) character is gradually "humanized" (99) by Margaret's influence of feminine and christian sensibility. Guy speaks of his learning to acknowledge the importance of compassion and feeling even in trade affairs (167). Thornton provides employment to Higgins on behalf of the Boucher children the worker takes care of. Ingham calls attention to the fact that at the end of the novel Thornton refuses "to speculate with his creditors' money" (60) even though it would bring him the profit he needs. Despite the fact that he misses an opportunity to make money, the decision affirms his status as a morally virtuous man. He then goes even further as he establishes dining rooms to keep his employees fed and begins to listen to them. However, as Raymond points out, this philanthropic project is again enabled only with Margaret's help and inherited property (99).

7. *Mary Barton* and *North and South*

Mary Barton and *North and South* are both industrial novels examining similar topics. They are both set in a similar urban environment based on the Manchester area and cotton mill industry. They draw inspiration from history, namely the 'Hungry Forties', but also from the author's personal life. They revolve around the difficult living conditions of the workers and the conflict with their masters. Due to this, there can be observed both similarities and differences in certain reoccurring themes, such as the depiction of the working and middle class or the character of the main heroines.

7.1 Social class

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapters, there is a different degree of prominence given to the working and middle class in the two novels. Whereas *Mary Barton* focuses almost entirely on capturing the hardship and living conditions of workers, the narrative of *North and South* predominantly follows the consciousness of the middle-class characters. However, while the representatives of the middle class in *Mary Barton* are portrayed as flat and stereotyped, this cannot be said about the working-class characters in *North and South*.

7.1.1 The working class

Gaskell's portrayal of the working class is distinctive in her intention to appeal to the sympathy of her readers. Workers are always depicted with importance placed on their families and relationships in the community. They differ from the middle class through the loyalty and kindness they show to one another. This communality does not exist in the middle class outside of families and, according to Guy, it was meant to demonstrate "the decency of the poor" (166).

Barton and Wilson take care of the sick Davenport and his children despite their own lack of money and Higgins looks after the Bouchers in the exact same way. Stoneman claims that all prominent parental figures, including Barton, Job Legh and Higgins, adopted a "nurturing role" brought about by poverty and the necessity of their circumstances (46). They are shown when they are tending to the sick, caring for the well-being of their neighbours or looking after their motherless daughters. Stoneman refers to this also as "a 'feminisation' of working-class men" (46), but Stoneman stresses that at the same time these men partake in political life, strikes or even a murder.

The suffering of the working class is illustrated for the reader mainly through descriptions of unwelcoming and dirty households, with cold fireplaces and hungry children. The poverty is rooted in insufficient wages caused by the bad situation on the market, but understood mainly as a fault of

greedy masters. *Mary Barton* is set directly during the 'Hungry Forties' and therefore the dire conditions caused by a lack of money and starvation occupy an extensive part of the story. *North and South*, which is set later during the fifties, reflects the slightly better situation on the market and the deaths occurring in the novel are rather reflections of the industrialisation itself.

Spencer expresses the idea that since *Mary Barton* depicts a more numerous community of working-class families, their hardship appears to be "representative of a whole class" (90). It creates a weightier and more grave atmosphere than in *North and South*, where the heart of the action is occupied by the middle class. In the second novel, therefore, the attention to the misery of the workers is weakened as their lives are given less space in the story. According to Spencer, the small number of featured working-class characters make the suffering seem "more simply personal and more manageable" (90).

7.1.2 The middle class

North and South features a variety of middle-class characters and families and it includes the contrast between the 'old' and 'new' middle class. The old or southern middle class is represented mainly by the Hales, who despite being less well-off appear to be more distinguished than the wealthy mill owners. The newly emerged middle, or rather upper-middle, class comes from the ranks of the masters. They differ in the origin of their status and demonstrate behaviour that seems rather vulgar and foreign to the members of the traditional middle class. To the second group belongs Thornton and the other Milton masters, as well as the Carsons who are the only representatives in *Mary Barton*.

Masters, or mill owners, as a group are in both novels treated similarly. During the meeting with the union representatives in *Mary Barton*, or during the dinner party at the Thorntons in *North and South*, the masters express their disdain for the workers. In *Mary Barton* their dismissal turns into mockery which sets in motion the murder at the centre of the plot. In *North and South* this situation serves to enlighten their motives, the circumstances of the strike, and also to show them together as a community.

7.1.2.1 The masters Carson and Thornton

Both novels include a middle-class character who poses as the antagonist to the workers. Foster suggests that Thornton might have been modelled after a real person living in the period (109) and he is given considerable more space in the narrative than Carson, whose portrayal reflects the stereotype of a rich middle-class factory owner. What they have in common is their origin. They are both self-made men who belonged to the working class in their youth. However, while Thornton is

described as a hard but just person, Carson's personality is dominated by his desire to acquire more money and above all by his desire for vengeance.

Another difference lies within their character development. While Thornton, under Margaret's influence, shows a capability and willingness to change and to become a better master, Carson is not given this space for progress. Although his moral awakening leads him to give forgiveness, it is rather "a solution more symbolic than material" (Stoneman 79). The narrative does not offer an indication that it would bring him to make any change in his attitude towards his employees, whereas Thornton starts building kitchens and dining rooms for his workers, regardless of his unfavourable financial situation.

7.1.2.2 Women of the upper-middle class

As for the middle-class women, there are but few of them featured in *Mary Barton* and they all conform to "the middle-class concept of ornamental femininity" (Stoneman 50) which contrasts with "the useful, caring habits of the working class" (Stoneman 50). The young daughters of Carson clearly resemble Edith and Fanny Thornton in *North and South*. All of them are alike in their love for dresses and other things which are, in the context of working-class suffering, seen simply as frivolities. Ingham points out that similarly, the much older wives of the manufacturers talk in a way that enables them to mention all their wealth "in the prettiest accidental manner possible" (*N&S* 202) (72).

7.1.3 Masters and workers

Both novels feature the conflict between masters and their workers as an important part of the plot and they explore similar themes connected to it. This source of tension is brought about by poverty, desperation and the bad situation on the market, but is regarded differently by the two sides.

7.1.3.1 Paternalism

Stoneman expresses the idea that the two novels, but especially *Mary Barton*, examine the notion of "paternalism" (47) in relation to the middle and working class. In other words, paternalism identifies the attitude of masters, representing fathers, to their workers, who are understood as children. In *Mary Barton* Carson is portrayed as a neglectful father, who has little care for those he is responsible for (Stoneman 47). While working-class characters educate and raise their own children towards independence and responsibility, the masters do not provide them with the same treatment. In *North and South*, Margaret observes that: "the masters would like their hands to be merely tall, large children (…) with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience" (*N&S* 142). Ingham mentions that as fathers, the masters have an "absolute authority over their workers" (64), but the

novels show them treating their employees with a dismissive and neglectful attitude. According to Stoneman, by refusing to look upon them as equal, they do not allow them to grow (48) and at the same time they retain their power over them.

7.1.3.1 The cause and solution to the class conflict

Gaskell's novels further criticise the lack of communication between the classes, which is presented as a significant cause of the tension between masters and workers. In *Mary Barton* the masters reject the demands of the Union almost immediately, without any explanation to its representatives and treat them with disdain. In *North and South*, this is developed further. Milton's manufacturers see their workers as not intelligent enough to engage with them in a discourse. They do not explain to them the situation of the market that compels them to keep the wages low. Margaret asks why "could you not explain what good reason you have for expecting a bad trade?" (*N&S* 140) and Thornton proudly retorts by asking if she explains herself to her servants. In return, Margaret makes the valid observation that the "two classes [are] dependent on each other in every possible way" (*N&S* 141) yet because of their antagonism they continuously suspect each other.

Due to the nonexistent conversation, the circle of disagreement cannot be broken as the workers naturally assume the masters to be simply avaricious (Guy 167). The resolution of the conflict in *Mary Barton*, when Carson forgives the murderer of his son, is a symbolical reconciliation between the two classes. However, in *North and South* Thornton's experiment with dining rooms allows him to "bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact" (*N&S* 525). Stoneman acknowledges that Gaskell knew it would not be the end of strikes, but that it might lessen the "venomous sources of hatred" (*N&S* 525) that cause them (80).

7.1.3.1 Trade unions

Both novels feature trade unions as an agent in the conflict of masters and workers, which is meant to provide power to the workers "since 'unity is strength'" (Stoneman 82). Manufacturers naturally see unions as a bothersome element and are not willing to meet their demands. As a result, in *Mary Barton* a murder is committed on behalf of the union and in *North and South* the union organises a strike. However, while in *Mary Barton* the act is intentionally violent and born out of desperation, in *North and South* it is initially intended as peaceful. Foster suggests that the novel "takes a maturer look at the unions" (109). The strikers are "charged (…) to lie down and die, if need were, without striking a blow" (*N&S* 241), because by keeping the protest non-violent the union would endorse the righteousness of its demands. Unlike Barton, who becomes the tool of the union for murder, Higgins would "ha' given his right hand if [the riot] had never come to pass" (*N&S* 241).

7.2 Women

Mary Barton and *North and South* feature a variety of female characters in different roles. Apart from rough but independent factory girls and shallow upper-middle class daughters, Gaskell pays special attention to mothers and their role. Noteworthy is also the comparison of Mary and Margaret, her two main heroines.

7.2.1 Mothers and motherly figures

The theme of the motherless heroine is a reoccurring trope in Gaskell's novels. In the absence of the mother, the nurturing role has to inevitably be taken over by someone else. In *North and South* Nicholas Higgins is raising both of his daughters after the death of his wife and John Barton attempts to do the same in *Mary Barton*. The nurturing qualities adopted by the working class enable them to do so, but Higgins happens to be more successful as Barton never truly recovers from the absence of his wife. Therefore, he cannot fill the motherly role and give guidance to Mary in the time of her greatest need, nor would he be able to do so.

Esther is the only one who can help Mary as she once faced the similar choices. Stoneman points out that the motherly message Esther comes to deliver is ultimately "the fruit of her 'fallen' experience" (52), which was tragically fuelled by the love for her own child in the first place. Although Margaret Hale in *North and South* is offered similar guidance after her mother's death, the advice of Mrs Thornton is neither required nor welcomed. Unlike in Mary's case, it is delivered only out of obligation and with underlying spiteful intention.

According to Ingham, in other cases "biological mothers characteristically fail" in the role of "caring (…) and cherishing" (76). In *North and South*, all responsibility for the family falls to Margaret, due to Mrs Hale's fragile health and self-centeredness. Although Mrs Thornton provides her children with more attention, she is too soft with Fanny and way too protective of John (Ingham 76). Mrs Wilson, in *Mary Barton*, shows the same over-possessive behaviour when it comes to Jem. Both mothers esteem their sons highly and in their pride they look down upon Mary and Margaret, who they deem unworthy of their superior sons. While Mrs Wilson eventually starts to soften up to Mary after she saves Jem's life during the trial, Mrs Thornton continues to hold Margaret in disregard even after the events of the strike. As Job Legh observes: "a mother only gives up her son's heart inch by inch to his wife, and then she gives it up with a grudge" (*MB* 405).

7.2.2 Mary Barton and Margaret Hale

Both Mary and Margaret are undoubtedly the protagonists of their stories. Although, Gaskell intended Margaret to be the main heroine from the beginning, Foster mentions that it was not like that in Mary's case (37). Mary's character and development is therefore given significantly less

space in the narrative. However, despite the fact that both come from a different background and social class, they are both kindhearted, compassionate and, as Beer puts it, "strong-minded and self-reliant in physical as well as moral issues" (165).

Throughout the novels, the protagonists have to make a symbolic journey from their youth to adulthood. For Mary it is her pride and desire to rise above her station, while for Margaret it is rather her lack of knowledge about Milton and her ignorance of the working-class hardship. Margaret seems to be the more mature of the two. She is forced by circumstances to manage family affairs and take care of her parents from the first chapters of the novel. Nothing like that is required of Mary early in the novel. She assumes the nurturing role only at the end of the story, when her father is dying and she becomes Jem's wife.

7.2.2.1 Power deriving from public roles and social class

Their public roles differ in accordance to their class as well. Naturally, Margaret is privileged by her middle-class status, despite the fact that her father is a dissenter and only a tutor. Unlike Mary, she has not experienced the hunger and misery of the working class firsthand and her life is not restricted by lack of finances. Spencer notes that Margaret's access to both the middle and working-class worlds enables her to become a "mediator" (91) in the conflict of the novel. Her middle-class status empowers her and gives her not only an opportunity to be heard, but more importantly to influence the Milton community in a ways the seamstress's apprentice Mary would never be able to.

On the other hand, Mary is in a certain way given freedom by her working-class status. As Beer points out, "Margaret Hale is a lady and cannot be expected to thread her way through strange rough cities" (165). Mary can openly take active action and has liberty to "accost tough sailors at the quayside and get herself rowed down the river in an open boat" (Beer 165). Unlike Margaret she does not face the risk of losing her 'respectability' in the eyes of public for actions like this. Eventually, even Mary assumes a public role in her story. Stoneman suggests that by speaking out during the trial Mary obtains "brief public power" (54) even if it is only temporary and driven by necessity (55). She embraces the opportunity in order to save Jem and shield her father, but that is where her part ends (Stoneman 55).

7.2.2.2 Consequences of heroic actions

Due to their heroic actions both protagonists are also briefly deprived of their spirit and strength. It is a result of a guilty conscience originating in the lies they told to protect their loved ones. Even though Mary's moral offense is not an outward lie, but rather withholding of the truth, it has a similar effect on her as it has on Margaret. The fainting, feebleness and silence on their part

however, cannot be understood as a weakness of their character, but rather as a result of the pain caused by an inner conflict and high moral qualities.

7.2.2.3 The end of the journey as wife and fiancée

The last significant difference between Mary and Margaret is the end of their journey. As Matus points out, even though both heroines step forward and take action in times of need "Mary sinks into private sphere when her task is done" (145). She sails away to Canada with Jem towards a better life, "leaving the stark realities of the Manchester slums behind her" (Bloom 58) and finds fulfillment in the domestic sphere as a mother. Spencer observes that when at the end of *North and South* Margaret agrees to marry Thornton and become his wife this decision will include her giving up the "economic power" (95) and freedom she gained. Nevertheless, Stoneman underlines that unlike Mary she will remain involved in the public sphere of life, Milton's affairs and "the process of social change" (90) commenced by Thornton' s philanthropic plans.

8. Conclusion

The introduction to this thesis stated that its aim would be to explore the depiction of social class and women in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Both of the analysed themes play a significant role in each novel and were close to the author's heart. The industrial theme was primarily meant to provide a sympathetic view of the working class and thus rouse the attention of her readers. As a wife and mother, Gaskell also created a variety of compelling female characters, who are defined not only by their compassion and Christian charity but also by their inward strength and courage.

The theoretical part examined the Victorian period from the sociohistorical point of view. The Industrial Revolution brought about massive urbanisation, the rise of the middle class, but it also caused the lower classes to live and work in very difficult conditions. Due to the high prices of food and general poverty during the 1840s, social unrest grew and also the importance of trade unions, which fought for better rights for the workers. The morality of Victorian society was based on respectability, hard work but above all family. Women were valued for their chastity, pure morality and they were supposed to adhere to the 'Angel in the House' ideal. According to Victorian society, they flourished in the domestic sphere tending to children and the household. However, this model applied mainly to the women from the upper and middle classes. Unlike them, so-called 'factory girls' of the working class, though considered coarse, earned their wages and thus retained a certain degree of independence at least until they married.

The practical part of the thesis applied the context of the era and Gaskell's own life experience to her writing and her depiction of society and characters. The aim was to assess the ways in which the author adhered to the Victorian norms and the ways in which she diverted from them.

Mary Barton is predominantly concerned with the hardship of the working class. The heroine of the story, Mary, is a young working-class woman driven by her desire to become a 'lady' and live a life removed from the poverty. Her vanity and ambition bring her dangerously close to becoming a 'fallen woman' as happened to her aunt. Esther plays an important part in the story by becoming a brief motherly figure to her niece, despite her self-loathing and 'fallen' nature. While the message Esther comes to deliver is not needed to save Mary from the fate of a 'fallen woman', it does enable her to find an inner strength and become the saviour of the story. Despite her underprivileged status as a working-class woman, Mary manages to assume a public role, which grants her brief power that she then uses to protect rather than condemn. In the eyes of the reader Mary's bravery expiates her youthful lapse in judgement, however, Esther is not granted this forgiveness even though the

author contemplates it. Esther the 'fallen woman' dies and the main surviving characters sail away from the misery in a slightly idealised ending.

In relation to social class, *Mary Barton* places an emphasis on two different ethical systems. The one of the workers is based on mutual aid and compassion, while the one of the rich masters is based solely on capital and law. Nevertheless, the kindness of the lower classes comes at the price of improvidence in financial matters, which only serves to aggravate their already difficult living situation. Attention is equally paid to realistic descriptions of different homes, which reflect the character and the situation of the families living there. The upper-middle class Carsons are depicted as ignorant of the situation of their workers and they thirst for money. Mainly the character of Mr Carson serves as a stereotyped example of a master with moral shortcomings, who puts forward personal gain at the expense of solidarity. However, the ending of the story suggests that pain is a universal thing and it underlines the importance of Christian compassion and forgiveness.

North and South examines many similar themes, but the story is told mainly from the middle-class perspective. The protagonist Margaret Hale is a young woman dealing with the loss of social status and envisioned future because of her father's decision. She shows great inner strength, but at the same time she plays the role of a dutiful daughter and demonstrates the traits of the 'Angel in the House'. However, it is her compassion that makes her take an interest in the world outside her home. She engages in social discussions and eventually even directly steps out into the public sphere while protecting Mr Thornton and later her brother. The consequences of her actions cause Margaret to feel sexual and moral shame, which manifest in a deprivation of her strength. Eventually, she is liberated from her duties, given access to power in the form of capital and uses it to do good in the Milton community she has come to love.

As for the depiction of social class, *North and South* describes the industrial city and the community of workers as viewed by a middle-class outsider. Gaskell again stresses the communality among the workers, but she also calls attention to the industrial exploitation and the intelligence of workers. The depicted upper-middle class is represented by Milton's masters with their flashy luxury which seems vulgar in comparison to the effortless elegance of the traditional middle class portrayed by the Hales. The character of Mr Thornton is defined by his pride and firmness of character, but unlike Carson he takes care of the health of his workers and gradually learns the importance of compassion.

Both novels explore the notion of paternalism as a relationship between the masters and workers, which is likened to the one of incompetent children and neglectful parents. *North and South* develops the conflict between the two estranged groups in more detail than *Mary Barton*. In both

cases the desperation of the workers drives them to a violent action originating in a lack of communication, but it is the author's later novel that provides more in-depth insight into the motivations of both sides. Each novel equally suggests a different solution to the hostility. *Mary Barton* offers a rather symbolic reconciliation based on mutual pain and Christianity. *North and South* also uses the premise of Christian kindness, but demonstrates it through a more practical solution that will enable contact and discussion between the classes.

As for the female characters, there are many motherly figures featured in both stories, who are often very much alike. Some of them embody the usual nurturing qualities, others fail in this regard and two of them even display jealous over-possessiveness. The protagonists Mary and Margaret share several similar character traits, such as inward strength, kindness and bravery. Where they fundamentally differ is their class status and privileges deriving from it. While Margaret is empowered by her social standing, Mary is in a way liberated by hers. In their stories they both enter the public domain and acquire different forms of power, which they use for the benefit of others. At the end of her journey Mary returns to the domestic sphere and finds happiness as a wife and mother. Margaret also willingly gives up her power and independence by becoming a fiancée. She exchanges her capital for moral influence, but unlike in Mary's case it is suggested that she will remain involved in the public sphere as well.

To conclude, Gaskell's novels provide a sympathetic, yet realistic and insightful portrayal of the working class even though it sometimes, but not always, comes at the cost of stereotyping the middle class. The author captures a variety of women characters who display not only the typical traits of the period, but also admirable strength, kindness and willingness to step out of their designated role and take action.

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