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**SOCIAL ISSUES OF VICTORIAN AGE IN  
E. GASKELL`S NOVELS  
VIKTORIJAS LAIKA SOCIĀLĀS PROBLĒMAS  
E. GASKELAS ROMĀNOS**

BACHELOR THESIS

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## ANOTĀCIJA

Bakalaura darba tēma ir Viktorijas laika sociālās problēmas E. Gaskelas romānos. Darba mērķis ir salīdzināt Gaskelas romānus „Mērija Bārtone” un „Ziemeļi un dienvidi” ar teorētisko informāciju par Viktorijas laika sociālajām problēmām un industrializācijas procesu 19. gadsimtā Lielbritānijā. Salīdzinājums ir veikts, lai atklātu kādas sociālas problēmas ir attēlotas romānos, un cik precīzi Gaskelas atainojums atbilst 19. gadsimta situācijai Lielbritānijā. Pētījumu metodes ir: vēsturiska un salīdzinoša analīze, teksta analīze. Pētījuma rezultāti atklāja, ka Gaskela attēloja dažādas sociālas problēmas kuras ir saistītas ar 19. gadsimta industrializāciju Lielbritānijā.

**Atslēgvārdi:** Gaskela, Viktorijas laiks, sociālās problēmas, industriālā revolūcija, strādnieku šķira, salīdzinājums

## ABSTRACT

The theme of this Bachelor thesis is the depiction of social issues of Victorian age in E. Gaskell's novels. The purpose of the paper is to compare Gaskell's novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South* on the basis of the theoretical background about Victorian society and industrialization process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The comparison is made in order to find out what social issues are depicted in the novels and how accurately Gaskell's depiction corresponds to the real situation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. The research methods are the following: historical approach, comparative analysis of the theoretical literature, close reading of the texts and qualitative analysis of the quotations. The results of the research revealed that Gaskell depicted many social issues of the time which are connected with the process of industrialization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

**Keywords:** Gaskell, Victorian age, social issues, industrial revolution, working class, comparison

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain experienced a number of changes, innovations and problems in different fields. The quality of life was influenced by different social issues and rapid process of industrialization. Indeed, life in Victorian age differed greatly from what society is used to nowadays. In order to have a look into the lives of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorians, contemporary reader has to look for various sources of available information. It is important to have a look into the historical background of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to find out what is Industrial Revolution and what consequences Victorians had to face in the Victorian age, and how it affects literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Apparently one of the most significant English novelists of the Victorian age was Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-1865). Her novels offer to the reader a glimpse into the lives of Victorian society, including the working class and wealthier classes. In addition to writing about the life of Victorian society, Gaskell was interested in other relevant problems of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, in Gaskell's novels the reader may find many representations of the health problems, working class misery, and fragility of life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, for better understanding of these peculiarities, as well as character's viewpoint towards situations depicted in the novels, it is necessary to analyze the historical background of the specific period of time. It is important to look at Gaskell's depiction of Victorian social issues and to compare them with historical background in order to see how Gaskell's characters acted in the typical situations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain.

Consequently, **the goal** of the bachelor thesis is to compare Elizabeth Gaskell's novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South* with theoretical background about Victorian social issues and industrialization process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain in order to find what social issues Gaskell mentions in her novels, and how precisely her depictions correspond to the real situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain.

**The research questions** of the bachelor thesis are as follows:

1. What kind of social problems affected British society and literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?
2. How did the Industrial Revolution affect the society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain?
3. What were the main social problems of Victorians and which of them are caused by industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain?
4. What social problems are discussed in Elizabeth Gaskell's novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South*?
5. How accurately Gaskell's depiction of social issues corresponds to the real situation in the society of 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain?

6. How Gaskell's personal experience influences the depiction of social problems in her novels?
7. How Gaskell's portrayal of characters corresponds to the real population of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain?

**The methods of the research** are as follows:

1. qualitative research based on the historical approach in order to find out the background of the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
2. comparative analysis of the theoretical literature;
3. close reading of the texts;
4. qualitative analysis of the sources.

**The main authors used:**

1. Foster, S. (2002) *Elizabeth Gaskell. A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. Benson, J. (2003) *The Working Class in Britain: 1850-1939*. London: I.B.Tauris
3. Matus J.L. (2007) *The Cambridge companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Corpus of the texts analyzed:**

1. *Mary Barton* by Elizabeth Gaskell
2. *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell

**Outline of the paper:**

*Chapter 1* is divided into five subchapters. The first subchapter looks into the background of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and characteristic of Victorian society; the second subchapter deals with the quality of life of the working class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain; the third subchapter describes the fragility of life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain; the fourth subchapter depicts the class division in Victorian period; finally fifth subchapter describes Gaskell's personal experience in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Chapter 2* is divided into five subchapters. The first subchapter concentrates on problems depicted in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*; second subchapter reveals about the class conflict problems in *Mary Barton*; the third subchapter depicts the class conflict problems in *Mary Barton*; the fourth subchapter deals with the quality of life of the working class in *Mary Barton*; the last subchapter depicts the quality of life of the working class in *North and South*.

*Chapter 3* consists of two subchapters. The first subchapter depicts poverty and addictions in *Mary Barton*; the second subchapter deals with the depiction of polluted environment and poverty in *North and South*.

The present bachelor thesis includes thesis, relevant conclusions and references.

# 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTRY BRITAIN

One of the most significant periods in British history is the time when Britain changed from agricultural society to urban society based on industrialization during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Huge part of the era is characterized by rapid changes and development. Including strict rules for society, or so called Victorian morality. According to Strohmeire, morality is the term describing the inner, partly learned notions (Strohmeire, 2014:7).

This time in history of Britain is known as Victorian era. The period is named after Queen Victoria (1819-1901), who ruled over the Britain for 63 years.

## 1.1. Victorian Society and Industrialization in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain

Victorian society can be characterized by several social issues, including Victorian morality and industrial revolution. The moral climate governing the time is called Victorian morality or so-called Victorian values:

It covers a long and changing transitional industrial, economic, socially and politically important period, whose cultures were dauntingly complex. It was an age of contradiction, variously dominated by Evangelical, utilitarian and imperialistic trends. It has come to refer to a specific set of attitudes whose influence had extended geographically well beyond the shore of Britain and its empire. Sometimes it has been applied to specific respectable characteristics, such as moral rectitude or so –called Victorian values (Huggins, 2015:2).

Several social factors like industrialization, abrupt class division and religious views influenced Victorian morality and thus inhabitants of Britain in the 19th century.

Queen Victoria is the second British monarch who reigned for the longest time in the history of Great Britain. The time of Queen Victoria`s reign covers 63 years and seven months, from 24 May 1819 till 22 January 1901. The first longest reigning monarch in Britain is the present Queen Elizabeth II. But under Queen Victoria`s reign Britain becomes one of the most powerful nations in the world. Even though during Queen Victoria`s reign the moral climate is based on strict set of moral principles, according to Shepley, Victoria became synonymous in the mind of the public with Britain`s growing imperial power and military might, particularly following her coronation as Empress of India in 1877 (Shepley, 2015: 5).

In agreement with Encyclopaedia Britannica Victorian morality is based on particular principles, standards of moral conducts. The article form Encyclopaedia Britannica mentions such set of values like sexual restraint, low tolerance of crime, and strict social conduct of crime dominates in the 19th century Britain:

What kept mid-19th-century civilization whole was a subdued faith in the reality of all the things Realism and materialistic science denied: religious belief, civic and social habits, the

dogma of moral responsibility, and the hope that consciousness and will did exist (Mayne, 2008).

Victorian period in Britain is truly affected by industrialization. British believe that Britain is the first country in the world to experience massive industrialization, and thus face all the consequences and social problems of the period:

From late 18<sup>th</sup> century, onwards Britain became the first fully industrialized nation in the worlds. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century her four staple industries, iron, cotton, coal and ship building would dominate world markets and bring huge in-flows of wealth into the country (Shepley, 2015: 9).

Perhaps, industrialization and the consequences of it affected the society, especially leaving huge impact on literature and art. Due to this reason prominent Victorian literary works emphasize the effects of industrial revolution, depicting social difficulties of the population of Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

New achievements in history usually lead to new era in literature and art. According to present knowledge, as Romantic Movement comes to end it gradually gives way to more realistic literature of Victorian era. While Romantic period is remarkable for the poetry, dominant genre in British Realism becomes the genre of novel. According to Amigoni, towards the end of Victorian period, 380 novels were published in the year 1880: that was 200 short of the total number of all published books (580) that had appeared in 1825 (2011:37).

During Victorian period the world gets to know such great Realism authors like Charles Dickens and his novels like *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*, thus Dickens is one of the greatest novelists of that time. Brontë sisters with their novels like *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Wuthering Heights* Emily Brontë, William Thackeray and his novel *Vanity Fair*, Thomas Hardy and his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and many more. One of the most prominent writers during the Victorian era is also Elizabeth Gaskell, who is famous for her industrial novels containing detailed descriptions of lives of many social layers:

She has also become one of the most popular novelists of her age, especially since her last novel, *Wives and Daughters*, was adapted so successfully for television. From being regarded merely as a gently humorous commentator on English provincial life, she has been positioned among the period's canonical writers and discussed accordingly (Foster, 2002:1).

Elizabeth Gaskell is focusing in her works on the working class and middle class strata, and even nowadays, her works are of great interest and importance to social historians. Her social novels are a good source of knowledge about life during Victorian era, revealing to the reader many unpleasant subjects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Foster, as minister's wife, she inevitably came into contact with this suffering population, the lowest in the city's social scale, even while she refused to allow charitable work to dominate her life (2002:22).

Gaskell observes in her novels Victorian morality, and the main issues she raises are the effects of industrialization and class division in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her industrial fiction accurately depicts different social issues of the industrial era. She precisely describes Victorian working class difficulties, focusing on the problems between employers and workers. In her works she pays particular attention to the environmental pollution in industrial cities and illnesses which are caused by the pollution. She also raises the question of housing, mainly speaking about poor quality of working-class houses. She also speaks about working-class suffering from lack of money and decent food, and many other problems.

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain experiences great changes due to industrial revolution. The period of industrial expansion starts about 1760 till approximately 1840. Speaking about the industrialization, it is necessary to mention that it had influenced not only industry, but all aspects of life, cultural life and literature in particular. Industrialization involves scientific advances and the development of new technologies, especially in such industries as energy and metallurgy. During the industrialization the society has also went some changes, the perception of the world becomes different. At some point a positive attitude to work combined with the desire to explore new technologies, but in some cases industrialization brings suffering and undesirable transformation in the society, mainly it is observed in the lifestyle of the working class.

Industrialization is remarkable for innovations and city growth combined with foreign trade expansion. For the Empire, some of the good sides of the industrial revolution is building the railways, housing and bridges, and of course the great expansion of the population:

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as a result of the industrial revolution, Britain also underwent a transport revolution, as a mine owners and iron masters needed modern roads, canal and eventually railways to connect their mines and foundries to the sources of raw material that powered them, and to markets for the finished products (Shepley, 2015: 9).

Scientific discoveries also contribute to the accelerated growth of output and income of the population. It results in greater world market for products and services of all kinds, which, in its turn, stimulates capital investment and further economic growth.

Of the staple industries of the time, the textile industry was pre-eminent, being based increasingly on factory production employing steam-driven machinery; the import figures tell their own story. The consumption of raw cotton rose from 52 million pounds (lb) in 1800 to 588 million pounds in 1850, while raw wool imports, which totalled 1,571,000 pounds in 1722, by 1824 had reached 23,849,000 pounds. Cotton exports increased in value from £6.941 million in 1801 to £37,269 million in 1829. As for the other great industry, coal mining, output figures soared from about 5.23 million tons in 1750 to 30.86 million tons in 1830, reaching a five-year average by the mid-nineteenth century of 68.4 million tons (Hopkins, 2000:3)

The process of the urbanization leads to the development of major cities like for example Manchester, the city where Elizabeth Gaskell gains her experience in industrialization and eventually depicts her knowledge in her fiction:

Factory centers such as Manchester grew from villages into cities of hundreds of thousands in a few short decades. The percentage of the total population located in cities expanded steadily, and big cities tended to displace more scattered centers in Western Europe's urban map (Mayne, 2008).

Manchester becomes a developed industrial city. The growth of population and various mills makes Manchester one of the most developed cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Elizabeth Gaskell gets all her experience in industrialization exactly in Manchester when she moves there with her husband William Gaskell. According to Fosters, after their marriage, the Gaskells moved into 14 Dover Street, off Oxford Road. The area, on the southeast side of Manchester in the Ardwick district (2002:20).

Certainly not only Gaskells moves to the industrial city, every year the population grows so fast that by the end of the nineteenth century there are three times more inhabitants in British mainland than it was in the beginning, it takes just 100 years for a powerful nation to grow:

For Britain and the people of Britain, the nineteenth century was a century of transformation. The population of mainland Britain rose from some 10.5 million in 1801 to over 37 million in 1901...the production of coal rose from 11 11m tones in 1800 to some 225m tones in 1900. The invention of the railway meant that there were 18,680 miles of tracks in Britain by 1900, carrying 1,114 million passengers in that year (Williams, 2007:1).

A century of the transformation remains in British history as time for nation`s growth and economical increase, nevertheless the consequences of industrialization supposed to be urgent issue in literary works of the 19th century. Elizabeth Gaskell is one of those authors who witnessed industrialization and had an experience living in industrial city Manchester.

## **1.2. The Quality of Life of the Working Class in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain**

The rapid growth of the population in Britain caused many difficulties in the society not only on the governmental level it also affected daily routine of citizens. People start to move from countryside to cities, seeking for a better life and job and as a result each family needs a place where to stay and settle their life. In this way, houses are built very quickly in order to accommodate as much inhabitants as possible. Yet the problem is that the most of those houses are of poor quality. In order to give more new places to the working-class community and families, houses are built similarly and very close to each other, even with shared lavatories. At that time the quantity of the houses is urgent problem for the society, yet not the quality of these:

These new factories workers needed to live somewhere, so houses were quickly – and often shoddily- built to accommodate them. Back to back houses were the norm in industrial cities. Most people did not have an inside lavatory let alone a bathroom: they used earth closets outside. Many families shared one earth closet- in one factory town about 7,000 people shared 33 such closets – which frequently overflowed into the streets (Bartley, 2016:4).

Even though Gaskell herself never lived in this type of houses, she clearly knew how terrible it was. Her house in Manchester is very close to those described above, as Foster claims, they (Gaskells) were also never far from the kind of environment which Engels describes so graphically in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (2002:23).

German philosophers Fredrich Engels (1820-1895) published in 1845 his work *The Condition of the Working Class in England* that is based in his own experience and personal observations. It is a study about working-class during industrialization in Victorian Britain. In fact Gaskell may be influenced by his work because at that time they were neighbors in Manchester and Gaskell`s husband could read this work and advise his wife in writing her first industrial novel *Mary Barton*:

Engels in fact lived near the Gaskells, off Oxford Road, during his time in Manchester from 1842 to 1844, and William may have read his work (which was available only in German at this time) (Fosters, 2002:24).

Hence, in is necessary to include Engels` lines from his study about working class in England, which clearly shows the real situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Right and left a multitude of covered passages lead from the mainstreet into numerous courts, and he who turns in thither gets into a filth and disgusting grime, the equal of which is not to be found –especially in the courts which lead down to the Irk, and which contain unqualifiedly the most horrible dwellings which I have yet beheld. In one of these courts there stands directly at the entrance, at the end of the covered passage, a privy without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants pass into and out of the court only by passing through foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement (Engels, 2005:5).

Gaskell depicts the same horrible dwellings in *Mary Barton*, which also Engels describes so expressively, Gaskell makes her characters stay and survive in these cellar dwellings, in cramped, badly ventilated places. Which often were situated in polluted city center near the factories and mills.

Britain experiences massive expansion of the industries. The working class society settles in industrial cities, practicing new life in the city with number of difficulties which they have to face. Rapid urbanization and an increase in the number of hired workers extremely aggravate social problems. While factory production centers remain relatively small, an urban lifestyle and agricultural laboring becomes of less interest for the workers, even though it may give some benefits for the working class family:

Agricultural laborers remained the least to know, as well as the lowest paid, of all major groups of male workers. Even the persistence of free grazing, cheap food and subsidized

accommodation did not augment their money earning sufficiently... In 1850 the earning of farm laborers averaged just 10s a week, half those of coalminers and barely 40 per cent of those of cotton spinners (Benson, 2003:43).

Money which worker could receive plays the most important role; their choice for the industrial lifestyle is obvious, because it is a chance to earn better wages. But, working class representatives received not only higher wages, but also faced a number of problems in industrial cities. Elizabeth Gaskell witnesses the suffering of the working-class families: working hours are extremely long; job at a factory involves physical labor every day:

With a long line of people willing to work, employers could set wages as low as they wanted because people were willing to do work as long as they got paid. People worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day six days a week (Benson, 2003:89).

Working conditions most of the times are so poor that cause nervousness and stress for the workers. The excessive noise at factories, polluted air in the cities, poverty and unstoppable illnesses, lack of housing and many other factors make the lives of many workers miserable. The working hours are extremely long not only for male workers, but also for children and women, who also had to work at that time:

Duration of work everywhere remained long, up to 14 hours a day, which was traditional but could be oppressive when work was more intense and walking time had to be added to reach the factories in the first place. Women and children were widely used for the less skilled operations; again, this was no novelty, but it was newly troubling now that work was located outside the home and was often more dangerous, given the hazards of unprotected machinery (Mayne, 2008).

The combinations of unpleasant conditions are mixed with other cases at the factories, which caused additional stress to the worker:

It could also become offensive: in the same year, a factory inspector discovered one firm, employing 500 women, in which each worker had to hand a tally to a male overseer when she went to the lavatory. The time spent in the lavatory was recorded and passed to the manager and at the end of the month the worker was fined if it was found that she had spend more than four minutes in the lavatory (Benson, 2003:11).

All these transformations in people`s habits and daily routine affected their mental and physical health. For the working-class society the adaptation to the new lifestyle in cities sometimes is a question of life and death. This idea is proved by Shepley, who states that even a life expectancy became shorter:

The immense wealth generated by Britain`s industrialization came at high price to those who did most of the work. Britain`s industrial working class by 1851 had a life expectancy shorter than that of peasants during the middle ages, and the half century saw the development of a powerful trade union movement and governments that prioritized social reforms (Shepley, 2015:10).

Somehow, almost every aspect of life in Britain is influenced by industrialization. It affected the standards of living, house building, and even the life expectancy of the population. The quality of working-class life is often so poor that people can hardly survive.

As creation of factories led to the industrialization, the growth of various manufactures, mills, and coal factories become a turning point in the history of Britain. An excellent example of growing industrialization can be observed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Manchester. Cotton mills become popular in industrial era, and because of the dominance of textile industry the city is named as Cottonpolis. According to Roger Beck, Leeds and Manchester dominated textile manufacturing. Along with the port of Liverpool, Manchester formed center of Britain`s bustling cotton industry (Beck, et al. 2005: 724)

Manchester is the city where Elizabeth Gaskell spends the biggest part of her life, obtains urban life experience and eventually writes her best works. In addition, according to Fosters, in many ways, indeed, Gaskell never really liked living in Manchester. She found it dirty and depressing, and its urban poverty and deprivation must have been eye-opening for her (2002:20).

All factories are mainly operated by working-class society, the more factories opened the more employers needed:

Cotton replaced wool as the material of choice. It was cheaper to produce, easier to keep clean and comfortable to wear. More and more workshops, factories, mills and mines used water and steam power rather than human muscle to make cotton cloth. This resulted in factories increasing in size as the installation of large, heavy and expensive machinery made it necessary to employ more than just a few people (Bartley, 2016:4).

Working-class society starts to settle in industrial cities, as Manchester, and the city grows rapidly. The housing problems became an urgent issue in the cities like Manchester. Working class layer of society mostly shares the same job and same living conditions, so they start to create friendly communities to support each other at these hard times. Elizabeth Gaskell, despite the fact that she has never worked at the factory, is one of those who support and show sympathy for the working class. Her novels show deep compassion to the working-class, she depicts in her works housing problems and extreme working conditions at the factories.

### **1.3. Fragility of Life in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain**

Apart from the good sides of the industrialization, like technological progress, city development, and creation of jobs for workers, there are a number of problems that follow industrialization. One of those is a health problem caused by the pollution and low sanitation. Sickness and illness is widespread in Victorian age. The main reasons for diseases start from environment pollution and end with bad quality of working class living conditions. The air pollution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century occurs in Britain because of steam and smoke created by various

factories. As it is already stated, Britain experiences the increase of different factories and mills. According to Mitchell, the smoke of those factories is extremely dirty and dangerous for breathing, thus industrialization may be blamed in this case, for instance, in winter, few days with the dense fog that trapped the smoke always lead to the great number of death from pneumonia and bronchitis (2009: 201).

Low quality medical treatment, or even lack of any treatment, leads to numerous deaths in the Victorian society, especially affecting working class people. According to Beck, in 1842, a British government study showed an average life span to be 17 for working class people in one large city, compared with 38 years in a nearby rural area (2005: 724).

The data approve that one of the most urgent issues consider to be health problems affected by low quality of medical treatment and poor quality of living of the working class.

In mill towns the population density is extremely high and the quality of living often is extremely poor. Life of working class families often is of low hygiene, as they had to share toilet facilities if such existed at all and live in damp dwellings. But the main problem is that nobody is protected from diseases, neither poor citizens nor wealthy class representatives. At that time there is no remedy for most of the diseases, because of little understanding of those illnesses:

In the early Victorian period disease transmission was largely understood as a matter of inherited susceptibility (today's 'genetic' component) and individual intemperance ('lifestyle'), abetted by climate and location, which were deemed productive of noxious exhalations (a version of environmental causation). Water- and air-borne infection was not generally accepted (Marsh, J. n.d.)

This may be the only industrialization problem that affects all society layers, but somehow working class suffers more than wealthier classes due to several reasons. The main reasons are that their workplaces and homes are the best examples of anti-sanitation of Victorian age. Probably because of lack of any protection and support from government, the question of hygiene is the last one somebody from lower-class could have thought about:

Soon this new towns and cities became densely populated and exceedingly dirty as the coal-fired steam factories polluted the air people breath and turned buildings blacks. Not surprisingly, health problems such as cholera, typhoid and other related disease were the results, all caused by poor sanitation. These types of illness affected all classes: Queen Victoria and her eldest son, Bertie, the Prince of Wales, become seriously ill from typhoid; many believe Prince Albert died from it (Bartley, 2016:4).

All these facts show that apart from advantages like employment and life in developing city, working class members suffer greatly. It comes at a price to settle in industrial city in the 19th century Britain. Very often long working hours of physical labor cause health problems to such extent that these may lead to death. The expansion of diseases is wide and affects all classes.

Despite the fact that polluted environment and various health diseases truly affected the everyday life of Victorian, many of them were addicted to the alcohol and opium, which

consequently shorten their lives and caused additional problems with physical and mental health. Probably the main reason for the alcohol and drug addictions being widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain is the fact that it was easily available, as stated by Mitchell, until 1868, the sale of drugs was practically unrestricted, and they could be bought like any other commodity (Mitchell, 2012;228).

One of the most popular addictions in Victorian age was opium eating and alcohol drinking. The use of alcohol was popular in Britain for long time, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the expanding British Empire, Victorians get to know the use of opium. Very soon, according to Diniejko, opium and opium derivatives were widely recognized by Victorian Britain as a *cure all* and the range of opiate preparations on the market was enormous (2002).

It is necessary to mention that many notable persons of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were addicted to the opium. Referring to Diniejko, the most popular opium derivative was laudanum, a tincture of opium mixed with wine or water, called *the aspirin of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*. Many notable Victorians, who used laudanum as a painkiller, included E.B. Browning, C. Dickens, B. Stoker, G. Eliot and E. Gaskell (2002).

Nevertheless, opium addiction was available also for the lower layers of society, for example, for the working class members. The cheap mixture which representative of the working class used as a painkiller and also killer of the starvation feelings was given to children as well:

Children were also given opiates. To keep them quiet, children were often spoon fed Godfrey's Cordial (also called Mother's Friend), consisting of opium, water and treacle and recommended for colic, hiccups and coughs. Overuse of this dangerous concoction is known to have resulted in the severe illness or death of many infants and children (Castellow, n.d.)

The attitude towards the use of opium and alcohol was very complex. For some part of the population, mainly for upper-classes, it was a habit or used for amusement. But for the biggest part of the population, including the lower classes and working classes, the heavy use of the opium and alcohol was serious addiction.

#### **1.4. Class Division and Class Conflict in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain**

The question of social class division is important in terms of 19<sup>th</sup> century British history studies and literature as well, particularly in works of Elizabeth Gaskell. In Victorian age Britain reaches the status of urban and industrial society caused by industrial revolution. At this point the distinction between social classes is kind of a tool to categorize the population of Britain. This issue is also of great importance in the works of the novelist of the Victorian period like Elizabeth Gaskell, who depict class distinctions almost in every novel. Her most prominent works focusing social issues are novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South*.

Rapid industrialization and development of factories, made abrupt division of society into those who own the factories and those work on them, or in other words owners and workers. At that time working-class is the majority of the society, and this part of the population suffers from different social problems, mainly from lack of protection from the government and finally from hard, monotonous and exhausting work.

One of the urgent problems is the lack of appropriate wages for their hard and long work at the factories. Working class families fully depend of factory operation:

Most working people earned just enough money to alive, and could be thrown into poverty by illness, layoffs, or a sudden misfortune such as factory fire that caused even short-term unemployment (Mitchell, 2009: 18).

The dependence of working class on industrial progress is obvious. On the one hand the work on factories and mills is dangerous and definitely harmful for health, on the other hand it is the only way of surviving and earning some money. The city and factory growth cause the growth of working class representatives, thus the conditions of their lives did not grow from low to more or less comfortable. At that time working class people were not protected by any related to labour laws, the quality of life at some point became even worse:

As factories worked to maximize output and therefore profit, the working conditions worsened. There were no labor laws, which meant that men, women and children could work extensive hours with little to no regulation for their health, safety or well being. Shifts could be as long as twelve hours, with people working very close together with very heavy machinery (Hopkins, 1982:1).

Working class people suffer from injuries caused by heavy machinery. Exhausting hours of work somehow lowers their attention and cause unpleasant consequences:

The machines all required careful attention and frequently malfunctioned, causing injuries to the operators. During the summer months, despite increased heat in the factories, shifts would sometimes be even longer because that was the height of both cotton production and daylight under which to work (Hopkins, 1982:1).

The life of average working class member focuses and depends on the work at factory or mill. Despite all unpleasant consequences and social issues which they have to face, the working class layer of the society was one of the biggest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

While the working-class experiences hard labor and low conditions of life, wealthier classes like the middle-class and upper-class take all the advantages of industrialization period. Not all of the 19<sup>th</sup> century population lives in poverty and poor quality housing like working class families. Some part of the population enjoys wealthy and prospering life.

The political and cultural life during Victorian era is also affected by industrialization like all other aspects of life. Industrial era witnesses the transformation of middle-class society and their new opportunities. The biggest part of advantages is on behalf of men of course, thus many of them become industrialist, owners of the growing factories and mills, and businessmen:

The new middle class transformed the social structure of Great Britain. In the past, landowners, and aristocrats had occupied the top position in British society. With most of the wealth, they wielded the social and political power. Now some factory owners, merchants, and bankers grew wealthier than the landowners and aristocrats (Beck, et. al, 2005: 724)

Most of the wealthy middle-class men becoming successful owners of factories or mills, as it is a time of great industrial expansion and gain good life conditions. The growth of the middle-class layer perhaps is one of the consequences of industrialization in the Victorian Britain. At some point to the middle class society belong not only the wealthy families, but also those who operate the system of city administration and those are small entrepreneurs:

The middle class grew in size and importance during the Victorian period. It made up about 15 percents of the population in 1837 and perhaps 25 percents in 1901. This was diverse group, including everyone between working class (who earned their living by physical labor) and the elite (who inherited landed estates). It's important to remember that money was not defining factor in determining classes. The middle classes included successful industrialist and extremely wealthy bankers such as Rothschild; it also included poor clerks like Bob Cratchit (of Charles Dickens's Christmas Carol) (Mitchell, 2009: 28). The middle class is somewhere in between poor and rich families, yet it includes working class as well, in that way forming the biggest social strata in the Victorian period.

The upper-class society, or the aristocracy lives in prosperity and richness, these are the luckiest landowning families, whose income comes from land lording. Just like some of the middle-class men, male aristocrats often are involved into political life, or military career, or do not work at all. According to Mitchell, aristocrats and the gentry made up a hereditary landowning class, whose income came from the rental of their property. The title (in case of aristocrats) and the land usually passed intact to the eldest son (2009: 19).

Elite families are protected by their property, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century owning land and property gives to the family confidence in their prospering future.

As the eldest son in the family gets the land and property, some of them start to do something useful for the society. Many of them involve themselves into politics and start to use their influence in the society:

When the eldest son inherited the estate, he was expected to do something useful- to sit in Parliament, take part in local affairs, use his influence in a charitable cause- although he did not do any paid work. In 1843 there were 562 titled families in England (Mitchell, 2009: 21).

Titled British families form the elite and aristocracy probably enjoy their wealthy lifestyle. They use the influence and power in the social questions and at the same time most of them are not challenged by the social issues of that time, like for example low conditions of life, lack of money and definitely they are not challenged by hard and exhausting work.

The population of the nineteenth century witnessed a number of great historical inventions, scientific progress and ideas, for example first commercial electrical telegraph and scientific progress in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Thus, it is necessary to conclude that many of these social issues are illustrated in the literary works of many English writers like for example Elizabeth Gaskell. She is one of those who also suffers from the problems of industrialization, and feels deep compassion for working class families. She witnesses their living and working in harmful conditions during her lifetime in Manchester in Victorian period. It is the time of strong social injustice and hard working conditions for the working class combined with the problems caused by the industrialization, and prevailing Victorian morality.

### 1.5. Gaskell's Observations of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain

Elizabeth Gaskell represents her experience and her observations in her writings like many other Victorian artists. Society witnesses industrialization in the form of innovations: new mills and development of machinery, the improvement of efficiency of water power and many other useful modernizations. Apart from great scientific progress, the society is challenged by social problems, difficulties and health issues, which Mrs. Gaskell perfectly portrays in her writings.

Her experience starts in Manchester. She marries Reverend William Gaskell, an assistant minister at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel. Eventually they move to Manchester, to the one of the most industrial cities of that time, and according to Encyclopedia Britannica, in 1832 she married William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, and settled in the overcrowded, problem-ridden industrial city of Manchester, which remained her home for the rest of her life (Britannica Academic, 2017).

Later she will depict city Milton in *North and South* based on her experience and observations in Manchester. And of course, she will portray all major events in *Mary Barton* also in Manchester:

Her first novel, *Mary Barton*, reflects the temper of Manchester in the late 1830s. It is the story of a working-class family in which the father, John Barton, lapses into bitter class hatred during a cyclic depression and carries out a retaliatory murder at the behest of his trade union (Britannica Academic, 2017).

The couple had six children, and as a mother of four girls and a wife of a Unitarian Minister her life is full of responsibilities and duties; she is occupied with charity work in Manchester, and family. At that point Gaskell starts to see the reality of big city; she witnesses the real life of poor families, their needs in food, clothing and shelter, witnesses slums and work at manufactories. When they start to live in Manchester, she wrote her so called dedication to the

working men of Manchester *Temperance Rhymes* (1839). Her husband William supports her very much in her literature achievements, when she starts one of her biggest work it is believed but not confirmed, that William was the one who suggested and inspired Gaskell to write one of her best known social novels *Mary Barton. A Tale of Manchester Life*. After the death of their son William, Elizabeth is depressed and only writing helps her to return to normal life:

In July 1845, she had taken Marianne and Willie, only nine months old, to Ffestiniog, where the former contracted scarlet fever. The eleven-year-old girl recovered, but ten days later Willie caught the disease; they removed to Portmadoc, where he died on 10 August. (Foster, 2002:25).

Nevertheless, her worries are greatly depicted in *Mary Barton*. As Shirley Foster points out, in an 1849 letter to her friend Mrs. Greg, Gaskell said that she 'took refuge in the invention to exclude the memory of painful scenes which would force themselves upon my remembrance (Foster, 2007: 5).

The death of her son can be also viewed from the point of the negative sides of that time. Her son died in infancy from scarlet fever, a common disease of Victorian England. Nobody was protected from diseases in Victorian Britain, neither poor citizens nor the wealthy class. Lack of useful remedies and proper treatment from most of the disease caused main problems with health for Victorians. Soon after losing her beloved son caused her growing feeling of sympathy to the suffering part of population and as a result her support to social reforms concerning lower-class society.

The other problem which Elizabeth Gaskell experienced during industrialization is the class division. Gaskell, who was from middle-class society, was fighting for justice desperately and tried to draw public attention to the lower-classes and their problems through her literature, particularly in the novels *North and South* and mostly in *Mary Barton*:

The gulf between the rich and poor was never wider than when Elizabeth Gaskell set out to depict the abyss of working class misery in her novel *Mary Barton*, and since she was writing for the rich, with a desire to engage their active sympathy for the poor, she constantly faces a diplomatic problem. How can she tell the truth- the extreme poverty is a result of an unjust and exploitative social system – without causing offence? (Hoppi: 2012)

Elizabeth Gaskell is very accurately choosing her words and thoughts in the novels; she tries not to blame anyone directly in the situation which prevailed in the society. But for a good reader it is obvious that it is a social system which very much causes social abuse and sometimes even discrimination. The novels written by Elizabeth Gaskell unveil a wide range of social and political issues which are characteristic to the Victorian period in the 19th century. Among the most urgent problems and ideas expressed in the novel “*Mary Barton*” and “*North and South*” are working-class problems and class conflict.

Elizabeth Gaskell may be one of those writers, who spoke on major problems of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even those unpleasant to hear or understand. She tries to show the pain and suffering of the other people, how they felt and understood the situation. Certainly she speaks about herself as well at some point she also suffers from industrialization in her own way, from social injustices and loss of her son. May be without having that bitter experience, the world would never have seen the greatest social novels of the nine-teeth century like *Mary Barton* and *North and South*

## **2. THE CLASS CONFLICT AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN MARY BARTON AND NORTH AND SOUTH**

### **2.1. The Depiction of Problems in Mary Barton and North and South**

A close examination of the literary works of Elizabeth Gaskell reveals to the reader a grim picture of the working class society during the Industrialization in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. It is necessary to mention that Elizabeth Gaskell is quite critical about life in Victorian England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in her works she shows her readers many obstacles which the working class has to overcome in order to live a more or less normal life with their family at that time. In her first industrial novel *Mary Barton* she focuses mainly on lifestyle of working class in the industrial cities like Manchester. According to Foster, *Mary Barton* (1848) is the best-known of Gaskell's fictions of urban realism, its subtitle, *A Tale of Manchester Life*, is indicating its regional specificity (Foster, 2002:34).

Elizabeth Gaskell depicts her knowledge of industrialization almost in each her literary work. Her intelligence about industrial lifestyle and personal experience plays the most important role in her fiction, thus it helps her to write her first major work. According to Fosters, she visited the poor operatives, tried to understand their position, and helped them where she could with money, sympathy and advice (2002:34).

She gains the familiarity while helping the working class, thus Gaskell depicts her observations in her industrial novel *Mary Barton* and further she depicts her observations in *North and South*. Surely, her life in Manchester and charitable work gives her opportunity to speak on behalf of workers:

In as far as they impacted on her writing, Gaskell's Manchester experiences were most important early in her career. Even her first works, however, show how she was inspired by a variety of interlocking influences (Foster, 2002:28).

On the basis of her life experience, strong moral beliefs of the Victorian period and the examination of the society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the depiction of the industrialization problems becomes her fundament in her literary carrier. According to Fosters, her marriage and subsequent move to Manchester laid the foundation for her future life, socially and geographically (2002:18).

Gaskell makes her characters experience a number of problems connected with industrialization process: massive expansion in industry, city growth and expansion of the population. In addition, Gaskell speaks about the social problems of that time. One of the most important social issues which she depicts in her works is the working class sufferings. The main problems of working class, which Gaskell takes into consideration are the low conditions of life,

starvation, illnesses, and issue of mortality. She also raises the question of poor quality housing and bad conditions at the work place which plays significant role in working class lifestyle. However the dominant theme in her industrial novels is hard labor at the factories and mills, with long working hours and bad conditions at the work place. Gaskell is one of the most talented authors who reveal to the reader many peculiarities about working class struggles in the 19th century Victorian Britain. Through her writings – particularly through two specific works, *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, the author reflect both the good and bad sides that the Industrial Revolution caused in Britain in 19th century.

Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South* is published seven years later after her first work *Mary Barton*. Same as it is with writing *Mary Barton*, one of the main things that prompt Gaskell to write *North and South* is her own experience in Manchester during the “hungry forties”. The work is another great example of the industrial novel and it is also exemplify as a classical British Realism fictional work. Despite the fact that Gaskell fell great sympathy to the sufferings of the working class, after receiving critical comments of *Mary Barton* she is suggested to write another industrial novel with more balanced plot between the workers and masters. Main criticism about *Mary Barton* is focusing on the fact that Gaskell portrays her characters in favor of the working class. According to Foster, Gaskell shares her thoughts about criticisms with her friend:

As Gaskell explained in a long letter of 16 July [1850] to her friend, Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, after criticism of *Mary Barton* for giving an unfair portrayal of the masters in favour of the workers, several people suggested that she should write another novel redressing the balance (Foster, 2002: 108).

Probably Elizabeth Gaskell thinks about the suggestions she is receiving and takes into account the ideas, so very soon she starts to write another industrial novel. In *North and South* Gaskell tries to speak on behalf of both sides, she depicts the sufferings and problems of the working class at the same time somehow she also pays more attention to the mill owners. She illustrates a mill owner as one of the main characters, who is given a chance to speak on behalf of mill owners. As stated by Foster, in this novel, the masters are given a much larger voice through Thornton, who debates the questions of labour relations and conditions of trade with both Margaret and Higgins (2002:109).

It turns out that the mill owners also face some difficulties during the Victorian era, but probably not so hard situations as working class Gaskell does not change her position in *North and South*, through her characters she contributes another portion of sympathy to the working class of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As it is already stated, Gaskell's first industrial novel *Mary Barton* is widely criticized, meanwhile the novel *North and South* receives less critical comments about prejudiced

illustration of the characters, somehow book receives more positive comments than the previous one. Commentary is given with some sympathy and understanding of Gaskell's message which she tries to tell to the reader in *North and South*:

*North and South* was on the whole received generously by the critics..... Not surprisingly, most reviewers focused on the novel as 'special interest' fiction: the *Guardian*, for example, declared that 'the true purpose of the book is to throw light on difficult social questions (Fosters, 2002:112).

Nevertheless the main theme in Gaskell's novels observes capital and labor relations. The novel *North and South* is not an exception in this case. Gaskell speaks emotionally about relationship between workers and masters, but she also speaks on behalf of both sides: prosperous mill owners and starving mill workers. Despite the fact that before the book is published, Mrs. Gaskell asserts that it is hardly possible to show both positions in a single novel:

She considered that both sides of the question could not be represented in a single work of fiction, and partly because she did not know enough about good mill-owners and their benevolent schemes (Foster, 2002:107).

Eventually Gaskell writes an impressive novel and disapproves her own words that both sides of a question could not be represented in a single novel. She depicts in one work of fiction both positions: starving workers and successful owners. Probably Gaskell as a person with a wide range of interests gains her experience not only in question of suffering working class representatives, but also goes into contact with wealthier families like mill owners in order to get as much data as possible. Finally the world gets to know *North and South*, a novel which is as the guidance to the industrial lifestyle in the Victorian age.

## **2.2. The Depiction of Class Conflict in Mary Barton**

The novel *Mary Barton* unveils a wide range of social issues which are characteristic of the Victorian period in the 19th century. Among the most urgent problems and ideas which Gaskell express in the novel "Mary Barton" and which are going to be discussed in this paper, are as follows: class conflict which is observed from the first pages of the novel, the importance of hard work, comparison of the lifestyle of the working class and wealthier classes, and working class lifestyle particularly at the hard times. Elizabeth Gaskell do not try to persuade the reader somehow, but she shows the real situations in which working class people were living for a long time in Britain. Elizabeth Gaskell unveils the main consequences of the industrial revolution and social inequality of people in Manchester.

The protagonist of the novel *Mary Barton* is John Barton. Gaskell portrays him as a representative of the working class, in this way Gaskell shows the situation more on behalf of the lower-class or working class. She depicts her character's sufferings and his vision upon the situation in the country. Foremost class distinction issue is central theme in the novel. It is

arguing about working class weakness in the face of the industrialization. Gaskell portrays working class citizens as persons fully dependent on work and owners of the mills and factories. Sometimes Gaskell forces them to reflect how workers are often forced to work under unsuitable conditions. Gaskell shows how helpless they are in the face of industrialization and wealthy employers. She also speaks about hardly possible partnership between two classes. In the beginning Elizabeth Gaskell gives very specific description how Trade Union works, she illustrates her thought through her main character John Barton:

They were, firstly, withdrawing the proposal just made, and declaring all communication between the masters and that particular Trades' Union at an end; secondly, declaring that no master would employ any workman in future, unless he signed a declaration that he did not belong to any Trades' Union, and pledged himself not to assist or subscribe to any society, having for its object interference with the masters' powers; and, thirdly, that the masters should pledge themselves to protect and encourage all workmen willing to accept employment on those conditions, and at the rate of wages first offered (Gaskell, 2012:172)

In the novel Gaskell makes working class representatives to sign a declaration so that one becomes unprotected and is forced to stay on the mill also on poor conditions. She also depicts the rate of wage does not change, in this way her characters do not have a chance to earn more money. The wages remain the same as firstly offered by the owner. Probably Gaskell depicts her own knowledge about the Trade Unions, because as Foster says, Gaskell is aware about the situation in factories, she also familiarized herself with the factory environment, as a letter of March 1864, detailing the various manufactories in Manchester and describing their machinery and products, makes clear (*Letters*, pp. 729–30) (Foster, 2002:23).

Gaskell portrays the real situation of factory environment in *Mary Barton*, thus she makes clear for the reader that many of the workers had no choices and most of them sign the documents and work as much as possible.

John Barton's focus on the huge gap between the wealthy class and working class permeates every page of the novel *Mary Barton*. Gaskell returns to this topic many times in the novel, she makes John Barton in the course of events speak desperately and sometimes even violently. Barton's character is at the basis of Elizabeth Gaskell's will and proposal for communication between two classes, which is by the way hardly possible. Thus the abrupt distinction between the working class and wealthy mill owners which Gaskell portrays in *Mary Barton* looks like an absurd for the reader. Two opposite lifestyles prevail in the novel. She portrays working class families starving for food, at the same time she also portrays wealthy mill owners moving from one luxury house to next one better than the previous. The character is a working class member in this way Gaskell makes his words sound tragic and desperate for the reader. Somehow Gaskell fills reader's heart with compassion to the working class families:

Among these few was John Barton. At all times it is a bewildering thing to the poor weaver to see his employer removing from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all, or withdraws his money from the concern, or sells his mill to buy an estate in the country, while all the time the weaver, who thinks he and his fellows are the real makers of this wealth, is struggling on for bread for their children, through the vicissitudes of lowered wages, short hours, fewer hands employed, &c (Gaskell, 2012:22).

In this small passage Gaskell reveals powerful illustration of the class conflicts in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Gaskell portrays a working class member to whom the main struggle in life is to earn some money. In this way she makes clear that they have to rely on work in order to earn at least something for the family. She shows how workers have to work at mills, preferably every day so that food could be provided for the family also every day. At the same time, Gaskell portrays wealthy mill owners who can easily move from house to house, or sell the mill easily in order to buy an estate in the country.

It represents Gaskell's sympathy to the working-class society, because Elizabeth Gaskell support them a lot in the real life and obviously her choice for the leading characters falls on working class representative. Despite the fact that Gaskell makes John Barton, who generally speaks on behalf of all working class, claim that he and his colleagues suffer from low wages and short hours, he really wants any type of work at factory. Gaskell makes him desperately seek for the job. She portrays John Barton as a working class man whose desire is to work hard and earn some money:

Once, when she asked him as he sat, grimed, unshaven, and gaunt after a day's fasting, over the fire, why he did not get relief from the town, he turned around, with grim wrath, and said, 'I don't want money, child! Damn their charity and their money! I want work, and it is my right. I want work (Gaskell, 2012:108).

Gaskell even makes John Barton say that he does not want the money as a charity, the only thing he is looking for is work. John Barton claims that it is his right to work and earn the money. It looks like Gaskell shows to the reader that for a working class man, ability to work is the most important thing above the other problems.

In the course of events Gaskell makes John Barton face a great number of different difficulties. Gaskell portrays John Barton as a man with industrial experience. He grows up in a working class family and experiences some hard situations in his childhood. Gaskell makes him truly believe that working hard on mills is the only way to survive in this world and to support his family. Gaskell also makes his parents suffer from poverty, so John Barton tries hard to provide all the life necessities for the family:

Among these was John Barton. His parents had suffered; his mother had died from absolute want of the necessaries of life. He himself was a good, steady workman, and, as such, pretty certain of steady employment. But he spent all he got with the confidence (you

may also call it improvidence) of one who was willing, and believed himself able, to supply all his wants by his own exertions (Gaskell, 2012:23).

The portrayal of John Barton includes a negative experience with his mother. John Barton is portrayed by Gaskell having a strong belief that he with his own effort can provide all the needs for the family.

Even though the working conditions at the mills depicted by Gaskell sometimes are terrible for the workers, Gaskell makes every working class member understand that one would not survive with out work. In this way she makes her characters desperately seek for work all the time. John Barton is not an exception, Gaskell makes him spend hours in different factories in order to find any job. Gaskell also illustrates the fact that it is a common thing for mills to stop operating. As soon as master fails, one is not able to provide any job for the working class men, so the workers are forced to look for a job on their own:

And when his master suddenly failed, and all hands in that mill were turned back, one Tuesday morning, with the news that Mr. Hunter had stopped, Barton had only a few shillings to rely on; but he had good heart of being employed at some other mill, and accordingly, before returning home, he spent some hours in going from factory to factory, asking for work (Gaskell, 2012:23).

When Gaskell portrays the bad times in *Mary Barton*, the situation becomes worse. Gaskell portrays not only Barton's family suffering, but she also indicates that all families are suffering:

For three years past trade had been getting worse and worse, and the price of provision higher and higher. This disparity between the amount of the earning of the working classes and the price of their food, occasioned, in more cases that could well be imagined, diseases and death. Whole families went through a gradual starvation (Gaskell, 2012:80).

Probably Gaskell illustrates hard times in *Mary Barton* as a depiction of her knowledge gained during "hungry forties". According to Foster, the book opens in a period just before the "Hungry Forties", when the factory workers were relatively well-off, but unlike her other Manchester short stories, moves into the next decade (2002:35). Starvation is something ordinary for the working-class society, it is a challenge for them, and Elizabeth Gaskell portrays John Barton as a character who is challenged by issue of starvation. For him, hard work is an act of morality, one of Victorian moral values, and it allows a working-class man feel responsible and capable.

Gaskell even makes John Barton return to Christian principles in his long dialogue with Wilson about the poor and rich. She uses Dives and Lazarus parable, which appears in Gospel of Luke and tells a story about a poor but happy man in heaven and cursed rich man in the hell. It sounds like a promise that an after all terrible earthly struggle follows a better afterlife:

The rich know nothing of the trials of the poor; I say, if they don't know, they ought to know. We're their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat

of our brows, and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay as Dives and Lazarus (Gaskell, 2012:10).

Meanwhile, the problem which Gaskell illustrates is a present situation for her characters, thus hardly possible that a promise for a better afterlife helps them somehow.

She makes John and his colleagues fight the injustice that has already suppressed them and at some point even destroys their personalities. Gaskell makes John Barton speak bravely in his claims and a little bit desperately. In the conversation with Wilson, Gaskell makes John Barton reveal his true feelings for the wealthy class:

And what good have they ever done me that I should like them?" asked Barton, the latent fire lighting up his eye: and bursting forth he continued, "If I am sick do they come and nurse me? If my child lies dying (as poor Tom lay, with his white wan lips quivering, for want of better food than I could give him), does the rich man bring the wine or broth that might save his life? If I am out of work for weeks in the bad times, and winter comes, with black frost, and keen east wind, and there is no coal for the grate, and no clothes for the bed, and the thin bones are seen through the ragged clothes, does the rich man share his plenty with me, as he ought to do, if his religion wasn't a humbug? When I lie on my death-bed and Mary (bless her!) stands fretting, as I know she will fret," and here his voice faltered a little, "will a rich lady come and take her to her own home if need be, till she can look round, and see what best to do? No, I tell you it's the poor and the poor only, as does such things for the poor (Gaskell, 2012:10).

Gaskell reveals to the reader probably the most shocking part of the working class lifestyle. She portrays working class people suffer not only in the mills or factories because of hard work, but also at their own houses. One of the most tragic scenes in the novel which Gaskell portrays is John Barton's desperation. She places Barton in a challenging situation when one has to choose how to act in order to survive. Probably the novel depicts a grim picture of working life in Manchester.

Even though in both of her books Gaskell pays attention to the relationship between the capital and labour or the issues of class conflict is raised, Gaskell's novel *North and South* argues more about the condition of life and work of the working class society. Gaskell also speaks about the attitude towards each other between workers and employees. The novel is full of examples of class conflict of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

### **2.3. The Depiction of Class Conflict in North and South**

The protagonist of the novel is a female character Margaret Hale, a young intelligent woman from the southern England. Gaskell portrays her as a character who did not belong to the working-class family, neither she belongs to the mill owner's family. Margaret Hale is portrayed as a member of the middle class society same as Mrs. Gaskell. Certainly reader understands that Gaskell portrays Margaret Hale based on her life experience. Elizabeth Gaskell during her lifetime is somewhere in between, her family belongs to the middle class but her philanthropic

nature makes her understand the position of those who were less lucky than she was. As Foster claims, it may be that at some point Gaskell's charitable work could somehow dominate her life:

Despite the cultural and social richness which Manchester offered Gaskell, however, it was the encounter with social distress on a hitherto unknown scale which had the greatest effect on her. As a minister's wife, she inevitably came into contact with this suffering population, the lowest in the city's social scale, even while she refused to allow charitable work to dominate her life (Foster, 2002:22)

Although Gaskell's belonging to the middle class strata offers her many benefits, same as to her character Margaret Hale, Gaskell tries not to overuse her position in society. As reported by Foster, clearly Gaskell (probably much more than William) found such material and social luxury very seductive, though she was too loyal to her Unitarian background to be seriously envious (Foster, 2002:22).

Through her observations while helping to the poorest half of the society and friendships with wealthy families, Gaskell reveals the truth about the class conflict between the working class and wealthier class representatives. She also provides a real help to the workers, and then shares her knowledge while portraying Margaret Hale:

Gaskell's involvement in philanthropic work in the city is verified by various sources. A retrospective article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1895, for example, states that 'she worked hard amongst the poor during those dark days [the 1840s and the cotton famine of the 1860s] (Gaskell, 2002:22).

Margret Hale is portrayed more as an observer of the class conflict; somehow Gaskell makes her less as a participant of a class conflict in *North and South*, probably because in real life Gaskell herself is mainly noticing the class conflict and less experiencing this issue.

The class conflict in *North and South*, is depicted by Gaskell when Margaret Hale asks Thornton about the wages for the workers and he refuse to answer. Gaskell shows the position of the mill owners in communication with workers. She makes him believe that it is not necessary to give any explanations, thus character also shows that mill owners hardly thought about bad times for the working class and about their further life after receiving less money:

Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditure, or your economy in the use of your own money? We, the owners of capital, have a right to choose what we will do with it (Gaskell, 1855:131).

The remembrance of Gaskell's experience is seen on every page of the novel, same as in *Mary Barton*, the basis of her depiction of Milton is based on her experience in Manchester. According to Foster, *North and South* may be Gaskell's last extensive reflection on Manchester life, but it is also part of her wider ongoing debate about roles and relationships (2002:113)

## 2.4. The Quality of the Working Class Life in Mary Barton

Gaskell observes also the quality of life of working class families. She depicts in her novel lifestyle of the working-class in comparison with the wealthier population of the 19th century. Gaskell portrays wealthy class as those who enjoy their prosper lifestyle, meanwhile the working class families Gaskell portrays having poor quality of life. Most of the time Gaskell makes these families experience unpleasant situations. For example she depicts working class members as one`s who cannot not afford bed, so some had to sleep on the floor. The depiction of their houses by Gaskell includes damp atmosphere and poor ventilation. Gaskell portrays a tragic scene in the beginning of the novel, when the main hero John Barton is forced to visit Davenport family:

The window-panes, many of them, were broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the even at midday. After the account I Have given of the state of the street, no one can be surprised that on going into cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so foetid as almost to knock the two men down. Quickly recovering themselves, as those inured to such things do, 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 fireplace was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband`s lair, and cried in the dark loneliness (Gaskell, 2012:57).

The peculiarity of this tragic scene is that Gaskell`s description of Davenport`s cellar is based on Engle`s work. Gaskell uses many times her knowledge from Engels` work:

The description of the Davenports` cellar, filthy, malodorous and revealing the terrible poverty of its inhabitants, is markedly similar to the previously referred to descriptions of Manchester slums in Engels` *Condition of the Working Class in England*, suggesting the accuracy of Gaskell`s portrayal. (Foster, 2002:35).

Many times when Gaskell refers to the working-class families or their lifestyle she portrays one of the members crying. The tears symbolize their desperation and misery in the face of the hard times brought by industrialization. The conditions in which they live are often dreadful. Most popular houses for the working class were back-to back houses, but the worst place to live was cellar dwellings. Elizabeth Gaskell portrays family of Davenport live in this type of housing and she depicts precise and bleak picture of that housing. Another peculiarity of this moment is Gaskell`s choice to name the poorest family in the novel. Probably it is a recall on her own experience, when she used to meet her wealthy friend, belonging to the family of Davenports. According to Fosters, Gaskell herself began her visits to her wealthy friend, Mrs. Davenport, at Capesthorpe Hall in Cheshire, in the mid-1830s, the general lifestyle of which was clearly very appealing to her. (2002:21).

It may be Gaskell's irony that she had chosen family name of her rich friend in order to depict the poor family in her novel. She makes her characters Davenports to suffer in the worst housing of the 19th century.

The contrast of this hopeless depiction is observed in the passage when Elizabeth Gaskell portrays the house of Mr. Carson, a wealthy mill owner. Higher class society lived in very comfortable houses, with servants and designed furniture, sometimes these houses were overcrowded with the furniture whilst the working-class families could not afford even bed:

Mr. Carson's was a good house, and furnished with disregard to expense. But, in addition to lavish expenditure, there was much taste shown, and many articles chosen for their beauty and elegance adorned his rooms.... So he was ushered into kitchen hung round with glittering tins, where a roaring fire burnt merrily, and where numbers of utensil hung round, at whose nature and use Wilson amused himself by guessing (Gaskell, 2012:63).

Obviously mill owners were one of the luckiest persons in Gaskell's novels and probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They lived in appropriate housing and were surrounded with all the blissful things, never seen their own starving children, and probably never been exhausted at the work on mills of factories.

## 2.5. The Quality of Life of the Working Class in North and South

Apart from the grim depiction of the city and the polluted environment another aspect which Gaskell depicts in north and South is poverty of the working class and the flourishing lifestyle of the mill owners. This is important issue not only in *Mary Barton* but also in *North and South*, which Gaskell accurately illustrates to the reader. Elizabeth Gaskell speaks on the problems of working-class such as starvation and lack of appropriate wages. Through her character Margaret Hale, in order to speak on these problems, Gaskell depicts Margaret's awareness about starving children and hope on getting higher wages:

She knew how it was; 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 (Gaskell, 1855:198).

At this moment it is necessary to mention the mill owner's position in order to make a comparison between working class family and wealthier family. Gaskell depicts mill owner's dinner during the worker's strike, thus making her heroine Margaret attend this dinner and also tell about it to the starving working class child: "Dear! And are you going to dine at Thornton's at Marlborough Mills?"(Gaskell, 1855:165).

Gaskell makes Bessy Higgins bitterly comment on Margaret's choice and Bessy suggested that at the dinner of the mill owner it was so much food available that it could feed all the starving families and crying babies:

Food is high, - and they must have food for their child, I guess. Suppose Thorntons sent them their dinner out, - the same money, spent on potatoes and meal, would keep many a crying baby quiet, and hush up its mother's heart for a bit! (Gaskell, 1855:167)

Gaskell makes Bessy Higgins suggest kind of an alternative to the Thornton's dinner. Her main idea is that the food is available in large amount, and only one organized dinner could save many starving children.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth Gaskell's main idea is to show that starvation of the working class and full tables of the mill owners is the main problem between two classes, this issue may be one of the most urgent cases in the class conflict. The problem of food availability can be seen from another perspective, as a part of the social system of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The hunger stays for the tool to organize the social system. The case with Bessy Higgins and her alternative idea proves the concept that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it existed enough food, it may be suggested that there was enough food for everybody. But as it was already claimed in the previous chapter about *Mary Barton*, some part of the Victorian population were entitled for food in any circumstances but some part of population was hungry all the time. Thus the hunger somehow controls the working-class families; as long as they are hungry they will work for any wages in order to buy at least something to feed the family. In this way the main idea is that the most powerful are those who have full tables at the dinner, those who can control hungry working-class families.

### 3. FRAGILITY OF LIFE DEPICTED IN MARY BARTON AND NORTH AND SOUTH

Another aspect of working class suffering is also connected with the fragility of life. Gaskell speaks about fragility of life almost in her novel *Mary Barton*. She portrays her characters that belong to the working class in Manchester, being haunted by sickness and death, poverty and starvation all the time and everywhere. Gaskell portrays death and deathly environment as something ordinary at that time.

#### 3.1. The Depiction of Poverty and Addictions in *Mary Barton*

In beginning of the novel Gaskell makes John Barton lost his beloved wife, and it is the first tragedy in his life:

He opened the latched door, stayed not to light a candle for the mere ceremony of showing his companion up the stairs, so well known to himself; but, in two minutes was in the room, where lay the dead wife, whom he had loved with all the power of his strong heart (Gaskell, 2012:19).

Gaskell portray Mary's mother in poor health in the novel, probably it is caused by the disappearance of her second daughter named Esther, and of course the bad environment may be blamed as well. Gaskell's illustration of strain and bad conditions of lifestyle leads to her characters' early death.

Further, Gaskell portrays the death of a child, and it is obviously based on Elizabeth Gaskell's own experience. Shortly after losing his wife, John Barton is challenged by his son's health issues. Gaskell makes him suffer also from lack of work and of course lack of money for food:

But every mill was some sign of depression of trade! Some were working short hours; some were turning off hand, and for weeks Barton was out of work, living on credit. It was during this time that his little son, the apple of his eye, the cynosure of all his strong power of love, fell ill of the scarlet fever (*Gaskell, 2012:23*).

Scarlet fever is one of the most common diseases in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as it is already stated, none of the citizens are protected from it. Certainly Gaskell connects scarlet fever and the death of Barton's son on the basis of her own sour experience. It is represented as no less a terrible tragedy because of the family's reduced circumstances, as Matus asserts:

The suffering of those fictitious people is conflated with the suffering of real people the author has known. To separate the two, in short, is to misrepresent the ethical and imaginative wellspring of Gaskell's art (Matus, 2009: 23).

Unfortunately John Barton did not succeed at Gaskell's challenge, she gives him no chance to save the child, thus portraying the death of a child:

And out of the shop came Mrs Hunter! She crossed to her carriage, followed by the shopman loaded with purchases for a party. The door was quickly slammed to, and she drove away; and Barton returned home with a bitter spirit of wrath in his heart, to see his only boy a corpse! You can fancy, now, the hoards of vengeance in his heart against the employers (Gaskell, 2012:24).

When Gaskell gives John Barton a chance to steal the food, it is another challenge for him. She questions her character on the nature of what is a real sin. Gaskell shows that John Barton thinks about stealing food, when his family is totally out of money and food is desperately needed, because the life of his son deems on good nourishment. Even though he did not get a real chance in the end, Gaskell makes him believe that stealing food for dying son is not a sin it is a must for him, as a father in the family:

Barton tried credit; but it was worn out at the little provision shop, which was now suffering in their turn. He thought it would be no sin to steal, and would have stolen; but he could not get the opportunity in the few days the child lingered. Hungry himself, almost to an animal pitch of ravenousness (Gaskell, 2012:24).

Even though the medical treatment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and particularly in the novel is not really good and effective, doctor whom Gaskell depicts in Mary Barton believes that a lot depends on good nutrition. Gaskell portrays those characters that were badly ill in desperate need for food, as last just for surviving. At some point it is a question of life and death. Gaskell *portrays* hunger and starvation as one of the consequence of industrialization, and connects the good nourishment with ability to live:

Everything, the doctor said, depend on good nourishment, on generous living, to keep up the little fellow`s strength in the prostration in which the fever had left him. Mocking words! When the commonest food in the house would not furnish one little meal (Gaskell, 2012:24).

Gaskell raises the issue of starvation, good nourishment and connects it with life expectancy in the in the novel many times. The reader quickly gets to know that the working class characters are portrayed by Gaskell portrays as the poorest part of the society of the 19th century. Gaskell`s characters may starve in Manchester, not because there is no food available, but because the food is available only for the wealthy class representatives. The main problem which Gaskell depicts conveys the idea that the food is unattainable for the working class, because of their lack of money or low income. At some point Gaskell`s character John Barton can only look at the food not eat it or buy it, and the passage when Mrs. Hunter comes out of the shop loaded with purchases proves the idea of lack of money in working class families. Somehow, even if Gaskell depicts only few unemployed working-class characters like John Barton in the novel, the main problem Gaskell observes in their income. At some point Gaskell portrays John Barton suffering from lack of work, and this problem eventually leads to the lack of any money. This depiction shows to the reader that is not possible to earn more money to leave for the bad times:

He stood at one of the shop windows where all edible luxuries are displayed: haunches of venison, Stilton cheese, mould of jelly - all appetizing sights to the common passer-by (Gaskell, 2012:24).

Due to unemployment, illnesses and other factors Gaskell portrays her working class characters in *Mary Barton* suffering from lack of good food. Nevertheless, such advantages as good nourishment and availability of decent food every day, comfortable housing Gaskell portrays for characters that belong to wealthy class. Gaskell makes the character of John Barton associated the working class in order to reveal to the reader all the pain of their lifestyle. Despite the fact that at the beginning of the novel Gaskell portrays John Barton as a person with a disciplined will for work, gradually Gaskell makes her character change.

Gaskell portrays Barton unable to cope after the deaths of his wife and son, so Gaskell makes John Barton poison himself. She makes John Barton turn to opium as the only thing which helps him to forget the moments of his tragedies:

It is true much of their morbid power might be ascribed to the use of opium. But before you blame too harshly this use, or rather abuse, try a hopeless life, with daily cravings of the body for food. Try, not alone being without hope yourself, but seeing all around you reduced to the same despair, arising from the same circumstances; all around you telling (though) they use no word or language, by their looks and feeble actions, that they are suffering and sinking under the pressure of want (Gaskell, 2012:159).

Probably Elizabeth Gaskell did not support any types of addictions and poisons, but it is a part of the lifestyle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so she depicts these addictions in her novel. According to Diniejko, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a result of the expanding British Empire, opium also became available in Britain and soon it was as popular as alcohol (Diniejko, 2002).

Gaskell makes John Barton use opium in order to dull his hunger pangs, but taking opium also illustrates gradual decline of the character from working class man to the murderer. Despite the decline of her character, Gaskell tries to explain to the reader why John Barton is portrayed as the opium eater. Gaskell challenges her reader by asking a rhetorical question: "Would you not be glad to forget life, and its burdens? And opium gives forgetfulness for a time" (Gaskell, 2012:159).

Gradually opium become necessity like food for Gaskell`s character. She makes John Barton become fully addicted to the opium. When it comes to the choice between food and opium Gaskell makes John Barton choose opium because of his addiction:

He had hesitated between the purchase of meal or opium, and had chosen the latter, for its use had become a necessity with him. He wanted it to relieve him from the terrible depression its absence occasioned. A large lump seemed only to bring him into a natural state, or what had been his natural state formerly (Gaskell, 2012:115).

Drug and alcohol addiction in Victorian times is a serious problem. Elizabeth Gaskell could not skip these issues in her novel. She shows the importance of it same like class conflict,

housing issues and other cases discussed in this paper. Gaskell portrays the working class character John Barton addicted to opium in order to forget about the hunger.

She also portrays alcohol addiction of Barton`s daughter Esther. She is drinking in order to forget about her life problems. Elizabeth Gaskell makes her heroines addicted to the alcohol, whose life could be one of the most dramatic depictions in Gaskell`s novel. Author makes Esther become an alcoholic because Esther is ashamed of her life, Gaskell involves Esther into prostitution in order to get some money to feed her starving child. Eventually Gaskell use alcohol addiction to numb Esther`s pain of all the bad experiences she had to overcome:

I must have drink. Such as live like me could not bear life if they did not drunk.

It`s the only thing to keep us from suicide. If we did not drink we could not stand the memory of what we have been, and though of what we are, for a day (Gaskell, 2012:154).

Elizabeth Gaskell observes some problems of addictions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Author reflects unpleasant consequences of poverty and starvation which caused addictions of her characters at some point.

### **3.2. The Depiction of Poverty and Pollution in North and South**

In the beginning on the novel, Gaskell forces her character Margaret Hale to leave the rural household and move to the north. Gaskell makes Margaret Hale move to the industrial part of England, a city called Milton. It is a first challenge for Gaskell`s heroine Margaret Hale, to get used to the new lifestyle. The main heroine starts to observe the polluted environment in the 19th century Britain which Elizabeth Gaskell depicts in her work. The brusque difference between rural countryside and industrial city plays important role in the novel *North and South*. The depiction of polluted environment of Milton affects the working class and wealthier classes lifestyle and health in particular. The fragility of life caused by dirty environment is observed in *North and South* more than in *Mary Barton*. Gaskell depicts comparison of north and south through her heroine`s Margaret Hale perspective, thus it is important to mention that many Margaret Hale`s observations are the depiction of Elizabeth Gaskell experience. According to Foster, although containing less of the environmental/contextual specificity which is such a feature of *Mary Barton*, *North and South* still draws heavily on Gaskell`s own experience(Foster, 2002:108).

Gaskell makes Margaret think about the difference between the north lifestyle and southern standards of living. Gaskell reflects struggles of her heroine which one should face when moving from south to north. In the beginning, somehow this abrupt distinction caused Hale`s disgust at the dirt and gloominess of Milton, probably Gaskell depicts her own thoughts about Manchester. As Foster states that, in many ways, indeed, Gaskell never really liked living in Manchester. She

found it dirty and depressing, and its urban poverty and deprivation must have been eye-opening for her (2002:20)

The line from the novel, when Margaret reached Milton proves the idea about antipathy towards industrial cities:

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay. It was all the darker from contrast with the pale gray-blue of the wintry sky; for in Heston there had been the earliest signs of frost. Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; perhaps, after all, more a loss of the fragrance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell (Gaskell, 1855:63)

Even though Margaret at this stage observes only the polluted environment, she starts to realize that the extreme pollution in the industrial city and poverty-sticken atmosphere prevails in the society.

The city Milton is depicted full of the working-class representatives, recalling the real situation in all industrial cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the inhabitants look poor and exhausted, the wealthier class representative is like an opposition to the working class members. Workers live closely to the factories and mills, in order to be closer to the working place and Gaskell raised this issue so she compares Milton with a coop. Where the leading role, or so-called hen stays for factory and mill, meantime houses of the workers would be chickens. This brief simile actually portrays the precise picture of the city life, these working-class houses in poor condition looked very small and helpless in comparison with the big factories:

Quick they were whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick. Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black 'unparliamentary' smoke, and sufficiently accounting for the cloud which Margaret had taken to foretell rain (Gaskell, 1855:63)

Probably the comparison is used by Gaskell in order to show to the reader that the most important thing or a leading role in the industrial cities takes the factory or the mill. It is of the utmost importance for the society and government in particular. Whilst the inhabitants and the working class in particular, the power for those factories and mills to operate, deserve less attention from the owners regarding the quality of housing and wages which consequently caused problems with health. As it was already stated the wages of an average mill worker was hardly enough to survive and the quality of their living is extremely bad.

Gaskell makes the main production in Milton, just like in Manchester, the cotton production. Obviously the city is surrounded with cotton mills and factories. The cotton is everywhere: at work, at streets, at home and even inside one`s body. Gaskell makes Margaret pay her attention to the cotton obsession of Milton inhabitants, particularly to the fact that everybody is busy with cotton production in Milton:

As they drove through the larger and wider streets, from the station to the hotel, they had to stop constantly; great loaded lorries blocked up the not over-wide thoroughfares. Margaret had now and then been into the city in her drives with her aunt. But there the heavy lumbering vehicles seemed various in their purposes and intent; here every van, every waggon and truck, bore cotton, either in the raw shape in bags, or the woven shape in bales of calico (Gaskell, 1855:63)

Every vehicle in Milton is carrying cotton, either for the further production, or one which is ready for the realization. It is a daily routine of any worker who lives in Milton, to focus more cotton.

Gaskell makes Margaret pay her attention to all the details, definitely like Gaskell herself. In this way Gaskell makes Margaret start to realize that the polluted air is something natural for the citizens of Milton, as it also was in the real life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This fact makes her heroine Margaret feel desperate. Portrayed by Gaskell as the well-educated character she realizes that this type of lifestyle is not healthy and may lead to unpleasant consequences. Very soon character of Margaret Hale will witness how fragile and short life of the working class member may be, due to the unhealthy air they breathe and common diseases of Victorian Britain depicted in this novel. Lines from the novel prove the idea that Gaskell makes Margaret start to feel a little bit miserable in Milton:

At night when Margaret realized this, she felt inclined to sit down in a stupor of despair. The heavy smoky air hung about her bedroom, which occupied the long narrow projection at the back of the house. The window, placed at the side of the oblong, looked to the blank wall of a similar projection, not above ten feet distant. It loomed through the fog like a great barrier to hope. Inside the room everything was in confusion (Gaskell, 1855:72)

Gaskell also makes Margaret Hale become adapted to the heavy smoky air and fog, as a part of a daily routine of anyone who lives in the industrial city like Milton. Gaskell repeatedly refers to the comparison, this time she depicts window as a great barrier to hope. But she never mentions to what kind of hope, probably leaving this for the reader to decide.

Gaskell speaks many times about the unhealthy environment in *North and South*, once she speaks through her heroine Margaret Hale, but Gaskell also involves other characters. Gaskell makes Margaret's father realize the sick environment in the town when he sees how his wife, Margaret's mother, starts to get seriously ill:

Margaret, I do believe this is an unhealthy place. Only suppose that your mother's health or yours should suffer. I wish I had gone into some country place in Wales; this is really terrible,' said he, going up to the window. There was no comfort to be given. They were settled in Milton, and must endure smoke and fogs for a season; indeed, all other life seemed shut out from them by as thick a fog of circumstance (Gaskell, 1855:71)

In some way, extreme air pollution affects all layers of society; yet the biggest part of the sufferings caused by pollution goes on behalf of the working class, as they breathe even more polluted air at the factories or mills. As it was already stated, the working class houses are settled very close to the factories and mills, in this way making the polluted smoke and fog fill their

houses and lungs. Eventually the working class families suffer from pollution more than wealthier masters.

Gaskell's characters blame the polluted environment many times in the novel, and the main character Margaret is not an exception. She is challenged by her mother's health problems, thus Gaskell makes Margaret not only see the other characters suffering, she also makes Margaret's family suffer from health issues. It is the case when Gaskell portrays Margaret not as an observer of the health problems, but as a participant of the problem. Many families face health issues in Gaskell's novel, recalling her own sad experience with the death of Gaskell's son. Thus the protagonist does not have children, in contrast with John Barton, one of the family members is portrayed as a sick person. In the beginning of the novel, Margaret realizes that the bad quality of the air they breathe may cause some unpleasant consequences to her family. So Gaskell portrays Margaret's mother as a victim of the dirty environment, thus making her the weakest in the face of the diseases. Certainly the rest of the family members understand the problem, and somehow blame the industrial lifestyle:

And above all possible chances, avoid letting papa hear anything like what you have just been saying. I can see that he is tormenting himself already with the idea that mamma would never have been ill if we had stayed at Helstone, and you don't know papa's agonising power of self-reproach! (Gaskell, 1855:270)

Gaskell makes Margaret's father realize that wife's problems with health are caused by the polluted environment of Milton. Even though Gaskell never points out what kind of illness destroys Mrs. Hale, her husband strongly believes that wife would never fall sick if they would stay at the south at Helstone.

It is necessary to mention, that actually Margaret's mother is portrayed as one of those who really enjoys their moving to the industrial city, at some point she feels great sympathy to the industrial Milton:

After a quiet life in a country parsonage for more than twenty years, there was something dazzling to Mr. Hale in the energy which conquered immense difficulties with ease; the power of the machinery of Milton, the power of the men of Milton, impressed him with a sense of grandeur, which he yielded to without caring to inquire into the details of its exercise (Gaskell, 1855:75)

It could be that Gaskell speaks sarcastic, when portraying Mrs. Hale as a person who is admiring industrial lifestyle, and in the end she is the one who is deathly ill because of the industrial lifestyle. With this character Gaskell tries to show to the reader, that nobody is protected from terrible industrialization consequences, and it does not depend on personal feelings towards the industrial lifestyle. The main reason for sudden death in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is an absence of proper understanding of medicine and epidemic disease. According to Kenneth,

most doctors did not understand the aetiology of diseases in the early Industrial Revolution; they were, in particular, unfamiliar with the germ theory of diseases (2004:9).

In the end, Gaskell makes her character Mrs. Hale experience the worst ending, Margaret's mother dies because of convulsion, so Gaskell's idea about fragility of life in the Victorian Britain is proved again. It does not depend on the social position, or the amount of money which family can spend on good treatment, it is the lack of proper knowledge about medical treatment and bad environment in the city:

Convulsions came on; and when they ceased, Mrs. Hale was unconscious. Her husband might lie by her shaking the bed with his sobs; her son's strong arms might lift her tenderly up into a comfortable position; her daughter's hands might bathe her face; but she knew them not. She would never recognise them again, till they met in Heaven. (Gaskell, 1855:275)

Gaskell portrays the death of a middle class member, and this case proves the fact that nobody is protected in the face of health problems in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

Another significant character in this novel, which is worth to mention in this sub chapter is Bessy Higgins. A sick working-class child speaks to the protagonist Margaret Hale, and perhaps it is most emotional moments of the novel. Gaskell raise the issue of the fragility of life one more time, providing her reader with another great example when one could easily die because of the environmental pollution. And this time it is a representative from the working class.

When Gaskell makes Margaret Hale meet Bessy Higgins and her father Nicholas Higgins for the first time, Gaskell points out Bessy's disability. Gaskell shows to the reader that the character Bessy Higgins is very weak, in contrast with healthy Margaret Hale. Gaskell makes Margaret not only meet Bessy, but also build a kind of possible friendship between the two ladies. As a result their friendship is very symbolic in the novel. Margaret Hale is portrayed as a person who comes from the south, as she is kind of the southern representative in the novel, thus she is also a representative of the middle-class strata, and meanwhile Bessy Higgins is a working-class girl, who comes from the north. When Gaskell makes two of her characters come into contact, she tries to show to her reader how different these two personalities are. Gaskell reveals the difference between the north and south, working-class and middle-class and also makes an embodiment of the title of the novel.

Definitely Gaskell portrays Margaret on the basis of her own middle-class life experience, she makes her heroine enjoy some middle-class benefits and at the same time, she portrays her heroine as a young woman with deep compassion to those who is suffering, same as Mrs. Gaskell herself is full of compassion to the working class.

When Margaret Hale meets Bessy Higgins with her father Nicholas, and Gaskell points out Bessy's weakness, Gaskell makes Margaret speak with compassion in her voice:

Margaret had slackened her pace to walk alongside of the man and his daughter, whose steps were regulated by the feebleness of the latter. She now spoke to the girl, and there was a sound of tender pity in the tone of her voice as she did so that went right to the heart of the father (Gaskell, 1855:79)

When Gaskell involves Margaret and Bessy into the conversation, the reader realizes that Gaskell shows the desperation of those who were ill. Most of them knew that there is no chance for them to survive, and that they are ready to face their destiny:

I'm afraid you are not very strong.' 'No,' said the girl, 'nor never will be.  
Spring is coming,' said Margaret, as if to suggest pleasant, hopeful thoughts.  
Spring nor summer will do me good,' said the girl quietly (Gaskell, 1855:79)

Gaskell portrays a young girl, who is still a child, as a very brave character. Gaskell did not emphasize that she is scared or not willing to die, Bessy Higgins speaks quietly as if she is ready for the consequences. With this example Gaskell shows the desperation which prevailed in the society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the face of illnesses and mortality.

Another line from the novel also proves the idea that most of the characters knew their future if being seriously ill. It is the shocking moment for the reader and protagonist in particular, that Gaskell made Bessy's father Nikolos speak on this issue calmly, without any hope for a better future for his daughter. Margaret looked up at the man, almost expecting some contradiction from him, or at least some remark that would modify his daughter's utter hopelessness. But, instead, he added: "I'm afeared hoo speaks truth. I'm afeared hoo's too far gone in a waste" (Gaskell, 1855:79).

From the perspective of Bessy Higgins and her father Elizabeth Gaskell shows to the reader the position of the working class society towards the illnesses and diseases. Gaskell tries to show to the reader that it is a depiction of real atmosphere in the 19<sup>th</sup> century working-class families.

Gaskell makes Margaret curious about health issues of Bessy Higgins, and reveals the truth to her reader in the conversation between Bessy Higgins and Margaret Hale. Bessy Higgins is deathly ill because of her workplace. She is working at the factory, and inhaling so-called "fluff" while she is working.

I think I was well when mother died, but I have never been rightly strong sin' somewhere about that time. I began to work in a carding-room soon after, and the fluff got into my lungs and poisoned me (Gaskell, 1855:113).

Gaskell makes Bessy explain her situation, and it is clear for the reader that the deathly illness is caused by the work at the factory. Meanwhile when Gaskell is portrays the illness and death of Margaret's mother she never gives a clear evidence that the industrialization may be

blamed. Gaskell proves the idea that the biggest part of the sufferings from the illnesses comes on behalf of the working class society. Their poor conditions of life at the work place and at home may be blamed.

Further explanation is also depicted in the novel, Bessy Higgins continues to speak about the fluff in her lungs. The description is so accurate as if Gaskell knows all the details about fluff, carding rooms and working at the factory. Despite the fact that she never had an experience working at the factories or mills:

Fluff? said Margaret,inquiringly.

Fluff,' repeated Bessy. 'Little bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff (Gaskell, 1855:113)

Gaskell is aware of many facts about industrialization issues, thus it is another depiction of her distinct knowledge about the problem:

Gaskell, as earlier, was using factual evidence here: details of Bessie's lung disease were either from personal knowledge or perhaps from statistics about diseases of cotton workers supplied by James Kay, Lady Kay-Shuttleworth's husband; the workman (Foster, 2002:108)

Pulmonary diseases are widely spread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so called consumption affected almost every person who worked at the factory, probably because of little understanding about those diseases and poor medical treatment, society preferred to call it consumption. According to Byrne, in the nineteenth century, consumption was often used as a blanket term for various unidentified pulmonary diseases (2011:63).

Gaskell portrays Margaret Hale as a character with a warm heart to those who is suffering, and of course she is anxious about improvements to avoid the inhalation of the fluff. Even though Bessy explains that a wheel to blow away the fluff is too expensive improvement for the factory, the most shocking part is that the workers themselves did not want for a wheel to be installed. In this case the issue of starvation is raised again. Poisonous fluffs filled not only their lungs, but also stomach, and gave a feeling of full stomach and allow workers to forget about the food for some time:

I've heerd tell o' men who didn't like working in places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it made \_em hungry, after they'd been long used to swallowing fluff, to go without it, and that their wage ought to be raised if they were to work in such places. So between masters and men th' wheels fall through (Gaskell, 1855:113)

It is not the first case when Gaskell portrays the situation when her characters poison themselves in order to forget the hunger. In this case she makes her characters to fill the stomach with poisonous fluff and in *Mary Barton* she makes her characters use opium to lack the starvation.

Even though Elizabeth Gaskell`s novel *North and South* portrays both position, masters and workers, the depiction of the working class sufferings remains to be the urgent theme in Gaskell`s fiction. *North and South* contains the depiction of the same social issues as in *Mary Barton*. Gaskell illustrates the most tragic episodes in both novels: child death, poverty and starvation of the working class strata. All these episodes are based on Gaskell`s own life experience, thus Gaskell depicts to the reader the social problems of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

## CONCLUSIONS

The novels of Elizabeth Gaskell are worth to read and also it is worth to think over the social issues she raises in her works. Gaskell's works are appreciated as one of the greatest examples of social novels, providing to the reader not only the depiction of the social issues of 19<sup>th</sup> century like, for example, health issues and polluted environment, but also her works give a kind of experience for the present-day reader to have a look at the ways of life of different classes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Probably, due to the reason that Gaskell's novels are of great interest to the modern society, film adaption of *North and South* has been made in 2004 and produced by the BBC. Gaskell's personal observations are seen in her every work, thus making the reading of her work pleasurable for the reader.

The historical approach applied for the research, revealed that Victorian era was characterized by social and economical change. It was time not only for industrial revolution; it was time also for social revolution in British Empire. That time was remarkable for the growth of population and urbanization. Rapid changes and expansion of population made many of the newcomers settle in unpleasant conditions; the issue of housing was an urgent problem. The biggest part of sufferings probably appeared for the working class society. They were those who experienced low wages for dangerous and hard labor at factories and mills, the lack of money caused unpleasant consequences for the whole working-class family. Many of them suffered from inappropriate conditions at work, being unprotected not only from injuries but also from unemployment, which consequently caused poverty and starvation for thousands of families. Working class people experienced health problems and number of terrible diseases and illnesses. Additionally, society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is challenged by very strict class division and as a result the class conflict. The difference between classes at some point was very distinct, and in many ways it affected everyday life of Victorians, especially the quality of life.

Elizabeth Gaskell's interest in social issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was truly affected by her own life experience. Gaskell was one of those who had lived the biggest part of her life in industrial city Manchester, thus she was also one of those who had witnessed the suffering of the working class, social injustice and many other difficulties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. Furthermore during her life experience in Manchester, she had a bad experience, when she lost her child because of scarlet fever. Along these lines Gaskell was not only an observer of the difficulties she was also participant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sufferings. However disregarding her sour experience, Gaskell's heart was always full of compassion for the working class families.

The practical part of the Bachelor thesis consists of the analysis of two novels by Elizabeth Gaskell. Relevant conclusions are that in her social novels Gaskell depicted very precisely and

exceptionally the real situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. In *Mary Barton* Gaskell raised question about working class sufferings and desperation in the face of industrialization and wealthy owners of the factories, because the protagonist of the novel was depicted as a representative of the working class. In addition, she also depicted problems of starvation and poverty of the working class families. Consequently Gaskell`s characters in *Mary Barton* suffered from health problems and poor medical treatment during illnesses, but the main problem of the working class in the novel remained the lack of money and decent food. In addition, her characters were addicted to opium and alcohol, nevertheless Gaskell tried to explain to her readers the reasons for these addictions. In *North and South* Elizabeth Gaskell depicted the class conflict from the perspective of a young and intelligent woman, thus Gaskell compared the lives of a middle class woman and the working class members. Additional attention in the novel Gaskell left for the wealthy owners, Gaskell managed to show both sides of the conflict. She also raised the question of the polluted environment, lack of money and food and health problems as a result of all these difficulties. Nevertheless the issue of mortality of the characters caused by the industrialization processes remained essential for her.

To sum up, Gaskell`s way of telling the plot makes the reading enjoyable and gives convenient information to her reader about life of Victorians, process of industrialization and even a glimpse into health issues and medical treatment of the time. Though in order to get precise and correct information about 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain one should consult reliable sources, novels of Elizabeth Gaskell remain as a good addition to the studies of the Victorian age.

## THESIS

1. The period of British history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is named after Queen Victoria (1819-1901), and the era is called Victorian age. During reign of Queen Victoria Britain undergoes various social problems.
2. Victorian era is characterized by industrial revolution (1760-1840) and expansion of the population, thus the century of transformation in Britain remains to be long period of prosperity for the empire.
3. The quality of housing is one of the most urgent problems of Victorian Britain. Many of the working class people used to live in bad conditions: sharing one lavatory, staying in cellar dwellings. Those places were often dirty, damp and bleak.
4. The working class people received low wages for hard and dangerous work. The money they were paid, was hardly enough for sustainable life. However, there was a long line of people willing to work as long as they were paid at least something.
5. Health issue affected all classes, typical diseases of the time was cholera, smallpox, scarlet fever, etc. Queen Victoria and her eldest son became seriously ill from typhoid, illnesses also took many lives of working class representatives.
6. The class division became very distinct in 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was rapid distinction between those who work and those own factories. It was time for middle class growth, thus forming the largest social layer in Victorian period.
7. Gaskell`s sour experience in her lifetime was when she lost her youngest son, who died from scarlet fever, one of the common diseases of the time. Thus, Gaskell depicted her worries in her first social novel *Mary Barton*.
8. In the first social novel *Mary Barton*, Gaskell focused mainly on life of working class people, she spoke on behalf of workers. Thus novel was widely criticized; many believed that the portrayal of the owners became prejudiced at some point.
9. The protagonist of the novel *Mary Barton*, was portrayed by Gaskell as a worker with a will to work and support his family. Gaskell made him gradually decline in the end, thus John Barton experienced the loss of his wife and son, lack of money and work, and addiction to opium in the end of the novel, which was Gaskell`s depiction of the real life in the `9<sup>th</sup> century Britain.
10. Gaskell made her working class characters in *Mary Barton* suffer from starvation and poverty, in contrast she depicts wealthy owners loaded with purchases from shops and living in good quality houses.

11. In comparison to *Mary Barton*, Gaskell`s novel *North and South* focused on the relationship between workers and owners, thus Gaskell tried to depict both sides in her novel, portraying one of main characters as a wealthy mill owner.
12. Gaskell portrayed the protagonist of *North and South* based on her own experience. Margaret Hale is portrayed as an intelligent middle class woman, forced to leave southern area in order to live in industrial north, just like Mrs. Gaskell herself moved to Manchester.
13. Both novels focused on working class sufferings, Gaskell raised important issue in poverty, hard labour and class division in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, mostly referring to her own observations of 19<sup>th</sup> century Manchester.

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