

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI  
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Philanthropy and philanthropists in the works of  
Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot

Bakalářská práce

Anna Lockerová

Vedoucí práce: doc. Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.

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## **Zadání závěrečné práce**

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla jsem veškeré použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne:

Podpis.....

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## **Obsah**

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Philanthropy and its representation in literature</b> .....	7
2.1	Philanthropy in nineteenth century Britain .....	7
2.2	Critique .....	8
2.2.1	Economic perspective .....	8
2.2.2	‘Telescopic’ philanthropy .....	9
2.3	Literature and personal charity .....	9
2.3.1	Personal charity in Victorian novels .....	9
2.4	Literary realism.....	10
<b>3</b>	<b>Philanthropists in Victorian novels</b> .....	12
3.1	Motivation.....	12
3.1.1	‘Real philanthropy’ .....	12
3.1.2	Religion.....	13
3.1.3	Women philanthropists .....	13
3.2	Condescension .....	14
3.3	Form.....	15
<b>4</b>	<b>Philanthropy in the works of Charles Dickens</b> .....	16
4.1	Ebenezer Scrooge.....	16
4.2	Mr Meagles .....	19
<b>5</b>	<b>Philanthropy in the works of Elizabeth Gaskell</b> .....	21
5.1	Margaret Hale .....	22
5.2	John Thornton .....	24
<b>6</b>	<b>Philanthropy in the works of George Eliot</b> .....	27
6.1	Dinah Morris.....	27
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	29
	<b>Resumé</b> .....	30
	<b>Annotation</b> .....	33
	<b>Anotace</b> .....	34

# 1 Introduction

This thesis deals with the motive of philanthropy in British literature of the Victorian era. The approach I chose is to analyse the characters associated with philanthropy, using one common method, in order to reveal in what aspects, the examined characters differ and which on the other hand they share.

In the first two chapters I briefly introduce philanthropy as a social phenomenon and comment its representation in contemporary literature. I state in what context are these characters usually described and suggest which criteria should be used for their analysis and why.

In the second part of the thesis, I apply the established criteria on chosen works of three distinguished novelists of the Victorian era, namely Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot.

If all of the points I purpose in the first part are commented it should result in basic analysis of the characters of philanthropists and it should distinguish them from other similar characters. That is why the examples were chosen to be as distinct as possible, in order to find out whether the conditions apply to characters from all parts of the spectrum.

In each of the analysis I try to answer three main questions: (1) Is philanthropy in its original sense behind their charitable acts? (2) Is the benefactor member of social class superior to the beneficiary? Do they condescend? (3) What is the form of their help?

The purpose of this paper is not to make a complete and exhaustive analyses of each of given characters (in order to achieve that each character would have to be dealt with individually) but rather to determine and test distinctive factors which can be applied universally. Finally, I asses which of these factors proved useful and suggest further amelioration.

## 2 Philanthropy and its representation in literature

Philanthropy, as a phenomenon generally associated with the Victorian era, appeared in many forms, in connection to various individuals as well as institutions and as such it inevitably evolved and faced criticism from different sides. The first question that should be asked in a study of this social practice is what is meant by ‘philanthropy’ and how is this expression usually used. When etymology is concerned, the original meaning of ‘philanthropy’ was ‘love of mankind’ or ‘good nature,’<sup>1</sup> the opposite of misanthropy. Eventually the meaning shifted to ‘giving of money or simply to an attitude of benevolence towards fellow human beings.’<sup>2</sup> In this thesis the term is used in regard to both its definitions, it stands for: love of mankind, good nature of a person expressed by charitable deeds.

### 2.1 Philanthropy in nineteenth century Britain

Although philanthropy (both the term and the fact) existed earlier it was not until nineteenth century when it came to general awareness.<sup>3</sup> Cunningham in his research based on number of occurrences of words associated with philanthropy in newspaper detected its peak during 1830 and 1840. It became a widely discussed topic. In the newspaper articles the word ‘philanthropy’ was usually put alongside words such as ‘statesman.’ Inclination to philanthropy was perceived as a noble virtue of a politician.<sup>4</sup>

Not only was philanthropy presented in the context of politics, it was also linked to nationalism. It was often regarded as an essentially British value which is either unknown to other nations or imperfect in their case:

The response to the French Revolution, in pitting philanthropy against patriotism, did much to tarnish its reputation, but it also reinforced the belief, originating in the mid-eighteenth century, that the benevolence,

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<sup>1</sup> *A Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "Philanthropy," accessed April 27, 2021, [https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/1755/philanthropy\\_ns](https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/1755/philanthropy_ns).

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *The reputation of philanthropy since 1750: Britain and beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 206.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Christianson, *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction: Dickens, Hawthorne, Eliot, and Howells* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2007), 31.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, *The reputation of philanthropy since 1750*, 60-62.

charity and philanthropy of the British stood preeminent among nations.<sup>5</sup>

This could mean that the British were a generous nation by their nature but it also suggests that they lived in society which had both opportunities and need of their generosity.

## 2.2 Critique

Defenders of philanthropy faced criticism for multiple reasons. Among the arguments that appeared were that philanthropy creates what Siegel called ‘cycle of condescension and gratitude,’<sup>6</sup> a reproach attributed to so called personal charity, or a claim that ‘philanthropy posed a very real threat to liberal values and their corresponding vision of social progress,’<sup>7</sup> which was seen as a disadvantage of institutional philanthropy. The Poor Laws that came after 1834 were also often criticized.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.2.1 Economic perspective

The most overt points of criticism of philanthropy are those with regards to economy. The connection between economy and philanthropy is not the objective of this thesis, it was already studied by multiple scholars and to be described in depth it would require a separate work; however, it cannot be ignored entirely. It is the economic situation (and social as well) that allowed to one person to be in superordinate position with regards to another person and that eventually gives the possibility to cross this boundary. In many cases charity is essentially a financial transaction.

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<sup>5</sup> Cunningham, *The reputation of philanthropy since 1750*, 214-215.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Siegel, *Charity and Condescension: Victorian Literature and the Dilemmas of Philanthropy* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Christianson, *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction*, 43.

<sup>8</sup> John-Paul McGauran and John Offer, “A Philosophy of Charity and the Debates over the English and Irish Poor Laws in the 1830s,” *SOCIAL POLICY & ADMINISTRATION* 51, no. 5 (September 1, 2017): 721, accessed August 18, 2021, doi:10.1111/spol.12191.



Usually, philanthropy is said to be harmful to the economy. Christianson even summarizes three traditional models of the relation between these two domains which include their coexistence, opposition and complementation of one another.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.2.2 ‘Telescopic’ philanthropy

Another point of critique of philanthropy is usually termed ‘telescopic philanthropy,’ the expression comes from a chapter title in Charles Dickens’ *Bleak house*. It denotes concerning oneself with distant problems (typically an effort to ameliorate the live conditions of people from British colonies) rather than addressing issues from one’s nearest surroundings.<sup>10</sup> This is understandable given the fact that in the public view at the time philanthropy was mostly connected to politicians. An act of ‘telescopic philanthropy’ could raise public opinion without much effort being done because its effects are not noticeable for majority of people living in Britain.

## 2.3 Literature and personal charity

Beside this model which can be called ‘institutional’ or ‘political’ philanthropy there was another, much more personal approach. People, as individuals, were reaching to those in need, more precisely to another concrete person. This ‘personal’ philanthropy was not glorified in the speeches of statesmen nor in newspapers. On the other hand, it was a topic that intrigued the authors of fiction.

### 2.3.1 Personal charity in Victorian novels

As Victorian novelists concentrated on individual characters and tried to capture their life stories, often choosing individuals from middle or lower classes of the society, it was inevitable that they encountered acts of charitable giving. How the society was governed, who created the system and what was its purpose was not in the centre of their attention but rather on the background of the personal histories they showed. As Christianson puts it: ‘The topos of philanthropy became a uniquely suitable site for the examination of mid-Victorian moral psychology and the models of social relation which were its outgrowth.’<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Christianson, *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction*, 42-46.

<sup>10</sup> Cunningham, *The reputation of philanthropy since 1750*, 206.

<sup>11</sup> Christianson, *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction*, 32.

When philanthropy became a subject in fiction a new point of view emerged; the authors tried to capture what does philanthropy reveal about the relationships among people and social classes.

For some, the relation that charity established between rich and poor must have [sic] to be maintained even if relief itself were abandoned, while for others, it was exactly this relation that needed to be altered.<sup>12</sup>

They were interested in the relation and seek the ‘sympathetic experience.’<sup>13</sup>

## 2.4 Literary realism

Siegel examines closer how philanthropy is represented in literature, he states that: ‘[v]ictorian fiction stages countless scenes where acts of goodwill fail, due sometimes to the insensibility of those who have and sometimes to the viciousness of those who want.’<sup>14</sup> Philanthropy is not showed in fiction as uniquely positive moral virtue (although it can be argued here that some works, for example the early works of Charles Dickens, capture philanthropy in rather idealised and simplified way); there is still a notion of benefit in the literary representation of philanthropy but its shortcomings or even failures are definitely not omitted.

This corresponds with the fact that the prevailing literary movement in Victorian fiction was realism. According to Cunningham philanthropy is neither a motif entirely descended from Enlightenment, even though it conveys certain rationality, nor typical for Romanticism, even though it includes interpersonal relationships and the call for sympathetic experience.<sup>15</sup> And again the ideals of realism emerge, as it combines both these aspects.

Claybaugh in his essay about charity even sees literary realism as the first necessary step to the actual reform. He claims that ‘the novel’s attention to social problems quite literary helped to solve them.’<sup>16</sup> He talks about social issues in general

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<sup>12</sup> Siegel, *Charity and Condescension*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Christianson, *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Siegel, *Charity and Condescension*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham, *The reputation of philanthropy since 1750*, 89.

<sup>16</sup> Amanda Claybaugh, "Dickensian Intemperance: Charity and Reform," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 37, no. 1/2 (2003): 45, accessed August 18, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30038529>.

but it specially applies to the problem of poverty. The Victorian novelists in this case not only helped to raise awareness about the situation but also pointed out a solution which is philanthropy. By describing scenes of generous behaviour, they showed to the readers an example to be followed.

### 3 Philanthropists in Victorian novels

As mentioned above, novels from the Victorian era captured philanthropy as a relation, or it could be said interaction between individuals, as oppose to newspapers and official reports and other literature from the given period which presented charity simply as numbers of people who received some form of help from a charitable organization.<sup>17</sup> If philanthropy is to be examined as a relation, two sides need to be considered, that is the benefactor and the beneficiary. An analysis of the later could answer questions such as why would someone except (or refuse as well) assistance and from whom or what aspects effect it. However, as this work focuses primarily on the benefactors a different set of criteria need to be used, as would be explained in the following subchapters.

#### 3.1 Motivation

As Hunter explains, sentimental charity always raised questions about ‘method and motives’ especially after a phenomenon labelled ‘fashionable slumming’ arose. It denotes a popular trend among members of the higher social class to purposely seek out people in dire straits and visit them in their homes.<sup>18</sup> Even besides that, it seems logical when a person gives priority to someone else’s interests over their own, to ask why do they choose to do that.

##### 3.1.1 ‘Real philanthropy’

Given the fact that the word ‘philanthropy’ original denoted ‘love of mankind’ as was already mentioned, the first answer to the previous question which suggest itself is that someone wants to assist other simply out of their good nature or genuine concern about other’s well-being. However, Beardman who examines altruism from psychological point of view, explains that it is natural for people to be concerned with other people’s intentions or even doubt them. She asserts:

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<sup>17</sup> Pamela Corpron Parker, "Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and "North and South"," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25, no. 2 (1997): 322, accessed August 18, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058392>.

<sup>18</sup> Adrian Hunter, “Arthur Morrison and the Tyranny of Sentimental Charity,” *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 56, no. 3 (June 22, 2013): 296-297, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsglr.A337717373&lang=cs&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Moral attributions play a large role in much ordinary explanation of human behavior. We say someone was motivated by honor, duty, kindness, goodness, compassion, or that she acts with integrity or because she is virtuous. We also attribute immoral motivations, such as bad or evil intentions, spitefulness and malice, self-despising feelings, or desires to be cruel, unkind, or to humiliate.<sup>19</sup>

If it is natural to try to reveal others intentions, it probably could not be avoided in an analysis of a literary character. Moreover, even if an author introduces a character of a philanthropist in the original sense of the word, the reader might tend not to believe it.

### 3.1.2 Religion

An important aspect in the discussion about motives for philanthropy is religion. It should be noted here that in nineteenth century Britain the fact that everyone should profess Christianity was unquestionable. Therefore, to claim that a person is a philanthropist because of their faith would not a very solid argument. However, religion should not be entirely excluded from the discussion for two reasons. Firstly, parishes were considered charitable centres for centuries, and at least some benevolence was still expected there.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, the ideology itself encourage to be altruistic. As Porter explains, charity is either ‘sufficient to fulfill all the acts of virtue’ or it is one among several virtues and person who possess the ability to be charitable does not have to have the others, anyhow charity is connected to moral virtues and therefore to Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.1.3 Women philanthropists

It should be noted that many philanthropists, not only but also, in literature were women. This fact is worth looking into because whereas men typically handled the finances and their charitable contributions took the form of money donations, women

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<sup>19</sup> Stephanie Beardman, "Altruism and the Experimental Data on Helping Behavior," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 15, no. 4 (2012): 547, accessed August 18, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23254311>.

<sup>20</sup> Claybaugh, "Dickensian Intemperance: Charity and Reform," 3.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Porter, "Moral Virtues, Charity, and Grace: Why the Infused and Acquired Virtues Cannot Co-Exist," *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, no. 2 (June 2019): 49, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=137425428&lang=cs&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

united in charitable societies and organizations. Their role in such organizations was to distinguish who needs their help and pay them a visit in their homes.<sup>22</sup>

The use of women as home visitors accorded with society's deeply ingrained beliefs about the family and woman's place as the guardian of the home. ... women's philanthropic work became more than a logical extension of their cultural role as domestic angels; it was another of the significant economic and political functions performed by middle- and upper-class wives.<sup>23</sup>

This is of course the archetypal division but it is important to be aware of it because novels from the Victorian era show countless examples of characters (both men and women) that either confirm or oppose this distinction.

### 3.2 Condensation

Scholars who have been studying philanthropy often agreed that it is not merely the form of help that determine whether it would be successful or not but rather the attitude of the benefactor. This fact opens the question of condensation. 'Condensation' is another term that went through a shift of meaning, it 'originally denoted an act whereby an authority figure temporarily abdicated the privileges of his or her position for the benefit of a dependent.'<sup>24</sup>

In the middle of nineteenth century when philanthropy became a 'vague,' cases of 'superficial philanthropy' or 'pseudo-philanthropy'<sup>25</sup> emerged. This resulted in adding a new negative aspect of meaning of the term 'condensation':

In the Victorian period, the belief in a constructive condensation largely fell away, and the word itself (with exceptions) was given over to its negative connotations. Condensation came primarily to signify self-promotion at another's cost; to condense was to assert one's own superiority in a way that degraded others.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Parker, "Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and "North and South"," 322.

<sup>23</sup> Parker, "Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and "North and South"," 323.

<sup>24</sup> Siegel, *Charity and Condensation*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Cunningham, *The reputation of philanthropy since 1750*, 219.

<sup>26</sup> Siegel, *Charity and Condensation*, 17-18.

Whether a character condescends, either in the original or in the current sense of the world, can be a valid point of its analysis.

### 3.3 Form

Philanthropy can also be specified in terms of form; this particular aspect also makes a neat division among characters who practice philanthropy. This point of view has been used in several academic source including an article by Matthew Harding. In order to introduce the phenomenon of legal charity (which needs to be specified in terms of form for legal reasons) Harding uses an example showing what different shapes a charitable deed can have:

To illustrate, consider how I might improve the life of a homeless person. If I am a property owner, I might lease my flat to her. If I am a government official, I might grant her access to public housing. If I am politically inclined, I might lobby my Member of Parliament to fix homelessness in my district. If I have a charitable disposition, I might pay for a hotel room or even, if I am an energetic type, set up a homeless shelter. These are all ways of achieving a particular outcome: putting a roof over a homeless person's head.<sup>27</sup>

Harding uses this example to show the diversity of forms of charity, and although some proposed solutions of the given problem may seem far-fetched, they all come from the same assumption; that is the form of help one chooses depends on the type of person they are. These 'modes of action'<sup>28</sup> can thus serve as leading points in the description of the benefactor.

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew Harding, "Charity and Law: Past, Present and Future," *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* 2020 (2): 565, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.sjls2020.31&lang=cs&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>28</sup> Harding, "Charity and Law: Past, Present and Future," 565.

## 4 Philanthropy in the works of Charles Dickens

When examining philanthropy in Victorian literature the work of Charles Dickens constitutes a good starting point not only because he represents the beginnings of philanthropic narrative but also for the reason that his work contains the motive of philanthropy in various contexts and with different perceptions; in addition, Dickens' writing captures the transformation of philanthropy as social phenomenon. Despite the development of the conception of philanthropy, some general characteristics can be found in the novels by Charles Dickens.

For example, the majority of the novels is set in a city which according to Claybaugh means different relationships among characters than if the stories were set in a small parish in the country. She also points out that when in some works Dickens's descriptions is stylised or contains comic figures it creates a semi-fictional in which philanthropy is more probable to exist.<sup>29</sup>

### 4.1 Ebenezer Scrooge

One of the most noticeable scenes of philanthropy in the work of Charles Dickens is, without any doubt, the one presented to the reader at the end of a short story *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens first introduces the main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, as a cold hard and selfish person, his lack of sympathy is underlined by the Christmas setting of the story which makes the first impression even greater.<sup>30</sup> After the reader sees Scrooge at his very worst, they appreciate more to see him change and become a better person. Scrooge certainly cannot be called a philanthropist at the beginning of the story and if he should be described as such, only the second part of the tale need to be considered. However, the old Scrooge must not be overlooked because it is the contrast that adds importance to the newly formed character.

In order to find out whether the love of mankind is Scrooge's motivation for helping others another question should be raised, that is whether his change is permanent or not. Christianson points out that if Dickens wanted to show a realistic psychological growth of a person, then why choose a magical over-night

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<sup>29</sup> Claybaugh, "Dickensian Intemperance: Charity and Reform," 3.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph (Jody) H. Clarke, "The Metapsychology of Character Change: A Case Study of Ebenezer Scrooge," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 11, no. 4 (October 2009): 252, accessed August 18, 2021, doi:10.1080/19349630903310039.



transformation triggered by ghosts.<sup>31</sup> Gilbert on the other hand believes that Scrooge has finally reached the goal of his life, the child-like innocence that he missed in his own childhood and that he was yearning for ever since.<sup>32</sup> The bottom line is – if Scrooge’s ‘conversion’ is doubted, then philanthropy in its original sense is probably not behind his actions. He might be acting out of fear for his life knowing he would die in a year if he did not change his ways. Possibly he could be acting out of guilt because of the suffering he caused to others.<sup>33</sup> For example the couple that owns him money, Scrooge is brought to see them talking about his death:

[...] it would be bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with light hearts, Caroline!” [...] it was a happier house for this man’s death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.<sup>34</sup>

Or he might be simply enjoying life after he came back to his cheerful youth.

“I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!”<sup>35</sup>

If, on the other hand, the frame of the story is respected than Scrooge can be called a ‘real philanthropist’ who is genuinely concerned about Tiny Tim’s welfare and who even seeks out the people raising funds for charity and rectifies his previous behaviour.<sup>36</sup>

If Scrooge is accepted as a philanthropist, another question is whether is he condescending. When his social status is considered, he is definitely superior to the Cratchit family and others. He is a wealthy business owner besides he is Bob Cratchit’s employer. But it should be mentioned here that as the story continues Ebenezer

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<sup>31</sup> Christianson, *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction*, 82.

<sup>32</sup> Elliot L. Gilbert, "The Ceremony of Innocence: Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol," *PMLA* 90, no. 1 (1975): 22-23, accessed August 18, 2021, doi:10.2307/461345.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph (Jody) H. Clarke, "The Metapsychology of Character Change: A Case Study of Ebenezer Scrooge," 259.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (New York, 1905; Project Gutenberg, 2006), 86-87, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19337/19337-h/19337-h.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 94-95.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 98.

Scrooge is reminded that he himself comes from modest background. This means that when he eventually starts helping those in need, he is much closer to them than he would have been at the beginning. As for condescension, he definitely could not be accused of being condescending before his transformation because neither would he be willing to help anyone nor would he mind his bad reputation. After his ‘conversion’ however the answer is not so straightforward. Dickens wants the reader to believe that Scrooge’s change is genuine and if that is the case then he is probably not condescending. Still, it can be argued otherwise. A condescending person is trying to make themselves to look better than they really are, and it could be expected that Scrooge would try to make himself look better than he was. He is terrified of his old reputation after the Ghost of Christmas Present reminds him:

“Have they no refuge or resource?” cried Scrooge.

“Are there no prisons?” said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. “Are there no workhouses?”<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that Scrooge does his first charitable deed anonymously which he would not have done if he had expected any sort of gratitude or self-promotion. Besides he does not mind that someone might find him ridiculous:

Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset ...<sup>38</sup>

It is logical that as a form of help Scrooge chooses giving out his fortune because it is the easiest and most self-evident solution. He probably owns a considerable amount of money and can afford to be generous:

“Lord bless me!” cried the gentleman, as if his breath were taken away.

“My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?”

“If you please,” said Scrooge. “Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 98.

Additionally, it is quite neat decision because it was the pursuit of money (among other reasons) that turned him into an unpleasant and lonely man and that destroyed his associate Marley.

## 4.2 Mr Meagles

One of Dicken' later novels *Little Dorrit* also provides various examples of charity. There are several characters that occasionally help others financially, people that give employments to those in need or there is, for example, charity in the form of an obligatory fee to the Father of the Marshalsea:

It became a not unusual circumstance for letters to be put under his door at night, enclosing half-a-crown, two half-crowns, now and then at long intervals even half-a-sovereign, for the Father of the Marshalsea. 'With the compliments of a collegian taking leave.' He received the gifts as tributes, from admirers, to a public character.<sup>40</sup>

Another unusual situation is the case of Mrs Merdle and Fanny Dorrit who secretly compete in being generous to each other's servants. There is also Mr Meagles, character to be analysed below, with his uncommon approach to philanthropy.

Mr Meagles might seem to be a man whose acts of good will are motivated by his good-heartedness. He provides home and employment to Tattycoram, helps Arthur Clennam and Daniel Doyce to start their business and is generally concerned about wellbeing of Little Dorrit and other people he knows are in a difficult situation. Siegel does not agree with this description of the character in question, in connection with Mr Meagles he writes about 'diseased arithmetic' which, as he explains, is 'a strategy in which a person comes to believe in his own authority by treating others as beggars and debtors.'<sup>41</sup> Therefore his motivation is not so much philanthropy in the sense of 'love of mankind' but rather his own benefit. He persuades himself that people need his assistance and then he provides that too.

This is also connected with the fact that people he helps come from across social classes. Social background is not really of importance when the character himself decides that the person requires his attention. That is why some beneficiaries, for

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (Bookclassic, 2015), 99, accessed June 29, 2015, <https://www.scribd.com/book/270237656/Little-Dorrit>.

<sup>41</sup> Siegel, *Charity and Condescension*, 56.

example Arthur Clennam and Daniel Doyce, are equal to Mr Meagles and others such as Tattycoram are inferior. It seems only logical that such a character would be condescending even if it was unknowingly. It is apparent even from his behaviour towards his own daughter who he calls 'Pet' instead of her first name.<sup>42</sup>

Mr Meagles provides various forms of charity from financial support to providing housing or other services. The form of charity he practices coincides with the method of choosing the person who needs him. He offers to each individual the form of help which he finds the most generous.

'Upon which,' said Mr Meagles, 'as a practical man, I then and there, in that presence, took Doyce by the collar, and told him it was plain to me that he was an infamous rascal and treasonable disturber of the government peace, and took him away. I brought him out of the office door by the collar, that the very porter might know I was a practical man who appreciated the official estimate of such characters; and here we are!'<sup>43</sup>

In other words, after he identifies the issue (another question is how accurately) he offers an accurate solution.

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<sup>42</sup> Siegel, *Charity and Condescension*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 178.

## 5 Philanthropy in the works of Elizabeth Gaskell

Another significant Victorian novelist, Elizabeth Gaskell, captures philanthropy in her work in several forms and under various circumstances; and adds, thus, different points of view to the discussion about philanthropy. It is particularly intriguing to examine her work in comparison with novels by Charles Dickens because although they share many characteristics, certain points differ considerably. For example, as Claybaugh claims that unlike Dickens', Gaskell's writing crates 'our recognition that any particular instance is not an isolated instance, but rather part of a general phenomenon'.<sup>44</sup> She explains that it is not possible to be sympathetic for one character without feeling some sympathy to those who resemble them.<sup>45</sup> Dredge proposes a somewhat similar hypothesis, she claims that Gaskell puts emphasis on the fact that charity is a reciprocal interaction and that the beneficiary effects the benefactor as well.<sup>46</sup> Yet another specificity of Gaskell's work points out Parker in her article and that is its influence on contemporary society:

By associating moral behaviors with traditionally feminine tasks, Gaskell extends feminine authority beyond the domestic realm and encourages a wider range of feminine activity. Likewise, in portraying working class men and women as more compassionate than their wealthy neighbors, Gaskell elevates the moral authority of the working class while emphasizing the moral failures of the industrialists.<sup>47</sup>

Her novels thus are not only helping to raise awareness of the problem and suggesting a slightly different view of the lower social classes but also 'assuring the suffering workers that the upper classes are not without compassion, even as she challenges her readers to more explicitly philanthropic enactments of that compassion.'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Claybaugh, "Dickensian Intemperance: Charity and Reform," 49.

<sup>45</sup> Claybaugh, "Dickensian Intemperance: Charity and Reform," 49.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Dredge, "Negotiating 'A Woman's Work': Philanthropy to Social Science in Gaskell's 'North and South,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 84, accessed August 18, 2021, doi:10.1017/S1060150311000258.

<sup>47</sup> Parker, "Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and "North and South"," 327.

<sup>48</sup> Parker, "Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and "North and South"," 322.

## 5.1 Margaret Hale

In her novel *North and South* Elizabeth Gaskell describes the northern industrial region of Britain (in the contrast with less industrial South, as the title suggests) and realistically depicts the effects of mass production of cotton on life conditions of the workers, their health and the region in general. In such environment charitable activities can be expected, nevertheless Gaskell is cautious about presenting a great number of philanthropists (her works contain less such characters than novels by Charles Dickens), she describes rather smaller amount of philanthropy as realistically as possible and even includes scenes where such help is unappreciated. *North and South* introduces two figures with opposing approach to charity, namely Margaret Hale and John Thornton.

It is undeniable that Margaret Hale is a philanthropist and probably no one would claim that she does charity work for some self-seeking reason. Her motivation, however, is not so clear to interpret as it might seem to be. It could be stated that Margaret is motivated simply by her good will, she is definitely sympathetic with suffering people, including Bessy, and she is very observant in this particular matter:

I see men here going about in the streets who look ground down by some pinching sorrow or care—who are not only sufferers but haters. Now, in the South we have our poor, but there is not that terrible expression in their countenances of a sullen sense of injustice which I see here.<sup>49</sup>

However, there might be another possible explanation, that is that Margaret takes charity as her occupation.<sup>50</sup> As it is noticeable at the beginning of the novel where unlike her cousin Edith who spends her time attending parties and resting, Margaret is always busy. Her sympathetic nature in combination with her inability to do nothing makes philanthropy an evident goal for her. She perceives it almost as her duty.

Margaret Hale is the daughter of a vicar who later becomes a private teacher. It means that her position in the society of Milton is decent. By someone she is perceived as a member of a less significant family from the country, for example by Mrs

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<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Bookclassic, 2015), accessed July 7, 2015, <https://www.scribd.com/book/269788747/North-and-South>, 115.

<sup>50</sup> Parker, "Fictional Philanthropy in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and "North and South"," 328.

Thornton, and she is not as respectable as the mill-owners and their relatives, but she is superior to those who work in the mills. That she is not one of the workers is also obvious from her appearance and behaviour as comments Nicholas Higgins during his first encounter with Margaret, he is shocked that she would express concern about him and his daughter:

'I'm none ashamed o' my name. It's Nicholas Higgins. Hoo's called Bessy Higgins. Whatten yo' asking for?'

Margaret was surprised at this last question, for at Helstone it would have been an understood thing, after the inquiries she had made, that she intended to come and call upon any poor neighbour whose name and habitation she had asked for.<sup>51</sup>

Although Nicholas might not realize it, Margaret's social status – and more precisely their financial situation – does not give her much opportunity to be generous.

With that being said it is evident that Margaret cannot be condescending. She comes to keep Bessy company as a friend; and she regrets when she has to leave Helstone without even saying goodbye to the people she used to visit and the children she used to look after because she cares about them:

She took a pride in her forest. Its people were her people. She made hearty friends with them; learned and delighted in using their peculiar words; took up her freedom amongst them; [...] <sup>52</sup>

To go even further it could be argued that Margaret finds her superior social status harmful to her charitable activities. Once again it is Nicholas Higgins who makes himself clear that Margaret's interest in Bessy bothers him because of his bad experience with wealthy people (but he is willing to accept it for Bessy's sake):

'Thornton's! Ar' t' going to dine at Thornton's? Ask him to give yo' a bumper to the success of his orders. By th' twenty-first, I reckon, he'll be potted in his brains how to get 'em done in time. Tell him, there's seven hundred'll come marching into Marlborough Mills, the morning after he

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<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 21.

gives the five per cent, and will help him through his contract in no time.  
You'll have 'em all there.<sup>53</sup>

As mentioned before Margaret is not in such financial situation that she could afford to offer enough money to all the people she visits or feels sympathetic for. She of course gives some money or food to Bessy and a poor woman that appears later in the novel, but most of her altruistic effort consist of keeping someone company or looking after children.

[She] nursed their babies; talked or read with slow distinctness to their old people; carried dainty messes to their sick; resolved before long to teach at the school, where her father went every day as to an appointed task, but she was continually tempted off to go and see some individual friend—man, woman, or child—in some cottage in the green shade of the forest.<sup>54</sup>

She is donating her time and work now and then. This coincides with the assumption stated earlier that Margaret sees philanthropy as an occupation.

## 5.2 John Thornton

Quite the opposite of Margaret is John Thornton. He could not be described as a philanthropist in the original meaning of the word, in fact it might be even doubted if he is to be called a philanthropist at all. He specifically declares against charity without consideration.

Now when I feel that in my own case it is no good luck, nor merit, nor talent,—but simply the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned,—indeed, never to think twice about them,—I believe that this suffering, which Miss Hale says is impressed on the countenances of the people of Milton, is but the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives. I do not look on self-indulgent, sensual people as worthy of my hatred; I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 216.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 120.



At the same time, it cannot be claimed that John Thornton is not sympathetic. He builds a canteen for all the employees of his mill and he is resolute to help his Irish workers when they are in danger:

'Let them yell!' said he. 'In five minutes more—. I only hope my poor Irishmen are not terrified out of their wits by such a fiendlike noise. Keep up your courage for five minutes, Miss Hale.'<sup>56</sup>

While his response to the striking crowd is 'Let them yell!' the threat to the Irishmen worries him. The difference is in responsibility. He feels responsible for his employees but not for everyone who suffers from lack of money or so.

While Margaret Hale has all the will to be beneficial to others but very restricted opportunities, John Thornton is more capable to help others than anyone. As a respected man from higher social class and a mill owner he has not only the financial resources but also the power to ameliorate the life conditions of his workers.

It is quite clear that Mr Thornton is not condescending. As stated earlier he has good opportunities for charitable deeds so if he sought any sort of self-promotion, it would not be difficult for him to reach it. Instead, he treats his employees as equal to him:

It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks; it may not be always as a master, but as an over-looker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order.'<sup>57</sup>

John Thornton does not consider himself above his workers or anyone else in an uneasy situation, he believes that if everyone has the same possibilities nobody needs to be advantaged. He simply distinguishes what is and what is not his concern.

As for the form of philanthropy John Thornton practices, it surprisingly does not start with his financial resources but rather with an idea or it could be said a project. He does not seek an altruistic way to spend his money, but when he comes up with an

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<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 252.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 118.

idea how to improve the conditions for his workers, he is willing to invest in it. It was already mentioned that he establishes a canteen for his workers, but there is also his concern about the air pollution in the town:

'But I think you told me you had altered your chimneys so as to consume the smoke, did you not?' asked Mr. Hale.

'Mine were altered by my own will, before parliament meddled with the affair. It was an immediate outlay, but it repays me in the saving of coal.

I'm not sure whether I should have done it, if I had waited until the act was passed.<sup>58</sup>

Altogether John Thornton is not a character that would be given as a model of a 'real philanthropist' whose generosity knows no limits. He is cautiously generous and more importantly innovative.

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<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, 115.

## 6 Philanthropy in the works of George Eliot

George Eliot approaches philanthropy in her novels even more realistically than Elizabeth Gaskell because she tries to completely avoid certain archetypes. Siegel explains that ‘Eliot believed that true sympathy could not be achieved through the inherited conventions of literature but must arise out of an accurate and diverse picture of the human condition.’<sup>59</sup> What is also specific for her writing, as suggests Fessenbecker, is the depiction of the conflict between sympathy and principals.<sup>60</sup>

### 6.1 Dinah Morris

Since George Eliot tries to modify previous standards in Victorian literature, her novels offer more complex characters. This is true also about the characters of philanthropists such as Dinah Morris, a self-sufficient woman preacher absolutely dedicated to her work.

Dinah Morris can certainly be associated with philanthropy in the sense ‘love of mankind.’ The crucial fact here is that she is a preacher. It would be misleading to think that Dinah’s charitable behaviour originates in her job description, especially when preaching was not a job in the sense of paid employment. However, it could be claimed that she is acting out of duty; different from the kind of duty that urged Margaret Hale and which was triggered by sympathy with those who suffer, and different from the one of John Thornton which resulted from responsibility. Dinah Morris’s sense of duty comes from her faith:

"Yes," said Dinah, quietly. "I'm called there. It was borne in upon my mind while I was meditating on Sunday night, as Sister Allen, who's in a decline, is in need of me. I saw her as plain as we see that bit of thin white cloud, lifting up her poor thin hand and beckoning to me. And this morning when I opened the Bible for direction, the first words my eyes fell

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<sup>59</sup> Siegel, *Charity and Condescension*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> Patrick Fessenbecker, “Sympathy, Vocation, and Moral Deliberation in George Eliot,” *ELH* 85, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 504, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edswah&AN=000434476200010&lang=cs&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

on were, 'And after we had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia.'<sup>61</sup>

Dinah Morris comes from working class and only her position of a preacher makes her mildly superior to other characters. During her preaching she stands slightly above others (both literary and figuratively), still, there is no selfish reason or even self-promotion behind it.

But Dinah walked as simply as if she were going to market, and seemed as unconscious of her outward appearance as a little boy: there was no blush, no tremulousness, which said, "I know you think me a pretty woman, too young to preach"; no casting up or down of the eyelids, no compression of the lips, no attitude of the arms that said, "But you must think of me as a saint."<sup>62</sup>

There is another reason why Dinah could not be accused of being condescending, it is the fact that she does not concern herself with what impression she makes, as oppose to Hetty.

As established above, Dinah Morris's social status and her financial situation does not allow her to give out money. It is understandable then, that she is choosing other form of charity. She sacrifices her time and effort for the benefit of others.

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<sup>61</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Seltzer Books, 2018), 30, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.scribd.com/book/375892998/Adam-Bede>.

## 7 Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to propose and test factors that effect and consequently help to analyse characters of philanthropists. The three main criteria that were used, that is motivation (with emphasis of so-called real philanthropy), condescension and form, turned out to be effective when used in combination with one another.

The method that was used helped to reveal a character, Ebenezer Scrooge, that is a philanthropist in the original meaning of the word, does not condescend and helps quite traditionally by donating money, as oppose to a character whose motivation is not 'real philanthropy,' does condescend but practice charity in an innovative way, namely Mr. Meagles. There also arose a distinction between him and John Thornton who does not help simply out of his good nature either, and who is innovative in terms of form as well but does not condescend. Interesting is also the difference between Margaret Hale and Dinah Morris; they both donate their time and afford and neither of them condescends, but while one of them helps to work, the other one works to help.

For further research it would be useful to make the question about motivation more precise because it is not always easy to interpret it, besides it is a subject that would require more detailed answer than just yes or no. Another further amelioration could be adding the notion of duty in the set of criteria because I came across it several times in the analysis.

## Resumé

Cílem mé bakalářské práce bylo vyhledat motiv dobročinnosti v dílech britské literatury devatenáctého století, konkrétně ve vybraných dílech autorů Charlese Dickense, Elizabeth Gaskellové a George Eliotové. V úvodu práce nastiňuji postup, který bude použit při rozboru postav dobrodinců.

V první kapitole je popsán posun ve požívání slova filantropie od původního významu – láska k lidem, až k novodobějšímu použití jako označení pro charitativní činnost. Dále je zde popsán vývoj filantropie v britské společnosti, rozdělení na dobročinnost osobní a organizovanou a také kritika, které dobrodinci v devatenáctém století museli čelit, a to zejména pro nepříznivý vliv dobročinnosti na ekonomickou situaci. V příznivějším světle je filantropie popsána v souvislosti s literaturou, do které se promítla zejména v období realismu.

V druhé kapitole jsou již popsána kritéria, která jsou často zmiňována v odborné literatuře v souvislosti s dobročinností. V rozbořech jednotlivých literárních postav si kladu otázky, zda je daná osoba filantropem v původním slova smyslu, jaké je její společenské postavení a případně, jestli se chová povýšeně, a nakonec jakým způsobem daná osoba pomáhá druhým.

V hodnocení na závěr uvádím, že požitá kritéria vytvářejí zajímavé porovnání postav. Některé postavy jsou podle těchto kritérií navzájem svým pravým opakem, například Ebenezer Scrooge a pan Maegles, jiné jsou si naopak velmi podobné, jako Margaret Haleová a Dinah Morrisová.

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## **Annotation**

**Author:** Anna Lockerová

**Department:** The Department of English and American Studies

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This thesis deals with the motif of philanthropy and characters associated with it in British literature in nineteenth century. In the first – theoretical part I try to define philanthropy in the historical, social and literary context and specify the features which the characters of philanthropists have in common, in order to find out whether they can be used as the main criteria for the analysis of these characters. In the second – practical part I apply the previously established set of criteria to chosen works of three distinguished Victorian novelists, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. Finally, I assess the value of these criteria, state which of them proved to be effective and propose further amelioration.

## **Anotace**

<b>Autor:</b>	Anna Lockerová
<b>Katedra:</b>	Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
<b>Název práce:</b>	Dobročinnost a dobrodinci v dílech Charlese Dickense, Elizabeth Gaskellové a George Eliotové
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**Klíčová slova:** dobročinnost, rozbor postav, britská literatura, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskellová, George Eliotová

Ve své práci se zabývám motivem filantropie a s ním spojenými postavami v Britské literatuře devatenáctého století. V první, teoretické, části vymezuji filantropii v historickém, společenském a literárním kontextu. Snažím se určit společné vlastnosti filantropů, abych zjistila, zda mohou být použity jako hlavní kritéria v analýze obdobných postav. V druhé, praktické, části aplikuji tato kritéria na vybraná díla tří významných autorů Viktoriánské doby, Charlese Dickense, Elizabeth Gaskellové a George Eliotové. Na závěr hodnotím, která z těchto kritérií se ukázala jako přínosná a navrhuji jejich případné zlepšení.