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## **Autobiografické a společenské aspekty díla Elizabeth Gaskellové**

Bakalářská práce

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**Autobiographical and social aspects of Elizabeth Gaskell's  
work**

Bachelor Thesis

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Klíčová slova: *autobiografie, vliv na její psaní, Viktoriánské období, industrializace, společnost, odbory, události v jejím životě*

### **Annotation**

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The paper briefly characterizes Elizabeth Gaskell's figure, outlines her biography and discusses the autobiographical elements and the relationship to Victorian society in her selected prose with the use of secondary sources.

Keywords: *autobiography, influence in her writing, Victorian period, industrialization, society, trade unions, events in her life*



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## 1 Introduction

The bachelor thesis deals with the social novels of the author Elizabeth Gaskell. The thesis is divided in two parts. The first chapter introduces the autobiographical aspects in her work because the life of any author is usually imprinted into her or his work. The second chapter is about the social aspects that appear in her work.

Elizabeth Gaskell is a writer of the Victorian period and she was a paradigm of her age. She was quite successful as a woman writer. She wrote lots of novels, short stories and other works; the first subchapter shows her bibliography and a short list of her work. This thesis, however, focuses on her two so called social novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. There are short summaries of the books to make it easier to understand the following analyses of her life impact in the novels.

Every person is different and so are their styles of writing. Elizabeth Gaskell had her own style of writing and her typical features are the purposes of the other subchapter. Her style and features of writing are nevertheless influenced by special persons who appeared in her life and by many losses in her life. There were not only lots of events which happened and had an enormous effect on her personality but there is a place as well which influenced almost her whole life: Manchester, where she moved with her husband to. That's why the second subchapter describes each of them and tries to find some examples from her books. It should help during understanding why she added these special features to her characters in the novels.

The third subchapter is the most important one of the first part of the thesis. Her life with all its milestones, which seem to be substantial for the beginning of her writing, is there introduced. Each of the milestones is shown, explained and described with examples from the books. These milestones mirror in her novels the most often and that's why I have chosen precisely them. They connect her novels. To understand the details of her losses and her character, there is a short description of her life and a little summary of the historical background.

The second chapter is interested in the social aspects in her work as written above. She belonged to a group of writers who started revealing things like bad working condition and publishing it to the world. In the first place, some features of the Victorian age and

the life style of the people from different social classes as middle class and working class introduced. These two classes are important because she belonged to each of them. Middle class should say how Elizabeth lived because she spent her whole life as a member of the middle class; however, although she belonged to a middle class, she was more interested in the working class and therefore she wrote about it. She met the people from the working class when she helped under administration of The Cross Street Chapel. So the first subchapter describes all of that.

How the Victorian period affected her is shown in another subchapter. She became a member of Unitarians and she was inspired by their freedom of speech so there is a short characteristic of this movement in this subchapter. Together with that the position of women is the other main purpose of this subchapter. She as a woman did not suffer from the injustice unlike majority of women of that time. Nevertheless, she was interested in their support so she wrote about their work, their domestic duties and their lives to show it to the outside world.

The last two subchapters comprise a description of the working and living conditions, the relationship between the workmen and their employers during the industrialisation. It concerns, moreover, the first establishments of trade unions and their requirements, members and ways how they worked. It is followed by a mention of today's working class. The chapter describes and compares differences, changes and the same issues of both sides.

The thesis studies two novels of the same author and therefore, to simplify the orientation in the text and in the primary sources, all extracts from *North and South* in the thesis are referred to by the acronym "NS" and all extract from *Mary Barton* are referred to by the acronym "MB". I have read both novels in Czech and English language but all extracts from the novels in the text are cited from the novels in English. In the secondary sources, an author of one book has the same surname as Elizabeth Gaskell thus for better distinction, the professor P. Gaskell is mentioned in the text as "P.GASKELL" and Elizabeth Gaskell as "GASKELL".

The last aim of this bachelor thesis is to give more details about this author and show her novels to other readers because, although she mastered her writing, there were other writers who overshadowed her during that age and she would deserve to be discovered.

## **2 Autobiographical aspects**

This chapter is going to deal with the autobiographical aspects which appear in the works of the author I have read and discussed. It is impossible to cover the whole topic in only one chapter, for that reason, this chapter is divided into smaller chapters which, however, will be more detailed and each of the chapter will deal with each part of the topic.

These subchapters are divided further in each part of the exploring elements. The first one describes the basic biographic facts. It means to describe a little bit, not only the books which are involved and studied in the thesis, but also all the books she ever wrote and published. This is really important because we can see if she was a writer of one book or of many books. Since we know she was the author of more than two works, the views on her life and work on one hand could be more interesting. It means to study the elements which are common and different in each of her books. On the other hand it could be more difficult because you are about to read majority of those books to gain some knowledge and overview of her personality.

This chapter is moving further in to another, which is about the characteristic and the way of writing which is typical only for her. This is thought as a description of the language she used, her expressions of formal and informal vocabulary which she used to highlight the difference between the language of the low and high society. Next, this part should describe and show people she met and the influence or impression they had over her.

### **2.1 Basic bibliography**

She was an author of novels, novellas, short stories and non-fiction. She started writing after she had got married. The first impulse of writing came after the death of her second child; the only son. Other works she wrote were published in the newspapers published by Charles Dickens who was something like her supervisor. Thus, the smaller works appeared step by step. First works, she wrote, she did not let be published under her name and she used the nickname "Cotton Mather Mills". Probably after the success of first publications, she began using her name as an author of the books. This chapter includes a list of her works, but a little shorter because it is impossible to include all the

works in this thesis. The following subchapter contains small overviews of the novels which are spoken about in the thesis.

#### **Novels**

Mary Barton (1848)

Cranford (1851–53)

Ruth (1853)

North and South (1854–55)

etc.

#### **Short stories**

Libbie Marsh's Three Eras (1847)

Christmas Storms and Sunshine (1848)

Hand and Heart (1849)

The Heart of John Middleton (1850)

etc.

#### **Novellas and collections**

The Moorland Cottage (1850)

Mr. Harrison's Confessions (1851)

The Old Nurse's Story (1852)

Lizzie Leigh (1855)

etc.

#### **Non-fiction**

Sketches Among the Poor (poems 1837)

An accursed Race (1855)

The Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857)

French Life (1864)

### **2.1.1 Summary of the novels**

This chapter describes the plot of two main novels, so called social or industry novels which are important for this thesis. It is her first novel *Mary Barton* together with *North and South*.

#### **Mary Barton**

The plot is set in the city called Manchester and among poor workers during the Victorian period. Two families the Bartons and the Wilsons are introduced at the beginning of the story. Unfortunately at the beginning, the mother of Mary died and because her father had lost with her a son as well, he started being interest in the Chartist and trade union movement to forget the misfortune, more than ever before. He is supposed to bring up Mary but the bad conditions such as almost no food and no work created from him a murderer. Mary grow up and she started working as a dressmaker, but something inside of her was telling her that she can do better because she has a possibility to marry to upper class. There is a man, Harry Carson, to whom Mary is attractive. She thinks he could marry her but he has different motive - having

her only for pleasure. There is the other man, Jem Wilson, who has been interested in Mary since their childhood but he is only a worker in a factory in a comparison to Harry Carson, and he is unfortunately refused by Mary. Immediately afterwards, she realised that she truly loves Jem.

A new character appears in the plot, Esther, a “street-walker” and the sister of dead Mary. She warns John Barton, father of Mary, to protect Mary not to become the same being as she is. However, he just pushed her away and is not interested in her anymore. After few days, Esther does the same with Jem. He promises her that he will take care of Mary. Esther told him that Mary perhaps had fallen in love with Harry, so when Jem meets Harry, they eventually enter into a fight, which is witnessed by a policeman. Unfortunately, in few days Harry Carson is found shot on the street. Automatically, Jem is the main suspect; because of the gun they found which belongs to his family. Esther attempts to investigate this case a little and she finds a small piece of paper with Mary’s name. She immediately brings it to Mary to warn her. Mary finds out that the murderer of Harry is nobody else than her father. She recognizes it by his handwriting on the paper. However, her father is all the time in Boston.

Jem is imprisoned and Mary does her best to find any witnesses and to find an alibi for him. Jem’s cousin, Will Wilson was with him the night the murder had happened. The main problem was to contact Will because he was to sail to America at the same day, the trial took place. Fortunately, both these events took place in Liverpool. At the end, Jem was justified but Mary was utterly in madness. After few days, she recovered and left home with Jam. At that time, John Barton appears moping around. He confessed to the murder of Harry in front of Mary, Job and first of all Mr Carson. After that he died. Jem was unable to work in Manchester again because of his reputation, so he married Mary and together with her and his mother left to Canada.

### **North and South**

The story begins in London where the preparations for wedding are almost done. The cousin of Margaret Hale is married to Captain Lennox. Margaret Hale is the main character, and after her refusal to proposal of Henry Lennox, the brother of the captain, she leaves London and goes home to Helstone. Unfortunately, her father Mr Hale left the church because of his private reasons and the whole family moved from South to the

fictional industrial town of Milton in the North. Margaret and her mother are disgusted with this dusty town full of smoke and poor workers.

As Mr Hale left the job of a pastor, he became a tutor in Milton. His favourite student is the owner of a mill factory, John Thornton. They are both great friends but Margaret feels resistance to him and Mr Thornton shares the same opinion to her. During the first months, Margaret starts feeling sympathy with the poor workers and she became a friend with Bessy, who is consumptive from inhalation of cotton dust and subsequently, she died of the illness which was caused just by these bad conditions.

It was a time of strike and the workers lose their jobs because they wanted bigger salary and better conditions. However, lots of factory owners threaten them with workers from Ireland who could work for the same or lower salary. At this time, the illness of mother of Margaret getting be more serious and her last wish is to see her son Frederick who worked as a naval but after a rebellion on the boat, he is was punished by exile. If he ever comes to England, a death penalty is waiting for him.

The strike intensifies and the workers came to the courtyard of the factory in front of the house of Mr Thornton. By coincidence, Margaret is at that time at the house of Mr Thornton and she advised him to face the people. At the end, she ran downstairs to help him. She hugged him in aim of protection and she is hit by the stone. Afterwards, he fell in love with her and he proposed her but she is not prepared, and refused. Now the time of full hate between them came.

Because of the dying mother, Frederick secretly came to Milton. However on his departure to London, a man called Leonards, who is from Helstone too, recognised Frederick at the train station and wants him to arrest. Frederick pushed him away on the train station and Leonards died shortly after. During this situation, Margaret was with Frederick and they were seen by Mr Thornton who thought he was her lover. Afterwards, the police investigated the death of Leonards and they questioned Margaret if she was at that place. She told them a lie that she had not been there. Mr Thornton revealed the lie but let the case be closed. Margaret appreciated him for the behaviour. After that, Margaret convinced Higgins to ask for job directly Mr Thornton. Due to it, he eventually got the job, although they did not like each other. However, after several weeks they started using their opinions and became something like work partners.

The death of the wife of Mr Hale made him so sad that the only thing which could make him happy was his trip to Oxford to visit his friend Mr Bell. He died there. Margaret stayed alone and convinced by her aunt from London she went back with her. Meanwhile, the factory of Mr Thornton went bankrupt and he was invited by Henry Lennox for a small party in London. Mr Lennox thought that it could help Margaret to make her happier, because she was getting to hate the place in London where she lived. Henry Lennox proposed her again but she refused him for good. Mr Thornton also came to London to solve his business problems with Margaret because she inherited everything from Mr Bell who was an owner of the building where Mr Thornton's factory was. During the conversation with Margaret about these matters, he proposed her and she finally agree.

## **2.2 Characteristics of her work**

Every writer has his own typical features which is possible to recognize in his work. So was Elizabeth Gaskell. Through her experiences and many acquaintances she created special introduction to each chapter in her novels as is written below and through her husband she got to know some dialects which appears there as well. Especially, her characters from the lower social class speak by these dialects. Nevertheless, as is written above she was influenced by many people and almost each of them shared with her some ideas. Of course, there were people who have bigger effect like her father, husband and acquaintances, but the environment where she lived inspired her as well. This subchapter is dealing with the typical features of her writing, with the people and with other milestones in her life, which are reflected in her novels.

### **2.2.1 Typical features in her writing**

She shows us the dialect of the people from the working class in the North of England. All local people from the town of Milton and of Manchester speak dialect. In the novel *North and South* it is shown in the conversation between Margaret and Bessy. Especially Bessy and her father Nicholas Higgins speak like it is shown in this following quotation: "*But hoo's come at last, - and hoo's welcome*" (GASKELL, p. 91). The dialect is probably the Lancashire one with which she met through her husband who studied in Manchester and knew lots of people speaking it.

There is one of the really interesting features which she used in both novels. She used, as other writers of that time, introductory devices such as poems, mottos, quotes and others literary devices. These devices always express what the chapter is about in the



figurative meaning. She uses parts of songs, parts of poems which show us how intelligent and educated she was. The forms of these introductory devices are usually short, written max on four lines and they are usually rhymed. It often comes up with an idea the reader can deal with before he or she begins with the chapter. It is very impressive way of expressing the idea of the chapter by another type of literature. For example the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter in the novel *Mary Barton* is called 'Murder' and the short poem which introduces the chapters sounds as follows: "*But in his pulse there was throb, Nor on his lips one dying sob; Sigh, nor word, nor struggling breath Heralded his way to death. – SIEGE OF CORINT*" (GASKELL, p. 186). Other example of the poems is from the novel *North and South*. The chapter number thirty-six is called 'Union not always Strength' and the quote sounds this way: "*The steps of the bearers, heavy and slow, The sobs of the mourners, deep and low. – SHELLEY.*" (GASKELL, p. 293) This is an amazing way which is genially used by the author.

### **2.2.2 Who influenced her**

She was affected by many people but her family were the first people who influenced her and introduce her world of thinkers, high-ranking persons and special societies about which some of other people did not have even any idea.

The first of person who had probably a huge impact on her was her father. She actually never had any right relationship with her father. Maybe she substituted it in her novels where the fathers of the heroines were more connected to their daughter as it is for example in *Mary Barton*. After the wife of Mr Barton died, he told his daughter: "*Child, we must be all to one another, now SHE is gone*" (GASKELL, p. 25). The author explains the relationship between them which arose after the death of their wife and mother. "*Between the father and the daughter there existed in full force that mysterious bond which unites those who have been loved by one who is now dead and gone*" (GASKELL, MB, p. 25) Since her mother died, she was send to the house of her mother's sister to be brought up. She was a young girl and her father was to her mainly a man who pays her school and who is interested in her education and this is right away the influence. As Shirley Foster claims, her father "*probably had an effect on Gaskell's subsequent literary development.*" (p. 16) He sent her a lot of books written by the British classics so she had an access to the world of the classic literature.

*“He had many marine family connections, including brothers who fought in the navy during the Napoleonic Wars”* (FOSTER, p. 17) and his experience is somehow reflected in her work. His father changed many jobs and once he became a *“tutor in classics at Manchester Academy”* and he preached *“at Dob Lane Chapel” ... “near Manchester”* (FOSTER, p. 17) All these experiences could have a final effect on the main character of the novel *North and South*, Mr Hale whose working matters are probably based on her father. Mr Hale is a local pastor who, however, abandoned his place because he lost his faith and moved with his whole family to the North to become a tutor for the workers there.

Her unmarried aunt Holland influenced her attitudes towards the help for women. Their good connections *“were deeply influential on her thinking and her fiction.”* (FOSTER, p.19) She was related to many other unmarried aunts who *“gave her a sense of the possibilities of female solidarity and community – a sense which may have been partly responsible for her commitment to helping women, both socially and professionally.”* (FOSTER, p. 19)

The town where she lived probably did not influence her as it is thought. Knutsford, where she lived, was a peaceful town and with some poor people and workers, but she probably did not meet with them as much as in Manchester. That’s why her moving to Manchester had a huge effect on her. She saw for the first time such a dirty town, exactly as Margaret who moved to Milton and who is describing it in the *North and South* in this way: *“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.” ... “Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke.”* (GASKELL, p. 58) So without the doubts, Manchester and its characteristics together with its people had to appear in her work. She, actually, *“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.”* (FOSTER, p. 29) It was the time of poverty, crazy behaviour of both sides as employers so employees. *“Manchester into which Gaskell settled was by no means a city solely of industrial and working-class suffering.”* (FOSTER, p. 29)

Nevertheless, a bigger town means more opportunities. In that time the biggest libraries were opened, the balls were hold, many institutions were in boom and the situation for woman writers got better and Gaskell became popular mainly thanks to Manchester.

The Hollands, the family who took care of Gaskell was well-known family and had a lot of contacts. Especially, "*Henry, later Sir Henry Holland, FRS, Physician-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria and intimate of many well-known writers, scientists and intellectuals,*" (FOSTER, p. 20) thanks to him she got into the high society and into the interesting world where at that time not everyone got. She met through him many personalities who were models for her novels. Two of them were the acquaintances of Holland and she met them when she visited the mill apprentices and they remained friends. They were "*Samuel and William Rathbone, themselves mill-owners*". (FOSTER, p. 21) They could be the models for the employers in her social novels, for example Mr Thornton and Mr Carson.

### **2.3 Autobiographical influence in her work**

Every man usually shares a part of his personality in every work he writes. Though he should stay objective, there is usually at least a small piece of him what let us try to understand not merely his life but also the background and the conditions he lived in. This is the case of Elizabeth Gaskell, or more specific case. Of course, on one hand she probably tried to distance her feelings from some novels or short stories, but on the other hand she involved something of hers in some of them on purpose. She definitely imprinted her opinion of working class and of the owner of factories as well as her sympathy to those poor workers without any hope for better way of life. It was the time of all the worst and who was a worker, he had to fight for his life, because they did not live to fight but they fought to live.

She never belonged to those poor people. She lived always in good conditions but she spent many years in Manchester where she saw all these difficulties which those people had. Two of her novels are set in this city, especially because it was one of the first industrial centres of that time. Problems of that time were exactly these cities like Manchester was. It must have appeared, without any doubt, in her work because these things have usually a deep influence, especially, when you are a sensitive woman, wife and mother at the same time.

Her life was very various. For her, unfortunately, not so happy but even in those sad moments she was always helpful, especially when she helped her husband to prepare food for poor ones.

She was so worried about the workers and their membership in trade union. She had no positive attitudes to these associations. She did not trust them although, they presented themselves quite responsible and supportive. The second main chapter deals about this topic.

This chapter presents some milestones of her life which appeared in her work and is going to show them on some examples from the work. Some milestones do not appear only in one book and in that case, there may be comparison with other books. All of these elements are possible to find in her work.

### **2.3.1 Life of Elizabeth Gaskell**

Life of this author was really interesting and full of events which influenced her more than it is thought. The events of her life can be divided in five main milestones which are described in this following subchapter. However, this subchapter does not include the examples of influences which they had on the writer. It is only the chronology of her life to make it understandable of her feelings during her life in the Victorian England resulting in writing of the novels and other works.

Elizabeth Gaskell was born on the 29th September 1810 in Chelsea. She was one of eight children from whom six unfortunately died; she was the youngest. She was a daughter of William Stevenson who had been a Unitarian minister and who became a journalist. Her mother Elizabeth Stevenson (née Holland) came from Knutsford in Cheshire. There is the first big milestone of her life. Small Elizabeth was only 13 months old when her mother died and her father did not have any other possibility than to let her daughter be brought up by a sister of his wife in Knutsford. She was called Hannah Lumb and Elizabeth was happy with her and she gave an opinion on her. She said about her that she was for her more than her mother. Between the years 1822-1827 she studied at school in the city of Stratford-upon-Avon followed by school near Warwick.

Another woman came into her life. It was the second wife of her father, her name was Catherine Thomson. In the meantime, she received the traditional education in arts, the classics, decorum and propriety given to young ladies at the time.

Nevertheless, there was a bigger event which had happened and let her in painful memories. It was connected with her brother who had joined the Merchant navy, where he vanished on the way to India.

Next two steps in her life was her marriage with William Gaskell, who was a Unitarian minister, and Manchester, where she moved after the wedding. She joined her husband there in his work with distributing food and clothes to poor people at Cross Street Chapel. Manchester was other milestone of her life. At the time she lived there, this city was one big extreme. It was full of poverty and of dreadful behaviours of employers to their employees while it was the golden age of industry revolution. On the other hand, this city was a great cultural city. Elizabeth had there lots of views on different social classes to describe them in her novels.

Her son is the last one of the milestones. She had five children. Unfortunately, her one and only son died of Scarlet fever and it was a big misfortune for her. She almost collapsed but she got over it by writing. It seems that writing helped her in the life during the crisis. But not only writing was her hobby. She was really friendly and her best friendships were Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens. She liked travelling as well but unfortunately, she died during the journey to her house in Hampshire.

She was a great woman not just a writer. Her life is too long to be described in one chapter but her life can be called adventurous and hard because of the age she lived in. This subchapter showed the main milestones of her life and how she was solving them.

### **2.3.2 Historical background of her life**

There are lots of important events which happened in England and in the rest of the world and here are some of them which can outline the century which Elizabeth Gaskell lived in.

There was already industrial revolution in England in the time of the birth of Elizabeth Gaskell. In the same year she was born the “*Luddites break machinery in Nottingham, effectively the beginning of wide industrial unrest.*” (Handley, p. 28) The Luddites were the group who refused the arrival of the machinery and they gathered into groups which were spread out over the north England. They organized a lot of attacks on the factories where they damaged the tools and machines. The government, however, took action

against them. There were many punishments and some of them ended with death penalties as in the year 1813. The “66 Luddites tried at York” (Handley, p. 30) and the government let 17 of them execute.

During this time in the Europe there were Napoleonic wars. In June 1812 “*Napoleon invades Russia and in September enters Moscow*” (Handley, p. 29). Nevertheless 2 years later there was an “*abdication of Napoleon, who is exiled to Elba*” (Handley, p. 30) and without him the Napoleonic wars were over. However, this is not the last abdication or change of a sovereign in this decade.

In year 1820 the British King Georg III died and his son Georg IV, who is already a “*Regent since 1811*” (Handley, p. 33), became a new king who has to rule over the rich middle classes and the poor working classes.

The railway in England lives its popularity and boom, so that new railways were still opening. 27 September, 1825 there was an “*opening of the Stockton-Darlington railway*” (Handley, p. 38)

The first struggles between the trade and the workers appeared on 15 July, 1828. “*Differential scale of charges introduced for the importation of wheat (Corn Law) keeps the price of bread high and particularly embitters the labouring poor.*” (Handley, p. 41) These problems with the price of food continued the whole time Elizabeth Gaskell lived and longer.

In 1837 Victoria became a Queen of the kingdom and her reign started one of the biggest and famous periods in the history of Great Britain – the Victorian Era.

### **2.3.3 Loss of her mother and her bringing up made by a different person**

“*Undoubtedly the greatest personal loss which Gaskell experienced was that of her mother.*” (FOSTER, p. 18) There are sings in her novels where the mothers of the main heroines died and the heroines had to become independent. However, these two heroines had different relationship to their mothers. The mother of Margaret died recently after Margaret came of age, so she spent with her mother more time, that’s why she probably suffered more than Mary in the second novel. However, Margaret tries to hide it in front of her brother and father. She “*rose from her trembling and despondency, and became as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother.*” (GASKELL, NS, p. 253) She made calm at first them and then she has time for her.

Mary Barton could be based more on the experience of the author. Her mother died during the delivery and together with her the son as well. This is quite similar to the life of Elizabeth Gaskell. She let Mary show her pain and sorrow. *“She repeated, over and over again, the same words; the same vain, unanswered address to her who was no more. ‘Oh, mother! Mother, are you really dead! Oh, mother, mother!’”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 24) As the result of the loss of her mother, she had to grow up without her and even though there was still a female influence, she created her opinion to and empathy with other girls who grew up alone. Inspired by them, she comprised them into the novel as a successful “motherless girls” (FOSTER, p. 19).

#### **2.3.4 Loss of her brother**

Her brother caused a huge loss in her heart. Although he was older about twelve years, it seems from their correspondents that he loved her and he really wants to keep in touch with her and Elizabeth has the same feelings. Eventually, he was her only sibling she had though she had other siblings but they died in young age. That’s why the loss of her brother, who vanished on his cruise to India, was a huge shock for her and there are lots of significances in her novels of how much she missed him. It could be a lost aunt of Mary Barton, Ester or Will William who is on the sea and his aunt misses him the whole novel and who eventually appeared. It could be a missing brother of Margaret, Frederick, who was in exile to not be hanged in England. The last mentioned who is coming back to see his ill mother *“may represent wish-fulfilment for her lost sibling’s reappearance.”* (FOSTER, p. 18) His and Margaret’s mother is dying and her last wish is to see her son which is difficult due to his death penalty for a rebellion on a British naval ship. Margaret wrote him but she does not expect that he could appear although she would be very happy. There is a mention in the book how Margaret behaves when *“the one precious brother, was there, safe, amongst them again,”* (GASKELL, NS, p. 247) Nevertheless, it is not important how she behaved; the arrival of her brother Frederick is more significant for Elizabeth Gaskell because the brother of the heroine came back whereas the brother of Gaskell could never do it again.

#### **2.3.5 Her husband**

As is mentioned above, Elizabeth married a Unitarian minister, William Gaskell with whom she moved to Manchester. He was totally different from Elizabeth and she was sometimes sad that he avoids the social life. However, he surprised her once with a very long discussion with his company. He was maybe not a social type but he definitely

supported Elizabeth in her writing career maybe because they stayed a lot of time separated, because he was too busy with his too many jobs in The Cross Street Chapel and he wanted to pay her attention in this kind of way. So *“this is no way to suggest that the marriage was an unhappy one. William was always supportive of his wife’s literary endeavours and helped her in her difficulties with publishers.”* (FOSTER, p. 28) However, he did not just help her in this way, he also influenced her novels and moreover, *“he gave her the benefit of his knowledge of Lancashire dialect for Mary Barton,”* (FOSTER, p. 28) the dialect is mentioned in this novel: *“studied absorbing attention by many a broad-spoken, common-looking factory-hand.”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 38)

Unfortunately, due to his husband who took her to Manchester, she was suddenly alone there. Nevertheless, after some time they spent together in the town, *“they increasingly extended their range of social acquaintance. The cross Street Chapel congregation itself included prominent factory owners, members of parliament, doctors and public health campaigners”* (FOSTER, p. 30) but they met any other very successful people who could help Elizabeth with her inspiration for her novels. She got into contact with the hungry and dying other side of society in the town. Due to her position as a minister’s wife *“she inevitably came into contact with this suffering population, the lowest in the city’s social scale.”* (FOSTER, p. 31) She was a part of help which consist of providing food, coal, medicine and materials for the poorest citizens. This is the reason why she was capable of detailed description of the working class in her novels, which we can see in the both industry novels. There is her description how the workers looked like: *“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,”* (GASKEL, NS, p. 81) and how they behaved to strangers on the street on their way home; *“the factory people as they poured from the mills, and in their freedom told the truth (whatever it might be) to every passer-by”* (GASKELL, MB, p.29)

#### **2.3.6 Death of her son**

This was probably the most painful period of Elizabeth’s life; the loss of her beloved son. Her husband suffered from this loss as well but he might have worried more about his wife. He was a reverend and he tried to make it easier for his wife to come over this period therefore he advised her to *“turn to writing as a distraction from grief after her young son Willie had died of scarlet fever.”* (MATUS, 2007, p. 51) Since she wrote



some music books in previous years, she attempted to create something new. She started writing a novel set in her hometown Manchester.

It is going about the novel called *Mary Barton*. It is her first novel and for some critics she reveals too much of herself in the narration which is for them immature. However, she wrote to forget about her grief, she was not experienced in such a work and I agree with the opinion of Mr Maltus: *“But I would argue that in Mary Barton the moments when the novelist’s feeling bubble up into the narrative are important in demonstrating the process by which Gaskell found her subject and focus in this first novel”* (2007, p. 52)

She created a term of commonality of suffering thus she described something common which is shared by all kinds of social classes, it means the same suffering although some classes deal with it more times than members of upper classes. This case appears in the end of the book *Mary Barton* where Mr Carson lost his son and he suffers from it so much that he wants to punish the murderer with a death penalty but eventually, he discovered how the murderer suffers much more than he does therefore he forgave him. It is described in this simple sentence *“Rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart.”* (MATUS, p.53) Elizabeth Gaskell and her character Mr Carson share the same grief because they both know what it is to lose a son.

Other sign of her grief for her son could be the description of conditions of the working class. How members of this class suffer from famine, hunger, illness, coldness and extreme poverty. *“The people had thought the poverty of the preceding years hard to bear, and had found its yoke heavy; but this year added sorely to its weight. Former times had chastised them with whips, but this chastised them with scorpions.”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 107) There is something strange especially with this novel. Perhaps it is caused by desperate feeling the author included in the plot. She used this novel as a therapy how to make the grief easier, hence there is a shadow of sorrow and sympathy with working class over this novel. The death of her son had utterly influence on the way how this book presents itself.

### **3 Social aspects**

This chapter is about the social aspects which appeared in the Victorian England. It is the time of huge differences between the rich and the poor and the time of Elizabeth Gaskell. At first, this chapter will describe what this period was about – typical features, conditions for living, problems of women with their position in the society and problems of working-class with the comparison to today's working-class. It shows how much those environment and conditions must have affected the author. For this time is typical the purity of behaviour which means almost no sexual education for girls and boys, and the idea that woman is the weaker gender and should be protected and behave after the rules. On the other hand there is infinite freedom for boys. All these features of education created the society and this chapter describe the majority of consequences which this education had.

In this time the Unitarian Church has a huge effect on inhabitants of the industrial area in the North, especially in the town of industry, such as Manchester, Edinburgh and Leeds. Why it was so successful in the northern England, I will try to explain in the following subchapter.

This chapter shows the division of the society and their typical features. Since both of these two novels describe the lives of these classes, this chapter mentions the behaviour of the working-class and the middle-class which are very important for this thesis.

#### **3.1 Victorian society**

The time of the reign of the Queen Victoria is called the Victorian period. It was the time when the British kingdom was on its top regarding business, industry, finance and colonies. It was the time the British feel that they are important for the world and they were too self-confident which has its reasons. England produced more iron than the rest of the world altogether, it had enough coal, iron and steel thus it could even produce it in large quantities. This industry, especially in the North, has caused a huge rise of population, mainly the middle-class which is linked with the working class.

##### **3.1.1 The middle class**

The middle class arose very fast due to industrialisation. Lots of men found their opportunity and made a fortune in factories with wool or coal. One of big problems which appeared was import of material from America. This meant a lower price of material and bankrupt of many small manufacturers. The owners of factories could

dictate their conditions, such as the salary of workers and the number of working hours. The middle-class was quite satisfied with its social position and with their income. The middle-class was quite strong in the self-confidence. It consisted of

*“everyone between the working class and the elite class. The middle class included successful industrialists and wealthy bankers. It also included poor clerks that normally earned only half as much as skilled workers such as a printer or a railway engine driver, but a clerk would still be considered middle class, because income was not the defining factor of class, the source was.”*(classicbookreader)

They had great prerequisites to stay strong thanks to a great base in the family. They had something which for the other social classes was luxury. *“They had the opportunity to be together,”* (classicbookreader) unlike the working-class or elite class. The working class sent their children to work in very young age and the elite class has its nannies that brought up their children instead of them. However, the middle-class let their children study until their age of 14 or 15 and took care of them. Moreover, the men were to marry someone in the age of around 30 because they were supposed to lead the factories before marriage.

Elizabeth Gaskell lived in the background of this middle-class because her father and her husband were Dissenting Ministers and as the clergymen, *“in minor parishes might have had very small incomes, but they were still considered gentlemen because of their education, values, and community position,”*(classicbookreader) they were part of the middle-class. Nevertheless, since she moved with her husband to the North and helped him to support the working class, she got to know the working class and she had a close-up view on their lives.

### **3.1.2 The working class**

Whereas the members of the middle class were pretty satisfied with their ways of life, the working class starts to feel injustice. *“Most people of the working class earned just enough to stay alive; they could easily be thrown into poverty by illness, layoffs or even a sudden misfortune that could have caused a short-term employment.”* (classicbookreader). So they lived different lives from the middle-class. Their houses or if it is right to call their households the houses were quite similar to their uncertain, dirty and demanding labours. One of these houses and the street is described by Gaskell in

her novel *Mary Barton* when John Barton with George Wilson goes to help their ill friend.

*“As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of EVERY description into gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot. (GASKELL, p. 58)*

The household inside looks almost the same like the street but it was even worse because people lived in it. *“It was very dark inside. The window-panes, many of them were broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the place even at midday.” (GASKELL, MB, p. 58)*

They did not feel the social security. When they got marry they earn together little more money but immediately when the woman gave a birth, their social position sank again to poverty status. Woman was not capable to work the whole day so it was up to her husband to support the family. The situation changed when the children grew up to the age of ability to work. The children were usually fairly young. However, after their children got married, the status of the parents was again at its lowest place. They were not only old but also devastated from the work and do not have any bright outlooks. They were quite happy when they survived disease waves such as cholera or typhus fever and poverty connected with famine.

### **3.2 Her relation to Victorian society**

She was a Christian but after she met her future husband, she discovered a lot of advantages in the Unitarian church and it affected her in her attitudes towards the society and towards the education the people, especially those from low social classes needed and required. She as a woman was very interested in the position of women. She became known for her support of woman writers but she was busy with ordinary women as well. Since she was a member of Unitarians she wanted to follow their journey of revealing taboo in England so she revealed the condition of workmen and their families which of course included their wives and daughters. Some of features from the typical ways of life of the Victorian women are shown in her both social novels because she was a part of it – she lived in the time of the Victoria’s reign

### 3.2.1 Unitarian influence

It was typical for the north or industrial part of England that poor people were either atheistic or members of other different churches but Church of England. One of the biggest and very popular was the Unitarianism. Elizabeth Gaskell became a member as well through her husband who was a Unitarian minister. *“In broad terms, Unitarians rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and denied the divinity of Christ, arguing that Jesus was an exemplum, not a redeeming saviour who intervened on behalf of mankind.”* (FOSTER, p. 21)

The Unitarians created a special community which comprised of many popular prominent on intellectual, cultural and cultivated field. *“They were fearless in speaking out on subjects which they felt needed address.”* (FOSTER, p. 22) This inspired Gaskell to open a topic about the conditions of workmen in Manchester and in other industrial towns which was in that time a huge taboo and she wanted to reveal it to ignorant society, especially into the higher class, such as middle class or upper class.

### 3.2.2 Position of women

In this time, the position of women was unbelievable hard and difficult. Being a mother meant fighting every day just to survive and to find meal for her and for her children. *“The desperate times that lower class women found themselves in periodically made them stoop to desperate measures, such as prostitution.”* (Nicole Lemieux) This is exactly the case of Mary’s aunt Ester who left the family to protect them from the shame she is a prostitute. However, the case of Ester in the book is typical for its time as Nicole Lemieux describes in her work *“the real defining characteristic of the era was found in the extreme religious leanings of the people, which resulted in sexual repression and a profound distancing between the wealthy and the working classes.”* (WEB) This sexual repression and sexual ignorance which was kept by the church destroyed many women lives. Gaskell described this feature on the character Ester. She was seduced by a man from the upper class who refused to marry her due to her social position. She probably did not know what happens when she agreed to that man.

*“For women, there were always places in the ‘slop trade’, producing cheap mass clothing and uniforms for the forces and for prisons. The pay was pitifully low. A woman might make one shirt in a long day, sewing by hand in poor light – she had to buy her own candles – and she would be lucky to earn 6 shillings for a dozen. After 1856 the advent of the sewing*

*machine improved the lot of some women, but not all had access to a machine, and the new technique required was daunting.” (PICARD, web)*

### **3.3 Working class in the Victorian society**

England was at the top regarding to economy, trade and industrialisation at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was called the Golden Age. The empire was under reign of the Queen Victoria and her husband prince Albert and the country enjoyed uninterrupted economic growth. The Empire possessed many colonies in the world and was ready for the headway. However, not everything was so positive *“The Victorians wrestled with this schizoid legacy of industrialism. The Victorian town symbolised Britain's progress and world pre-eminence, but it also witnessed some of the most deprived people, and depraved habits, in the civilised world.” (Professor Eric Evans)*

The industrialisation caused a huge migration to the towns so that at the end of the century only a few percent of the population worked on the farms which caused higher prices of bread and of other food. And since the industrialisation brought more jobs, the amount of population grow, especially in the towns, which meant more people and less food. With the import of machinery and materials, the wages fell down and the huge unemployment came quick as a streak. The industrialisation had huge negative impact on the ordinary people of the working class. *“Desperately poor housing conditions, long working hours, the ravages of infectious disease and premature death were the inevitable consequence” (Professor Eric Evans)* of industrialisation in the urban society.

There are two groups of people – those who believed in advantages of industrialisation and those who saw only disadvantages. The former group says that the machinery revolution brought many jobs, better level of life and many opportunities for new jobs as clerks. However, I agree more with the pessimists that the machinery had much bigger impact in the negative way on the lives of workmen. People listened to bigger wages and better life in the North and they went there, nevertheless those who were unskilled previous rural workmen, lived still in the poverty but they lived better than in the South. We can say that *“the success of the Victorian economy was accompanied by high unemployment, poverty, urban squalor and harsh working and living conditions.” (Professor Pat Hudson)*. This is not the best picture of the popular empire which

England was. This empire took more care about its image in outside world so to look better from outside than to solve problem of inner part which is hidden to the outside world. Those problems were poverty, terrible conditions in the factories, bad relations between employers and their employees and establishing of first club which were the first forerunners of the future trade unions.

### **3.3.1 Poverty**

*“People had thought the poverty of the preceding years hard to bear, and had found its yoke heavy; but this year added sorely to its weight. Former time had chastised them with whips, but this chastised them with scorpions.”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 107) With these sentences, one of the chapters of the novel begins which does not sound positive. It shows us how people felt the poverty and how bad it was when they compare it to the scorpions.

It is possible to divide the poor in the rural and urban poor. There is something they have in common *“unsanitary and overcrowded housing, low wages, poor diet, insecure employment and the dreaded effects of sickness and old age.”* (Pennington, Joanne de) Together with poverty, a famine comes. Lots of people were dying of hunger. The prices were high; wages were low and as result of it the death comes. It is, however, not only case of adults who died of hunger but unfortunately of children as well. They were the weakest creatures in the world of the Victorian age. Almost 2 children of 6 survived childhood. There is an example in the novel *North and South* how the youngest boy suffers from hunger. *“...and there’s our little Jack lying a-bed, too weak to cry, but just every now and then sobbing up his heart for want o’ food.”* (GASKELL, p. 157)

Elizabeth probably never lived on the edge of poverty or hunger. She was a member of middle class and then she became a wife of Unitarian minister, she was educated so she had as a woman quite good position in the society. She helped even the poor with money and other stuffs. So the only way how she met with poverty and famine was during her cooperation with her husband on helping the poorest and the weakest.

### **3.3.2 Conditions in the factories**

*“The textile industry was at the centre of Britain industrial expansion in the Victorian period”* (Liza Picard, the rise of technology and industry) which was gathering in the North of England, because *“Cotton needs a humid atmosphere, to keep the fibres pliable enough to twist into thread. The cotton industry settled in rainy Manchester for that*

reason” (PICARD, the rise of technology and industry) However, these “better” conditions for cotton which should have been ensured by moving in the North did not mean better conditions for workers. They suffered not only psychically but also physically. One character, in the novel *North and South*, Bessy explained why she is ill *“I began to work in a carding-room soon after, and the fluff got into my lungs and poisoned me.”* (GASKELL, NS, p. 103) This fluff which are *“Little bits, as fly off fro‘ the cotton, when they’re carding it, and fill the air til lit looks all fine white dust”* (GASKELL, NS, p. 103) are typical for cotton factories. It was thought that if they move the textile industry to the rainy area, as the North of England is, it will help against fluff in the air, however *“the weaving and spinning sheds were still full of dust and fibres, which irritated and damaged the lungs of the operatives.”* (PICARD, the rise of technology and industry)

Except the air, the machinery was as dangerous for workers as the air was. It was a problem with the machinery in the factories. Since the industrial revolution was in the process, lots of people took advantages of it and invest in the machinery for their factories. Nevertheless, they did not create any new safety rules for workers to prevent injuries which subsequently happened because of almost no instruction how to avoid wounds, damages or even death. The machinery was not somehow secured by machinery guards thus *“there were moving belts everywhere which could catch a woman’s hair and scalp her. A worker who leant over to adjust a spindle risked losing a finger or a hand, or worse”* (PICARD, the rise of technology and industry). As the result of the machinery, there were thousands of injured employees and tens of deaths. Other typical feature of factories was extremely noise of the machinery in the halls which has its own negative impact on the health of people as Liza Picard mentioned in her work *“The appalling clatter of a weaving or spinning shed led to occupational deafness, that was taken for granted.”* (PICARD, the rise of technology and industry)

The industry revolution left its marks on the bodies of people. People could recognise who works in which factories only by looking at them. They were humped from the all-day standing at the moving belts. Their heads were often beneath the back. All these damaged human creatures were the results of the children labour. It was a result of work conditions where they were as children *“cooped up in a heated atmosphere, debarred the necessary exercise, remaining in one position for a series of hours, one set or system of muscles alone called into activity,”* (P.GASKELL, p.202)



From our point of view it could seem that people who moved from the calm, clean south of England into the noisy, dusty and dirty North were crazy and moved into worse condition. However, their social position got better. In the South, they worked outside on the field the whole year included the winter. Especially during the mentioned winter the life in the South was even more terrible. People usually had almost no work than in the rest of the year whereas in the North they kept their working status the whole year. They had job no matter the seasons of the year. Moreover, they were in the city which meant participating on the city life. They could join the trade unions to be sure that they will help them during the hard times. Also Margaret Hale whose opinion on the north was at first negative *“It would be different. Discordant as it was – with almost a detestation for all she had ever heard of the North of England, the manufactures, the people, the wild and bleak country.”* (GASKELL, NS, p.37) However, she changed her mind and mentioned the disadvantages of the hard work in the South when she speaks to Higgins who wanted to move from the North because of his disappointed attitudes to the industrial area.

*“You would not bear the dullness of the life; you don't know what it is; it would eat you away like rust. Those that have lived there all their lives, are used to soaking in the stagnant waters. They labor on from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields — never lifting up their poor, bent, downcast heads. The hard spadework robs them of their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination. . . . they go home brutishly tired, poor creatures! caring for nothing but food and rest.”* (Gaskell, NS, p. 310)

She is right with that dullness of the life. Although the life in the dusty grey cities in the North could be literally grey and boring, the life in the South was much worst. In the North there was still something to happen even though it was a strike, disaster, misfortune; people could see that the city lives, unlike in the countryside.

### **3.3.3 Relations between Employers and Employees**

*“By the 1830s and 40s, in most major industrial towns and cities, entrepreneurial figures gained control of local and municipal government and had a major impact on urban and regional politics.”* (HUDSON, Pat, Professor) There is an example of the gained control. There was a murder of a son of Mr Carson who is the mill owner in the novel. There are some evidences that this murder was done by a young man Jem Wilson. Unfortunately, the court has a different man and Mr Carson wanted to hear the

death penalty as soon as possible. So he is writing to all of his influential acquaintance like judges and advocates are, to arrange the judgement. We can see how a huge control he has as a factory owner and as a respected personality of the town. Nobody is surprised that the relationship between the factory owners and the workmen were in tense situation. This tension could be broken only by a banality and it could have huge consequences if it was not a banality. Every time there was somebody who was unsatisfied with the condition and if he has an ability to lead, it usually ended with a strike.

The workmen were aware that the employers are as same humans as they are however, there were situation in the life which the ordinary workman did not understand, why it happens only to him or to his friends and not to employers. They also asked where the justice is and if God exists, why he wants only workmen to suffer. This is really common question of people, especially when the Church of England was in such high position. John Barton wondered about *“rich and poor; why are they so separate, so distinct, when God has made them all? It is not His will that their interests are so far apart. Whose doing is it?”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 158)

The workmen were really angry when they saw that despite hard times, the employers still live high on the hog. John Barton disputes the existence of God when he sees all the dissatisfaction among the working class. Furthermore, he wonders how unfair the life is to the ordinary man, especially, if there is a crisis, *“he is, I say, bewildered and (to use his own word) “aggravated” to see that all goes on just as usual with the millowners.”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 26) How he perceives the crisis, *“Large houses are still occupied, while spinners‘ and weavers‘ cottages stand empty, because the families that once filled them are obliged to live in room or cellars”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 26)

He describes what happened in the streets and areas where the middle class live. How can they still enjoy the life when they must know in how bad conditions their workers live and work?

*“Carriages still roll along the streets, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, the shops for expensive luxuries still find daily customers, while the workman loiters away his unemployment time in watching these things, and thinking of the pale, uncomplaining wife at home, and the wailing*

*children asking in vain for enough of food. The contrast is too great. Why should he alone suffer from bad times?”*(GASKELL, MB, p. 26)

Unfortunately, some of the employers were not as interested in their employees as they should have been. If the workers are not satisfied with their working conditions, there are plenty of other workers who are begging for being employed. We can see it in the novel *North and South* where Mr Thornton warns the workers that if they do not stop the strike, he will carry Irish workers who are ready to work in even worse condition. – „*At discovering that Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of bread,*“ (GASKELL, NS, p. 180) the workers got into madness.

Strikes were quite popular. The workmen hoped that it is the way how to try to change their conditions in the work. They hated those factory owners who lead stable life even though there was an economy crisis as stated below in the next subchapter. The owners of factories would do better if they share their plans with them. There was a question if they should do it and mainly, how to govern work-people. Mr. Thornton in the Gaskell’s novel asks about it as well if he should govern people “*by giving men intelligence enough to rule themselves, or by a wise despotism on the part of the master.*” (GASKELL, NS, p. 232) He prefers the idea of despotism as he continues further: “*I maintain that despotism is the best king of government for them; so that in the hours in which I come in contact with them I must necessarily be and autocrat.*” (GASKELL, NS, p. 122)

In the novel there are shown the feelings of the workmen during the strikes. There is described what they think about the employers and there is shown the problem with strikes from the second aspect - from the employers’ point of view. The employers behaved to the workmen like to children or even worse like to things because they had different problem than to solve workman’s problems The employers asked: “Where will they buy the material? How will they pay the workmen? What do they have to do to keep healthy trade and to keep the factories working?” These were really difficult questions to answer, which anybody of the workmen had no idea about, and they could not imagine that the employers have problems like they do. It was the result of the manners of the factory owners who acted like they were overconfident and who did not answer them on anything as stated below.

*“So class distrusted class, and their want of mutual confidence wrought sorrow to both. The masters would not be bullied, and compelled to reveal why they felt it wisest and best to offer only such low wages; they would not be made to tell that they were even sacrificing capital to obtain a decisive victory over the continental manufacturers. And the workmen sat silent and stern with folded hands, refusing to work for such pay. There was a strike in Manchester.”*

(GASKELL, MB, p. 160)

Since the time when there were strikes in any towns, the trade unions from other towns sent their representatives, money and encouragement to the striking workers to support their movement in every corner. *“Delegates from Glasgow, from Nottingham, and other towns, were sent to Manchester, to keep up the spirit of resistance“*(GASKELL, NS, p. 160)

#### **3.3.4 Beginning of trade unions**

The beginnings of trade unions were difficult. People who unified into an association with the idea of improvement of their working conditions were considered to be a poison for common workers and dangerous for factory owners. Due to this suspicion the members of trade unions were in danger in the Victorian Age until 1824/25. Until that time the gathering was illegal and was punishable by the criminal law. In 1824/25 the Combination Act was published which meant that the gathering into trade union is no longer illegal. However, ten years after the Act was announced, *“the Tolpuddle Martyrs; farm labourers who had sworn an oath of loyalty to their labourers’ union, were sentenced to transportation to Australia.“*(PICARD, the rise of technology and industry)

There were serious reasons why the employers disliked the trade unions. They pointed to *“the dangerous conditions of their work, and their pitiful level of pay“*(PICARD, the rise of technology and industry). Actually, they spread the information about the working condition which the employers wanted to hide.

It was the time of division on work time and leisure time although the leisure time included only few hours in the evening after the work. Nevertheless thanks to this leisure time the new type of man appeared - so called self-made man. England changed itself every minute during the Victorian Age and those who grabbed their opportunity could earn a fortune. One of the possibilities how to improve the life were evening

classes, where *“they could be educated If a man had enough initiative and energy after a long working day, he could attend evening courses on scientific subjects or Latin or shorthand at a Mechanics’ Institution, or at one of the Working Men’s Colleges founded in 1854.”* (British Library) Lots of men used their situation and became educated which meant gaining literacy and knowledge in various fields or branches. Elizabeth Gaskell mentions the self-made man in her novel *Mary Barton* as a common thing. *“Mathematical problems are received with interest, and studied absorbing attention by many a broad-spoken, common-looking factory-hand.”* (GASKELL, p. 38) Literacy was one of the biggest issues in that time. Not many people from the working were able to read or even write so those who were capable of this ability worked usually in higher spheres. As Jill L. Matus claimed in his work *“writing and literacy are a means of access to information and hence power makes clear”* (p. 34). This was the reason why those literate people played an important role in the common life. They were sought-after persons especially by the trade unions because they *“needed intelligent self-educated men as Union officials.”* (British Library) However, not only intelligent self-educated men were needful also the men who were well-known between the locals and had a voice which could lead the masses. Mr Barton and Higgins were those examples. Elizabeth Gaskell described John Barton almost as a hero for the working class.

*“He had a pretty clear head at times, for method and arrangement; a necessary talent to large combinations of men. And what perhaps more than all made him relied upon and valued, was the consciousness which every one who came in contact with him felt, that he was actuated by no selfish motives; that his class, his order, was what he stood by,”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 158)

The trade unions were created to defend the rights of the working class and to point out the dreadful living and working condition. The union were there also to help members in their hard times like unemployment or family tragedy like funeral and others were. The narrator mentioned this help from the worker’s point of view in the novel: *“He was in a club, so that money was provided for the burial.”* (GASKELL, MB, p. 25) However, the trade unions were always choosing whom they will help. Sometimes they

refused to help some workers only because he was not as proactive as the unions needed. The evidence is shown in the novel *"It<sup>1</sup> had not much to give, but, with worldly wisdom, thought it better to propitiate an active, useful member, than to help those who were more unenergetic, though they had large families to provide for."* (GASKELL, MB, p. 108) This made a bad reputation to the unions. They should have helped all type of people and it could help them to create a trust-worthy-union. As the result of their behaviour the employer did not want to employ anyone who was a member of the trade union. Actually, thanks to that behaviour of the unions, the employers could dictate their conditions such as written below:

*"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 masters' power,"*(GASKELL, MB, p. 171).

Afterwards there were some trade unions which matured and succeeded. It was exactly *"because they could safeguard if not improve the living standards of their members by making capitalism work for them as well as for their employers,"* (EVANS, p. 201) So at the end, if they wanted to survive and to do something more like to try to perceived the employers, and to negotiate with them the condition and not only pay the members in hard times, they had to be somehow beneficial for the employers. Eventually, many of the trade unions became the "elite" clubs because they selected, who they want.

### **3.4 Working class today**

One of the biggest differences between today's working-class and the Victorian one is the wage rise and also the age of people in which they earned the most. In the Victorian period the working hours were much longer and the labour was really exhausting therefore *"working men were often most highly paid in their twenties because at their peak physically"*(classicbookreader). During the last 200 years the pay peak has grown from twenties to where *"women's pay peaks at age 39"* and *"men's salaries continue to grow until age 48"* (ASHFORD, Kate). The wages were extremely low, especially for the workers who were called *"the lowest being 'working men' or labourers"*(British

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<sup>1</sup> The trade union

Library). They had to count every shilling and had no luxury to save the money. *“A labourer’s average wage was between 20 and 30 shillings a week in London, probably less in the provinces. This would just cover his rent, and a very sparse diet for him and his family.”* (British Library)

Today this situation of living from salary to another salary has not changed during the years. The workmen still usually cannot afford going on holiday abroad as is now supposed by majority of people. They usually come exhausted from their work home and have no lust to do something like a hobby. Of course the time is different. They do not suffer from hunger and not die of it but they work for no pleasure but having food and place to live.

The woman position in the work has changed pretty much. They can work at the same jobs as men. There is still female discrimination in the world as a lower salary for the same job for which men earn almost twice as much. However, this is not the same discrimination as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women can now success in each sphere of branches. Nevertheless, they are still women who are expected to have a child especially in a young age. Therefore they have often problems to find and to keep the job. This is the reason as well why they earn less than men. Men can built the career whereas women start building it but in a few years they gave a birth and they took care of a child and then there can be other children and they lose almost 5 or more working years for their children. This situation was same in the Victorian period. Even men thought that women should stay at home and keep their domestic duties and not work or if they want to work then they should work only as a dressmaker. So they usually stayed at home uneducated for any kind of a job. So there is no doubt that this is the time of feminism which is followed by many new female writers who became famous in the society thanks to Elizabeth Gaskell.

## 4 Conclusion

The purpose of the thesis was to find any autobiographical and social aspects in the works of Elizabeth Gaskell and to give some items of evidences from the novels. The first chapter covers the autobiographical aspects in her novels and the second chapter describes the time in which she lived, the features of that time, a division of the society and its condition of living and eventually a short comparison with the contemporary society.

The first subchapter of the first chapter aimed to outline a short introduction to her bibliography. Besides the bibliography, I had to understand the plots of the books in order to create analyses of books and that's why there are short summaries of those books.

Next part of the first chapter was firstly supposed to find and show typical features of Gaskell's writing. However, my English is not as excellent as is needful to understand various styles of writing and to recognize some differences between her and other writers but in spite of the fact there are some significant features. She introduced each of the chapters with a poem or with a quote which comprised the topic of the chapter. This shows how educated she was, because she used lots of poems or quotations from different sources whether it be Greek philosophy or citations of various authors. She let her characters likely speak Lancashire dialect which was introduced her by her husband. Secondly, the subchapter gives the information about the people and places which had a fundamental influence on her literary output. Through her family, which was quite social, she met lots of significant people from who she learnt many things. One of the biggest effect had her father, although, they did not meet very much. He provided education for her so that she became an exception between the women with knowledge. This was a great base for her literary life. Some of the people she met became models for her characters in the novel.

Finally, the last part of the first chapter describes the events of her life which appeared, in the figurative meaning, in the novels. There is a description of her life. Some points from her life are emphasized and expanded in the other subchapters. She experienced lots of family disasters. First and the most important for her as well as for the main characters in the novels was the death of her mother when Gaskell was very young. She



suffered from not having mother although she was brought up by the sister of her mother. She felt that she missed something and maybe that's why the mothers of both main woman characters died sooner or later in the novels. She supported the development of *Margaret* and *Mary*, who had to overtake the role of their mothers. A mysterious disappearance of her brother is imprinted in both novels as well. Although he was much older than she, they had good relationship thus his vanishing was a disaster for Gaskell. She substituted him by a character of Frederick in *Mary Barton* and she created his arrival, which she probably wished a lot, so she experienced his arrival in the novel. However, there would not have been a *Mary Barton* novel without the death of her son. She wrote this novel to overcome this sad event.

The second chapter deals with the society of the Victorian age and their lives described in the novels. At first, there is a description of both main social classes to understand the differences between them and to make it clear who was who. Gaskell belonged to the middle class and she realized that there is no mention about the lives of lower social class in the public. Therefore, thanks to her experience with the Unitarians, she followed their principles and described the poverty and the dreadful conditions, which were created by industrialisation and by the behaviour of both employers and employees. The third part of the second chapter described the conditions where the people from the working class lived. They lived in such conditions as probably not even animals could live nowadays. This was caused by the migration of people from the countryside to industrial town, where there was little place for them. The prices were high because of the importation of material and there was not hygiene thus lots of people suffered from many illnesses. All kind of this are described in each of the social novels and to each of the cases there are examples from the books.

Together with industry and machinery in the factories came riots and demonstration which were organised either by radical groups or by trade unions which were in their boom in that time. The society of the trade unions and their merits were often unfair to their members. They did not carry out their duties and if they did, it was an exception. So, if they wanted changes, they had to start cooperating with the employers; otherwise they would have stayed forbidden and with illegal status.

The last subchapter contains the comparison between workmen of that time and of today's. The conditions got better but present workmen cannot afford more than food

and living for each month so they live still from salary to salary. Maybe the conditions seem more or less better for workmen; nevertheless the working position of women experienced a revolution. Women can nowadays work in any field and be independent and not only exist from day to day as it was in the Victorian age.

Elizabeth Gaskell is very interesting author who was unfortunately forgotten when she passed away. It would be appropriate if such an educated, intelligent and talented author is not counted among the biggest writes, because she gave the world one of the first view on real life of the working class during the Victorian period.

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