Social Commentary and Critique in the Victorian Novel

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti – prevoditeljski smjer i mađarskog jezika i književnosti – komunikološki smjer

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Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

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Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Introduction 1
1. The Industrial Revolution and the Industrial Novel 3
1.1. The Industrial Revolution and Workers' Rights 3
1.2. The Industrial Novel 5
2. Industrial Towns 8
2.1. Population Growth and Urbanization 8
2.2. Dickens and Coketown 9
2.3. Industrial North and Rural South 12
3. Utilitarianism and *Hard Times* 16
4. The Masters' Perspective 20
4.1. Josiah Bounderby 20
4.2. John Thornton 22
5. The Workers' Perspective 25
5.1. The Workers in *Hard Times* 25
5.2. The Workers in *North and South* 27
Conclusion 30
Works Cited 32

Abstract

This paper explores the social and historical context of the Industrial Revolution in Victorian England as portrayed in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Dickens's *Hard Times*. Both authors create their locations and characters to depict the effects of heavy industrialization that led to the dehumanization of the Victorian society. Inspired by the filthy and polluted industrial towns, Gaskell's critique highlights the contrast between the North and the South and the vast gap between the rich and the poor, the masters and the workers that leads to class struggles and violence. Likewise, Dickens emphasizes the same gap focusing on the system of education that produces a workforce resembling programmed machines to suit the needs of the bleak factories. However, despite the pessimism and the gloomy atmosphere of the two novels, both authors hope for reconciliation which is possible by the masters and workers acting in unison, listening and responding to the needs of the other.

Keywords: industrial novel, *Hard Times*, *North and South*, dehumanization, industrialization, utilitarianism, masters, workers

Introduction

The Victorian Era saw the rise of Britain as a dominating world force. The country was reaping the fruits of the Industrial Revolution and its technological advancements. The process of industrialization affected and changed many aspects of British culture, including the society and its values. The industrial society of Britain generally benefited from these changes, even though some of them brought devastating consequences. This paper explores two industrial novels: Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* with the aim to show how the authors use locations and characters to give a powerful criticism of the industrial society in nineteenth century England. The selected novels of Dickens and Gaskell not only mirror the social changes but more importantly highlight the authors' belief that industrialization dehumanized the society and deepened the gap between the rich and the poor.

Chapter 1 introduces the major changes that the Industrial Revolution brought for the country. It explains how those changes further affected the society in the Victorian Era. The main part of the chapter focuses specifically on the events that shaped the lives of the working class. This chapter also discusses the most important acts and regulations, as well as the workers' struggles to get better legal protection and more rights. Further in the chapter, the genre of the industrial novel is introduced highlighting the role of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell as authors of the industrial novel who used the genre to deliver a powerful criticism of the industrial society and the injustice in it.

Chapter 2 discusses Coketown and Milton-Northern in separate subchapters. In the first subchapter, the similarities between these two fictional towns and the real industrial towns in England are highlighted. Some of the topics discussed are the living conditions, pollution and slum areas. The second subchapter talks about the uneven development of the English North and South and how this is reflected in Gaskell's Milton and Helstone.

Chapter 3 focuses on *Hard Times* and the philosophy of utilitarianism. It discusses how Dickens chooses this philosophy to criticize the changing values in the Victorian society. According to him, the industrialization caused the society to become more materialistic and profit-oriented. The consequences on the society are the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, the dehumanization of society and the popularization of the utilitarian principles.

Chapter 4 focuses on the portrayal of the masters in the two novels. The first subchapter examines the portrayal of Dickens's Bounderby as a symbol of the oppressive rich manufacturer who exploits all those around him for profit. It analyses how he presents himself to the other

characters, the relationships he forms with them, and the cruelty with which he treats his workers. The second subchapter analyses Gaskell's John Thornton as a more realistic depiction of an industrial master. There is a particular focus on the development of his character, especially his growing understanding for his workers.

Chapter 5 gives the workers' perspective by focusing on the authors' depiction of working-class society and the problems faced by their working-class characters. Dickens's Stephen Blackpool is a true symbol of an oppressed worker who is the ultimate victim of the social injustice and inequality in the Victorian society. Similar victimization is depicted in Gaskell's Higgins and Boucher who serve as examples of down-trodden workers struggling against the harsh realities. In addition, the chapter presents the role of the Union in the novel.

1. The Industrial Revolution and the Industrial Novel

1.1. The Industrial Revolution and Workers' Rights

The eighteenth century was a turning point in the world's history, especially in the history of Britain. It was the era of revolutionary inventions and turbulent changes. The country entered a transitional period known as the Industrial Revolution, during which the societies were changing from agrarian to industrial ones, and numerous inventions of the time helped accelerate this transition. Many of these inventions had a huge impact, but perhaps the most significant is the steam engine which "in 1769 [the] Scottish inventor James Watt reworked . . . to make it more efficient and more reliable" (Stewart). With the new technology, Britain went through the transitional process much faster than the other countries. In addition to the technological advancements, there were other factors that helped expedite the country's development. Firstly, its geographical features played a great role. At the time Britain was extremely rich in natural resources, such as ore and, more importantly, coal. The country also had the advantage of structured society and stable political situation. But the factor that made Britain the dominant world force was its colonial empire. The advancements in technology, especially the newly improved steam engine, enabled Britain to produce more goods than ever before. The British textile industry boomed, which made trading cotton with the colonies very lucrative. The trading and transfer went faster because the steam engine found great use in the transportation system. Britain's dominance in the world market ensured the country's unprecedented economic growth and made it a global force.

The situation only got better when Victoria "inherited the throne of Great Britain at the age of eighteen, upon the death of her uncle William IV in 1837" (Cody). Her accession marked the beginning of the Victorian Era, the most prosperous time in British history. On the global scale, Britain was at the top, but the situation in the country was a much different story. Industrialization was at an all-time high at that point, and the negative consequences of such rapid development were starting to show. Coal burning was polluting the air, industrial waste was polluting the waters, and materialism was "polluting" the people. The ones who suffered the most under those circumstances were the poor factory workers. To fully understand their struggles, we need to look at how the government and the rich manufacturers treated them.

The government policies at the time were mostly beneficial for the wealthy business owners. One such policy was the laissez faire principle. "[L]aissez-faire practices, developed

further by such British economists as Smith and David Ricardo, ruled during the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th century" ("Laissez-Faire"). Its supporters "argued that a free market and free economic competition were extremely important to the health of a free society" ("Laissez-Faire"). The logic behind this policy was that "people will develop habits of sturdy self-reliance, but if they are supported by the state, people will rapidly sink into a mode of dependency" (Evans 2). The policy advocated free trade and fewer restrictions enforced by the government. In this way the country would gain even more economic power, and the sellers and traders would get even richer. The manufacturers also greatly benefited from the legislation of the time, namely, the Reform Acts, such as the "1832 Reform Act [that] gave the vote to a sizeable proportion of the industrial middle classes. This piece of legislation meant that the manufacturers now had more importance in the governance of Britain" (Bloy). Before this act, there was no balance when it came to parliament representation, meaning that many newly developed industrial towns were unrepresented. The act further extended the voting rights "to any man owning a household worth £10, adding 217,000 voters to an electorate of 435,000. Approximately one man in five now had the right to vote" (Everett). With this, many middle-class people rose to the level of the upper classes. On the other hand, the laissez faire politics and the Reform Act of 1832 did very little for the working class. The working class was still oppressed by the rich and the laws. "At the end of the French Wars that year Parliament passed legislation that stated that no foreign corn could be imported into Britain until domestic corn cost 80% - per quarter" (Bloy). With these new regulations, known as Corn Laws, food became more expensive, especially for the people in the urban areas, and many were left hungry. The working class was also fighting for more rights and parliament representation. One of the biggest movements for workers' rights was Chartism, "a movement established and controlled by working men in 1836 to achieve parliamentary democracy as a step towards social and economic reform" (Bloy). It spread through England and was active in major cities like London and Manchester. The reasons for the movement were many, the most important ones being the horrible working conditions, low wages and long working hours. Workers were also disappointed by the results of the 1832 Reform Act, because the majority of the working class still was not allowed to vote. More disappointment for them came with the Factory Acts. "The first effective Factory Act, passed in 1833, prohibited the employment of children under nine years of age in all textile mills… In addition, the act limited children aged 9 to 12 to nine hours per day or 48 hours per week" (Nardinelli). The Factory Act regulated the employment and the working conditions for children, but the adult workers were mostly unaffected by it. After this, the chartists decided to draft and publish the official document of their program. "The People's Charter was officially launched on 8 May 1838" (Walton 6). In the document, six

main demands were listed: “1. Votes for all men; 2. Equal electoral districts; 3. abolition of the requirement that Members of Parliament be property owners; 4. payment for MPs; 5. annual general elections; and 6. the secret ballot” (Everett). Even though Chartism as a movement eventually failed, and the government rejected their demands, it was still very important. It drew attention to serious social problems; it united workers and served as a predecessor of many other working class movements.

Another way in which the workers were endangered was the fact they had no protection since the “1799 Combination Act, titled *An Act to prevent Unlawful Combinations of Workmen*, prohibit[ed] trade unions and collective bargaining by workers” (Diniejko). “The Combination Laws remained in force until they were repealed in 1824” (Simkin). But the repeal only made the situation worse because the majority of the workers immediately went on strike. To prevent strikes from happening too often, “the 1825 Combination Act was passed which again imposed limitations on the right to strike” (Simkin). The act allowed the formation of trade unions but enforced certain restrictions: it “prohibited breach of contract and ‘molestation’ or ‘obstruction’ of employers” (Allingham). However, the unions still had little power, seeing as the main method they used was striking, and the employers usually countered it with lockouts. The employers also had the full support of the government, so the power was on their side. The situation truly improved several decades later when “British unionism received its legal foundation in the Trade-Union Act of 1871” (“Trade Union”). Until then trade unions could only unite the workers but couldn’t guarantee any legal protection.

1.2. The Industrial Novel

While dominating the global scene, Britain was internally struggling with the social problems created by industrialization and subsequent changes. Many important people of the time, such as theorists, historians and politicians, recognized the urgency of these issues and gave their various contributions in addressing them. Writers were also among them. Inspired by the current situation, they used their works to draw attention to industrialization and give their opinion and criticism. Since the novel is one of the least restrictive literary forms, it is ideal for discussing any subject and thus became especially popular during the Victorian Era. Most Victorian novels dealt with social problems such as social inequality, class differences, poverty and the oppression of the working class. Since these social problems appeared as a result of Britain’s industrialization, the novels discussing them are known as the industrial novels. The Industrial novel emerged as a

subgenre of the Victorian novel and remains relevant even today. The industrial novels point to the growing concerns regarding the negative social effects of the Industrial Revolution in an effort to raise public's awareness. "The novelists are commonly credited with the intention of trying to educate, and therefore by implication to change, the opinions and prejudices of their readers" (Guy 4). Some of the most relevant industrial novels are: "*Hard Times*, *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, *Alton Locke*, *Sybil* and *Felix Holt*" (Guy 3). Childers explained the importance of the industrial novels: "the social investigations looked to the novel as the most effective way of organizing and presenting those details [of everyday life]" (78).

Charles Dickens was one of the most important Victorian novelists and a relentless social critic. Through his works and the characters he created, he discussed the most pressing issues of the time. The atmosphere of his novels was often dark, with sad stories and pitiful characters, often living in squalid rooms, derelict houses or filthy streets. He usually picked characters from some of the most marginalized groups of the society, such as orphan children, exploited workers, criminals and prostitutes. This was in accordance with the zeitgeist, because "those who had previously been socially peripheral became symbolically central to the projects of novelists and social reformers alike … [i]n fiction as well as in non-fiction it was the poor, the criminal, and the diseased who elicited the most interest" (Childers 78). Dickens criticizes the exploitation of workers and their horrible living conditions in many of his novels, but in *Hard Times* his criticism reached its peak. As a true industrial novel, it discusses issues like the working conditions, cruel masters, materialism and greed of rich industrials, and many other social problems. It features interesting characters like Mr. Gradgrind, who is a firm believer in the philosophy of utilitarianism, his children Louisa and Thomas, a rich manufacturer Mr. Bounderby, and factory worker Stephen Blackpool. The atmosphere and the setting of the novel are gloomy and deeply pessimistic. Every character is almost a stereotypical representative of their social class, and their lives are determined by the demands of the industry.

Dickens's attitudes towards the industry were shared by his contemporary, and another important Victorian author, Elizabeth Gaskell. Elizabeth Gaskell moved to Manchester after getting married in 1832. Manchester was the city that was affected the most by the Industrial Revolution and it was "recognised as the world's first truly industrial city" (Phelps 6). Gaskell gained first-hand experience of living in the heavily urbanized industrial cities. She witnessed the poor living conditions, the slums, the filth and pollution, and the exploitation of the working class. It's interesting that she knew "some of Manchester's wealthy businessmen … personally because they and their families formed a considerable part of the congregation of Cross Street Chapel" (Duthie 5). Through them she could also learn about their perspective on current social problems.

She documented her opinions and criticism in her industrial novels, the best-known ones being *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. The story of *North and South* follows a young woman Margaret Hale, who, like Gaskell, moves to an industrial city (Milton-Northern) and learns about the unjust treatment of the cotton mill workers. Gaskell used the character of Margaret as a mediator between the two classes of society, the workers and the masters. Through the novel, she tried to promote better communication and mutual understanding of the two very different sides.

Since the plot and the characters reflected the rapid changes of the nineteenth century, the novels are still used to explain these changes and their powerful impact on the society. In a similar manner, both *Hard Times* and *North and South* offer insight into the state of the society and the prevailing attitudes and sentiments at the time. These two novels were chosen specifically because both Dickens and Gaskell depicted the society in a way that shows the readers how industrialization depersonalized places and people.

2. Industrial Towns

2.1. Population Growth and Urbanization

The Industrial Revolution was the catalyst for numerous changes that happened further on in the history of the United Kingdom. Most of the changes were positive, considering the country experienced rapid development and economic growth, and established itself as a powerful imperialistic force. However, the process of industrialization came with some negative consequences for the people, their environment, and various aspects of their lives. These consequences had varied impacts, depending on the area of the country. The way of living in the rural areas remained for the most part unchanged, with the society still being primarily agrarian. People earned their living through farming and small workshops. But the society in the cities had to navigate through rather turbulent changes. The numerous newly opened mills and factories affected the landscape, demographic image, and the quality of life in the cities. The two accompanying processes of urban development were population growth and urbanization. The population had been growing steadily for some time already and was expected to continue to do so. The growth of the population is mostly credited to the increasing economic power of the British Empire. Additionally, improvements in the field of transportation helped in better connections, a bigger market and easier migration. However, the rate at which the population grew was unprecedented. "From 1803 to 1867, the population grew from just over two million to more than six million families. The huge increase in population was felt most heavily among the working class, where the number of families went from scarcely one million to over four and a half million" (Prewitt Brown 85). Such rapid growth could not be predicted and quickly became a problem for the nation. The problem was mostly felt in the English towns, which were not equipped at all to deal with the ever-growing number of residents. The lack of space, good infrastructure and good sewage system were only some of the critical issues that needed to be addressed. Some of the early measures taken were "the transfer of criminals into colonies and the elimination of family allowances (known as laws for socially dependent" (Lukáčová 27). Some contemporary theorists believed the Poor Laws to be one of the causes of the population growth. "In 1601 the Elizabethan Poor Law Act was passed, making the relief of poverty the responsibility of each parish" (Bloy). Theorists came to believe that, since "the system was tied to the parish, it discouraged the unemployed workers from engaging in industrialized cities and the income provided encouraged young people from poor conditions to early marriages and large families" (Lukáčová 28). As a solution, "[i]n 1832 [the government] set up a Royal Commission … with a view to amending the

existing legislation" (Bloy). The task of the Royal Commission was to send its members to different areas of the country and have them inspect closely how the Poor Laws functioned and how the relief they provided was distributed. "The report …called for sweeping reforms of the Poor Law, including the grouping of parishes into Poor Law unions [and] the abolition of outdoor relief for the able-bodied and their families… Soon after the report was published Parliament adopted the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834" (Boyer). After being left without financial aid, many went to cities looking for a job. Manufacturers always needed more workers in their mills and factories, or builders to build them even more factories. The already mentioned improvement in transportation also meant more workers were needed. The English railway system was keeping up with the innovations of the time, and the industry and trade depended heavily on it. Another factor that pulled people to the cities was the fact that factories offered jobs with a stable income. This made the factories more attractive than fields, because in agricultural work, farmers were always at the mercy of weather and crop diseases. Urbanization was soon in full swing and "England and Wales were approximately one-quarter urban by 1751, half by 1851" (Woods 360). Moreover, the changes also happened in population dynamics and dispersion. "[O]ne-third of the population of England and Wales lived in 50 districts in the 1860s and in only 39 in the 1890s" (Woods 195). Just how drastic the surge was, can be better shown using the example of Manchester, one of the towns that was transformed by the industry very early on:

> At the start of the 18th century, Manchester was a small, market town with a population of fewer than 10,000. By the end of the century, it had grown almost tenfold, to 89,000 souls. In the 19th century, the population continued to grow unabated, doubling between 1801 and the 1820s and then doubling again between then and 1851, to 400,000 souls. This was phenomenal growth transforming Manchester into Britain's second city. (Griffin)

This degree of urbanization came with a price. Up until that point, the country had never been faced with a similar situation. The changes were too sudden and happened so quickly that most of the towns simply could not keep up. The further subchapters discuss in detail how the quality of urban living deteriorated and how it was reflected in both *Hard Times* and *North and South.*

2.2. Dickens and Coketown

Dickens's criticism of the industrialization and its consequences on the people and environment reached its peak in *Hard Times*. He chose to set the plot of the novel in fictional Coketown, a true industrial town, overrun by mills and factories. Although it is fictional, Coketown could easily be mistaken for any of the typical English cities of the time. Through *Hard Times*,

Dickens expresses his harshest criticism yet. Some literary critics even resent his use of exaggeration and satire to draw attention to the state of affairs in England, and emphasize the importance of tackling the problems the heavy industrialization had caused for the society and nature. Dickens introduces Coketown in a very negative light:

> It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it … It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever … It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long. (Dickens 17)

From the very beginning, it is obvious that the town was being consumed by the industry. It is a town where men and machines completely dominated over nature. Instead of trees, the tall factory chimneys could be seen on the horizon. In fact, the town seemed to be completely deprived of any greenery, parks or trees. Other than tall chimneys, the most prominent feature of the town, seemed to be the thick black smoke in which it was engulfed. There is so much smoke that the house bricks have lost their red colour. The black smoke was caused by the coal burning, and it was a known environmental problem of the time. The negative effects of coal burning on the air were well known but were mostly ignored. "Industries during that period were using coal in ever greater numbers. Indeed, in 1800, there was a total of 2191 coal powered steam engines … in Britain, and by 1907 that figure had risen to 7,734" (Basdeo). The more innovative the technology got, the more coal it needed, and more coal burning only meant heavier air pollution. An article from the 1849 December issue of *London Illustrated* describes the smog and the air pollution: "You fancy that all the smoke which had ascended for years from the thousands of London chimneys, had fallen down all at once … smelling as if it had been kept too long, and making you wheeze and sneeze" (Miller). The amount of smoke in the air posed a serious threat to public health and made pulmonary diseases more common. The pollution in Coketown was so great that it started to affect its canals and the river. Coketown's river is purple and black, colours rarely associated with water, and it was also ill-smelling. Through this descriptions Dickens draws a parallel with the pollution of rivers in industrial cities. Because of the industry and urbanization, cities started to produce more waste, which was usually dumped into the rivers. The concrete example of this is the river Thames. The state of the Thames deteriorated because of the sewage, but also because "paper mills, tanneries, dye-works, and breweries all used the river as both water source and waste basin" (Allen). As Allen explains, the Thames is a tidal river, so instead of flowing out to sea, the waste mass stayed in London (Allen) and created a horrible smell that spread through the city.

Another way in which Coketown resembled real industrial cities is with its slums. People who abandoned their countryside homes in search of better job opportunities had a hard time finding accommodation or housing in the crowded cities. Their choices were limited, on the one hand by their already poor financial situation, and on the other, by the lack of space in cities to take in the large influx of people. However, the developing industry required workers, so entire blocks of workers' housing sprung up. These quarters became known as slums, and the houses in them were built in a rush, using cheap materials and with disregard of any city planning or infrastructure. In his descriptions, Dickens mirrored the reality and made Coketown's slums just as filthy and depressing. The air is worse than in the other parts of the town, because "nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs were bricked in" (Dickens 49). People living there could not escape the air pollution, so pulmonary diseases were very common. The quarter is "the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, streets upon streets" (Dickens 49) where buildings and houses are placed in arbitrary order and people have to compete among themselves for food and other resources. There are numerous sources confirming the true state of English slums, but perhaps the most well-known is Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* where he describes the slums in which the workers lived in great detail:

> These slums are pretty equally arranged in all the great towns of England, the worst houses in the worst quarters of the towns; usually one- or two-storied cottages in long rows, perhaps with cellars used as dwellings, almost always irregularly built…The streets are generally unpaved, rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters, but supplied with foul, stagnant pools instead. Moreover, ventilation is impeded by the bad, confused method of building of the whole quarter and since many human beings live crowded into a small space, the atmosphere that prevails in these working-men's quarters may be readily imagined. (Engels 24)

Coketown's slums serve as a reflection and a harsh criticism of the real state. The ever-growing number of mills and factories required a lot of workers, but cities couldn't properly take care of the incoming people. As a result, the workers were herded into the gloomy quarters that had been, according to Engels, strategically built so that the rich employers could "take the shortest road … to their places of business, without ever seeing that they are in the midst of the grimy misery" (Engels 35). The upper classes of society did not like to be reminded of the grimy and untended parts of their cities, and they liked it even less to think about the residents of those parts. Dickens's main critique here is against the neglect of the poor workers and their living conditions. With such attitudes of the rich manufactures and other members of the upper classes, and without any social security, the poor were left to take care of themselves. The entire families spend their days working

tirelessly for someone else, and then came home to sleep in a single, squalid room. They had been pushed aside to the margins, to live in places in which no human should ever live.

It is clear that Dickens chose to focus on the negative effects of industry when he created Coketown. Factories that took over the town and spread their waste into every corner, causing harm to the people and the environment. The atmosphere of the town feels almost dystopian, and it seems like no one could live a happy or even healthy life there. It is an industrial town without any memorable landmarks and with filthy, identical streets. People's lives there completely revolve around the factories and the industry. By creating a town like this, Dickens managed to capture the depersonalization brought by the Industrial Revolution and accompanying processes.

2.3. Industrial North and Rural South

Even though both *Hard Times* and *North and South* portray life in industrial towns, the approach of the authors differs greatly. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dickens delivers harsh and blunt criticism, almost on the verge of exaggeration. Gaskell on the other hand, chose a more subtle way and used the method of comparison and contrast. The clash between the North and South is the underlying theme through her entire novel. The clash can be observed on many levels. For instance, some geographical features had such a great effect that they changed the way of living in certain regions. The people behaved and talked differently, had different values and attitudes. However, to fully understand the differences, we need to look at the point in history when these two parts of the country started to go in different directions.

The answer, of course, is the Industrial Revolution that affected each part differently. The northern districts of England had better preconditions for development. The proximity to the Pennine range was a very important factor because it "offered plentiful coal in easily accessible seams" (Caunce). The easy access to the natural resources such as iron and coal, which was used as a fuel in the mills and factories, enabled the North to develop faster. Also, the fact "that transport costs doubled the sale price after only three or four miles made it uneconomic to mine it for other than very local use" (Caunce), gave northern districts a clear advantage. Because of the expenses of transport, the south of England had limited access to the coal and other ores, and it soon started to lag behind. In the North, Manchester was the city that profited the most during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it was quickly transformed into the most important industrial city, after London. Manchester became England's leading city in the textile industry. One of the reasons for this were the numerous waterways of the region that were ideal for cotton mills. Waterways

were also convenient for the transport of both the manufactured goods and raw material. “It is generally agreed that canals played a central role in Britain’s industrialization … Britain … enjoyed the advantages of cheap water transport by coast and rivers” (Turnbull 537). Gaskell spent most of her adult life in Manchester and it served as her main inspiration for creating her fictional setting of most of her novels, including *North and South*.

The main heroine of *North and South* is Margaret Hale. Margaret and her family belong to the upper class, and she is first encountered while staying with her aunt and cousin in Harley Street in London. She lives with her parents in her hometown Helstone, which is a small village or a hamlet, as she says, in the southern England. Like Dickens, Gaskell puts great emphasis on the locations in the novel. Helstone is one of the two main locations, the other being Milton-Northern. Helstone and Milton can be seen as polar opposites, the former representing the traditional South and the latter the progressive North. One of Gaskell’s goals is to realistically depict the life in industrial towns, but her approach to the theme is very different from Dickens’s. She did not choose to focus solely on the negative aspects of urban living and just criticize the industrial towns and societies. Her main method is contrasting Milton as a prototypical industrial town in the North with Helstone in the South. Both these places met in Margaret, when she had to relocate to Milton after her father left his position of a parish priest in Helstone. In fact, it is mostly through Margaret’s eyes and thoughts that readers get the picture and impressions of the locations and characters in them. Having spent most of her life in Helstone, Margaret has a strong bond with her hometown and the people there. She thinks of them as “her people” because she has known most of them for a very long time and helped them whenever she could. She looked after the elderly neighbours, and the small children, she taught at school and was very involved with the local community. This small, tight-knit community of Helstone is opposite of anything she had in Milton. Other than the working-class family she befriended, she had no friends there, and spent most of her time with her parents. Gaskell’s descriptions of Helstone correlate with Margaret’s thoughts and memories. It’s an idyllic picturesque village, surrounded by lush greenery. Nature seems to be the main feature of Helstone and Margaret enjoys taking leisurely strolls through its parks and meadows. Everything in Helstone is full of life, with buzzing bees and chirping birds, and everything is painted with light and warm colours. The air is fragrant and carries the smells of flowers and fresh fruit. The fairy-tale like village is in stark contrast with Milton, which can best be seen in the following lines: “the chill, shivery October morning came; not the October morning of the country, with soft, silvery mists, clearing off before the sunbeams that bring out all the gorgeous beauty of colouring, but the October morning of Milton, whose silvery mists were heavy fogs, and where the sun could only show long dusky streets when he did break through and shine”

(Gaskell 213). Like Dickens's Coketown, Milton is bleak and veiled in opaque fogs and factory smoke. It's also stated that there are several large mills and that on the streets "every waggon and truck bore cotton, either in the raw shape in bags, or the woven shape in bales of calico" (Gaskell 48), which can be seen as a confirmation that Milton is the fictional version of Manchester. According to historians, the sheer number of cotton mills in the Manchester area "earned it the title of 'Cottonopolis' in 1854" (Phelps 6). The number of mills and factories contributed to Milton's air pollution, causing Mrs. Hale's health to deteriorate even faster. Milton's houses were small and without gardens, built closely together to leave more space for the wider streets and roads so the transport of the produced goods can flow smoothly.

Along with the difference in landscape and air quality, there was also a significant difference in the people in Helstone and Milton, and their way of life. People of the North were busier and were more accustomed to the fast pace of life. On one occasion Margaret noticed how shop keepers always find something to do, unlike in the South where they just take a break when there are no customers. That is also how they felt about each other. The northerners believed those in the South are lazy, filling their lives "with slow days of careless ease" (Gaskell 66). On the other hand, Southerners claimed they know how to enjoy life and believed the northerners to be overworked and under stress all the time. They thought people in the North are constantly trying to keep up with the fast pace, without any time to relax, or go out in the nature; they are repressed and restricted by the small houses, depressing towns and harsh working conditions. Margaret also soon learned how different customs and etiquette are in the north of England. People in Milton were practical and direct, and she thought of them as unrefined and ignorant. She was shocked by the strangers on the street who approached her and talked to her like they knew her. Men would openly compliment her as she passed by them, and the girls would stop her and ask about or just admire the fine materials and designs of her clothing. The girls were also not impressed with Margaret's family name and unlike girls in the South, did not jump at a chance to work for an aristocratic southern family. People in Milton always put industry and money first and are usually dismissive of other values. "In Milton one does not require a classical education to be a successful business man … Culture is another traditional value which has depreciated in the industrial world" (Duthie 81). Manufacturers would teach their sons all about the work in a factory, often disregarding education on literature and other mental skills, "in hopes of throwing the whole strength and vigour of the plant into commerce" (Gaskell 56). Such is the case of Mr. Thornton, who only later in life wished to learn about classic literature, a pursuit his mother found ridiculous and unnecessary.

Gaskell used locations in her novel to depict how different surroundings affect and change people. South of England did not see such a drastic boom in industry and commerce, so the society remained mostly unchanged. People primarily worked in the fields or family owned workshops. Their lifestyle was more relaxed, but also more passive and stagnant. The society in the north of England had to adjust to the life in large urban areas and the demands of the industry. They had no use of formal education, so they often did not bother with it. They were taught about practicality and the work in industry and commerce, and it was almost "considered to the advantage of the masters to have ignorant workmen" (Gaskell 99). The manufacturers did not need their workers to be smart or creative; they just wanted more pairs of hands to produce more goods so they could earn more money. Even though Margaret eventually learns to appreciate the differences between the South and the North, the fact is that the industry depersonalized people. As Gaskell showed, people became focused solely on financial profit and they dismissed any opportunity for individual growth. They regarded important only the skills and experiences that can advance them in work and business.

3. Utilitarianism and *Hard Times*

The philosophy of utilitarianism was introduced in the late eighteenth century and quickly spread through industrial England. It "is a school of thought identified with the writings of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. It advocated the principle and goal of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'" (Lee). While seemingly a good principle, utilitarianism has its flaws. "Critics of utilitarianism argue that unlike the suppositions of the utilitarians, morality is not based on consequences of actions. Instead, it is based on the fundamental concept of justice" (Lee). Dickens was among the many influential people who strongly opposed this principle, as witnessed by the fact that he dedicated an entire novel as its criticism. In *Hard Times,* the philosophy of utilitarianism serves as the main element in the development of Dickens's characters. Utilitarianism in the novel is closely tied to industrialization because it enhances the mechanization of the society. The best example is Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, a wealthy upper-class man who preaches the utilitarian principles to his students. Dickens introduces him as a man "of realities… of facts and calculations [who is always ready to] weigh and measure any parcel of human nature" (Dickens 3). In his teachings, he emphasizes the importance of facts, and condemns every indulgence in fancy. The fancy in the novel stands for anything that is the product of one's imagination. Things like fairy tales, nursery rhymes, usage of metaphors, and all creative endeavours are strictly forbidden to the students in Mr. Gradgrind's classroom. The students in his classroom are all children, and it quickly becomes obvious that depriving them of playing and harmless fantasies can bring very negative outcomes. From an early age they "are to be in all things regulated and governed … by fact" (Dickens 6). With Gradgrind's character and teaching, Dickens criticizes the growing materialism in the industrial society. In it, there is no place for things that will not bring any profit. Even children are treated like "vessels", containers, to be filled only with the information that is useful in the industrial society.

The lives of all the children from Mr. Gradgrind's classroom were shaped by his philosophy, according to which "everything was to be paid for. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be" (Dickens 220). It is how he raised all the students from an early age. The students he had the highest expectations of were his two children, Tom and Louisa. They were the ones who suffered the most since they could not escape the repressive education even at home. Both Tom and Louisa are compared to the machines numerous times in the novel, which further testifies just how rigid their upbringing has been. They are also very tragic characters, because their education made them unfit to fully function in the society. Louisa may be even more so, because it also affected her femininity. When she is first introduced, Dickens

describes her as “metallurgical”, an adjective rarely used for humans, even more rarely for women. She grew up to be a repressed woman who has completely lost touch with her feelings. Her tragic marriage to Mr. Bounderby is the best example of how her father’s philosophy ruined her. She is promised to Mr. Bounderby very early, despite the big age difference between them. Louisa agrees to the marriage because it is the most useful for other people in her life. Her father’s friendship with Mr. Bounderby will become stronger, not to mention the benefits of having a rich manufacturer as a family member. Her brother Tom will also benefit from the marriage, as he will become Bounderby’s close associate and easily extract more money from him. Hence, her marriage to Bounderby hides the essence of the utilitarianism. Furthermore, because of her education and “untrained imagination, [Louisa] lacks the fancy that can decipher character” (Arneson 5) and is easily deceived by her brother and Mr. Harthouse. In the novel’s climax, Louisa finally stands up for herself and confronts her father, blaming him for how his teachings have made her life miserable.

Mr. Gradgrind’s teachings affected Louisa’s brother Tom in a different way. He starts resenting his father and Bounderby for the way he was raised and plans to take revenge against them. “Tom grows up to be an unfanciful egoist who cares only for his own pleasures and is somewhat repulsively incapable of imagining what his loving and self-abnegating sister feels or needs” (Arneson 4). This becomes evident in Tom’s approach to Louisa’s wedding. He acts only in his selfish interests, completely disregarding Louisa’s feelings. Another difference between Tom and Louisa is that Tom is more socially intelligent, knowing how to manipulate people and get what he wants from them. Others have recognized Tom’s materialism and greed, Bitzer even describes him as a “dissipated, extravagant idler” (Dickens 89). Tom’s selfishness turns to cruelty when he decides to steal money from the bank and set up poor Stephen Blackpool for the crime. Tom continues to blame his father’s upbringing and explains to his father: “So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law” (Dickens 217). The sole focus on the most profitable and useful choices, made Tom lose sight of other important values in life, such as morality, integrity and responsibility.

The same can be said about Bitzer, another promising student from Mr. Gradgrind’s school. From his introduction, Bitzer has shown to embody everything he was taught, paying attention only to the facts and figures, and never even wondering if there is something more. Bitzer has on numerous occasions shown how much his education has influenced him, and how he never doubted his way of life or tried to re-evaluate his actions. Tom’s closeness with Mr. Bounderby was especially hard for Bitzer, because of the envy he felt. Tom was higher in rank than him, even

though Bitzer thought he deserved the position more, and that Tom only got it because of his sister. He has contempt for Tom, but also for the workers of Bounderby's factory, such as Stephen Blackpool. He cannot comprehend why the hands cannot just save their money, clearly disregarding the facts they needed the money to provide food and shelter for themselves and their families. His lack of integrity makes him wonder why the strikers will not betray each other for money, since they need it so much. Bitzer embodies all the worst qualities that the utilitarian philosophy preaches, and he has no trouble admitting it. At the end of the novel, he betrays Tom for material gain and explains: "the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to, is a person's self-interest. It is your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young" (Dickens 219). His education promoted economic self-interest as the highest value and gave him enough tools to achieve it.

On the opposite side of Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy stands Mr. Sleary, the owner of the circus, and Sissy Jupe, whose father worked in the circus but has left her in care of Mr. Sleary. Sissy Jupe grew up in the circus and holds different values than the Gradgrind children. Mr. Gradgrind takes pity on her lacking education and brings her to his class, where she has a lot of trouble keeping up with the other students. The collision of the two world views happens when Gradgrind comes to meet Sissy's father and take her to school. Mr. Sleary agrees that education is very important, but does not diminish the importance of amusement and play, especially for children. He tells Gradgrind that "they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht" (Dickens 32). Despite her failure at school, Sissy is the one who grows up to be the most complete and the most well-rounded character in the novel. Her early years in the circus nurtured her feminine side and gave her compassion and the social intelligence. Her character serves to show how important family values are and how unhealthy it can be to be a part of society in which the main goal is profit and the highest value is self-interest. At the end of the novel, Mr. Sleary learns that Sissy's father died, but decides not to tell her because she is better off believing he is somewhere working hard to get back to her. Mr. Gradgrind does not understand why Sissy still loves her father, even though he abandoned her and will not come back. Mr. Sleary then points out that the reason is love, which is stronger than self-interest. This confirms Dickens's intention for creating the characters from the circus. Their lives were governed by their creative imagination and the compassion they receive from friends and family. Dickens mainly uses them as a contrast to the bleakness of Coketown and its dehumanized residents.

Dickens shapes all the characters of the novel to show how the over exposure to the utilitarian principle diminishes the humanity in people. He combines this with the industrialization to create a fictional society of Coketown. The rich only care about profit and self-interest, and they

raise their children to be the same. They cannot function properly in the society because they are detached from others and can't connect to them on any significant level. They also have trouble feeling empathy toward the sufferings of others. In their world, anything that cannot be proven or stated clearly as a fact is considered worthless. Dickens believes that industrialization paved the way for this principle and wants to emphasize the "bad moral consequences of the failure to encourage and educate fancy" (Anerson 4). Almost everything in the industrial society has a goal of making the most profit, especially all the large factories, built so they can house more machines to produce more goods to sell them faster and earn more money. People are also expected to act like the machines, doing the most profitable things and not wasting time on anything else. It is a society where "every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter" (Anerson 7).

4. The Masters' Perspective

4.1. Josiah Bounderby

Dickens's criticism of the industrial system reaches its peak in the character of Josiah Bounderby. Bounderby is a wealthy factory owner, a merchant and a banker, which also makes him one of the most powerful people in Coketown. He claims to be a self-made man, who had to endure much hardship to get to where he is. According to him, he came from nothing, being left by his mother in the care of his neglectful grandmother. He often talks about the nights he had to sleep in a ditch or a pigsty. By perpetuating this story, which later turns out to be a complete lie, he wants others to pity him, but also to admire his strength and resilience. Even more than that, he wants to make it known how he did not need to come from rich family or have a noble title to become one of the most powerful people in the town. All the values that became important in the industrial and the capitalist society are presented in Bounderby.

According to Josephine M. Guy, "Bounderby is a caricature of the model of humanity which informs the accounts of social life to be found in the doctrines of Utilitarianism and political economy. Bounderby has no feelings or sentiments apart from those which lead him to increase profits" (Guy 128). Money is the only value Bounderby knows and financial gain is his primary motivation for everything he does. For him, as a capitalist and a manufacturer, time is money, as he even points out to the people working in the Sleary's circus. Bounderby establishes "his relationships on the basis of profit. His attachments to others are dehumanizing – they are commodities" (David 87). This is even visible in the relationship he has with Mr. Gradgrind. They are not true friends, but Bounderby supports Gradgrind because of his educating principles. Gradgrind teaches children from an early age to remember and reproduce only facts, which is ideal for Bounderby. Those children will grow up into people who also have profit as their main goal, but won't question authority, which is why he employs Bitzer and young Tom Gradgrind. Bounderby marries a significantly younger Louisa to make him more appealing and human in the eyes of the residents of Coketown. The truth is that their marriage is just a facade, as is his entire story of a self-made man.

Dickens groups him with the other masters or as he calls them, gentlemen, who are equally despicable. They insist on having only things and food of the finest quality, but are never grateful or satisfied, and always greedy for more. Their selfishness is only more obvious in the way they treat the workers and the poor. Bounderby looks especially bad in his conversation with Stephen Blackpool. He talks about the unreasonable workers who "expect to be set up in a coach and six,

and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon" (Dickens 55). He of course exaggerates, but only because he is shocked that his workers, instead of being grateful for the job they have, have the audacity to ask for better treatment and better working conditions. "Bounderby, in his oft repeated comment … shows no sensitivity to the way the workers' desires are shaped by their deprived circumstances. He assumes that he knows what they want and that their desires are no different from his own, which have been shaped by his privileged life" (Kidder 4). He condemns the workers who have other goals in life or want to find better jobs and lift themselves from the utmost poverty and misery. He scorns their ambitions, saying that they will never aspire to anything more than being just a "hand" in the mill. Bounderby's callousness is revealed further in the conversation with Stephen, after Stephen asks him about the divorce process. Without showing any sympathy or offering any advice, Bounderby proudly points out that divorce is a privilege only the rich can afford. He, almost mockingly, continues to name the offices Stephen would have to visit and explains how expensive the process would be.

Other masters were the same, never caring about their workers, and even getting upset when their way of running the factories was questioned. They were only afraid of the inspectors who would come to the factory to examine the working conditions and were outraged when someone held them accountable for the accidents in their factories, for the poor working conditions or for the unnecessary pollution. "So convinced is the Coketown capitalist of the value of free enterprise" (Ingham 82) that in such cases, Bounderby threatened to "pitch his property into the Atlantic" (Dickens 85). The gap between the rich and the poor is so great in Coketown that the rich have completely lost touch with reality. The masters of Coketown cannot fathom why the poor can't just save the money and get richer. They are disregarding the cost of living or the fact that many workers have to provide for their children. In fact, the rich consider the poor people who start families improvident and irresponsible. They also do not understand why the workers constantly complain about their work. Bounderby says how the workers only care about their rights and constantly demand more, while ignoring their responsibilities. He believes that if the workers are dissatisfied that they'll do anything. When discussing the theft in his bank, he is sure Stephen must have done it because Stephen has no money. This is a drastic change from their previous conversation, in which he called Stephen his most honest and hardworking Hand. The logic behind his thinking is that money is the main motivation for everyone, the same way it is for him. He only talks about workers wanting higher wages, completely ignoring the complaints about the long working hours or inhumane working conditions.

Bounderby represents the rich industrials, a newly formed class of society, born out of the Industrial Revolution. He is a cruel capitalist with his mind set solely on making a profit. Dickens

demonizes him almost to the point of a caricature, emphasizing his bad and diminishing his good traits. In that sense, Bounderby can be seen as an unrealistic exaggeration. He may be a symbol of the rich manufacturers since he embodies all the negative traits that people usually assign to them. He is power-hungry, selfish and oppressive and unscrupulous in his pursuit of profit. In him we recognize the widening gap between the two ends of the society. His egoism and privilege make him indifferent towards the workers' plight. He dehumanizes his workers, seeing them as second-class citizens who should be grateful for the job they have, and stop striving for better because the better is not intended for them.

4.2. John Thornton

Gaskell's depiction of a wealthy manufacturer differs substantially from Dickens's Bounderby. She decides to take a more realistic approach, and tries to give the readers a complete image, a character that is flawed, but has redeeming qualities. The result is John Thornton, a factory owner in Milton-Northern, who embodies the ideals and attitudes of a northern industrialist. Thornton, unlike Bounderby, is truly a self-made businessman. His father made some bad investments and committed suicide, leaving John with his mother and sister. After working hard and saving money over the years, Thornton manages to establish himself as one of the most influential people in the town. The power of his influence is seen several times in the novel, most notably in the scene where he prevents the further police inquest which involved Margaret and her brother Frederick. At the beginning of the novel, Thornton is portrayed as a typical manufacturer from the north of England. He praises the innovation and progress the North has seen in the recent years. He is proud of all the ingenious people who used science to improve the technology, and in a way, enabled him to attain such a high position. While praising the North, he scorns the South, saying how he would "rather be a man tolling, suffering – nay, failing and successless, than lead a dull and prosperous life in the old worn grooves of ... more aristocratic society down in the South," (Gaskell 66). He thinks of Southerners as very lazy and careless and believes that is the main reason why the south of England cannot keep up with the North. His mother shares his views on the South and the old aristocracy, scorning Margaret upon meeting her and thinking that she is just an opportunist who is looking for a rich husband. Thornton and his mother share many similarities. They are very close and have the same strict attitudes towards the factory workers. However, Thornton's ability to form genuine bonds with the people in his life is one of the biggest differences between him and Bounderby. While Dickens chooses to portray Bounderby as a pure villain,

Gaskell gives Thornton kindness and compassion towards the important people in his life, especially his mother and later, Margaret. "By writing a male character who acknowledges dependence upon his mother and whose 'soul' is akin to hers, Gaskell creates from the very start of her novel what others have argued to be the novel's endpoint: an emotionally literate 'new gentleman'" (Morrissey 3). The next thing that sets Thornton apart from Bounderby is the character development that he goes through. His transformation starts with the arrival of Margaret and her family to Milton. The first level of his transformation is the one he starts himself, by employing Margaret's father Mr. Hale, as a private tutor. Unlike Margaret, who received a formal education fit for her social status, Thornton did not have much time for schooling in his younger days. He says how his priorities were different at the time, as he was more focused on acquiring practical knowledge so he can start earning and providing for his mother and sister. He had no use for Homeric heroes because they could not prepare him for the real world. He repeats this later when he talks to Mr. Bell who studies at Oxford. Mr. Bell considers himself an intellectual and looks down on the manufacturers of Milton. Thornton, always very protective of his town and its residents, says how people here more value experience and practicality. They do not have much use from discussing past events, they want to learn about things that will prepare them for real life situations. Thornton decided to become a manufacturer, because in commerce, one did not need to come from a rich family or have special privileges to become a successful merchant. He admired the "power that commerce gave to every brave, honest and persevering man" (Gaskell 358) and wanted to make a name for himself and be recognized everywhere he goes.

The more important change Thornton goes through is the one in his attitudes towards his workers. At the beginning of the novel, Thornton's behaviour as a boss was similar to Bounderby's. There was no communication between the two sides, and he was mostly oblivious to the dissatisfaction of his workers. Like Bounderby, he was also dealing with his workers going on strike. As a counter measure, Thornton decided to import some Irish workers. When Thornton's workers find out about the Irishmen, they riot against him, and he decides to call in soldiers. Margaret then assures him that all he needs to do is stand in front of them and respectfully listen to their requests. This does not go well, and the workers turn violent but stop after Margaret gets accidentally injured. The role of Gaskell's Margaret Hale is similar to the role of Dickens's Stephen Blackpool, in that they both preach tolerance and mutual understanding. Margaret is more successful than Stephen, since she eventually manages to get both sides to listen to each other. She sends Higgins, a worker who recently lost his job, to talk to Thornton and ask to work for him. At first, Thornton distrusts Higgins, believing he is the one who accused the masters and caused the riots, so he refuses to give him a job. However, after learning that Higgins waited five hours for

him and that he looks after his late friend Boucher's children, Thornton gives him a job. This marks the beginning of Thornton's transformation and the communication between him as a boss and his workers starts to improve after this point. Thornton's change of attitude was so drastic that he even became close friends with Higgins. He went to visit him frequently and took care of Boucher's children and their education. With the help of Margaret, he starts to listen to his workers and becomes friends with them. He opens a dining room and eats with them because there is "nothing like the act of eating for equalising men" (Gaskell 310). He realizes that it is the only way towards a better future for everyone. He is aware that they will run into problems and disagreements, but the better communication will "enable both master and man to look upon each other with far more charity and sympathy, and bear with each other more patiently and kindly" (Gaskell 359). He sees that the masters and workers have to have personal contact and discuss plans and problems together to find the most optimal solution. Those plans would serve as "common interest which invariably makes people find means and ways of seeing each other and becoming acquainted with each-others' characters and persons" (Gaskell 369).

With such a drastic transformation of character, Thornton at the beginning of the novel is almost a complete opposite of the Thornton at the end. Thornton from the beginning is the typical portrayal of a nineteenth century capitalist. He is ambitious and economically savvy, but, like Bounderby, lacks humanity and compassion. He has no contact with his workers and is oblivious to their suffering. However, with the interference from Margaret, he opens his mind and heart, and starts respecting the workers more. Gaskell is much less focused on the criticism and more on offering a solution. "Gaskell's idealized man of the future, embraces the social transformations of capitalism, justifying its laissez-faire philosophy, but possessing the humanistic sensibility to improve the lives of his workers" (Henry 158). She recognizes the lack of humanity in the industry and the depersonalization of workers by their distant masters. She uses Thornton to give the masters' perspective and to point out the flaws in it. Their perspective needs to change, because only through direct contact and listening each other can the two sides unite and move forward.

5. The Workers' Perspective

5.1. The Workers in *Hard Times*

The working class in *Hard Times* is mainly represented by the character of Stephen Blackpool. Stephen is one of the workers in Bounderby's factory, and through him we get the insight into the lives of the poor and oppressed Hands and learn about their daily struggles. Stephen lives a truly miserable life, in the slums of Coketown, in a single squalid room. He is married to an alcoholic woman who disappears often and comes home to sober up. It is a loveless and abusive marriage. The only source of positivity in his life is Rachael, another factory worker with whom he is in love. Stephen plans to divorce his wife so he can be with Rachael but learns from Bounderby that the divorce would cost a lot of money. "The inability of Stephen to be legally separated from his dissolute wife is an indication of the inequalities between the classes. Divorce was a privilege of the rich, for those among the middle classes who could afford both the money and time to prosecute a case successfully" (Guy 133). Having learned that there is no way out of his predicament, Stephen only replies "Tis just a muddle" (Dickens 58). This phrase, often repeated in the novel, signifies his acceptance of his depressing reality. He and the other workers live in the slum area, an area known for its filthy streets and poorly built houses. Workers are usually referred to as "hands," a term that reduces them down to the body part their employers value the most. Whether they work in a factory, or a mill, hands are their most useful body part. Dickens tells how the masters would like them even more if they were like "the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs" (Dickens 49), the hands for the work, and the stomach to eat and have more energy for working. That is how the masters mostly saw their workers. There were hundreds of workers in a factory and each one was just a tiny part of the system. The large number made them easily replaceable, which only further dehumanized them in the eyes of the masters. For the masters, they were often at the level of machines, to be used as much as possible until they needed to be replaced. Later, in his conversation with Bounderby, Stephen tries to draw attention to their inhumane living and working conditions. He says how many people come to the city in search of a job and a better life only to be treated like inferior beings. They work until they drop, they are forced to live in small and filthy places with many others just like them and have no choice but to accept their monotonous existence. He also points out that no one respects them or has any sympathy for their sufferings, and how everyone talks about them in the most degrading ways. And when they ask for some small improvements, like higher wages or shorter working hours, they are called ungrateful and demanding. Their ambitions are considered irrelevant and are

scorned if they want to achieve something more in their lives. As a representative of the working class in the novel, Stephen is "a symbol of how the demands of the culture of industry have robbed the labouring population of the chance to lead contented, fulfilling lives" (Childers 88).

Another significant character connected to the working class is the union representative Slackbridge. Slackbridge comes to Bounderby's factory when the workers decide to go on strike. Slackbridge represents everything that was wrong with the unions. He gives a speech in front of the strikers, wanting to rally them and unite them against Bounderby. He is a skilled orator and a demagogue, inviting the workers to overthrow their oppressor. He knows how to manipulate the masses, mentioning the workers' families and pretending to sympathize with them. By promoting a violent riot, he didn not have much trouble uniting the unhappy workers. They sympathized with each other and saw as their duty to join together and fight for their rights. Slackbridge goes even further, inviting them to form a United Aggregate Tribunal, a body that would represent all united tradesmen. However, Stephen disagrees with the union and the method it uses. He believes strikes and riots are not the solution and that they do not lead anywhere. This causes outrage among the strikers and Stephen's co-workers and they quickly turn against him. "In condemning Stephen the hands commit the very same wrong they believe they have suffered. In striking at the owners' tyranny they tyrannize over Stephen Blackpool; in the name of brotherhood they expel a brother" (Linehan 30). After this, Stephen becomes a martyr figure. Other workers, his friends, ostracized and shamed him, which was a common thing the unionists did when someone refused to join them. But Stephen understands them, and even defends them in front of Bounderby, again trying to shed a light on the difficulties they have to face every day. He calls for mutual understanding, saying how "[t]he strong hand will never do't. Vict'ry and triumph will never do't" (Dickens 116). The two sides will never find a common ground if each of them only tries to win, without listening to the other, or attempting to see the matter also from their perspective. The harder each side pulls, the further they are from the solution. By siding with neither and keeping his integrity, Stephen is rejected by both sides and decides to leave Coketown. "His fate thus serves to elaborate and validate the proposition that his fellow workers' actions were evil. These events also structurally confirm Blackpool's role as the one unfallen worker, representative of their potential good qualities" (Ingham 90). At the end of the novel, Stephen dies in a pit, grinded down by the oppressive boss, cruel rich-men and his co-workers. Stephen remains a martyr figure, and even in his last hours, he keeps wishing for everyone to listen to each other.

Most of Dickens's characters in *Hard Times* are portrayed as symbols and should be discussed as such. Stephen Blackpool is a symbol of an oppressed worker. He embodies all the characteristics that will easily make the readers feel sorry for him and his daily struggles. His life

is utterly depressing and there does not seem to be any hope for change. He cannot be with the woman he loves because he cannot divorce his abusive and alcoholic wife. He will never save the money needed for the divorce because of the low wages and the cost of living. The wages will never become higher because of the greed of his cruel boss. Stephen's life is an endless stream of miserable circumstances, yet he still keeps the moral high ground. There is no doubt that Dickens heavily idealizes Stephen, and the working class in general, but I do not think it is because of his bias. He sympathizes with their plights and wants to shock and alarm his middle-class readers, and hopefully, urge them to help the oppressed ones.

5.2. The Workers in *North and South*

Gaskell's two main representatives of the working class are Nicholas Higgins and John Boucher. Margaret first meets Higgins soon after she arrives to Milton. She runs into him and his sickly daughter Bessy. Margaret quickly gets attached to Bessy and starts frequently visiting the Higginses. Bessy Higgins worked in a cotton mill but had to stop because of serious health issues with her respiratory system. Sadly, Bessy's tragic destiny was not uncommon in the cotton mills. Many people got cotton dust in their lungs, and many died of it at the time. By making Bessy a young and a gentle girl, Gaskell wants to awaken sympathy in her readers, and draw attention to the serious health hazards many workers faced daily on their job. Higgins introduces Margaret to the other important working family in the novel, the Bouchers. Unlike Dickens, Gaskell abstains from overly idealizing the workers and introduces two characters with two different perspectives. Both are working class men who have to provide for their family, and both want to improve their working conditions and get more rights. While Higgins is the calm voice of reason, Boucher believes that strikes and riots are the best methods to fight for their rights. He has a large family to provide for, so he is on strike to get a higher wage. He also assures Higgins that the strike is the best method and that masters will not have any choice but to give in and raise their wages. "Thus, in much the same way that political activism in *Hard Times* is identified with Slackbridge, the urge for violent action in *North and South* is transferred from the group and isolated in the motivations of a single individual" (Young 56).

The central event in the novel is the riot in front of Thornton's factory. His workers had been on strike for some time, so Thornton imported a work force from Ireland. When the Milton workers realized their strike led them nowhere, they started rioting against Thornton and

threatening the Irish. The scene with the Irish workers is relevant because it shows that strikes are never guaranteed to succeed. There are many outcomes, and some can be completely unexpected for the strikers. The riots turned so violent that Thornton called for soldiers to scare the angry mob away. Upon hearing that, Margaret implored him to just try and listen to their demands. She knew the workers "were like Boucher, with starving children at home—relying on ultimate success in their efforts to get higher wages, and enraged beyond measure at discovering that Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of bread" (Gaskell 150). Here Gaskell wants to point out that strikes are not always a good option in the long run. As long as workers stay on strike, they aren't getting paid, which means there will be less money in the household, and they could be risking their families' well-being. Like the situation in the novel, strikes can easily grow into violent riots. But Gaskell also wants to point out that not all the strikers resort to violence. Higgins is the opposite of Bouncher in this regard. He is appointed by the Union as a member of a committee formed to keep the strikers in order. As Bessy informs Margaret: "the Committee charged all members o' th' Union to lie down and die, if need were, without striking a blow" (Gaskell 170). Higgins condemns the strikers and instigators who turn to violence thus forcing the masters to involve the authorities. With that all their efforts become worthless and they give all the strikers a bad name. Masters also fought against strikes in various ways. Some masters had spies who would warn them if they hear about anyone wanting to start a strike. Such was the case with Higgins's last job at Mr. Hamper's factory. He was fired before he could encourage and invite other workers to go on strike. After he looked into the book Mr. Hamper mockingly offered, Higgins saw only "capital and labour", but nothing about workers or their rights. He claims that that's how the masters see the workers; they dehumanize them by reducing them to mere numbers and calculations. Upon hearing of this situation, Mr. Hale quickly recognizes the main problem, which is the lack of proper communication between the masters and workers. Another industrial topic Gaskell deals with in *North and South* deals is the Union and its role in the fight for workers' rights. As a member of the Union, Mr. Higgins often defends it, saying how thing would be much worse if it hadn't been for the Union. According to him, the Union was formed some generations ago, when their fathers and grandfathers worked in the factories. Since those were the early days of the industry, the workers had very little rights and no protection. The Union was formed to represent their interests and their situation improved since then. He also says how the Union has ways to make the workers join them. "If a man doesn't belong to th' Union, them as works next looms has orders not to speak to him—if he's sorry or ill it's a' the same; he's out o' bounds; he's none o' us; he comes among us, he works among us, but he's none o' us" (Gaskell 197). This method of ostracizing the workers who refuse to join is very similar to the situation of Stephen

Blackpool in *Hard Times*. He too was ostracized and abandoned by his fellow workmen. Higgins also says how in some places, the Union fines those who break that rule and talk to the person that refused to join them. Upon learning of this, Margaret comments what a cruel form of torture that is, she even goes as far and compares it to the tyranny of the masters. She continues by pointing out how despite their noble cause, the Unionist are still guilty of caring only about their perspective. They are pulling on one side, the masters on the other and it still led nowhere because there is still no proper communication. Neither side is ready to compromise or even stop and listen to the other. Some of the masters, like Mr. Hamper, made their workers pledge that they will not give any money to the Union. Boucher in need of a job agrees to those terms and takes the pledge. Higgins resents him for this, because the Union tried to help him until he started causing riots and spreading violence. Higgins is greatly opposed to those methods and blames Boucher for using them and thus ruining the strike of Thornton's workers. Higgins thinks highly of the Union, saying how it's the only protection the workers can get: "it's the only way working men can get their rights, by all joining together. More the members, more chance for each one separate man having justice done him" (Gaskell 248). The government and the masters are against them, but as long as they're united, they can protest for their rights.

Gaskell's *North and South* offers a more realistic depiction of the industrial life in a manufacturing town in nineteenth century England. Although she remains fairly critical of the industrial society, her approach to delivering the criticism differs greatly from Dickens's. She avoids showing strong bias toward one side and wants to include both the good and the bad aspects of the matter. This is especially notable in her portrayal of the workers. Boucher and Higgins both need higher wages to provide for their families. This forces Boucher to turn to desperate and violent methods when demanding more rights. His rage is understandable, but inexcusable. Higgins on the other hand, remains calm and respectful in his protest. Gaskell's workers are not idealized, and her masters are not demonized. They are simply characters, separated by the vast class differences. The only way for them to bridge those differences is by achieving mutual understanding.

Conclusion

The industrialization process changed Britain in many aspects, including the society. On the one hand, the technological innovations made lives easier and thanks to the factories and mills, the working opportunities were abundant. However, the society became significantly more profit-oriented and the gap between the rich and the poor was widening. Dickens and Gaskell each dedicated their work to portray the industrial society and to put special emphasis on its negative aspects. Their novels are set in the fictional industrial cities, inspired by real English cities like Manchester, Preston or Leeds. The cities of the novel are smoky, filthy places, overrun by mills and factories. They're heavily polluted and the industry dominates over the nature. The main feature of both Coketown and Milton are the tall factory chimneys. By removing the nature from their cities, both Dickens and Gaskell wanted to put the industry into the sole focus of city life. The lives of everyone in the city revolve around the industry, whether they are the manufacturers or the workers. They put their workers in the slums, depressing areas separated from the other areas of the city, so the rich do not have to be reminded of their presence. By creating the dystopian atmosphere around their cities, the authors wanted to emphasize how inhumane the living conditions were. In *Hard Times* Dickens uses then popular philosophy of utilitarianism to point out the changed values in the society. The rich capitalists used this philosophy to justify their unscrupulous ambition and their Machiavellianism. The characters of the novel, such as Mr. Gradgrind and Bounderby taught this philosophy to the children in the novel, thus turning them into depersonalized and dehumanized people who have self-interest as their highest value. However, their strongest criticism is embodied in the characters they created. Bounderby dehumanizes his workers by seeing them only as disposable pieces in his factory and by not caring at all about their rights or well-being. Thornton begins with a similar attitude, but Gaskell transforms him into a character who improves by recognizing the interdependence between masters and their workers. Gaskell's main message is that people can bridge their social differences with open communication and mutual respect. Both Dickens and Gaskell authors foreground the plight of the working class. Stephen Blackpool, Higgins and Boucher are symbols of the oppressed workers, dehumanized by industrialization to the point that their masters and the government see them only as "hands", whose sole purpose is to work as long as they can, until they have to be replaced.

Both authors are critical of this system and both authors want to inspire change. Dickens uses his ideal of a working-class man, Stephen Blackpool, to preach understanding and tolerance. Gaskell goes even further, by showing how understanding and tolerance can be used to change

people. Her novel foregrounds the importance of an increased awareness of mutual interdependence and the mutual benefits of trying to see things from each other's perspective.

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