

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
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The Changing Roles In the Victorian Family in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South

*Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as a partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Master in Literature and Civilization*

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Academic Year: 2016-2017

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents for raising me to believe that everything is possible.

To my brothers: Samir, Hichem and Mounir.

To Eslam and Zineb whom encouraged me to fly toward my dreams.

To all my friends.

Acknowledgement

This thesis would have never been accomplished without considerable help, advice and guidance of my supervisor Dr. Mouro Wassila. For that, I owe my gratitude to her for her efforts.

I express my thanks to Mr. Oussar Moustafa for his help and support.

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the changes in some Victorian norms in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South. The study shows how Elizabeth Gaskell struggles against the patriarchal society to give power to women of her age. Throughout North and South, mainly through the protagonist Margaret Hale, Gaskell shows that women are strong and they deserve to live a respectful life. In this regard, the dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter involves an overview about the Victorian society and literature. It aims to shed light on the social life during the 19th century in Britain and circumstances, in which the work produced and affected the writer, and to define the Victorian literature with a reference to the famous writers of the era. The second chapter provides an analysis of the work under study. The aim through it is to examine Elizabeth Gaskell's transgression of the Victorian norms through some selected characters.

Key words: North and South, Victorian Norms, Margaret Hale, transgression, gender roles.

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General Introduction

General Introduction:

The field of literature is wide and extensive, and it consists of three different genres, namely prose, drama and poetry. Literature deals with different topics to convey the reality of each period; different writers take their pens and start writing about the issues of the period in order to reflect their age.

During the 19th century, Great Britain was under the rule of Queen Victoria from 1830 till 1901; it was the longest reign in the history of Britain. At that time, the novel was the major genre of Victorian literature; it helped in describing the social life in Britain through the writings of different novelists.

The Victorian era was an age of change; it witnessed different events in economy, science and society that led to the great progress of the country. On the other side, the era knew some problems such as poverty, famine, disease, child labour and the division of society into three different social classes: the upper class, the middle class and the working class. As well as, men dominated society and they enjoyed all their rights as citizens, whereas women were prevented from their legal rights such as education, work, owning a property and the right to vote; they were placed at home to be just successful housewives to take care of their husbands and to raise their children.

Literature was the field of men but by the beginning of the nineteenth century women fortunately did not remain silent; they raised their voices through writing novels to call for their rights and to show that women are strong and intelligent and they deserve a better life.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-1865) is a famous Victorian woman writer; she is the writer of her age. Her works are popular and admired by many readers; she mirrored the image of English society in her works, particularly, the issue of women and the conditions of the working class in the aftermath of the industrial revolution.

In this research work, the focus is on Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South (1855) social novel. Elizabeth Gaskell had chosen Margaret Hale as a heroine of her novel who is considered as the strongest heroine of Victorian literature. Through Margaret Hale, we noticed that women became educated as men and they could compete with them in different fields of work.

In fact, Elizabeth Gaskell lived in a period of the industrial revolution and in a society known by its oppression to women. So, the choice of Elizabeth Gaskell, mainly North and South in our research is based on our interest to understand the picture of women in English society, and why Elizabeth Gaskell struggled against the Victorian society and she gave different meanings to the Victorian families by challenging gender roles and the idea of the separate spheres.

The interest of this research work is centered on the following question: How did Elizabeth Gaskell challenge the Victorian norms in her selected work North and South?

Through Gaskell's North and South the traditions of the Victorian family had changed as a challenge from the writer to give power to women; she allowed some female characters to share the public sphere with men.

To achieve the objective of the study, Gaskell's work has been studied from a feminist literary theory point of view. It is employed to analyze the role of female characters in the society as it is portrayed in the selected work.

The research work is divided into two chapters; the first one entitled Victorian society and literature, deals with the historical background of the Victorian era. Our concern will be on social life, economy and industrial revolution and the status of women. The first chapter deals as well with the Victorian literature, Elizabeth Gaskell's life and works and it discusses feminist theory.

The second chapter is entitled tradition and transgression in North and South. It aims at making a comparison between the traditional women and the new type of women created by Gaskell in her novel. In this line of thought, we will analyze Maria Hale and Fanny Thornton who represent the traditional Victorian women. Then, to understand the transgression of Elizabeth Gaskell, the Hales family and the Thornton's family will be studied to understand the changing roles between genders in the selected work.

Chapter One:

**Victorian Society and
Literature**

Chapter one: Victorian Society and Literature

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1.1. Introduction

Literature and history are two interrelated subjects, and to understand the literature of any period it is a necessary to study its history. In the nineteenth century, Britain was under the rule of Queen Victoria, and at this time Great Britain knew several changes in society, economy and politics. Victorian literature drives attention to the nineteenth century's society in Great Britain.

The purpose of this chapter is to study the historical background of the social life and the economy of Great Britain during the nineteenth century, as well as to review to the Victorian literature and to one of the famous novelist of the period Elizabeth Gaskell.

1.2. A Thorough Insight upon the Victorian Era

The Victorian era revolves around the political career of Queen Victoria's reign from 1831 till 1901. According to William E. Burns (2010) "the British Empire under Queen Victoria was at its zenith of power and prestige" (p. 154). During the Victorian age, England changed as much and as dramatically as it had in all of its previous history.

Nineteenth century Britain was a society in the grip of enormous social change. Yet, the British Empire witnessed during that time conflicts and social issues like poverty, disease, famine and child labour.

1.2.1. English Society During the 19th Century

The nineteenth century was a century of transformation (Williams, 2004, p.01). England was under the reign of Queen Victorian which was the longest reign ever in British history (Lh  r  te and Barriat, 2001, p.204). Thus, England knew many changes that affected the social life; there were changes in politics, society and economy.

1.2.1.1. Social Life

Social life in Britain during the nineteenth century was characterized by different social classes: “the upper class, the middle class and the working class”. The difference in social classes could be distinguished by inequalities in wealth, education, working and living conditions. The classes lived in separate areas and they observed different social customs (Mitchell, 2009, p.17).

First, the upper class was the least studied of all classes; people from the upper class were mostly extremely wealthy and had numerous privileges unlike other classes (Williams, 2004, p.307). It consisted of the aristocrats, ruling families, titled people, and religious hierarchs. Those people had a fortune to be born with their high status and they did not have to make much effort to earn their place in society.

With the rise of industrialization, the British aristocracy became strongly involved in the development of mining, canals and railways. Moreover, their lives were comfortable; country house with a lot of servants and whose income derived from landed estate. When the eldest son inherited the estate, he was expected to do something useful to sit in the parliament (Mitchell, 2009, p.21). Women of upper class did not work, but it was expected for them to stay at home until they get married. Traditionally, children from the upper class were brought up at home by nanny for the first years of life. Then they would be schooled at home by private teachers.

Second, during the nineteenth century, Britain knew an extraordinary growth in population. By the beginning of the nineteenth century it was about ten and half millions and at the time of the 1901 it had more than tripled to reach thirty-seven millions (Ford, 1959, p.22). So, the enormous rise in population led to the rapid growth of the middle class and forced a change in political balance. It consisted of bankers, large shopkeepers, businessmen, doctors, lawyers and the clergy (Mitchell, 2009, p20).

Thus, with the change of commercial and industrial society, the middle-class grew larger with the rise of industrialists and factory owners. They became central to the Bourgeois identity of the nineteenth century (Williams, 2004, p.175), which means the middle-class had become more important politically after 1832 following the Reform Bill 1832 that gave the right to vote to all males owning property (Merizig, 2013, p.16). In addition to that, Middle-class women might act as housekeepers or general servants in the households of their relatives; it was a strategy for middle-class families to maintain adult women outside commercial or professional activities (Williams, 2004, p.262).

The working class is the poorer class between other classes because most of its members were agricultural labourers, domestic servants and factory hands. In addition, there were a great variety of unskilled, semiskilled and skilled jobs in mining, fishing, transportation, building, the garment industry and other manual trades. Their interest was just earning to stay alive and struggling the poverty and illnesses (Mitchell, 2009, p.18). During that time, many children never attended school and half of them grew up unable to read and write, and ended up in a workhouse, which housed and fed people who had no power to support themselves, otherwise they were put to work. Boys and girls had to start work very young and they often helped in the work done by older member of the family (Mitchell, 2009, p.19).

One major feature of the Victorian society was the abundant poverty. Because of poverty children were forced into child labour; they worked long hours under harsh conditions. The owners of textile mills needed children to do some parts of the work because of their small size, and they worked in coal mines too (Mitchell, 2009, p.41-42).

1.2.1.2. Economy and Industrial Revolution

Industrial Revolution began about 1780 in Britain. The term Industrial Revolution identifies its meaning with economic growth (Mokyr, 1999, p. 01). England was the first

country to move from agricultural economy to one based on industry (Mitchell, 2009, p.02).

According to Joel Mokyr (1999):

Some modern economists have defined the Industrial Revolution as a shift from an economy in which capital was primarily of the circulating kind (e.g., seed in agriculture and raw materials in domestic industry) to one in which the main form which capital took was fixed capital (e.g. machines, mines, and structures) (p.7.8)

However, several advantages helped Britain for being the first country to industrialize. Firstly, the enormous growth of population by the beginning of the nineteenth century which had increased by 50 per cent to reach sixteen and a half millions in 1830 (Ashton, 1948, p.03). Secondly, Britain was well equipped with coal and iron. Thirdly, the British colonies in different areas in the world were exploited as captive markets. Fourthly, England had mechanics and engineers who helped in inventing machines (Burns, 2010, p.144).

In the nineteenth century Britain became the centre of new ideology of free trade, of new technology and of continuing industrial inventions. During this period, the main invention of steam power was exploited for fast railways and ships, for printing process, for industrial looms and for agricultural machinery (Carter and McRae, 1997, p.272). In addition, the exploitation of iron and steel led to the discovery of new power and to the invention of new machines that increased production.

In communication, telegraph and the railways lines minimized the distance and improved the growth of commerce (Merizig, 2013, p.18). Besides, cotton and woolen cloth were the basic material of industrial revolution, and by the middle of the nineteenth century the demand for those materials increased which led to better production (McDowall, 1989, p.123).

Apparently, the industrial revolution developed many sectors such as: the cotton textile industry, the power producing industry, the iron steel industry and transportation (Clark, 2001, p.05). Thus, there was technical and demand connection between the development of each sector, which was explained by Gregory Clark (2005):

The development of the steam engine aided the development of the cotton textile industry, the coal mining industry, the railway, and the iron and steel industry. The developments in Iron and Steel aided both the development of the steam engine, and the development of the railway... [...]. Similarly developments in coal mining provided the fuel for the iron and steel industry and for the steam engines and railway system. But coal mining also provided a demand for steam engines to pump water out of mines, and a demand for new methods of transportation to get the coal to the customers. (p. 38-39).

Industrial revolution is a shift from using tools to make products to using new sources of energy, from home to the factory, from country to the city, from human or animal power to engines powered. It increased tremendously bringing wealth and power to Great Britain which became the super power of the world during the nineteenth century.

1.2.1.3. The Status of Women

The Victorian era was an era of men dominance, whereas women had no status in the British society. They did not have the same rights or the same opportunities that were presented to men in this period. Women of Victorian England were believed to be inferior to men; they were subjected to their men's authority in many ways and their legal status was similar to that of children. Their fathers, husbands or other male relatives were their legal

representatives and it was men who were in charge of women's property for almost the nineteenth century (Fletcher, 2002, p.108)

Society did not give the right for education to women as well as they had limited job opportunities. They were expected to be housekeepers or housewives. The role of women at that time was to take care of their children and their husbands. Women could not vote and they could not hold professional jobs apart from teachers or domestic servants, factory workers or agricultural labors (Mitchell, 2009, p.07). It was the Victorian ideology of "separate spheres" according to which women belong to the "domestic sphere" and men to the "public sphere," and that those two were never to be confused. Therefore, Victorian ideology always imposed the idea that women must have knowledge about art, music and language to be angels of the houses; they had to learn things such as drawing, singing and dancing. In addition, the highest goal for a woman is to become a wife and a mother (Sindradóttir, 2015, p.03).

The Victorian society characterized by distinct in social classes. So, the status of women, their rights and duties can be varied from one class to another; they had distinct position related to the class that women come from. For example, women from upper class did not work whereas women of working class they had to work to earn money for life.

1.3. Victorian Literature during the Nineteenth Century

Literature is considered as a work of art, it reflects to different periods in the life of human beings, and it helps the readers to understand these periods very well because it describes the reality. Literature is a link between the writers and their periods. Therefore, different scholars defined the word literature, but these definitions change over time.

1.3.1. The Concept of Literature

Literature is a difficult term to define, many scholars tends to give different definitions according to their own experience with the term literature. The word literature derived from

the Latin word “Littera“ which means “letters” and it is a body of written works of a specific culture, sub-culture, religion, philosophy or the study of such written work which may appear in poetry or in prose (Mark, 2009 ,N.P).

J.A. Cuddon (2013) defined literature as “a board term which usually denotes works which belong to the major genre: epic, drama, novel, short stories, and ode” (p: 404). Literature is classified according to the language, national origin, historical period, genre and subject matter, and it is the human expression of thought (Kharbe, 2009, p. 135/136).

Literature is a tool used by authors to describe the era they lived in, and it helps students or readers to know about the previous discoveries as well as to discover the ancient life.

1.3.2. The Victorian Literature

Victorian Era is regarded as a high point and the last completed period of English literature, almost coincident in extent with the reign of the Queen whose name it bears (Victoria, queen 1837-1901) (Fletcher, 2002, p.137). It is a literature that covers the whole nineteenth century and speaks of an age which witnessed great change. It reflects the intellectual patterns of the Victorian age, dealing with the examination of society, the law, industrialism and historical ideals. Victorian literature has one main mission: point finger at social problems to raise people consciousness (Ibid. p.138).

The technological revolution of nineteenth century life naturally had a profound effect on literature; the development of machine-made paper and the rotary steam press had begun to dramatically reduce the cost of printing (Adams, 2009, p.11).

The dominant genre of the period is the novel; long prose stories about common people (Burns, 2010, p.141). The novel it was seen as a narrative form opposed to “romance“, a work of fiction dealing with the affairs of everyday life. As late as Louis James (2006) could

complain that, as a form, it “had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind” (p.02).

In addition, the English novel applied a dual focus to inner life of individuals and the broader social context of class, gender, morality and culture. As Terry Eagleton (2005) puts it: “the novel is an anarchic genre, since its rule is not to have rules” (p.02). At that time, writers were turned from journalism and poetry towards the more lucrative field of novel writing (James, 2006, p.17).

The Victorian literature’s genres were poetry, drama and prose that found recognition in the Victorian period, but novels dominated the publishing industry because it is a way for writers to reflect social problems, therefore it is a way to influence the opinions of the public; the Victorian era is the golden age of novels as a literary genre (Coşar-Çelik, 2015, p. 02).

Victorian literature was not only about writing novels, but also there were many poets who produced a definite number of poetry. Its main themes were “social injustice, romantic love and the loss of innocence”. The famous poets of this time were Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson and Mathew Arnold. Williams (2004) said that:

Nineteenth-century poetry is characterized by variety: it offers a multiplicity of styles and genres, ranging in subject matter from the nonsense poems of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll to the Christian poetry of Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins, and spans a time line which stretches from the classical and medieval past recalled in the poetry of Tennyson and Swinburne, to the contemporary Darwinian doubts expressed by Matthew Arnold: an eclecticism of genre, theme and tone, reflecting the educational and social range of its audience.(p.446)

Hence, this variation highlighted in the quotation above is considered as a building block and corner stone for new authors whose prestige shined in the sky of British writers, and who got house holding names remained as famous writers.

1.3.3. Famous Writers

The most important types of Victorian literature are: essays, poetry and prose fiction (Fletcher, 2002, p.139). Victorian literature gave birth to a big number of writers who could put their names between the greatest writers of the period, for example Lord Macaulay , according to Robert Huntington Fletcher (2002) is "the first great figure, chronologically in the period" (139). Thomas Carlyle is, also, considered as an eccentric and in the same time he is the most stimulating writer of the Victorian era (p.142). Then, the novel of social critics linked with the name of Charles Dickens who wrote for a lower-middle class public (Fleischman, 2013, p.56). Charles dickens considered as the greatest novelist that England had produced (Evans, 1976, p.237). Then, the most popular historical novelist of the period is William Harrison Ainsworth (James, 2006, p.105).

In poetry, the light shed on Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barret Browning and Mathew Arnold who were proficient in poetry apart from the drama and they are considered as the greatest poets of the Victorian era.

1.4. Women Writers

The nineteenth century has witnessed the apparition of a new kind of literature which is « Female Literature ». British women at that time found out that writing is the best way to raise their voices against English society that was known by male dominance. For Elaine Showalter (1977) the nineteenth century was the age of female novelists, she thought that with the emergence of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, the question of women's efficiency for fiction has been answered (p.3-4). Indeed, women faced many obstacles when trying to write novels, since girls were restricted from various types of

literature, whereas men and boys were offered different novels than that offered to girls (Sindradottir, 2015, p.05). Women novelists had to use male pseudonym on their novels to avoid judgments of critics and that was the case for George Eliot and the Bronte sisters (p.07). In addition, the publishing industry was not receptive towards female writers (Fisher, 2013, N.P). Then, women wanted to be in the same level as men because women writers were always compared to other women writers and they were judged for being women (Showalter, 1977, p.95).

Women novelists have always had to struggle against the British culture of the nineteenth century that relegated women to the second demotion (Showalter, 1977, p.37). Most of women writers wrote based on their personal experience and they tackled different themes such as: their social status in British society, education, divorce and marriage (Salinovic, 2014, p.223).

Through writing novels women writers challenged their fear from the society by showing that women were not inferior to men and the idea of gender roles and they raised awareness of women's rights through their heroines. Their novel contains strong heroines that were able to inspire women, as well as help them to understand the injustices that they afforded (Sindradottir, 2015, p.21).

Women writers like Elizabeth Gaskell and the Bronte sisters had a great contribution to the flourishing of female writing. They brought new social, psychological and emotional possibilities for women (Carter and McRae, 1997, p. 289).

1.4.1. Elizabeth Gaskell's Life

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-1865), she was the daughter of a Unitarian minister William Stevenson and his wife Elizabeth Stevenson.¹

¹<http://gaskellsociety.co.uk/elizabeth-gaskell/>

Mrs. Gaskell after the death of her mother in 1811 went to live with her aunt Lumb in the country town of Knuts Ford in Cheshire, where she received a sound grounding science and classics (James, 2006, p.117), and after the second marriage of her father she returned to live with him and he took responsibility of her education until his death (Lyll, 1897, p.124)

In 1832 she married William Gaskell a Unitarian minister in a working class area of Manchester and she helped him in his work (James, 2006, p.117-118). Elizabeth and William had five children: Marianne (1834), Margaret Emily (1837), Florence (1841), William (1845) and Julia (1846). Her only son died at the age of nine months of scarlet fever and her husband suggested that she wrote novel as a distraction from her sorrow. Elizabeth died on 12 November 1865 at the Lawn in Hampshire²; she left behind her valuable works that cover the events of the Victorian age.

1.4.2. Elizabeth Gaskell's Works

Elizabeth Gaskell's first literary effort was a composed poem Sketches Among The Poor (1837) and short stories Libbie Marsh's Three Eras , The Sexton's Hero and Christmas Storms and Sunshine were published in 1847 (Gravil, 2007, p.07).

The death of her son inspired her to write novels. Mary Barton is her first novel to be published in 1848; it was a successful work that brought her into contact with Charles Dickens and Thomas Carlyle.³ Thus, Charles Dickens invited her to his new weekly, Household Worlds (1850-1859) and he published her two best loved-works Cranford (1851-1853) and Ruth (1853), the novel that challenged the middle class attitudes to the unmarried women (James, 2006, p.118).

North and South is an industrial novel, it was published in (1854-1855) (Adams, 2009, p.152) this novel earned Gaskell £250 and she became wealthy and famous in her lifetime

²<http://gaskellsociety.co.uk/elizabeth-gaskell/>

³http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/gaskell_elizabeth.shtml

(Algotsson, 2014, p.05). She had a strong friendship with Charlotte Bronte, and after her death she was asked to write The Life of Charlotte Bronte (1857), a work that remains one of the best Victorian literary biographies (James, 2006, p.118).

Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life (1848) and North and South (1855), these two novels deal with the terrible situation of the working class of the industrial cities. Mrs. Gaskell novels were not written for the poor, but she addressed the masters that the way they exploited the workers is dangerous to themselves and to society as a whole (Fleischman, 2013, p.61). Elizabeth Gaskell died on 12 November 1865 leaving her longest work Wives and Daughters incomplete. ⁴

Elizabeth Gaskell is a writer of her age; her works give the readers a clear image about Victorian society and women's status at that time.

1.5. Feminism in the 19th Century

Feminist criticism is a movement in critical theory and in the evaluation of literature which attempts to describe and interpret women's experience in various kinds of literature (Cuddon, 2013, p. 273), as Louis Tyson (2006) suggested: "feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, social, political and psychological oppression of women" (p. 83). In the same context, feminism began late in the eighteenth century with the struggle of women's rights (Cuddon, 2013, p. 274). It is a way of thinking and its primary aim is the equality between men and women in social, economic and cultural fields. Alexander Dumas; the nineteenth century French dramatist was the first one to use the term "feminism" for the movement for women's political rights (Kaur, 2016, p. 1107).

The history of feminism knew three different waves; the first wave was in nineteenth century which tackled issues like: contractual rights and property rights of women, opposition

⁴http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/gaskell_elizabeth.shtml

to chattel marriage, women suffrage and the treatment of women as properties. The pioneer works of this wave are A Vindication of the Right of Women (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft, Margret Fuller's Women in the Nineteenth Century (1845) and Virginia Woolf wrote A Room of One's Own in the nineteenth century (Bisong and Ekanem, 2014, p.33).

The second wave began in 1960s till 1980s and its main demands were civil rights, sexual liberation, education and work. The prominent works of this wave are: The Second Sex (1949) by Simone De Beauvoir, Feminine Mystique (1963) by Betty Fridan. In addition, the so called third wave appeared in the early 1990s and many works have been written on feminism since this time. Different shades of feminism from different societies involved in this wave to cover race, gender and feminism. They believe that feminist movement should address global issues (Bisong and Ekanem, 2014, p.34).

Accordingly, the goal of feminism is to call for the rights of women such as the equality with men and to be treated as a human being, as well as to affirm that the world is a place to live for both men and women (Kaur, 2016, p.1108).

1.6. Conclusion

To sum up, the theoretical chapter line out the social life of Victorian society that was characterized by three different social classes and it concerned with the Industrial Revolution and how it developed the economy of the country. As well as, women at that time had limited rights in comparison to men, they were inferior.

Next, this chapter provided an overview of the Victorian literature and its famous writers and poets. Last, Elizabeth Gaskell is a writer of her age; all her works dealt with the social life in Britain and in particular with the affects of the industrial revolution.

Chapter Two:

Tradition and Transgression in North and South

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2.1. Introduction

Elizabeth Gaskell is one of the Victorian women writers who struggled against the patriarchal societies. At that time, women were oppressed and had limited rights rather than men. Thus, Elizabeth Gaskell through her novel entitled North and South defended the rights of Victorian women; she reversed the roles of males and females by giving a chance to women to enter the public sphere and she rejected the traditional female stereotype. She also portrayed men as passive people within their families as well as in society.

2.2. Tradition: Keeping within Gender Roles

Elizabeth Gaskell as a woman writer of the Victorian era tends to describe Victorian social norms in her novel North and South. She deals with gender roles, social classes and the values of the Victorian era through some characters in the novel.

Victorian families were large with five or six children. The father is the head and the protector of the family; he is strict and obeyed by everyone⁵⁵. Moreover, the ideal woman of the Victorian society was described by Coventry Patmore's poem title "The Angel in the House". This term is related to a woman or a wife that should have been "passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious and above all pure" (Strandova, 2017, p.8-9). Women were inferior to men; they were obedient to their husbands and their roles were to raise the kids and to maintain the household (Young, 2013, n.p). Apparently, Victorian girls rose with the awareness that their only aim was to marry a man from the highest classes to maintain a good social standing.

In North and South, Elizabeth Gaskell mainly defines the Victorian image of the wife as the angel in the house through her character Maria Hale, and she represents the accomplished lady of the nineteenth century through Fanny Thornton.

⁵ <http://www.laura-cenicola.de/brithist2/brithist/8-1-introduction-into-victorian-morality-what-exactly-was-the-victorian-era.html>

2.2.1. Maria Hale

She is the protagonist's mother. She is from a respectable London family who married the man of her heart "Mr. Hale". Mrs. Hale is the ideal example of an angel in the house; she takes care of her husband and she looks for the happiness of her children "Margaret and Frederick" and that is why she asked Mrs. Thornton on her death bed to take care of her daughter Miss Margaret: "My child will be without a mother in a strange place. If I die will you?" (Gaskell, 1855, p.93)

The Victorian age is known as an age of conventional morality; it is characterized by large families with the father as a "Godlike head" and the mother as a submissive creature. The good example of this morality is Queen Victoria who was very loyal to her husband (Bedrani, 2011, p.93). In addition, Tyson (2006) stated that "traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive; they cast women as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive" (p. 85). Thus, it is under this morality that Elizabeth Gaskell portrays Mrs. Hale.

When Mr. Hale informs his family about their move to live in the industrial city named "Milton" because he is no longer a priest in the church of Helstone, Mrs. Hale subjection starts. She is obliged to accept her husband's decision although she is sick and the climate in the north is not good for her health, she remains silent and she follows the will of her husband. Matus (2007) suggested that Mrs. Hale is "rendered frail and sickly by the move to Milton" (34), she is not capable to acclimate with the new life in the city of Milton and therefore she cannot survive (Scholl, Morris and Moore, 2016, p.89). Mrs. hale dies as a result of leaving Helstone and she is considered as a victim in the novel (Bedrani, 2011, p.94).

Mrs. Hale's submissiveness to her husband prevents her from reacting against him; her only reaction is just crying; "Mrs. Hale sat down and began to cry" (Gaskell, 1855:20).

Elizabeth Gaskell set Mrs. Hale the embodiment of the Victorian ideal of the frail woman (Algotsson, 2014, p.04).

Greeks consider woman as a stranger and a suppliant, she is a foreigner who is put under man's protection at home and this is the case of Mrs. Hale; her place is at home whilst her husband occupies a public function as a tutor (Bedrani, 2011, p.94).

In addition, Victorian women's lack of education can be understood through Mrs. Hale when she realizes that her husband has decided to move to Milton because of religious doubt about the authority of the church, she could not understand why such doubts should interfere with his clergy living (Krenova, 2013, p.26). Furthermore, according to Stitt (1998) Mrs. Hale does not realize the importance of Margaret's adopting of the factory slang and she considers such words as vulgar (p.171): "Margaret said: I do not believe you know what a knobstick is and Mrs. Hale answered: No child, I only know it has a very vulgar sound, and I do not want to hear you using it" (Gaskell, 1855, p.92).

Hence, Maria Hale is the main representative of the Victorian women, and through her character the readers understand the meaning of "The Angel in the House".

2.2.2. Fanny Thornton

She is a young lady, the sister of the male protagonist John Thornton; "Fanny was weak in the very point in which her mother and brother were strong" (Gaskell, 1855, p.38). Fanny's interests are totally different from her brother's and mother's; she does not like Milton and she justifies this because of the smoke, the street and the noise, and she has a hope to visit London: "I would have to go, but mother does not wish to. She is very proud of Milton, you see. To me it is a dirty, smoky place but I believe she admires it for those qualities" (Gaskell, 1855, p.26).

Fanny is fond of fashion and jewelries according to O'Farrell (1997) what concerns fanny is only how best to look and not what to say (p.59): "I never knew Fanny have weighty reasons for anything, other people must guard her" (Gaskell, 1855, p.120). Fanny's material joy is, as well as, her "silks and satins" (O'Farrell, 1997, p.61). Through the novel, the readers understand that fanny is a materialistic stupid girl; she is not the girl who works to earn money but she is the girl who prefers to spend money buying expensive dresses and jewelries. Fanny is not interested in the public or economic life. As many Victorian women, her only aim is to get married with a rich man. So, she accepts to marry an older rich man who can provide her with a luxurious life.

Fanny is a brainless and selfish girl, according to Foster (1985) "Fanny Thornton is another somewhat feeble-minded creature whose main pleasure is the anticipation of orange-bloom and white veils." (p.149). Fanny hates Margaret for no reason and she was against her marriage with her brother: "

"I don't want to form any friendship with miss hale, mama." Said Fanny, pouting. "I thought I was doing my duty by talking to her and trying to amuse her"

"Well! At any rate, John must be satisfied now." (Gaskell, 1855, p. 40)

Jane Austen in her novel Pride and Prejudice defines the accomplished woman as "a woman who must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and modern languages..." (Austen, 2006, p.43). Thus, Elizabeth Gaskell characterized Fanny under the concept of the accomplished woman that was much known during the Victorian era. "I suppose you are not musical," said Fanny, "as I see no piano...I

wonder how you can exist without one. It almost seems to me a necessary of life”

(Gaskell, 1855, p.39-40)

Mrs. Hale and Fanny Thornton show that Elizabeth Gaskell is a writer of her age and she wants to give the readers a vivid image about the role of the Victorian women in society. On the other hand, Elizabeth had other expectations about women that allow her to challenge the norms of the Victorian era.

2.3. Transgression: Breaking the Norms

Elizabeth Gaskell challenges the norms of the Victorian era by giving her characters “males and females” opposite roles; she portrays the woman as an active person in both public and private spheres whereas she portrays man as passive and weak in the presence of woman.

The public sphere was limited to woman during the Victorian age in Britain but Gaskell through North and South proves that she had a future vision to the British society. Thus, she merges woman in the public sphere to be active in society. Gaskell challenges the traditional female stereotypes: “The Angel in the House, the fallen woman, the siren and the criminal” (Tobias, 2014, p.01).

2.3.1. The Hales Family

The Hales are from the middle class, they are four members: the father Mr. Hale, the mother Mrs. Hale and two children Margaret and Frederick. They first were living in Helstone where the father was working in the church, but when he resigned from his work, they moved to live in Milton except Frederick Hale who left the family and traveled to live in Spain because he was in the run of law.

2.3.1.1. Mr. Hale

Richard Hale is the father of the female protagonist Margaret Hale. He is a weak and less central figure. He is an investigator and commentator in the book; this function fits well with his passive role.

Mr. Hale was a clergyman in Helstone, he is considered as a figure of conscience which causes his doubts about the Church of England and he gives up his position as a ministry. Thereafter, he moves to live in Milton with his family where they know no one (Dubroy, 1977, p.66-67). According to Tobias (2014) “the father who should be the strong head of household has thrown his family’s world into chaos and uprooted them all to a place none of them have even been” (p.32).

Mr. Hale’s weakness is shown when he could not inform his wife about his doubts and about the move to Milton; he seems incomprehensible and his behaviour is uncomfortable: “Mr. Hale played with some papers in the table in a nervous way and confused manner, opening his lips to speak several times, but closing them again without having the courage to utter a word” (Gaskell, 1855, p.15).

In addition, he does nothing for the move to Milton, but he asks Mr. Bell to help him to find a work and a house while Margaret supervised the move itself: “do what you think best, only remember, we shall have much less money to spend” (Gaskell, 1855, p.22). Patricia Ingham (1996) considers him “almost wholly feminized” (p.75) and she adds that Gaskell treats him almost like a child to show how undesirable helplessness and weakness are in any person, no matter which gender (p.76).

Mr. Hale is the last one to know about his wife’s illness because according to Margaret he is too weak to bear it “I will not tell papa, he could not bear it as I can” (Gaskell, 1855,

p.52). After the death of his wife, he blames himself for her death “his reaction shows the helplessness and vulnerability” (Ingham, 1996, p.76), as it is mentioned here: “He uncovered the face, and stroked it gently, making a kind of soft, inarticulate noise, like that of some mother-animal caressing her young” (Gaskell, 1855, p.97).

Mr. Hale looks very weak and he has no strength to prepare for the funeral, while Margaret is left with the responsibility to prepare for it. Furthermore, when Margaret asks her father to tell Mrs. Boucher about the death of her husband he looks unable to comfort her, this idea sets him “trembling from head to foot” (Gaskell, 1855, p.114).

Mr. Hale is not the ideal household of the Victorian era; he is a weak character who left his daughter with all the responsibilities of the family. Margaret is strong enough to act as the man of the house rather than her father by assuming untraditional women responsibilities that ultimately give her power.

2.3.1.2. Frederick Hale

Frederick Hale is Margaret’s older brother. He appears in the novel only one time; when he comes from Spain to see his sick mother. Frederick is on the run from the law and he is obliged to leave the country before the funeral of his mother for his own safety.

His situation made him weak and he needs protection from his sister Margaret to keep him safe. Frederick Hale is another man who is in need of a woman’s protection at the time of man’s dominance in the British society.

2.3.1.3. Margaret Hale

Margaret Hale is the female protagonist in North and South. She is a woman of courage and noble qualities, she is considered as the strongest female character in English

literature. Elizabeth Gaskell created a very complex heroine who transgresses the norms of the Victorian era to show that women are suitable in both public and private spheres. Foster (1985) stated that “Margaret Hale represents a marked challenge to many accepted ideals of femininity” (p.149).

First, Margaret is introduced in the city of London where she is living with her aunt Mrs. Shaw and her cousin Edith. After the marriage of her cousin, she moves to live with her parents in the south in the village of Helstone which is Margaret’s ideal of a perfect location. Then, the Hales move to live in the north in the industrial city of Milton because Mr. Hale resigns from his work as a ministry. The city of Milton is the place where Margaret’s transgression starts.

2.3.1.3.1. Daughter

Margaret Hale as an unmarried woman performs the social role of a daughter. In fact, Margaret in North and South does not act as a daughter but she is “the Man of the Household”. Chris Tobias (2014) acknowledged that “the roles of parents and child are reversed in the Hale family” (p.32).

Margaret is the one to tell her mother of her father’s decision to move from Helstone to Milton, because her father is weak to do it himself; Margaret sustains the responsibility to arrange the move to Milton. Mrs. Hale suffers from the smoky air in Milton which turns her complaints into serious illness. Meanwhile, Margaret finds herself obliged to control affairs during her mother’s illness and she keeps it secret from her father, she negotiates the return of her exiled brother Frederick who is living in Spain after having been involved in a naval mutiny. After her mother’s death “she becomes the father figure, supporting her grief-stricken

father in her arms” (Foster, 1985, p.149); “Margaret rose from her trembling and despondency and became as a strong angle of comfort to her father and brother” (Gaskell, 1855, p.97).

A young woman at the age of Margaret needs a female guidance in life, but the death of Margaret’s mother is the first step towards Margaret having the opportunity to find herself. Then, for the sake of her father she needs to remain strong to keep him sane until his death.

The death of Mr. Hale cuts Margaret’s ties to traditional means of family and she is finally free from the heavy responsibilities of caring for everyone but herself.

2.3.1.3.2. Margaret and Marriage

During the Victorian era, the only goal for girls in Britain was to marry a man of a good standing. In North and South, Elizabeth Gaskell transgresses the traditional attitudes towards love and marriage. Female characters like Edith and Margaret marry for love and not for money.

Henry Lennox is a lawyer, he is a handsome man of a good standing. By the beginning of the novel he proposes to Margaret but she rejects him. Margaret’s rejection of Henry Lennox informs the reader about her expectation from marriage. When Henry proposes to Margaret, marriage is not on her mind. She is happy to return to her home in Helstone.

Henry Lennox is a man of his age; he supports the separation of private and public spheres by keeping women concerned within the home as wives and mothers (Elliot, 1994, p.37). In his conversation with Margaret, he insists on the difference between the spheres of male and female: “Well, I suppose you are all in depths of business. Ladies’ business, I mean, very different to my business, which is real true law business. Playing with shawls is very different work to, drawing up settlements” (Gaskell, 1855, p.07)

Apparently, Margaret refuses the proposal of Henry Lennox because of his attitudes towards woman, she believes, as well, that friendship between a man and a woman must be allowed (Foster, 1985, p.149). Moreover, when Henry Lennox asks her if he may hope that someday she will think of him as a lover; “she was silent for a minute or two trying to discover the truth as it was in her heart” (Gaskell, 1855, p.14). Ultimately she follows her heart and she replies with “no”, Margaret explicitly asserts to marry for love. Margaret’s refusal of Henry Lennox shows that she is not following the social rules of Victorian era and she is abandoning her social role of being wife and mother (Tobias, 2014, p.06).

John Thornton is the male protagonist; he is a wealthy and highly regarded mill owner in Milton. Mr. Thornton also gets a “no” from Margaret Hale.

When Margaret throws her arms around Mr. Thornton in an effort to save him from the striking workers, she is hit by a stone on her forehead. Margaret’s action was interpreted by everyone who witnessed the scene as a sign of her love for Mr. Thornton (Branthinger and Thesing, 2002, p.179). Margaret’s action encourages Mr. Thornton to propose marriage to her, but she insists that she was acting dispassionately and she describes her behaviour as “woman work” (Baker and Womack, 2002, p.204): “It was only a natural instinct; any woman would have done just the same. We all feel the sanctity of our sex as a high privilege when we see danger” (Gaskell, 1855, p.76).

In the end of the novel, the death of her parents sets her free and she accepts to marry Mr. Thornton; yet, Margaret waits until she became an independent person and an heiress who saves the Marlborough Mills to accept to marry Mr. Thornton. As Calder (1976) points out “Mrs. Gaskell is one of the few major Victorian writers who shows us marriage from a woman’s point of view as something other than an escape, a reinforcement of social status, or utilitarian contract” (p.81). Likewise, in North and South, the idea of marriage differs than

marriage during the Victorian era; Margaret Hale rejects to marry for money and she prefers to marry for love after making a good social standing for herself.

2.3.1.3.3. Margaret in the Public Sphere

Margaret Hale is used to enter the social sphere and to challenge the rules of social classes. When she moves to Milton she does not remain as so many Victorian women; she notices that Milton is a different world from the south and she tends to learn about the industrial world and its people.

On this business, she displays interests with activities that are associated with male and the public sphere. Margaret and her father attend a party in the house of Mr. Thornton with the mill owners in Milton. At dinner, Margaret finds herself interested with the serious conversation of men rather than that of women. Margaret's preference for the men's conversation over women puts her outside her traditional gender role (Algotsson, 2014, p.10). According to Foster (1985) "Margaret's role in North and South in complex" (p.148), and she adds that "Margaret interferes in the public male world" (p.149).

Furthermore, Margaret meets the Higgins Family from the working class, she becomes friend with them. In this way she learns about the workers' lives and their working conditions. Through Bessy Higgins, Margaret learns about the Boucher family and about Nicholas Higgins with whom she discusses the relationship between workers and employers. Margaret feels distressed over the hardships of the workers and she discusses this with Mr. Thornton but he tells her that they behave like children and they need a "firm authority". Then, she discusses the strike with Nicholas Higgins. In this context Margaret Hale is a mediator between two men, moreover, between the workers and the masters (Algotsson, 2014, p.11). In addition during the strike she encourages Mr. Thornton to face his workers:

Go down this instant, if you are not a coward, go down and face them like a man. Save these poor whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings speak to them kindly. Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. I see one there who is. If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man (Gaskell, 1855:70)

By this deed, Margaret shows her courage and her cleverness and she argues that “some norms must be broken in pursuit of something more important once more” (Strnadova, 2017:18).

After the strike, Nicholas Higgins is out of the work, it is Margaret who convinces him to speak to Mr. Thornton and after many tries, they finally shake hands and Higgins returns to work, this is a proof of Margaret's untraditional participation in men's affairs (Algotsson, 2014, p.11). Elliot (1994) argues that “Margaret serves as an exemplary mediator by translating the language of men to each other” (p.41). Thus, Margaret brings the two classes into contact and she conciliates between them.

Margaret Hale breaks the gender norms by acting in the public sphere and showing interest about political issues. In fact, Gaskell gives her heroine a moral space for claiming her own sphere of activity (Branthinger and Thesing, 2002, p.179).

2.3.1.3.4. Margaret as an Heiress

Needless to say that Victorian women did not play an important part in society, due to the fact that they had limited rights. They could not inherit a property until the decreeing of the Women's Property Act in 1870 only for married women while single women were not

concerned with the act. In North and South, Elizabeth Gaskell made Margaret an heiress of the fortune of her Godfather Mr. Bell. This deed confirms that Mrs. Gaskell in a way or another is defending the social status of women through her novel.

2.3.2. The Thornton's Family

They are from the upper class, they live in Milton. The father committed suicide leaving his wife Mrs. Thornton and his two children John and Fanny in difficult living conditions. Mrs. Thornton struggled for the sake of her children and she supported her beloved son John Thornton who became a mill owner and a master in Milton.

2.3.2.1. Hannah Thornton

Tobias (2014) argued that “women are prompted into making roles for themselves when the patriarchy of society fails them” (p.31). Mrs. Thornton is the mother of the male protagonist John Thornton. The narrator describes her as “a woman of strong power and firm resolve” (Gaskell, 1855, p. 35). She is like any mother who looks for the happiness of her children.

After her husband committed suicide, she was at the head of the family; she raised her beloved son Mr. Thornton to become the master in Milton. Mrs. Thornton differs from the women of her age because she has a strong opinion and she shares the managing of the Marlborough Mills with her son, according to Hunt (2010) “Mrs. Thornton allows herself power over her son's business” (p.79).

Mrs. Thornton faced harsh circumstances after the death of her husband; she lost the sense of motherhood and she gave up the traditional femininity and fully adopted the industrial, masculine world (Tobias, 2014, p.24).

Mrs. Thornton steps out of the passive, private sphere of the female, taking on the active, public sphere of the male.

2.3.2.2. John Thornton

He is the male protagonist and Mill owner, and he is a loving son and brother. After the death of his father who put them in debt, he is forced to abandon his education to provide for his mother and sister:

Sixteen years ago, my father died under very harsh circumstances. I was taken from the school, and had to become a man (as well as I could) in a few days..... We went into a small country town, where living is cheaper than in Milton, and where I got employment in a draper's shop (Gaskell, 1855, p.35)

Mr. Thornton's life is full of adventures, thanks to his mother who supported him from his childhood; he worked hard for the sake of his mother and his sister and he drove them from poverty to richness. Furthermore, Mr. Thornton has really a strong personality, although he always used to make his own decision, that was not the case in the presence of the two strong women in his life "his mother and Margaret Hale".

John Thornton considers his mother as a strong, independent woman and he sees her as a leader in everything; she helps him to manage the work in the Mill. Then, Margaret who sets herself in the public sphere has a big influence over Mr. Thornton's thoughts and decisions. He gave the chance to Margaret to teach him cultural values and how to respect his workers because he has a bad relationship with his them (Branthlinger and Thesing, 2002, p.450). Moreover, Mr. Thornton is a hard master and he is not interested with the needs of the

workers, Lewis (2011) suggested that “he is a true man who still believes in the necessity of philanthropy yet is still the controlling dominant patriarch” (p.108).

Apparently, Margaret’s influence over Mr. Thornton turns him to become sensitive and caring towards poor people (Lewis, 2011, p.107). As a result, masters and workers gather in a dining-room where different classes come together (Elliot, 1994, p.48).

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter we have analyzed how Elizabeth Gaskell challenges the norms and traditions of the Victorian era through different characters of her most successful industrial novel North and South. Margaret Hale is one of the strongest heroines of Victorian literature who transgressed the spheres and gender roles of women of her social status in the Victorian era.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

North and South is one of the most successful works of Elizabeth Gaskell that reflect the British society during the 19th century; where women were oppressed by the patriarchal society. The aim of this research work is to analyze how Elizabeth Gaskell broke the norms of the Victorian society. We have focused our analysis on two categories of women, the Victorian women ideal who kept to her gender role and the new type of women who transgressed the current gender role. We have, as well, examined the passivity of some selected male characters.

The 19th century witnessed many changes as a result of a phenomenon called the Industrial Revolution; it led to the great progress of the country in every field. On the other side, the industrial revolution created many problems such as child labour and poverty, and this led to a great gap between social classes. Then, the ideology of separate spheres was much known during the Victorian era; men dominated all fields of life while women were classified as the weaker sex, their only role was to take care of their husband and children. Women at that time were prevented from all their rights and they could not raise their voices in public; they were treated the same way as children. In fact, 19th century was the period of queen Victoria's reign but she could not bring rights to women because of misery and oppression.

Fortunately, women did not remain silent and they challenged the norms of the Victorian society; they found themselves obliged to struggle to call for their rights. Literature was their way to freedom; many women writers used it to question and challenge the limiting, domesticated angel in the house, and step by step they started to gain their freedom from the patriarchal society, and they began to act in the public sphere as men. For instance, Elizabeth Gaskell's novel addresses the conditions of women of her time.

Through the literary work North and South, we can notice that the idea of gender roles and separate spheres had been broken in the families and in the society in general. Through the Hales family we noticed that the roles of fathers and children were reversed; the daughter Margaret Hale became the man of the house by assuming different responsibilities which belong to men. In addition, in the Thornton's family, the mother Mrs. Thornton entered the public sphere by sharing the managing of the Mill with her son John Thornton.

In general, Elizabeth Gaskell gave a different meaning to the traditional Victorian families through her portrayal of passive men and active women. In other words, the interest of women in business, economy and social problems gave them power and they showed their capabilities in the world of men.

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