

Vilnius University  
Faculty Of Philology  
Department Of English Philology

Viktorija Plešanova

**Text and Textile: Weaving Class, Gender, and Religion in Elizabeth Gaskell's Novel *North and South***

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Academic Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rūta Šlapkauskaitė

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## Abstract

There is a tight link between the imagery of material objects and their cultural significance in Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novels. In this thesis, I will focus on how the novelist explores gender identity as well as the issues of the religious and social spheres in Victorian England through the representation of textile, cloth production and cotton industry in the novel *North and South*. The paper aims at examining the implications the relation between the text and its historical context has for our understanding of Gaskell's novel *North and South*. Two approaches will be applied for the present analysis: New Historicism and Thing Theory. New Historicism recognises the significance of the historical context in the analysis of the text, whereas Thing Theory explores Victorian complex relationships between material objects and human subjects. In *North and South* the descriptions of cloth and textile, from local to the imported ones, play an important role in the depiction of the Victorian period. Thus, different fabrics and garments that the characters of the novel possess, discuss and demonstrate symbolise the rise of the industrial economy that increased social inequality. Moreover, shawls passed down from mother to daughter reflect the hereditary nature of the attitudes towards economic imperialism and exploitative labour conditions at the cotton mills. The same shawls also embody the traditional female role in patriarchal Victorian society: women were still restricted to their domestic domain in spite of their active participation in the public sphere of life of the new industrial world. Finally, the whole textile industry becomes a lens through which the reader can take an insight into the problem of the religious crisis of the nineteenth century. The loss of faith among the working class is one of the prominent topics of the novel that is depicted through the representation of different garments and the whole textile manufacturing.

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# 1. Introduction

There is a direct link between the socio-political situation in a country and the author's perspective. Novelists usually attempt to draw attention at the most topical and problematic issues and invite readers to reflect upon them. Elizabeth Gaskell is one of the most famous female novelists, who allow modern readers to immerse into the reality of Victorian England. In the industrial novel *North and South* Gaskell provides the images of cotton production and cloth- from the local textiles to the imported shawls. Gaskell employs the metaphor of textile as a product of industrialized England and its consequences such as the rise of money driven by the exploitation of workers who struggle for justice.

In historical terms, the nineteenth century was a very rich time for British literature, at the same time it was important because of the significant political and social changes. The British Empire was moving toward becoming one of the most prosperous European countries due to the rapid expansion of its territories. Victorian Age is very precisely described by Michelle Allen (2008: 403) by using only three nouns: "progress, expansion, mobility". During this period of time the country had changed drastically: from scientific and socio- political spheres to religion and literature related issues. These important changes were, in turn, reflected in the enlarged geographical scope of the Victorian novel. The novel became a great source of information for the nineteenth century readers as it allowed them to learn about the enlarged world and its wonders.

There are many sub- genres of the Victorian novel: "the historical novel, the domestic novel, the silver fork novel, the detective novel, the industrial novel, and the science fiction novel" (Shires as cited in David 2001: 68) that comprise cultural discourses such as religion, science, politics and many others. According to Linda M. Shires (as cited in David 2001: 61), the main subject of the Victorian novel is the relation between self and society; for example, in the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell there are two spheres, public and private, that are interconnected by means of metonymy. These two spheres represent "the ideological opposition between self and society that is smoothed over aesthetically" (Shires as cited in David 2001: 61). Regarding the subgenre of Gaskell's novel, Rosemarie Bodenheimer (1979: 281-282) points out that *North and South* can be defined as an 'industrial' or 'social problem-solving novel': the novel focuses on the negative effects of the industrialization and the attempts of finding a solution to solve them.

Romantic writers recognized the evils of the industrialization; however, it was during the Victorian era when the effect of this process was already openly discussed by the British society, including Victorian novelists who also gave attention to the poor labour and living conditions of the working class. Writers

began to speak to the audience and comment on the real- world problems. The novel tended to provoke some reaction from the reader and placed him/her “in a position of privileged knowing and moral judgement, thus shaping his/her subjectivity into middle-class Victorian norms” (Shires as cited in David 2001: 65). It can be said that the Victorian novel served as a common thread between different British social classes. It became a mirror through which readers could face the reality, identify themselves with its characters and contemplate upon their own lives.

According to Craik (as cited in Martin 1983: 91), Elizabeth Gaskell had the ability to precisely reflect the reality of the Victorian era due to her “personal experience and personal contact, of having not only observed, but known, visited, and helped men like John Barton and the other mill workers”. Gaskell was also a member of the middle class; therefore, she had insight into its real conditions of life of the representatives of this social class in Victorian England. In Gaskell’s novels we can notice many descriptions of workers’ living conditions, the relationship between masters and men and the crisis of faith and identity as a result of the change of order in the Victorians’ private and public life that was provoked by scientific progress and the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. Her novels are often viewed as a critique of the Victorian society: its social attitudes, moral judgements and political system. Carol Christ and Catherine Robson (as cited in Balkaya 2015: 68) pointed out: “Gaskell wrote not just to entertain but also to critique society and to promote social reform”. Her literary works are a meticulous representation of industrial realities in Victorian England: her industrial novels are focused on a factory life in the northern manufacturing centre. The novelist tended to describe her surrounding realities: diseases associated with air pollution and labour exploitation that outweighed any positive outcomes of the industrial development.

*North and South* is one of Gaskell’s best-known novels that mirrors the reality of life in the mid-Victorian period and demonstrates the social circumstances of Victorian England. It raises readers’ awareness of the issues of labour, gender and religion through the lens of the symbolic representation of textile. According to Chloe Wigston Smith (2013: 3), “the analogy between dress and expression, textile and text, functions as a mere prelude to the real focus of storytelling and conversation”. The scholar explains that the novel’s engagement with material objects has a long tradition in literature: rhetorical usage of cloth and textile can be traced back to medieval times. However, as the print industry along with the textile industry developed, fabric and story weaving became even more linked together (Smith 2013: 72). In her work *Texts and Textiles: Affect, Synaesthesia and Metaphor in Fiction*, Thomas (2016: 3) also highlights the tight bonds between text and textile: “texts are often also inherent in textiles. Textiles can tell a story, communicate an idea or convey a narrative, meaning or emotions to the viewer in a visual or a tactile way”. Textile items play a crucial role in the plot creation

of the novel *North and South* and transmission of its main ideas; moreover, they reveal the subtle nuances of life in the industrial town of Milton and its contrast to the villages of Southern England.

As it was mentioned previously, *North and South* is an industrial novel in which the working class of the textile-producing town of Milton is given voice to expose the atrocious conditions they are confronted with. Gaskell describes child exploitation in the factories and miserable inhumane working conditions in which unskilled workers spent their lives: they were exploited and maltreated by their masters. In addition, the author illustrates the conflict between workers and masters in order to describe two opposite viewpoints: John Stuart Mill's idea of workers' freedom and John Ruskin's promotion of workers' responsibilities to their employee. The social divide between them is viewed by Gaskell as a social disease of the nineteenth century that needs to be cured. In order to describe social conditions of the working and middle class, Balkaya (2015: 67) makes a reference to the works of Karl Marx, who was a contemporary of Gaskell's. The scholar analyses the novel *North and South* in an attempt to discover how labour conditions of the "oppressed" working class and the relations between the working and middle classes were presented by Elizabeth Gaskell. The Victorian age was an era of the middle-class growth: it consisted of people of different professions such as doctors, teachers, military officers, clergymen, skilled manufacturers and clerks.

The social gap between the working and middle classes is one of the most important topics in *North and South*, but there is also another important topic in the novel that should be mentioned: the crisis of religious faith. The Victorian religious doubt is what makes the family of the protagonist Margaret Hale move from the traditional South to the modern North. In the nineteenth century religious certainty was intimidated by scientific discovery: Darwin's theory of evolution had a huge impact on the popular mind set and created more questions than gave answers. Christianity was no longer able to answer new questions about the modern world and explain the findings of science. Moreover, the nineteenth century scientific discovery was not the only reason of the change of the Victorian norms and attitudes. It is obvious that mass industrialisation had a huge impact on every aspect of the Victorian society. According to Kenneth Inglis (2007: 1), "most of the neglecters belonged to the masses of the working population. . . . These were never or but seldom seen in religious congregations". The industrial progress totally changed not only the public sphere of the Victorians' life, but also their way of thinking and perceiving the world around them. Material changes led to even major transformation in the quotidian life of the Victorian period. Childres (as cited in David 2001: 78) states:

*A number of critics have pointed out in various ways, a neat separation of industrialism and the novel is nearly impossible in the years between 1832 and 1867. Each looked to*

*the other for models of effecting and controlling as well as understanding change.  
Novels turned to the 'record of industrialism'.*

Victorian novelists reflected this religious crisis in their literary works and demonstrated what it meant for their contemporaries to be in the middle between their former beliefs and the present scientific evidence. As a daughter and a wife of a pastor, Gaskell attempts to demonstrate the religious context of the mid-nineteenth century in *North and South*. The crisis of faith was particularly common among inhabitants of London and other large cotton manufacturing towns (Inglis 2007: 12), such as Milton, where Mr Hale, the protagonist's father, decided to move from a small Southern provincial town. Thus, Gaskell's novel also takes up the issue of a crisis of faith in the industrial North where workers do not have place for religion in their lives of hard and exhausting labour.

Literature of the nineteenth century also reflected the change of attitudes towards typical gender roles in the Victorian society after the Industrial Revolution. There was still a huge difference between male and female rights and roles. In the early Victorian era women were seen as perfect creatures focused only on marriage and family questions; however, after the Industrial Revolution women started to question their role as an "Angel of the house". Harriet Martineau discussed the effect of the Victorian factory system on female factory workers who, as she claims, were "the greatest beneficiaries of recent mechanical innovations" (as cited in Ketabgian 2012: 35). Martineau saw the industrial progress as a great opportunity for women for whom it was "a source of useful and improving employment" (as cited in Ketabgian 2012: 35). Nevertheless, female presence in the male industry did not bring women more rights: they could not vote, own their property, divorce their husbands (with a few exceptions) and their educational opportunities were still quite limited. Female authors had their male pennames in order to be able to publish their works.

With the re-emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement, women's status changed and the idea of the "New Woman" appeared for the first time in the patriarchal British society of the nineteenth century. This ideology redefined the social status of women and supported women's professional endeavours (Walls 2002: 233). Thus, the "New Woman" fiction emerged as a product of industrial culture (Childers as cited in David 2001: 94). Although the term "feminism" was invented much later, some feminist tendencies can already be seen in the literary works of the Victorian novelists. As David (2001: 108-109) points out, "[...] if eighteenth-century fiction invented 'femininity', then it is fair to say that Victorian fiction invented 'femaleness'". Victorian novelists started to reveal the rebellious and independent side of the female identity. Many novelists wrote about the sufferings of women and their difficult role as angels of the domestic hearth ("Angel of the House"). They placed traditional femininity in an agonistic struggle with female nature. "New Woman fiction" touched upon the issues of new opportunities for women outside the domestic sphere: voting rights, education and new



standards of conduct and morality. In the novel *North and South*, female characters play a central role as Gaskell creates strong, intelligent and pro-active female characters like Margaret Hale and Mrs Thornton. The novelist questions traditional Victorian female roles and gender stereotypes and portrays her female characters as independent, decisive and modern women who are at odds with traditional patriarchal Victorian society.

Feminist approach is a common approach to the analysis of the novel *North and South*. Linda M. Shires (2012) discusses the role of the protagonist, Margaret Hale, in the novel. The scholar suggests that *North and South* can be read as “a novel of self- education” (Shires 2012: 71). According to Shires (2012: 71), the heroine is a “central ethical element” that connects two different domains of the novel, the public and the private one. The character of Margaret Hale was further investigated by Barbara Hardy (2011) who examines the contrast between the natural and civilized sides of the world that is reflected through Margaret Hale’s personality and her feelings. According to the scholar (2011), even the title of the novel emphasises the dichotomy of the wild and civilized parts of the world in which Margaret grows and develops as a strong female character. In addition, Séjournée (1999) also claims that the plot of the novel is woven around Margaret’s personality. The role of the female protagonists in Gaskell’s novel is to question the traditional gender stereotypes and to react against women’s oppression in Victorian society.

The majority of the studies of the novel analyze the conflict between the working and middle classes. The social and economic effects of industrialization and class struggles as portrayed in *North and South* are analyzed by Martin (1983: 92) who highlights “the contrasts between the death of those characters who are too rigid to modify in changing conditions and the survival of characters who do adapt to such conditions”. Martin draws a parallel between the theme of death in the novel and the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin.

Moreover, Ketabgian (2012) analyses the factories’ effect on their workers as they are presented in the industrial novels of the nineteenth century. She explores the topic of the industrial imagery in Elizabeth Gaskell’s literary creation and compares regular rhythms of the factory with “repetitive urges of the human body” (Ketabgian 2012: 12). Ketabgian states (2012: 13) that “Gaskell, like her peers, allies industrial culture with compulsive spending habits, deviant addictions, and ‘willful’ female independence, her novel also pointedly confounds animal need and intentional human desire, revealing the subjective aspect of the most nonhumane urges”. Ketabgian (2012) presents machinery as a mechanical force that provokes spiritual impoverishment of Victorians.

It can be noticed that the topic of the representation of social, gender and religious issues through the tropology of textile images in the novel *North and South* has not been fully covered yet. In the present

MA thesis the novel will be analyzed with regard to the implications the relation between the text and representation of textile and the historical context have for our understanding of the Victorian era. The aim of this MA paper is to analyse the dynamics of gender, religion and social class in Victorian England as conveyed through the depiction of textile, cloth production, and the cotton industry in *North and South* in order to examine the implications the relation between the text and its historical context has for our understanding of Victorian subjectivity. The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. The second chapter, titled “Theoretical Premises: Thing Theory and New Historicist Approaches” introduces the conceptual framework of the paper. The third chapter, titled “The Representation of the Cotton Industry in *North and South* By Elizabeth Gaskell” is divided into three parts: the first one examines the representation of different social classes, the second part is focused on the female role in Victorian society, and the third one discusses the crisis of the religious faith in the novel through the analysis of the textile representation in the text. Finally, the fourth chapter presents conclusions.

## 2. Theoretical Overview: Thing Theory and New Historicist Approach

Centring on the link between the imagery of tangible objects and their cultural significance in the industrial world of Gaskell's novel *North and South*, the analysis will employ two approaches: New Historicism and Thing Theory. New Historicism presents a new way of reading and analysing literary texts: it attempts to understand a certain historical period through literary works.

In the nineteenth century, two opposite approaches to literary history could be distinguished: the first approach presents it as isolated, while the second one considers literary history as a part of a general cultural history:

*Historicism was the offspring of Hegelian idealism, and, later, of the evolutionary naturalism of Herbert Spencer. Several major 'historicists' studied literature in the context of social, political and cultural history. They saw a nation's literary history as an expression of its evolving 'spirit'. (Selden, Widdowson, Brooker 2005: 180)*

New Historicism is concerned with the significance of the historical context in the analysis of the text and the role of literature in studying history. It is one of the most influential approaches that was developed during the 1980-s and was highly influenced by Stephen Greenblatt's theory and inspired by Michel Foucault's philosophy. It intersects with postmodernism in its emphasis on the breakdown of genre boundaries and the analysis of discontinuity. According to Anton Kaes (1992: 149), New Historicism is currently one of the most "talked about and hotly contested" approaches in literary studies in spite of a strong criticism by anti- Marxists and neo- Marxists.

As it was mentioned previously, the New Historicist approach was highly influenced by Michel Foucault's discourse and power theory. Discourse is defined by Foucault (1981: 52) as a social system that produces knowledge which is always related to the historical period in which it appears. Nevertheless, the relation between discourse and produced knowledge is quite ambiguous: common knowledge and social rules are always known 'per se' and they are already established in our society; therefore, discourse, in turn, is also determined by those rules and forms of knowledge (Foucault 1981: 61). Thus, there is a constant dialogue between history and texts: history cannot be discussed outside the textuality and, vice versa, we cannot analyze the text outside its historical background.

The term "New Historicism" was invented by Stephen Greenblatt, one of the most outstanding literary critics. Greenblatt wanted it to signal the sociological and historical orientation of his edition of the collection of essays on Shakespeare. In *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988), the scholar analyzed the literary works by Shakespeare and demonstrated that the poet was highly influenced by the ideas of his epoch and transferred this

influence into his literary creation. The scholar referred to New Historicism as a practice that is open to other literary theories and placed the approach in a broad historical perspective. Greenblatt proposed the idea that the text and its context should be both investigated in order to be able to truly understand their meaning and the way they interrelate with each other. The scholar also outlined four important principles of New Historicism that had a huge impact on the practice of literary practice:

*(1)The recasting of discussions about “art” into discussion of “representations”; (2) the shift from materialist explanations of historical phenomena to investigations of the history of the human body and the human subject; (3) the discovery of unexpected discursive context for literary works by pursuing their “supplements” rather than their overt thematics; (4) the gradual replacement of “ideology critique” with discursive analysis. (Greenblatt 2000: 17)*

In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), Greenblatt aims at analysing the way the identity was constituted in Elizabethan England. The scholar claims that authors were always situated within their cultural system as the way authors expressed the social experiences of their epoch depended a lot on the fact that they were always controlled by different institutions such as church, government, family, etc. Institutional powers controlled the literary creation of the nineteenth-century authors in order to regulate Victorians' social behaviour codes. Greenblatt (1980: 15) believes that literature is a product of the ideology and social circumstances of time when it was produced; therefore, it should be analysed within its historical context. Greenblatt both reconstructs the history through literary text and analyses literature through history:

*From the beginning we thought it crucially important to have it both ways: we wanted to delve as deeply as possible into the creative matrices of particular historical cultures and at the same time we wanted to understand how certain products of these cultures could seem to possess a certain independence. (Greenblatt 2000: 16)*

In *Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (2005: 181), Selden, Widdowson and Brooker highlight several assumptions on which New Historicism is grounded. They point out that history “can never be available to us in pure form”, but it is always perceived in a certain context “in the form of ‘representations’”. As Selden, Widdowson and Brooker (2005: 181) point out, history is “a matter of telling a story about the past” and it is always reproduced on the basis of the already produced texts. New Historicism views literature as a cultural product of a particular historical period and a tool to understand its intellectual history. This approach recognises that literary works cannot be analysed separately from their historical, social and cultural contexts: New Historicists analyse texts not as an entirely independent piece of art, but through their relation to the space and time (Richter 2007: 1205). Hence, as Alan Liu (1989: 755) states, according to the New Historicist approach, text and context are always connected with each other: they are equally important and cannot be examined separately (“the context *is* the text and vice versa”).

In Tyson's (2006: 278) opinion, New Historicism is concerned with the interpretation of history rather than with retelling of it. As Tyson (2006: 278) notes, "traditional historians ask, 'What happened?' [...]. In contrast, New Historicists ask, 'How has the event been interpreted?'". The scholars resist the idea of an objective look at history as they believe that every event is a product of its time and it can be interpreted only on the basis of the historical evidence. New Historicists view history not as fixed and stable, but rather as a matter of a constant interpretation as they resist the notion of the linear and causal relationship of historical events (Tyson 2006: 278). Alan Liu (1989: 733) also highlights the subjective nature of the historical explanation and states that one can analyse his history only through his own experience as they are always interrelated and inseparable. According to the scholar (1989: 733), "though we would understand the historical them in all their strangeness, the forms of our understanding are fated at last to reveal that they are a remembrance or prophecy of us". Liu (1989: 133) mentions that literary works serve as a historical mirror through which a person can learn more about himself and solve his "class-, state-, gender-, ideological- (and so on) uncertainty". Thus, although New Historicists claim that text and context are interrelated and cannot be analysed separately, there is always a metaphorical distance ("pure nothing") between them where the interpreter's influence is found (Liu 1989: 745). The interpreter's "I" is always present in his analysis of the text: Liu (1989: 746) defines this feature as "a consistently heightened self-reflexivity of the New Historicism".

Another important point was made by Mukesh Williams (2003: 127) who points out that historical events are usually characterized by their contradictory nature that has a great impact on the literary theory as "the engaging concern with socio-political origins of cultural artifacts now tended to reduce literature to a historical footnote, thereby neglecting the complexity and uniqueness of texts per se". Instead of analyzing the structural and stylistic aspects of the text, New Historicists shifted their focus to capturing the mood and temper of the historical events (Williams 2003: 127).

In the book *Cultural Materialism* (2008), Hans Bertens discussed two major literary approaches that developed at the same time: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. The scholar highlights several similarities between these two theories such as their focus on traditional texts, importance of the historical background and central concepts of power and discourse. Bertens (2008: 140) mentions that the text became "a vehicle for power" as it describes history as well as shapes it in a way. Nevertheless, although New Historicism and Cultural Materialism may seem similar, they are still different in many aspects. Cultural Materialism is more concerned with the notion of ideology and leans towards Marxism, while New Historicism focuses more on power and its relation to "the self":

*[...] self is always a construction, (that) our identity is never given, but always the product of an interaction between the way we want to represent our selves [...] and the power relations we are part of. (Bertens 2008: 142)*

While traditional Historicism rejects any historical value judgements and New Criticism approaches the essence of the text as given and portrays the discursive and social domains of the text as separate, New Historicists call these methods into question in an attempt to explain the text- context relationship. They are concerned with the fact that a certain literary work was created as an articulation of a particular need and intention (Kaes 1992: 150); therefore, a text can be seen as a medium for interpretative reading of the world. As Kaes (1992: 148) points out, “New Historicism, in turn, offered richness and resonance of a multi-voiced textuality and the never-ending sense of wonder and surprise that derives from the contingencies of history”. That implies that the meaning of a text is never fixed as it is always open to new interpretations and discussion by its contemporary readers. Edward Said (1983: 53) believes that it is critics’ responsibility to interpret “the silenced voices” of the text as “texts are a system of forces institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components. For texts, after all are not an ideal cosmos of ideally equal moments”. He also sees the nineteenth century British novel as a cultural discourse that strengthens the imperial hegemony and legitimizes its territorial possessions. Indeed, Victorian literary narratives mirror the most topical issues of the social, political and cultural situation in the country and New Historicism approach allows critics to situate the texts in the context and redefine their cultural meaning.

Although, as Greenblatt puts it, New Historicism cannot be regarded as a theory, but it is rather a methodology for reading and analysing literary texts, various aspects of New Historicism were criticized by critics who found this approach problematic and questionable. In fact, Greenblatt himself is also aware of difficulties that New Historicists may encounter with. He provided a list of concerns in his work *Practicing New Historicism* (2000: 14), co-authored with Catherine Gallagher. For instance, Greenblatt acknowledged that the choice of the source for the literary analysis can be quite challenging. There are no criteria of how to select the text that would be a fruitful material for the analysis. New Historicists consider both literary and non-literary texts equally important and relevant: diaries, chronicles, records and any other written source can also contribute to the analysis of the text and placing it in its historical context.

Moreover, according to New Historicists, literature can be viewed as being related to other cultural products that appear in that particular context. In this sense, it can be said that New Historicism has a linkage with Thing Theory, an approach in literary and cultural studies that explores complex relationships between objects and human subjects and puts a special emphasis on Victorians’ engagement with the material things. In *A Sense of Things*, Bill Brown (2001: 3) points out: “for even

the most coarse and commonsensical things, mere things, perpetually pose a problem because of the specific unspecificity that 'things' denotes". Thing Theory tends to determine the role of the material things in history in order to reconstruct their attached significance in a certain culture. Lorraine Daston (2004) in her article "Things that talk" does not apply the term "thing theory", but she explains that things can "talk" and by that create new meanings or shape already existing ones. The scholar discovers the significance of objects and the engagement between objects and people in order to be able to discover the significance attached to objects by human subjects.

John Plotz (2016: 1) states: „'thing theory' has established almost as secure a niche among humanists and social scientists as 'object biographies' (of chairs, paperclips, sofas) have carved out in popular writing". In fact, the scholarship of things is interdisciplinary: the issues of the notion of things and their role in our life have always been drawing attention of scholars from absolutely different research areas, from philosophers to art historicists and anthropologists. Plotz (2005: 110) mentioned that "'thing' is far better than any other word at summing up imponderable, slightly creepy what-is-it-ness". Leslie Atzom and Prasad Boradkar (2014: 144) provided the definition of things as objects of consumption, production and distribution. They (2014: 143) point out: "since the Enlightenment, we have tended to divide the world ideologically along material and non-material lines". This shifted focus on the importance of things in the interpretation of different aspects of our society is often referred to as "the material turn" which implies that objects are equally important as subjects, words and ideas. According to the material turn, things can function not just as symbols, but they also possess power and an agentic role on their own (Atzom, Boradkar 2014: 142).

Leslie Atzom and Prasad Boradkar (2014) also make references to the influential essay "Thing Theory" by Bill Brown who is credited for creating the term of the approach in 2001. Brown (2001: 1) states that there is a tight bond between people and objects that are an inevitable part of our life. There is a constant reciprocal process of configuration between human subjects and objects: objects are shaped by human subjects, while at the same time they themselves shape social and cultural forms of subjects. Their influence can be clearly noticed in literature, because literary works can be viewed as a mirror through which the "thingness" of objects is the most evident. It can be said that Brown is an apologist for the material culture as he believes that any everyday object can be transformed into art and things are a never- ending source of new forms of expressions.

Moreover, in his article "Thing theory", Brown (2001: 3) makes a distinction between things and objects. He mentions that things are "opaque" as they never have a functional value, while objects are metaphorically transparent, because it is people who attach semantic meaning and values to them. However, objects can become close to things when their relation with the subject changes:

*We begin confronting the thingness of objects when they stop working for us [...]. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (Brown 2001: 4)*

In fact, Brown adopts the distinction between things and objects from Heidegger who can be regarded as a grandfather of Thing theory: the German philosopher put forward certain aspects that laid the foundation of this approach (Pagan 2015: 28-29). Heidegger (1967: 15) admits that it is not easy to define what a thing is and to determine the distinction between things and objects. He introduced the idea that things receive their “thingness” only in the process of their interaction with people. Otherwise, it is impossible to analyse their significance in the history due to their objective nature. Also, Heidegger (1967: 15) first made a distinction between “objects” and “things” and proposed the idea that the concept of a “thing” is more meaningful and wide. People may attempt to explore the nature of things by studying its physical characteristics, but science is not able to say anything about their essence (“the thing as thing”), as science describes them as a universal phenomenon, while they are always particulars (Heidegger 1967: 15). All things should be analysed individually without making any generalisations, because each of them carries its specific meaning that is essential for understanding their value for those who use them and their significance attached by their owners.

The cultural and social meaning that people attribute to things and objects was also analysed by Arjun Appadurai (1988: 3) who states that “commodities can provisionally be defined as objects of economic value”. Appadurai (1988: 11) specifies that commodity is a thing with a social potential that can be discussed only in light of the industrial economy that operates according to cultural design of the capitalist society. Commodities serve as a link between people and things and the same commodity can be perceived as a different thing depending on the situation in which it occurs. Appadurai (1988: 13) states: “the commodity situation in the social life of any “thing” can be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature”. Furthermore, the scholar (1988: 13) highlights that the commodity situation can be divided into three aspects: “the commodity phase of the social life of any thing; the commodity candidacy of any thing, and the commodity context in which any thing may be placed”. These aspects again emphasise the temporal, social and cultural nature of any commodity. That means that objects cannot be perceived neutrally, just as “objects to hand” (Plotz 2005: 114), but they are always related to the social and cultural background of their epoch.

Bill Brown (2015) also discussed the commodity value of objects in “the culture of consumption”. The scholar states that human subjects identify themselves through the material objects that they possess and use, while at the same time those objects also have power over people as objects and subjects can be regarded as being cross-referential. Furthermore, Brown’s article includes the



discussion of Marx's concern with the 'commodity fetishism'. According to Marx (2007: 82), commodity as "a mysterious thing" with a social character of human labour that can be characterised by certain aspects of labour power that belongs to its owner:

*A commodity [...] not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities [...]. A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply [...] because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.*  
(Marx 2007: 82)

Moreover, Marx distinguishes between use value and exchange value. Use- value is related to "the physical properties of the commodity" that satisfies actual needs of people: "a commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far as it is a material thing, a use value, something useful" (Marx 2007: 27). Exchange value is tied to "the exchange relations of commodities" that is characterised by the amount of labour used in order to appropriate the commodity. Thus, human labour can be seen as an equivalent behind the exchange of goods on the capitalist market: "as values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labour time" (Marx 2007: 29). In order to illustrate this thought, Marx provided the example of the "commodity fetishism": when wood is turned into a table, it still remains wood, but it gains its exchange- value on the capitalist market. A table, in contrast to wood, is perceived in relation to all other commodities and to the amount of labour that they required for their production. Thus, Marx (2007: 47) states:

*A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.*

The impact of the "commodity fetishism" in the nineteenth- century literature and culture was further analyzed by Jennifer Sattaur (2012: 350) who stated that "the Victorian era is characterised by an ambivalence towards the commodity which resulted in a vast body of self- searching, self- problematizing literary explorations of the interactions among people, commodities and society". Thing Theory has been widely applied by scholars in their discussion of the meaning of the representation of material substance in Victorian literature. Material objects play a crucial role within a literary text and have an important symbolic meaning. As Jennifer Sattaur (2012: 347) argues, Victorian novelists were especially engaged in the representation of things in their literary works. The scholar (2012: 347) states: "the Victorians had a preoccupation with and predilection for the careful and considered acquisition and utilisation of objects, and this preoccupation has become a focus for

critical trends in this area". Indeed, Victorian novels contain a broad range of different objects which analysis contributes to the deeper understanding of their cultural significance in society. The products of consumer society and their representation in the Victorian literature have symbolic meanings that reveal relationships that existed between people and commodities. Sattaure (2012: 354) discusses the complex interaction between objects and people, and argues that „the social importance of food, and the cultural discourses surrounding the interior“ are two of the most popular Victorian objects that Thing theory has been applied to.

In the discussion of the Thing Theory in the Victorian studies, Sattaure (2012) also mentions Elaine Freedgood. In the introduction to *The Ideas in Things*, Freedgood (2009: 4) points out that the Victorian novel contains many descriptions of material objects in comparison with the eighteenth-century literature: “our nineteenth-century forbears [sic] may well have maintained a more complex relationship to the goods by which they were surrounded and mingled”. Victorian objects can be perceived as insignificant at first sight; however, they have a great significance for understanding the context in which the text was produced as “they suggest, or reinforce, something we already know about the subjects who use them” (Freedgood 2009: 2). The particular cultural and social meaning of the Victorian objects, „critical cultural archives“, may be lost over time or reshaped by those who use them, but they still possess a metaphorical meaning that tells us a lot about the subjects who used them (Freedgood 2009: 6). Thus, things represented in novels are always historically contextualised: a close look at material things allows us to approach their cultural history and reveal their social function in the epoch when the text was produced.

### **3. The Representation of the Cotton Industry in *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell**

In Gaskell's novel *North and South*, material objects play a crucial role in the depiction of the historical background of the Victorian epoch that unfolds on the surface of textile and clothing. The descriptions of different types of cloth, from the imported Indian shawls to the local textiles, constantly appear throughout the novel and introduce different aspects of Victorian life. In the introduction to *The Ideas in Things*, Elaine Freedgood (2009) analyses Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton* on the matter of the implication that material things have for a contemporary reader. She focuses on the everyday things and the set of meanings attached to them. The scholar (2009: 65) concludes that in her fiction Gaskell addresses history via different commodities, from cotton, sugar and tobacco to tortoise shells and other exotic things, which are very important for the analysis of her literary creation. In the analysis of Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, Freedgood (2009: 63) puts a special emphasis on the cotton industrial imagery due to its social and historical importance in Victorian England. Historically speaking, cotton was the first product industrialised on the global scale:

*Cotton textiles acted as global commercial, cultural, and social connectors; they supported agrarian structures, local manufacturing economies, and systems of taxation; they were a sector of dramatic technological innovation, experimentation, and transfer; and finally they were sought-after commodities that shaped taste and material expectations of populations living across the vast Eurasian landmass and beyond* (Riello, Parthasarathi 2009: 2).

By 1825 cotton became one of the most important commodities in the world; Britain produced half of the world's cotton cloth that was imported from India, Japan, North America and Egypt. Cotton became Britain's primary import, in its raw form, and export, in its manufactured form. Thus, cotton as a fabric became a central product in the process of the textile production and distribution of British products in the world.

#### **3.1 The Fabric of the Victorian Society in *North and South***

Cotton was Britain's gate to the global textile trade and also a strong impetus for the machinery progress and the Industrial Revolution, as a result. New machinery changed the whole order of life of Victorians as its production and export became one of the most important economic forces of the British Empire. In the end of the eighteenth century, cotton mills were primarily found in the North of the country; they organised the whole life of inhabitants and had influence on the socio-political situation in the country.

As Riello and Parthasarathi (2009: 4) state, “cotton textiles often articulated a language. Such language was social and had specific expressions, vernacular uses, and syntactic structures based on taste and custom”. The textile industry also had a huge impact on Victorians’ culture and clothing etiquette. It was a specific cultural feature of Victorians who began to pay attention to both, quality and aesthetic aspects of the fabric. E. Jane Burns (2004: 1) highlights: „textiles stand at the nexus of the personal and the cultural, often linking specific, individual expressions to institutionalized and hierarchical social structures”. Burns also adds that an item of dress can be seen as an agent of cultural imagination and a sign of one’s status, class, wealth and power:

*[...] one can speak of dress, textiles, and clothwork as "cultural imaginings," as the title of this volume suggests, and can understand dress and textiles as more than consumer objects or products and cloth work as more than a form of labor (Burns 2004: 4).*

Since the beginning of *North and South*, we can notice a special attention put on the cloth and textile. Fabrics can be viewed as a thread that connects different domains of the novel: domestic and public spheres of its characters’ life, national and imperial economics of the country and internal and international commerce (Burns 2004: 2). The commodity of cloth and textile appears in dialogues, description of the places and different situations. As Brown would argue, all tangible objects that Gaskell describes in *North and South* can be viewed as a mode of self- identification of the characters of the novel, who, in turn, also attribute social and cultural meanings to the garments and fabrics they possess and use. In general, the whole cotton industry becomes a lens through which readers can come to the deeper understanding of the message transmitted by the novelist.

In the opening chapter of the novel, Mrs. Shaw asks Margaret to bring down exotic Indian shawls that will be used for her daughter Edith’s wedding and to demonstrate their beauty. When Margaret displays the shawls, the discussion of their cost and beauty occurs between Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Gibson. Mrs. Shaw sees only the exotic beauty of the fabric, while Mrs. Gibson mentions their “extravagant price” (Gaskell 1994: 5). Moreover, when Mrs. Gibson questions about the borders of the shawls, it becomes clear that she probably cannot afford to purchase one of these expensive shawls and has never seen them before: “Helen had set her heart upon an Indian shawl, but really when I found what an extravagant price was asked, I was obliged to refuse her. She will be quite envious when she hears of Edith having Indian shawls. What kind are they? Delhi? with the lovely little borders?” (Gaskell 1994: 5). Apparently, Margaret Hale and Mrs. Shaw are from the social class that possesses this expensive commodity that many other British people only heard of; however, they are interested only in the “soft feel and their brilliant colours” (Gaskell 1994: 7) of the shawls, but not their unaffordable price for most Victorians. It could be said that in the beginning of the novel Margaret was not interested in the exchange- value of the Indian shawls that her family possessed. While living in

the South, she was not aware of the amount of human labour that was used for the production and distribution of this commodity; in other words, she did not know the real price of her shawls and garments that she took for granted. Nevertheless, when Margaret moves to the industrial Milton, she gets acquainted with another side of the textile industry. In the North she meets Bessy who suffers from the lung disease and dies because of the monstrous textile manufacturing labour. Also, Margaret meets Mr. Higgins, Bessy's father, who tells Margaret more about the real situation of workers in the cotton mills:

*'Why, yo' see, there's five or six masters who have set themselves again paying the wages they've been paying these two years past, and flourishing upon, and getting richer upon. And now they come to us, and say we're to take less. And we won't. We'll just clem them to death first; and see who'll work for 'em then. They'll have killed the goose that laid 'em the golden eggs, I reckon.' [...] 'yo're but a young wench, but don't yo' think I can keep three people—that's Bessy, and Mary, and me—on sixteen shilling a week? (Gaskell 1994: 131-132)*

Thus, after Margaret's personal encounter with the effects of the textile industry on the workers, her material possessions are attached a new semantic meaning: they symbolise inhumane working conditions in which they were produced. When Margaret decides upon what garment she should put on for the Thornton dinner party, after a short discussion with her mother, Margaret says: "I feel more as if it was the embarrassment of riches" (Gaskell 1994: 147). After moving to the North, Margaret discovers another, previously hidden from her, side of the textile industry and she even feels ashamed to demonstrate her possession of the outcome of the exploitation that workers are exposed to at the cotton mills. After the dinner, Margaret says: "I felt like a great hypocrite to-night, sitting there in my white silk gown, with my idle hands before me" (Gaskell 1994: 165). Here, Margaret's white silk gown embodies the industrial world of the nineteenth century in which the working class suffers from dreadful labour conditions, while people of higher social classes are seemingly unaware of the origins of the textile production they possess. Although white is symbolic for innocence, Margaret is not that naïve: her experience in the industrial North opens her eyes and she becomes fully aware of the real price of the fabrics that her middle-class family possesses. Moreover, the white colour is widely associated with cleanness and purity: after moving to the North, Margaret begins a new meaningful life and changes the course of her life as she becomes a politically active member of the Victorian society who takes control in her own hands.

Suzanne Daly (2011: 238) notes that Indian shawls "are also a coveted gift that men returning from colonial service in India bestow upon their mothers and sisters in a move that symbolizes the fitting and desired conclusion to a man's career in India: coming home wealthy, bearing the spoils of the East even as he reenters domestic space." Thus, Mrs. Shaw's gift from her husband who was a general may have a meaning of the imperial power of the British Empire that expands to the rest of the world and

connects domestic and public, national and international spheres. The antique shawls are commodities that become a tactile representation of the international trade and the imperial expansion of the Victorian age. Moreover, the shawls passed by Mrs. Shaw to her daughter, the future wife of a Royal Naval officer, symbolise the hereditary nature of attitudes towards economic imperialism and British exploitative trade relations with India. It seems clear that Gaskell implies that the international trade has a long history of the labour exploitation that is passed down from one generation to another.

Later, the same shawls that Mrs. Gibson gave to her daughter reappear in the novel, when Margaret reads Edith's letter. Edith tells Margaret that it is too hot in Corfu to wear the shawl that she brought:

*I tried to wear my great beauty Indian shawl at a picnic. I kept myself up as long as I could, "Pride must abide," and such wholesome pieces of pith...but it was of no use. I was like mamma's little dog smothered with an elephants trappings on – smothered, hidden, killed with my finery, so I made it into a capital carpet for us to sit down upon" (Gaskell 1994: 231).*

Edith's choice of words "killed" and "smothered" evokes associations with the life of the working class that produced these shawls: people spent long working hours on the cotton mills where they suffered and died from illnesses that were provoked by poor working conditions in the factory and the air polluted environment of the industrial cities. The industrial economy changed Victorians' living and working conditions: it became a matter of the social exploitation of men, women and even children. Less fortunate citizens who had to work at the mills were exposed to arduous physical work for a miserable payment. Thus, the presence of textile in *North and South* symbolises the rise of the industrial economy that increased social inequality.

The youngest victim of the industrialisation in the novel is Bessy Higgins, a girl who falls fatally ill with consumption after working at the cotton mill:

*I began to work in a carding-room soon after, and the fluff got into my lungs, and poisoned me [. . .] Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff (Gaskell 1994: 100).*

Her lungs are destroyed by the fluff that fills the air of the cotton mill. Bessy also mentions other workers who swallow the fluff in order to alleviate hunger: "I've heard tell o' men who didn't like working places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it mad 'em hungry, at after they'd been long used to swallowing fluff" (Gaskell 1994: 100). Workers are poisoned by the waste of their own labour; they are victims of the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. The novelist demonstrates how the commodity produced at the cotton mill literally kills employees who have no more strength to fight against all social injustices. They are left no choice, but to accept their working environment just as they cannot resist inhaling the fluff, the outcome of their own labour. Thus,

Gaskell's depiction of the cotton fluff serves as an emblem of the damage that Industrialisation caused to the working class. Bessy Higgins is Gaskell's critique of the manufacturing industry in which working class suffered and died from their hard and unhealthy labour in order to produce fashionable products for people who do not even know their real price. While Edith is „killed“ and „smothered“ by the shawl that was used as carpet, Bessy Higgins literally dies because of working on the harmful to health cotton manufacture. This way, textile can be viewed as a metaphor of class inequality and social injustice: working class experience dangerous effects of the textile manufacturing, while upper class enjoys the comfort and beauty of their shawls.

Nevertheless, the working class of the Northern Milton should not be perceived as being spineless: they have courage to claim their rights even at the expense of their own. Workers organise a riot and come to Mr. Thornton's home to demand better working conditions. Only together they feel powerful enough to speak for themselves. Gaskell describes rioters as “angry sea of men” with “myriads of fierce indignant voices” (Gaskell 1994: 169): just like machines, employees act as one apparatus, not as individuals. In his essay *Signs of the Times*, Thomas Carlyle considered industrial progress and machinery manufacturing as an evil mechanism that deprived people of their human nature converting them into the mass that is controlled not by feelings, but by that machinery force:

*Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. <...> Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind. (Carlyle 1829: 4)*

In *North and South*, we can notice this mechanisation of human beings in the industrial economy that Thomas Carlyle talks about in his essay. Thus, in an attempt to be perceived as individuals with their own rights and needs, workers of the Milton cotton mill act as an inhumane mass that tries to communicate to masters, but it is impossible until both sides will be able to perceive each other as individuals who have their own reasons to pose certain conditions related to both masters and men.

Apart from being a litmus paper of the Victorian society, textile also connects different social classes of the nineteenth century England. People from upper and working classes perceive cloth and textile from their own unique perspective, but they are still all related to the cotton industry. In *North and South*, textile can be seen as the link between Margaret and inhabitants of the industrial Milton. For instance, Margaret gets acquainted with girls who work at the factory because of their interest to her garment:

*The girls, with their rough, but not unfriendly freedom, would comment on her dress, even touch her shawl or gown to ascertain the exact material; nay, once or twice she was asked questions relative to some article which they particularly admired (Gaskell 1994: 68).*

Milton girls touch and comment upon Margaret's shawls, they admire its exquisite material; and this scene may remind readers the first chapter in which Margaret act as a model to demonstrate the beauty of the Indian shawls to Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Gibson. In these two scenes, Gaskell points out how textile acts as a common thread between people of the Northern working class and the Southern middle class.

In conclusion, textile products become a matter of practicing a particular kind of relationship between industrial world and human lives. In Gaskell's novel, material objects literally define the life of the inhabitants of the mill town and even highlight the change of Margaret Hale's attitudes and values. Margaret Hale can be viewed as a common thread between the industrial North and the rural South. Textile connects Margaret to the North and it is her unique way of exploring it: from meeting the girls who discussed her cloth to her friendship with Bessy. Cotton manufactured goods changed Margaret's way of thinking and her opinions on many issues. In contrast to her mother, Margaret turned out to be flexible enough to accept the truth about the social reality of the nineteenth-century England without sinking into stereotypical thinking typical for people from the upper and middle classes. After the death of Bessy, Margaret invites Higgins to talk to her father about the atrocious labour conditions that employees of the cotton mills are exposed to: "let us know each other and speak freely to each other about these things, and the truth will prevail" (Gaskell 1994: 223). Margaret becomes a thread between two social classes: she initiates a direct dialogue between masters and men and sees the resolution of the conflict in the open communication and intention to understand each other. It becomes clear that through the character of Margaret, Gaskell provides a possible solution to the problematic social issues of the Victorian England: members of different social classes should realise that they co- dependent upon each other as they are a part of the same society; therefore, they should respect each other and value each other's contribution to the whole industrial system, and an open dialogue would be the first step towards it. Also, through the images of cloth that Margaret Hale wears, discusses and exchanges, readers learn about different sides of the cotton manufacturing industry: on the one hand, fabrics can be viewed as a symbol of wealth and power; however, on the other hand, they are absolutely useless for employees who face low wages and unsafe working conditions.

### **3.2 Female Identity in the Textile Industry**

In the previous chapter the relationship between different social classes of the industrialised North and the agricultural South in Victorian England were examined through the appearance of material objects in the narrative fabric of the novel *North and South*. Gaskell depicts the social conflict between employers and workers by creating a strong female character of Margaret Hale who embodies a thread



as a social metaphor as she acts as a connecting link between masters and men, working and middle classes, domestic and public spheres of life of a Victorian woman. The novel traces Margaret's self-development and personal transformation from a puerile girl to an independent woman who is able to speak for herself and stand up for what she considers right. Thus, in *North and South* Gaskell also raises a topical for the nineteenth century England question of gender inequality and stereotypes presented through different descriptions of textile.

In fact, Indian shawls occupied an important place in Victorian culture and literature. Feminist studies often view textile as an important trope as it offers a multi-layered interpretation of the domestic and public spheres of women's life. As Reynolds and Humble (1993: 60) point out, "The Indian shawl is too important a garment to be merely frivolous, it echoes the strength and passion of the woman that wears it". It is also described as a garment that "betokens female power and agency" (Reynolds, Humble 1993: 60). Thus, textile has converted into a medium through which one can analyse the female identity in the nineteenth century as Victorian women were particularly engaged with textile production in absolutely different ways: from domestic needlework and possession of fabric to labour on the cotton mills.

The novel *North and South* traces Margaret's transformation from a typical Victorian Southern girl who spends her days around needlework to an independent married woman who owns a textile mill. Margaret's living conditions and changing attitudes are interwoven with the representation of the shawls she wears and the prosperity of the Milton textile mills. First, we meet Margaret in the rural southern Helstone when she demonstrates exotic Indian shawls to her aunt. In the opening chapter, Gaskell provides the following description of Margaret Hale:

*Margaret's tall, finely made figure, in the black silk dress that she was wearing as mourning for some distant relative of her father's, set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawls that would have half-smothered Edith. Margaret stood right under the chandelier, quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjusted the draperies. Occasionally, as she was turned round, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there – the familiar features in the usual garb of a princess. She touched the shawls gently as they hung around her, and took a pleasure in their soft feel and their brilliant colours, and rather liked to be dressed in such splendour – enjoying it much as a child would do, with a quiet pleased smile on her lips* (Gaskell 1994: 7).

In this scene Margaret admires the quality and beauty of the shawls and enjoys touching and trying them on. As we can notice, Margaret is described as "quite silent and passive": she is dressed by Mrs. Shaw with "gorgeous shawls" and does not resist that. Here, Gaskell seems to reveal Margaret's attitude towards the female gender role in the patriarchal Victorian society in the beginning of her life path in the South. Margaret remains silent and submissive and let other people decide for her;

however, it is clear that she feels comfortable with it as she “rather liked to be dressed in such splendour”. It could be said that Margaret’s identity is shaped by tangible objects that surrounds her; moreover, she herself fulfills the function of the object, and her passive behaviour further strengthens her image as an object. As it was mentioned previously, in Brown’s terms, material objects and human subjects are cross- referential as human subject identify themselves through the tangible objects they possess and at the same time they attach a particular social meaning to those object. Thus, Gaskell seems to imply that the decorative function of the objects that surrounded Victorian women and were associated with female domestic domain extended to the female personal identity in the nineteenth century and, this way, determined the social role of women.

However, in the industrial North Margaret becomes more aware of the true price of the exquisite fabric and that initiates the process of her self- understanding and empowerment. Margaret becomes more than just a model that can be dressed according to other’s taste; she takes the responsibility of her own life and life of those around her. She grows out of her function as an object and acquires her own identity. Gaskell presents Margaret Hale as a strong and independent woman who is interested not only in a traditional for a Victorian woman domestic sphere of life, but also in the public life of the industrial Milton. She is eager to learn about the industrial world with its struggles and tensions; this way, she wants to become a part of a male world and eventually she achieves that. Furthermore, Margaret is not just a part of this male- dominated environment, she actively participates in it: after the strike at the cotton mill, when Higgins was fired, Margaret sends him to Mr. Thornton in order to come to a consensus. Thus, Margaret breaks the gender norms by taking interest in socio- political problems and actively participates in the public sphere.

Although the plot of *North and South* is concentrated around Margaret Hale’s personal transformation in the industrial North, there is also another female character whose life is closely related to the textile industry. Bessy Higgin is also a part of the industrial world driven by men. According to Beth English (2013: 67), “women employed in the textile manufacture regularly worked long hours for low wages in atrocious labour conditions due to different processes such as the movement of technology from the North to the South and the development of global supply chains”. Bessy Higgins is a young girl who dies from the lung disease that she developed after working in the cotton mill: her life was sacrificed on behalf of the Industrialisation. As Bessy tells, mill owners did not want to spend money on purchasing the wheel that would save lives of thousands of workers: “Some folk have a great wheel at one end o’ their carding-rooms to make a draught, and carry off th’ dust; but that wheel costs a deal of money—five or six hundred pounds, maybe, and brings in no profit; so it’s but a few of th’ masters as will put ’em up” (Gaskell 1994: 100). Bessy was treated as an instrument of labour by mill owners: against her will, the girl performed a function of a wheel and consumed the cotton fluff that ultimately

killed her. It could be said that Bessy was deprived of her human agency and became an object of Industrialisation at the expense of amplifying the agency of cotton fluff. However, in Brown's terms, when Bessy dies, she loses her functional value and becomes just a thing with no purpose for the whole cotton industry. Thus, Bessy can be seen as a female victim in the male manufacturing industry; she pays the price of her life for participating in a public sphere that is traditionally occupied by men.

It is common knowledge that in the nineteenth century women began to question their traditional roles; nevertheless, they still faced a lot of gender stereotypes that held them to the domestic sphere. According to Maureen Moran (2006: 35), "in Victorian culture, women were idolized, protected and oppressed". The ideal woman was presented as an "angel of the house": her role was to give birth to children, raise them and manage the house. In other words, Victorian women were confined to the domestic sphere of life. In *North and South*, Gaskell expresses this archaic tendency by mentioning Margaret's and Fanny's needlework. In the eighteenth chapter, Gaskell describes the scene in which Mr. Thornton and his mother discuss socio-political situation in the country, while Fanny is occupied with her needlework:

*Candles had been brought, and Fanny had taken up her interminable piece of worsted-work, over which she was yawning; throwing herself back in her chair, from time to time to gaze at vacancy, and think of nothing at her ease* (Gaskell 1994: 142).

Fanny expresses her boredom ("yawns"), so it seems like she is bored with her traditional role in a male world. She is expected to sit quietly and do her traditional female work. Fanny performs this traditional gender role; however, she does not seem happy about her occupation and it does not give her much pleasure as she "thinks of nothing at her ease". Moreover, the girl does not participate in the conversation about the tense relationship between masters and men: it seems like she is simply not given any details about what happens at the cotton mill, although it is also closely related to her daily life. On the one hand, although Fanny's needlework can be perceived as something small and insignificant comparing to the whole cotton manufacturing, it is still a part of this industrial world that she lives in. Thus, Victorian women are presented as being a part of the cotton industry driven by men, but they are not allowed to participate in it, their destiny is to remain in the shadow of men.

In the fortieth chapter Margaret Hale is also depicted sitting under her needlework while Mr. Bell, Mr. Thornton and her father discuss political issues. Unlike Fanny, Margaret does not let Victorian gender stereotypes to restrain her own potential: she has her own opinion that she is not afraid to express. However, when Mr. Thornton makes a bitter comment, Margaret uses her needlework as a defensive mechanism that allows her to escape the further confrontation:

*But she neither looked nor spoke. Her round taper fingers flew in and out of her sewing, as steadily and swiftly as if that were the business of her life. She could not*

*care for him, he thought, or else the passionate fervour of his wish would have forced her to raise those eyes, if but for an instant, to read the late repentance in his* (Gaskell 1994: 329).

Margaret deliberately chooses to stop participating in the political conversation between men and concentrate on her sewing, traditional female occupation. In this manner, Margaret's behaviour reminds us Fanny's behaviour who also does not participate in the political conversation between her mother and brother. Both women seem to be marginalized and restrained to their needlework and their domestic sphere. Although it is clear that Margaret has a strong opinion on the discussed topic and is eager to express it, she realises that keeping her thoughts to herself and pretending to be engaged with a more suitable to a woman business would be a better choice. We can make a parallel between Margaret's behaviour and all other Victorian women who passed their days being excluded not only from important political conversations, but also from many other public spheres of life.

Moreover, needlework embodies the knowledge that is passed down from mother to daughter. In this simple action, mothers not only taught their daughters to sew, but also transmitted their traditional female role in Victorian society. Example of this textile heritage from mother to daughter can be seen in the act of passing down the shawls. For instance, Mrs. Shaw and her daughter Edith are both married to military men. Mrs. Shaw gives her Indian shawls to her daughter who accepts them and, as a consequence, she accepts her place in the patriarchal Victorian society. However, later Edith finds her mother's shawls too uncomfortable for her new life in Corfu as she feels to be "smothered, hidden, killed" (Gaskell 1994: 231) with her finery. By possessing the finery Edith accepts her domestic identity, but as time passes, she feels that it constrains her. Thus, Gaskell attaches different agencies to the textile industry and needlework: while the textile industry embodies the public sphere of life, needlework represents Victorian women's life of domesticity. Needlework is presented as a traditional female occupation, while men are associated with more global activities. However, it could be said that Margaret Hale blurs the line between the private and public spheres of Victorian women's life: she is engaged with needlework, but at the same time she enters into the public life of the industrial North. This division into public and private spheres of Victorian social life represented through the depiction of needlework and the textile industry reflects Gaskell's vision of Victorian womanhood.

There is also another exchange of foreign textiles in the novel: Spanish mantillas that Frederick sends to Margaret in the letter in which he announces about his marriage with a Spanish woman Dolores. In Spanish culture mantilla is a traditional silk veil that is worn over the woman's head and shoulder. According to Zanardi (2013: 139), in the nineteenth century black mantilla was an important element in the identity creation in visual arts, so it can be often noticed in the famous pictures by Goya who believed that mantilla was "one of the most engaging aspects of Spanish dress, an accessory that could

tantalize the male viewer by simultaneously hiding and revealing the face and torso” (Ribeiro as cited in Zanardi 2013: 140). In his art, Goya depicted a mantilla as a stylish modern Spanish woman’s garment that „optimizes her Spanish heritage and her interest in cosmopolitan fashion” (Zanardi 2013: 140). Before the seventeenth century, this garment was worn only by women from the upper class, but later women from all social classes began to wear mantillas for social visits, promenades and religious ceremonies. This item of cloth was a symbol of femininity and Spanish female identity. As it was traditionally manufactured by women for other women, the production of mantillas was in absolute female control in the patriarchal Spanish society; therefore, it became a mode to proclaim female identity (Zanardi 2013: 141). Moreover, by the end of the eighteenth century, silk lace mantillas appeared on the Spanish market. They were the most expensive and desirable by Spanish women for their material and hand- crafted production (Zanardi 2013: 141). As Zanardi (2013: 141) points out, „lace mantillas were predominantly produced by women since lace-making production in Spain occurred outside the strictly guarded and male- dominated guilds“.

In *North and South* mantilla serves as a textile- based language between two women that Margaret perfectly understands: “Dolores must be charming and the mantilla was exquisite!” (Gaskell 1994: 337). She perceives the gift as a sign of a newly established friendship. Mantilla converts into a universal symbol of the transnational relationships between two women who come from different cultures, but speak the same language of exquisite fabrics and textile. By choosing this particular garment, Dolores demonstrates her cosmopolitan identity that she thinks can be related to Margaret. In this manner, the mantilla serves as a cultural code shared by the female characters of the novel. This piece of clothing is attached a particular significance by Margaret and Dolores; thus, from a thing without any functional value mantilla converts into an object that is imbued with agency. Gaskell seems to employ the image of the Spanish mantilla in order to metaphorically connect women from different cultures on the basis of their common understanding of the value of textile as a symbol of female power in the male- dominated society. Thus, the novelist questions the traditional domestic sphere of interest of Victorian women as globalisation, triggered by the Industrialisation and international commerce, changed female identity: the exchange of the material goods demonstrated a new cosmopolitan identity of women of the nineteenth century. Moreover, in light of the complicated relationship between England and Spain in the nineteenth century, it could be said that Dolores’s gift of mantilla embodies the possibilities to strengthen relations between two countries. As Margaret accepts the gift and appreciates it, Gaskell suggests that this improvement in England’s relations with Spain is possible in case of mutual desire of both countries to initiate transnational dialogue. Thus, mantilla is no more just a thing; it becomes an object imbued with agency as it obtains a specific function in the transatlantic relationships between two women.

Furthermore, in *North and South* textile serves as a cultural bridge between women from different social classes. In the eighth chapter Margaret meets Milton girls who do not talk to Margaret directly, but by discussing and touching her cloth, they establish a connection between them. Milton girls cannot afford themselves to purchase such exquisite garments, but they appreciate their value and beauty. Another instance of the use of textile in establishing relationship between Margaret and other female character from the working class is Margaret's friendship with Bessy. In the thirteenth chapter, Gaskell provides an important scene in which Margaret comes to visit Bessy who in spite of her poor health admires Margaret's cloth: "Bessy [lies] back silent, and content to look at Margaret's face, and touch her articles of dress, with a childish admiration of their fineness of texture" (Gaskell 1994: 98). Margaret's garment is the only tangible object that connects her to Bessy: their friendship began with Bessy's admiration of Margaret's cloth and ended with Margaret's parting present to Bessy. Thus, it could be said that Margaret's clothes embody female friendship and rapport. Bessy's and Margaret's friendship is built on the shared knowledge of textile: Bessy's silent gesture of touching Margaret's cloth discloses their wordless communication by using the common language of textile. Although in the beginning of the novel Margaret perceives the textile industry from different perspectives, her friendship with Bessy allows her to broaden her knowledge and awareness of the other sides of the Industrial progress: Margaret's encounter with women from the working class opens her eyes on the sufferings that the working class was exposed to; the fabric-based language shared by the female characters of the novel helps Margaret on her way of self-development as only after her communication with working women of Milton, she realises that fine garments and exquisite materials are not just a source of pleasure, but they also a cause of workers' sufferings and hardships.

To conclude, Gaskell presents the topic of female identity in the patriarchal Victorian society through Margaret Hale, who can be called a model of a "New Woman". She chooses to actively participate in the social life of the country and tries to change the world around her for the better. Margaret fulfills traditional female role, but her interests do not end with it, she is interested in more than just sitting at home and sewing. She is eager to participate in both private and public spheres of Milton social life. As it was mentioned previously, Margaret initiates the conversation between masters and men and even participates in the riot as a mediator between them. Even the description of the damage that she gets in the riot ("the thread of dark-red blood") reflects her role of a peacemaker between masters and men of the cotton mill:

*They were watching, open-eyed and open-mouthed, the thread of dark-red blood which wakened them up from their trance of passion. Those nearest the gate stole out ashamed; there was a movement through all the crowd—a retreating movement* (Gaskell 1994: 177).

Margaret was not afraid to stand up for what she considered right and by her feminine power and great courage she managed to calm the whole crowd of workers down. Through the cloth-related metaphors, Gaskell expresses her opinion that the social peace in the country is impossible without a strong figure of a woman who has a voice and courage to act as an independent and equal member of the society.

Nevertheless, Margaret Hale is not an only strong female character in the novel: Mrs. Thornton is another powerful female figure in the male-dominated environment of the industrial town of Milton. When Margaret and her mother first meet Mrs. Thornton, Mrs. Hale pays attention at Mrs. Thornton's attire:

*Mrs. Hale was making rather more exertion in her answers, captivated by some real old lace which Mrs. Thornton wore; "lace," as she afterwards observed to Dixon, "of that old English point which has not been made for this seventy years, and which cannot be bought. It must have been an heir-loom, and shows that she had ancestors"* (Gaskell 1994: 94).

Here, Mrs. Hale emphasises the hereditary nature of Mrs. Thornton's attire. As it was mentioned earlier, according to Bill Brown (2015), human subjects identify themselves through their possession and use of different tangible objects. Thus, it could be stated that Mrs. Thornton's identity is created through her possession of the antique lace that "shows that she had ancestors". Moreover, Mrs. Thornton's past and present is connected through the old lace that she inherited and still wears. The old lace embodies family bonds that are respected and maintained by Mrs. Thornton; once again Gaskell seems to highlight the hereditary nature of a traditional female domestic sphere of interest passed down from one generation to another.

Nevertheless, it is undoubtful Mrs. Thornton can be associated with both public and domestic spheres of the Victorian female life: she runs the mill together with her son, but at the same time she is a good mother who raised her child and managed a household without any male support. Thus, at the first sight, Margaret and Mrs. Thornton may appear to have nothing in common; however, after observing their conduct in critical situation, it can be concluded that these two female characters both represent the ideal of the "New Woman". They are both active and independent members of society who are not afraid to entry the public sphere and see their duty in resolving the conflict between masters and men. In the fifteenth chapter, Mrs. Thornton tells Margaret about her participation in one of workers' protest, during which she joined factories owners on the roof in order to help them:

*Milton is not the place for cowards. I have known the time when I have had to thread my way through a crowd of white, angry men, all swearing they would have Makinson's blood as soon as he ventured to show his nose out of his factory; and he, knowing nothing of it, some one had to go and tell him, or he was a dead man; and it needed to be a woman,—so I went. And when I got in, I could not get out. It was as much as my life was worth. So I went up to the roof, where there were stones piled*

*ready to drop on the heads of the crowd, if they tried to force the factory doors. And I would have lifted those heavy stones, and dropped them with as good an aim as the best man there, but that I fainted with the heat I had gone through. If you live in Milton, you must learn to have a brave heart, Miss Hale* (Gaskell 1994: 114).

Mrs. Thornton realised her female power in the male conflict: she sees her self- assigned female role to mediate, conciliate and act as a social facilitator in resolving the conflict between masters and men. Once again, we can notice the image of the thread in Mrs. Thornton story: Gaskell seems to imply that it is impossible to solve the social conflict of the nineteenth century without strong and independent female characters like Margaret Hale and Mrs. Thornton.

### **3.3 Faith and Fabric in *North and South***

As it was mentioned in the Introduction, a great scientific progress and industrialisation of the Victorian age resulted in the crisis of the religious faith. Gaskell also touches upon this problematic issue of the nineteenth century: the novelist expresses her concerns through the description of Mr. Hale's resignation, Frederick's conversion into Catholicism, Bessy's prayers and other situations that have to be discussed in this chapter of the present MA thesis. Furthermore, it is impossible to discuss religion without any mention of cloth as there is a peculiar relationship between religious ceremonies and textile commodities. As Riello and Parthasarathi (2009: 4) mention, the imported Indian cotton and silk textiles were usually used in religious rituals; thus, they were attached a new meaning by Victorians: they became a part of their religious life.

Before analysing the theme of the religious crisis in *North and South*, it is important to mention that Elizabeth Gaskell held Unitarian beliefs. Gaskell's father was a Unitarian minister who eventually left the ministry because of his personal religious doubts. Also, the novelist was married to a Unitarian minister who was a lecturer at the Working Men's College. Gaskell and her husband shared the interest in socio- political situation in the country: they actively participated in the social life of Victorian England and were preoccupied with the level of living of the working class (Lansbury 1984: 5).

Unitarianism is a liberal religious movement open to any beliefs and doubts. It is a branch of Christianity that denies a traditional view of God being a Trinity:

*Whatever names it has borne, by its adherents and its doctrinal theology, as it has usually been regarded, alike opponents from the standpoint of movement or a sect characterized primarily by certain beliefs about the being of God and the person of Christ. It is true that it has from the beginning generally had such doctrinal associations. It has from first to last been anti-trinitarian, or at least un-trinitarian, if*



*the Nicene and Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity be taken as standard (Wilbur 1952: 4).*

The Spanish theologian Servetus, one of the first leaders of Unitarianism, was the first to describe the Unitarian approach in his works “On the Errors of the Trinity” (1531) and “The Restitution of Christianity” (1553). Like other Unitarians, Servetus emphasised the importance of religious freedom, social justice and interconnectedness. Unitarians believe that every person should have a right to believe in what he considers right, and the religious truth should not be imposed by any religious institution or Church ministers. Although this new form of Christianity caused much criticism on behalf of Victorians, there were many Anglicans who supported this movement. When in 1662 the Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity that prescribed that all public worship ought to be conducted as it was prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, more than two thousand clergymen refused to conform to this Act and were excluded from the Church (Wilbur 1952: 210).

As Margaret Hale changes her attitudes towards many things after the move to the North, so does her father regarding religious faith. His change of attitudes towards religion was accompanied by his decision to move from the traditional South to the industrial North. Mr. Hale denied his convictions and resigned from the Church; like many Victorians, he found it impossible to maintain his traditional religious life and experienced a crisis of faith: “I can meet the consequences of my painful, miserable doubts; but it is an effort beyond me to speak of what has caused me so much suffering” (Gaskell 1994: 31). Mr. Hale does not explain to his family his choice to resign from the Church that at first sight seems to be rather unmotivated. It is clear that Mr. Hale still believes in God when he says: “No! not doubts as to religion; not the slightest injury to that” (Gaskell 1994: 31). Thus, readers can conclude that his decision was motivated by his attitudes towards the Church order and his “smouldering doubts by the authority of the Church” (Gaskell 1994: 31). Mr. Hale’s resignation from the Church functions as a pretext to his family’s move to the industrial North and, at the same time, as an introduction to the topic of the religious crisis in Victorian England that is developed later in the novel.

Gaskell portrays Mr. Hale and Margaret as Unitarians who get to know people from lower classes: they are eager to know their way of living and always express kindness and compassion towards them. For instance, when Hales move to the North, Margaret meets Nicholas Higgins and his terminally ill daughter Bessy who live in poor conditions and experience financial hardship. Margaret spends a lot of time with Bessy: she understands how important their friendship is for the girl and never rejects Bessy’s invitations to meet: “Bessy roused herself and said,— 'I'll go to bed,—it's best place; but,' catching at Margaret's gown, 'yo'll come again,—I know yo' will—but just say it!' 'I will come tomorrow, said Margaret” (Gaskell 1994: 89). When Bessy dies, Nicholas Higgins is overwhelmed with

his grief. He drinks to forget his pain and starts to behave in an aggressive manner: “It's my own house. Stand out o' the way, wench, or I'll make yo'!” He had shaken off Mary with violence; he looked ready to strike Margaret” (Gaskell 1994: 217). Nevertheless, Margaret does not leave him alone; she takes control in her own hands and brings him home to her father who provides Nicholas Higgins moral support:

*Margaret was a little surprised, and very much pleased, when she found her father and Higgins in earnest conversation—each speaking with gentle politeness to the other, however their opinions might clash. Nicholas—clean, tidied (if only at the pump-trough), and quiet spoken—was a new creature to her, who had only seen him in the rough independence of his own hearthstone* (Gaskell 1994: 222).

Furthermore, one of the core values of Unitarians was the unity of humankind: they believed that people should be united and help each other. Margaret is the first one to provoke a conversation between employers and employees of the cotton mill as she considers that only an open dialogue between them can be a possible solution to the social conflict of Victorian England. She expresses this idea during her conversation with Mr. Thornton that is described in the fifteenth chapter. Mr. Thornton explains that there are serious reasons why masters cannot afford to pay higher wages, but he also mentions that he is not going to explain those reasons to his employees even in order to prevent direct confrontation. However, Margaret disagrees with him and says: “[...] you are a man, dealing with a set of men over whom you have, whether you reject the use of it or not, immense power, just because your lives and your welfare are so constantly and intimately interwoven. God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent” (Gaskell 1994: 119). The choice of the verb “interwoven” is peculiar in the present context: once again we can notice a tight tie between religion and the whole textile industry of the industrial Milton.

Moreover, after her move to the North, Margaret becomes friends with Bessy and gets to know Mr. Higgins. When Bessy is ill, Margaret cares about her and comes to visit her. During their meetings, a strong religious motif can be noticed: Bessy often quotes from Bible and once talks about her future after death as it is presented in the Sacred Book. Once during one of Margaret's visits, Bessy notices the beauty of Margaret's item of dress and says in admiration: “I never knew why folk in the Bible cared for soft raiment afore. But it must be nice to go dressed as yo' do” (Gaskell 1994: 98). Even in the religious context, there is a mention of textile; all Bessy's life was concentrated around the textile manufacturing production: faith and fabrics are tightly interwoven in her life. When Bessy dies, her sister asks Margaret to give something from her clothes as it was Bessy's death wish. Dixon suggests Margaret to give her a night cup that she does not need, but for Margaret this last gift to Bessy means more than just a piece of cloth. As for Bessy her afterlife was an important issue, this textile gift signifies a soft farewell with the girl who was killed by the cotton manufacturing industry.

Although Bessy maintained her faith in God in spite of her tragic fate, the vast majority of Victorians of the lower class experienced religious crisis. As Inglis (2007: 13) states, Unitarians did not try to reach the working classes: “the Unitarians, although not as exclusive, were similarly uninterested in evangelizing the masses; theirs, G. M. Trevelyan remarks, was a faith likely to be taken up by the mill-owner but not by his workmen”. Thus, the crisis of the religious faith was a particularly problematic issue in big manufacturing cities where attendances were lowest:

*The areas in which worship was least popular included every large cotton town [...]. In a score of the largest towns in England fewer than one person in ten, according to estimates made in the report, attended any place of worship on census Sunday (Inglis 2007: 1).*

It can be stated that in the nineteenth century the church lost its connections with the working and lower classes; Victorian religious life of the working classes was characterised by the ‘spiritual destitution’ as most of neglecters of religion belonged to the working population.

The industrial Milton is filled with people from the working class, and Bessy’s father is one of them. Nicholas Higgins is a member of the working class who raises even more doubt about religion in Mr. Hale’s mind. Like other Victorians from the working class, Nicholas Higgins has a crisis of faith and sees no reason to believe in God. When Mr. Hale asks him about his religious beliefs, Higgins admits that he does not believe in “any other life than this, in which she [Bessy] dreed such trouble” (Gaskell, 1994: 224). He does not approve when his daughter Bessy discusses with Margaret her reading of the book of Revelation: “But if it amuses her I let it be, but I’m none going to have more stuff poured into her” (Gaskell 1994: 88). As Nicholas explains, the inhabitants of the North simply do not have time to think about religious questions as they are more concerned with earning money to complete their basic needs: “They don’t believe i’ the Bible,—not they. They may say they do, for form’s sake [...] The purse and the gold and the notes is real things; things as can be felt and touched; them’s realities; and eternal life is all a talk [...]” (Gaskell 1994: 223). Textile manufacturing industry consumed all his time and did not leave him energy to maintain his faith in God. As discussed earlier, unlike her father, Bessy Higgins is not a neglecter: “‘Bessy—we have a Father in Heaven.’ ‘I know it! I know it,’ moaned she” (Gaskell 1994: 99); she often quotes from the Bible and believes in destination and afterlife. However, she also has doubts:

*‘Sometimes, when I’ve thought o’ my life, and the little pleasure I’ve had in it, I’ve believed that, maybe, I was one of those doomed to die by the falling of a star from heaven; ... One can bear pain and sorrow better if one thinks it has been prophesied long before for one: somehow, then it seems as if my pain was needed for the fulfilment; otherways it seems all sent for nothing’ (Gaskell 1994: 135).*

Bessy tries to maintain her faith in God, but difficult living conditions and illness affect her faith in God. Thus, Gaskell maps out the reasons of the religious crisis in Victorian England: the working class struggles for living and simply have neither necessity nor desire to think about religion and their faith in God. As Higgins puts it, “I believe what I see, and no more” (Gaskell 1994: 88). In other words, the novelist presents Victorians’ religious crisis as an evil outcome of industrialisation. As Thomas Carlyle (1829: 1) points out, religion was “lost” due to the mechanisation of the Victorian society in which “for all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep”.

Although industrialisation enormously affected Victorians’ attitude towards religion, it was not the only reason of the crisis of faith in the nineteenth century. Frederick Hale, Margaret’s brother, consciously decides to abandon the Protestant Church in order to cut off all ties to his past in England. When Frederick was young, he served in the British Navy under a cruel officer; therefore, Frederick and his companions tried to stand up for themselves. However, the mutiny did not result in anything good: most of his companions were executed and Frederick was lucky to save his life as long as he does not return to England. This way, he starts a completely new life in Spain where he marries a Spanish woman and converts into Catholicism. Frederick announces about his wedding in a letter to which he attaches a black mantilla that was chosen by his wife Dolores. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, mantilla is a Spanish traditional silk veil that was worn for social events and religious ceremonies. According to Zanardi (2013: 140), mantillas were manufactured in a huge variety of styles and fabrics, and each colour and ornament carried a specific meaning. Black lace mantilla represents deep Spanish religious roots, because Spanish women had to wear it in order to enter the church. Although in most cultures black colour is a symbol of mourning, in Spain this colour does not carry this significance:

*While the wearing of black has typically been associated with mourning, its use in Spain has a different historic significance. The Renaissance author Baldasare Castiglione praised the Spanish preference for black as a courtly example to emulate. He noted the colour’s relationship to the characterization of Spaniards as dignified and solemn [...] (Zanardi 2013: 153).*

Thus, Dolores’s gift of a black mantilla symbolises her sense of pride in her cultural and religious roots. Also, in spite of the tension in the relationship between Spain and England, Dolores expresses her desire to initiate a dialogue between two cultures in order to resolve a long- lasting conflict between two denominations of Christianity. This way, mantilla embodies possibilities of reunification of two denomination of Christianity. As Margaret accepts this gift, Gaskell seems to believe that this resolution of the tension between Protestantism and Catholicism is possible via an open dialogue with mutual respect.

In conclusion, by presenting different beliefs through Margaret's eyes Gaskell acknowledges that there are different religious perspectives that should be equally respected. In the industrial North of the nineteenth century there is no place for religious beliefs: its inhabitants are more concerned with their survival in the textile manufacturing world. The contrast between traditional South and industrialised North shows how the progress of the nineteenth century changed Victorians' attitudes towards many aspects of their life including their religious faith. Without directly criticising the Church of England, Gaskell expresses her opinion about the urgent need to reform it through the depiction of various material objects.

## 4. Conclusions

The Victorian era brought a lot of major changes in both public and private life of British people. It would be no exaggeration to say that the nineteenth century was the period of time that changed people's values and attitudes towards many aspects such as religion, woman's role in society, social inequality and others. The Victorian writers found their own unique "rhyme of acceptance and denial" of the reality (Timko 1975: 626): they recognised the evils of Industrialisation and its effects on the working class. The Victorian novelists saw their noble duty in revealing injustices of the day in an attempt to encourage society towards the higher good. They openly criticised atrocious working conditions, child labour, gender inequality and many other issues that needed to be urgently solved. Elizabeth Gaskell, one of the most highly-regarded novelists of Victorian literature, was not an exception: in *North and South*, the novelist reflects the material reality of the nineteenth century British society exploring its pressing problems. The main goal of the present thesis was to examine the issues of the social conflict, stereotypical gender roles and religious crisis in Victorian England as conveyed through the representation of the textile imagery in Gaskell's novel *North and South*. In order to achieve this aim, first of all, cloth and textile industrial images were identified; then, they were analysed on the matter of their relevance to the issues of religion, gender and social classes that are important for the better understanding of the novel's subtext.

Textile is an important narrative trope in Gaskell's novel *North and South*: the descriptions of textile and cloth constantly appear throughout the novel and introduce different aspects of the Victorian life. Fabrics can be viewed as a thread that connects different domains of the novel: domestic and public life of its characters, national and imperial economies of the country and internal and international commerce. Depending on their forms and colours, different garments transmit diverse cultural meanings. Cotton and the whole textile manufacture converted into a specific language that circulated among Victorians from different social classes. For instance, through her experience of living in the Northern cotton mill town and her encounters with cotton, from a raw material to manufactured cloth, the protagonist of the novel, Margaret Hale, has an opportunity to discover the negative outcomes of industrialisation; she learns about the real labour and life conditions in which people from the working class spend their days. Also, Margaret meets Bessy Higgins, a young victim of industrialisation, who dies from the lung disease after working at the harmful to health cotton mill. Bessy was deprived of her agency in the industrial North as she was treated as an instrument of labour by mill owners who cared only about their income and did not pay attention to workmen's health risks. Furthermore, from the opening chapter of the novel, readers can notice a special emphasis put on the exotic Indian shawls that Margaret and her aunt possess. At the beginning of the novel, Margaret is not interested in the

exploitative nature of her shawls; however, after she moves to the industrial North, she gets acquainted with the effects of the textile industry on the workers. This way, a new semantic meaning is attached to Margaret's material possessions: garments symbolise severe social exploitation and unhealthy labour conditions in which they were manufactured.

Also, it is important to mention that in *North and South* cloth and textile became a means of communication between women from different social classes and cultures. Margaret Hale's relationships with other female characters are based on the shared knowledge of textile and their common admiration of it. In fact, the trope of textile offers a variety of interpretations of the domestic and public domains of Victorian woman's life. The novel *North and South* traces Margaret's personal development from a rural girl to a strong and independent woman who has courage to speak for herself in Victorian patriarchal society. Industrial Milton changes her way of thinking and acting: she begins to actively participate in the public male-dominated sphere of life and this way she breaks traditional gender norms of Victorian England. Thus, although in the opening chapter of the novel, Gaskell describes Margaret as a naive young woman from the middle class who enjoys spending her days touching exquisite textiles and demonstrating exotic shawls, at the end of the novel Margaret is fully aware of all negative outcomes of the textile manufacturing industry and feels herself as an equal member of this male-dominated environment.

As it was mentioned previously, in her novel *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell described the topical problems of her age through the depiction of different garments and fabrics. As a daughter and a wife of Unitarian ministers, the novelist could not avoid mentioning the crisis of the religious faith in her novel. The theme of the loss of faith begins with Mr. Hale who experiences religious crisis that was a common problem in the nineteenth century. He resigns from the Church and moves to the industrial Milton that is commonly inhabited by people from the working class such as Mr. Higgins and his daughter Bessy. While Bessy maintains her faith in God, her father seems to completely lose his faith after all the difficulties that he experienced in his life and inhumane labour conditions at the cotton mill. Thus, Gaskell depicts how after exhausting labour members of the working class simply do not have any moral strength to maintain their faith in God; they are concerned with more mundane questions: how to earn enough money to complete at least their basic needs. Moreover, in her novel, Gaskell also raises another important religious issue: the strained relations between the Protestant and Catholic Churches. After a tragic event in his life, Margaret's brother Frederick wants to cut off all ties with England, hence he moves to Spain, marries a Spanish woman Dolores and converts into Catholicism. In a letter, in which Frederick announces his wedding, Margaret finds a black mantilla attached by Dolores. This textile gift embodies the possibilities to establish close relationship between two cultures and denominations of Christianity. Margaret's acceptance of the black mantilla is a sign

of her openness to other religious beliefs and practices which can be seen as a possible resolution of a long-lasting conflict between the Protestant and Catholic Churches.

On a final note, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* is an industrial novel, in which the novelist focuses on the problematic issues of Victorian England: Victorian religious crisis of faith, stereotypical gender norms and increasing social inequality. The novelist does not directly express her criticism; instead, she opts for their representation through the textile and cloth images. Different garments and fabrics, from local to the exotic ones exported from India, carry a huge variety of meanings that are crucial for our deeper understanding of the Victorian reality. As textile played an important role in Victorians' life, it became a specific language understood by all Victorians; however, in the novel *North and South* Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates how differently it is articulated by different people, depending on their gender, social class and even religion.



## Santrauka

### Tekstas ir tekstilė: socialinė klasė, lytis ir religija Elizabethos Gaskell romane „Šiaurė ir pietūs“

Viktorija Plešanova

Elizabeth Gaskell pramoniniuose romanuose yra glaudus ryšys tarp materialių daiktų ir jų kultūrinių reikšmių. Šiame magistro baigiamajame darbe aš analizuoju, kaip autorė atskleidžia Viktorijos laikų Anglijos lyčių normas, taip pat religinės ir socialinės sričių klausimus per tekstilės, audinių gamybos ir medvilnės pramonės vaizdavimą romane „Šiaurė ir Pietūs“. Darbe siekiama išnagrinėti teksto ir jo istorinio konteksto santykių įtaką romano supratimui. Šioje analizėje taikomi du metodai: naujasis istorizmas ir daikto teorija. Naujasis istorizmas pripažįsta istorinio konteksto reikšmę analizuojant tekstą, o daikto teorija tiria sudėtingus santykius tarp materialių objektų ir žmogiškųjų subjektų. Romano „Šiaurė ir Pietūs“ audinių ir tekstilės aprašymai, nuo vietinių iki importuotų, vaidina svarbų vaidmenį vaizduojant XIX amžiaus gyvenimą. Tekstilės gaminiai, kuriuos turi ir demonstruoja, apie kuriuos kalba ir kuriais naudojasi romano veikėjai, simbolizuoja pramoninės ekonomikos augimą, kuris padidino socialines ir klasines nelygybę. Be to, indišką skarą, perduodamą iš motinos dukrai, atspindi paveldimo požiūrį į britų ekonominį imperializmą ir išnaudojančius prekybos santykius su Indija. Tos pačios skaros taip pat simbolizuoja tradicinį moterų vaidmenį patriarchalinėje Viktorijos laikų visuomenėje: moterys, nepaisant aktyvaus dalyvavimo naujoje pramoninio pasaulio viešojoje erdvėje, vis dar apsiribojo savo namų sritimi. Pagaliau, visa tekstilės pramonė tampa objektyvu, per kurį skaitytojas gali išvelgti XIX amžiaus religinės krizės problemą. Darbininkų klasės tikėjimo praradimas yra viena svarbiausių romano temų, kuri yra aprašoma vaizduojant atskirus drabužius ir visą tekstilės gamybą.

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