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Thematic Concerns Reflecting Ramifications of Industrialization in Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton

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ABSTRACT

As an immediate result of industrialization, which actually started in the 18th century, many significant shifts have occurred in European history. The purpose of this paper is to look at the effects of industrialization on Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester, Elizabeth Gaskell's first novel. tells the story of the Victorian working and middle class in Manchester. To create a portrait of an industrial zone and the lives of its inhabitants, Gaskell primarily depicted the suffering of labourers with the wealth of the manufacturers. This paper looks at Gaskell's practical rather than theoretical response to the situation, which contributed to the widening gap between the rich and the poor, which manifested itself in the manner of adversity, marginalisation, and deprivation among industrial workers.

Keywords: Industrialization, Theme, Novel, English Society, Poverty, Class



Introduction:

The specific revolution was largely sparked by the scientific and technological advancements that occurred in Britain in the 17th and 18th centuries. These developments were mainly responsible for providing rise to the revolution. It was a facet of the Renaissance movement, which had been going strong across the continent of Europe for a number of centuries at the time. As a direct consequence of this, a wide variety of societal configurations and other human conveniences were rethought. To create a picture of an industrial town and the lives of its residents, the author of *Mary Barton* focused primarily on contrasting the impoverishment of workers with the wealth of manufacturers. It cannot be denied that the old ideal of a pastoral community and the modern industrial world appear to be in direct opposition to one another. After getting married, Gaskell moved from the rural environment she had grown up in to the urban setting of Manchester, which was the centre of the industrial revolution. The change in atmosphere had a profound impact on her. At the time in question, England's major urban centres were witnessing an unprecedented rise in the local population. This expansion was made possible in large part by the immigration of people from other countries. The growth of the industrial and factory sector led to an increase in job opportunities in metropolitan areas, which led to an increase in population density in those areas. The attitude of the industrialists, which was characterised by a laissez-faire approach, was added to the mixture.

In *Mary Barton*, Mrs. Gaskell explores a variety of themes, some of which include faith, the contrast between the rich and the poor, poverty and death, as well as pride and guilt. These concepts are being used in the intricate and expansive plot to portray the hardships of being of and living among the working class in Manchester during the middle of the 1800s.

The Rift between Rich and Poor: The Major Theme of the Novel

The disparity in socioeconomic status is a central theme throughout the book, and it serves as the impetus for a great deal of the action. Harry Carson is killed as a direct consequence of the unrelenting and escalating tensions that exist between the men of Manchester's working class who are employed in the city's industries and the men who own the mills. The conflict between



mill employees and owners led to many deaths of friends and neighbours, as well as the political radicalization of John Barton. This was also one of the outcomes of the conflict. The central idea is unmistakable. From the very beginning of the book, John Barton makes it clear that he disapproves of the way wealthy industrial owners treat their employees as a source of profit for themselves. This dynamic and John's perspectives both deteriorate throughout the course of the narrative, while the war continues to bring death and suffering at every turn.

The narrator makes an effort not to take a side in the conflict that is taking place between the factory landlords and the factory workers. The narrator goes out of its way to convey the events in as objective a manner as is humanly possible when the relationship between the rich and the poor is at its most tense. Workers in factories are going on strike because their pay has been cut while they continue to perform the same duties. The plant owners do not provide an explanation as to why this predicament exists; however, the narrator continues to bring it up despite the fact that it has very little bearing on how the strike will ultimately play out. The narrator approaches the situation with circumspection and deliberation. The rich versus the poor dichotomy has the potential to transform the work into a political argument. The objective of the narrator is to provide an account of society that is more balanced and unified, and he or she will accomplish this by presenting the conflict from all sides. Even though the narrator is making persistent efforts to portray all sides of the situation, the reality of the situation is still able to shine through, and the rich and powerful continue to emerge as the side that is significantly more malicious. The poor are targeted and killed by the conflict, while the wealthy continue to amass their wealth. The narrator's attempts to remain impartial only serve to highlight the obvious moral divide that exists between the wealthy and the impoverished.

The two gentlemen who make the proposal to Mary Barton serve as an illustration of the concept. Jem Wilson is a man of the working class who spent his childhood in the slums, where he was exposed to deprivation, suffering, and death. Harry Carson was born into a wealthy family as the son of a manufacturing company owner, and he has spent his entire life in close proximity to monetary wealth. Mary has nothing but love and admiration for Jem, but she is hopeful that by marrying Harry, she will be able to assist her friends and family in escaping



their impoverished circumstances. Harry does not intend to ever marry Mary because he views her as nothing more than a plaything on his part. In contrast, due to the fact that he is wealthy, he is able to indulge in the affections of a woman as a hobby, whereas Mary is compelled to forego the one and only opportunity she has to find true love in order to provide for her ailing father. The decisions made by the less fortunate people show that they have little room for error, whereas Harry Carson can act virtually without fear of repercussions when he does as he pleases. To put it another way, Jem Wilson is Harry's polar opposite in this regard. For him to be successful, he needs to be perfect in everything he does. He is an intelligent and hard-working man who puts his education and skills to use in order to establish a respectable career and give his family some measure of financial stability. Because of circumstances beyond his control, Jem comes perilously close to losing everything he owns. He is wrongfully accused of killing Harry, and as a result, he is fired from his job and estranged from the woman he loves. Although Jem had nothing to do with the murder, the fact that he is impoverished puts him in dangerous situations on a regular basis. As the struggle between the wealthy and the impoverished continues, Harry Carson ultimately becomes a victim of his own sense of entitlement. He is unable to be stopped from acting however he pleases and has no intention of doing so. John Barton decides to kill a wealthy business owner in the manufacturing industry so that he can serve as an example. In the conflict between the wealthy and the impoverished, the topic illustrates how one side is perpetually in jeopardy, while the other can only be defeated by its own haughtiness.

The process of industrialization was the primary contributor to the widening gap that already existed between the wealthy and the impoverished. If there had been no Industrial Revolution, factory owners could not take advantage of their workers in any way.

Faith as a Thematic Device:

Elizabeth Cleghom Gaskell uses the novel *Mary Barton* to convey her worries for the industrial impoverished, women's issues, and spiritual difficulties. Gaskell challenges the conventional beliefs, elevates female protagonists, and raises fundamental questions about the effective implications of ancient religious patterns through her novel *Mary Barton's* dedication to and



resistance to the conventional matrimonial plot. Her factory novels establish a connection between the domestic and public spheres by demonstrating how women who are deeply rooted in the private sphere can still have an effect on society. The novelist Elizabeth Gaskell's wish for a better society in the middle of the nineteenth century in Victorian England is revealed by the idea that the religion should be changed while maintaining connections.

In the industrial works of Gaskell, a strong emphasis is placed on faith as a foundation for action. The predicament of the industrial poor served as the impetus for Gaskell to write *Mary Barton*, and the characters in the novel reflect the author's belief that religious belief and social activism are inextricably linked. Gaskell places an emphasis on the crises that are being experienced by women and the working poor, connecting these catastrophes to the crises that are being experienced by Christian institutions; the author also illustrates a joint demand for the church to undergo transformation. Not only does Gaskell want to tell a story, but she also wants to raise the spiritual standards of society. It should come as no surprise that during the age of mechanisation and industrialization, faith was one of the fundamental necessities that was necessary to distinguish man from machine. This is because faith is one of the few things that can distinguish man from machines.

Theme of Death and Poverty:

A recurrent theme in *Mary Barton* is the close relationship that exists between extreme poverty and death. Those people who are the most economically disadvantaged are also the ones who are the most vulnerable to passing away. Every family in the novel that belongs to the working class suffers the tragedy of at least one untimely death. Both of Margaret Jennings' parents pass away, and John Barton loses both of his wives and one of their children. Jem Wilson is bereaved of the loss of both his father and his brothers. Because of their poverty, each and every one of them succumbs to a combination of illnesses, including malnutrition and disease. The narrative makes a concerted effort to show how these deaths are a direct consequence of poverty and how they could, consequently, be prevented in a society that is more just and equitable.



Both of Jem Wilson's twin brothers, as well as Mary Barton's brother, pass away as a result of an illness. The boys end up getting sick, but because there is not enough money, they are unable to get the nutrition or therapy that they need to get better. John Barton decides to sell everything he possesses in order to provide the necessary nourishment for his sick child. In an effort to save children and family members who already are malnourished and unlikely to survive even a mild illness, the characters waste their scarce resources on treatments that are ineffective. These deaths are a direct cause of poverty because illness adversely impacts the lowest people in society, and poverty is a direct result of these deaths. In order to cover the most fundamental costs associated with the funeral, many of the characters are forced to approach collective groups like trade unions. Only by banding together are Manchester's poorest residents likely to be able to afford treatment for their terminal illnesses and continue to live with them.

Direct malnutrition is another factor that contributes to mortality in Manchester's poorest neighbourhoods. After John Barton is fired from his job, he starts to spiral downward into a downward spiral. Because he is unable to save enough money to buy high-quality food, he must subsist on a diet of water and bread. As a result, he goes from being a robust and affable man at the beginning of the book to an emaciated and gloomy one. As a consequence of the economic downturn that has hit the factories, a great number of people are unable to eat. The owners of the factory have not stopped treating themselves to the finest and most elaborate meals that their wealth allows them to afford. George Wilson is forced to fend for himself after he is fired from his job. One day, he is delivered to the home of John Carson, where the kitchen staff has compassion for him and provides him with food. This is the largest and most magnificent meal that any character living in poverty eats during the course of the story, and it is also one of the few times that George is allowed to eat to his heart's content. He finally succumbs to his illness after a while. While those with more privilege in Manchester are permitted to go hungry, they are free to consume more than what would be considered a reasonable amount. Those who are impoverished often have their most satisfying meal in the form of the scraps that are left on the tables of wealthy men. A man and his family can starve to death in just a few short weeks if he is unable to find work because the gap between wealth and destitution has shrunk to such a narrow point.



Circle of Shame and Pride:

John Barton is obstinate that he wants to find gainful employment. He doesn't want anyone to do anything for him for free, and he definitely doesn't want anyone to give him more than what's rightfully his. The skilled weaving work that he does puts him in potentially hazardous situations. The specialised knowledge that he has spent his entire life cultivating is no longer in demand as a result of developments in technology and rising levels of competition from other sources. John takes immense pride in his work, and the self-assured and assertive nature that he possesses will not permit him to experience the humiliation and guilt that come along with being unemployed. On the other hand, the society in which he lives does not seem concerned in any way. Both his pride and his guilt are irrelevant when compared to the harsh reality of factory production. The owners of the factory don't give a hoot about John's pride because they pay the lowest possible wage to anyone who is willing to work there.

John is trying to demonstrate how arrogant he can be. He is a proud member of the working class and forms trade unions with other members of the working class in the mistaken belief that their combined strength will enable them to obtain better rights. John holds a firm belief in this particular doctrine. He approaches the task of organising the workers with the same sense of pride that he did the weaving. He submits a petition to the government and attempts to organise a strike, but he quickly realises that neither of these things will have any impact on the situation. Because output and profit are the only things that really matter, feelings of pride and shame are completely unimportant. The owners of the factory view their employees as nothing more than machines that can be switched on and off at any time they choose. They don't believe that employees are capable of feeling emotions such as pride or shame. It's possible that John will assert that all he wants is a decent wage for a full day's work, but the owners of the factory will laugh the workers out of the room at the meeting for the strike because this argument is so far outside their sphere of influence or interests. As a direct result of the way he was treated, John is made aware of how hollow his pride is. He is made to feel less human than he actually is, and as a consequence of this dehumanisation, he seeks answers that are even more extreme.



John murdered Harry Carson in an effort to regain his pride; however, he was only successful in making himself feel worse about himself. The assassination has nothing to do with Harry's character or his feelings for Mary Barton in any way, shape, or form. John decides to take his life because of what Harry stands for. As the public face of the factory owners' association, Harry is a symbol of wealth and entitlement. He is also a manifestation of the torment and humiliation that John has been forced to endure. The assassination is being done as a demonstration of power. John kills Harry with a bullet to the head to demonstrate that the factory owners, despite their wealth and success, are still vulnerable humans on the same level as the workers. The proud announcement that John makes does not go as smoothly as planned. His mind is consumed by feelings of guilt and contrition constantly. He is so overcome by his negative feelings that he eventually withers away and passes away. The fact that John is making an effort to reclaim his pride contributes to the growing shame he feels about himself. When trying to find a way to cope with the lack of employment, pride, and agency that society imposes on them, many of the characters in the book go through this cycle of diminished pride leading to humiliation. This cycle occurs as they search for a solution to the problems that society imposes on them. The cycle is brutal and appears to be impossible to break. Pride and shame are inextricably linked in the working-class scenario, and the subject reveals how the eradication of pride and the intrusion of shame may soon become dangerous and violent. In the working-class scenario, pride and shame are inextricably linked. These powerful feelings elicit forceful and destructive responses, highlighting the dangers that come with living in a society that is becoming more corrosive, alienated, and unequal.

The Web of Human Relation:

Even though the relationships between lovers, employees, and bosses make up the majority of Gaskell's works, she never fails to emphasise the divine side of her characters. This is true even though the majority of her works focus on those relationships. They all have religious beliefs and misgivings, regardless of whether they are affluent mill owners or ignorant and hardworking factory labourers, regardless of whether they are untrained dressmakers or well-informed offspring of middle-class families. Their spiritual connection to the All-Mighty seems



to guide the majority of their lives, which in turn causes changes and directs their actions. It is a good idea to learn a little about the author's religious beliefs before moving on to learning about the characters that the author has created.

It should not come as a surprise that the nature and religious practice play an important role in a lot of Victorian fiction because the era was going through a major crisis of faith due to the fact that scientific, technological, and technical advancements posed significant challenges to biblical beliefs, but it still held the Bible's teachings as the primary guide for ethics, civility, and societal morals. The Bible's lessons were the primary guide for morality, decorum, and societal morals. Gaskell's position as the wife of a minister puts her firmly in the centre of the mainstream of ethics and right behaviour, which viewed Christianity as the source and culmination of both concepts. However, the fact that William Gaskell was a Unitarian minister, in addition to Elizabeth's own background as a Unitarian, adds a special caveat to that position. This caveat is one that melds general Christian principles with a history of religious dominance, emphasises intellectual and rational interaction with theology, and fosters tremendous openness and tolerance. The serene and charitable atmospheres are strikingly similar to the Anglican faith practised in Cranford. As a consequence of this, the overriding perception of Gaskell's faith as it is conveyed in her work is one of inclusivity and acceptance for diversified beliefs and practises, and an emphasis on the virtues of compassion and intellectualism.

Mrs. Gaskell draws attention to the impoverishment of industrial workers while also drawing attention to other issues facing contemporary society. Barton decides to become a member of the labour union because he is under the impression that the economic downturn has only affected the workers, whereas the manufacturers have been able to maintain their lavish lifestyles. When he is unemployed and his child is ill with scarlet fever, he even entertains thoughts of stealing to support his family. When he was in this frame of mind, he saw a wealthy woman leaving a store with a significant number of items she had purchased for a party. Because of this contrast, Barton develops a sense of vengeance, and as a result, he becomes a Chartist.



There is frequently a correlation between the unsanitary living conditions of industrial workers' quarters and their level of poverty. Mrs. Gaskell's depiction of Mrs. Davenport's house paints a vivid image of the industrial slum, leaving the indelible impression that she knew what it was like to live in a working-class home. Mrs. Davenport's residence is unsanitary, musty, and dreary. "through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fireplace was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's lair, and cried in the dark loneliness," the author writes. (Gaskell 144) This accurate portrayal can be attributed to Mrs. Gaskell's first-hand experience of living in a slum.

Due to the harsh living conditions that prevailed during the Great Depression, also known as the "hungry forties," children and women were coerced into working in factories. There is no doubt that efforts were made to establish a minimum age requirement for young people to be allowed to work in workplaces. However, because there were no follow-up efforts made to make up for the loss of income and the lack of educational opportunities, the age bar lost its meaning. Consequently, it was rendered meaningless. In point of fact, in order for their children to be hired in the factories, the parents lied about their children's ages in order to get around the age restriction that was in place. Mrs. Davenport is against placing an age restriction on the employment opportunities available to children in *Mary Barton*. In contrast to the resentment and alienation that the poor workers experience as a result of their correlation with the masters, there is a strong sense of collaborative efforts, compassion, and shared awareness among the poor workers. They are willing to sacrifice their comfort and material possessions for the sake of their co-workers, as well as provide assistance to one another and share in each other's grief. This is a snide comment on the callousness and disregard that the masters have toward their operatives. The rulers have the capacity to support those in need, but they do not have the motivation to do so. But at the other hand, those who are impoverished have a passion to help each other, but their capacity to do so is restricted.

Conclusion:

It is possible to assert while summing up that Gaskell made a sincere effort to illustrate the challenges faced by the working class by incorporating a variety of topics and ideas into her



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fictional works. Gaskell has made a significant contribution to our understanding of human existence through her writing on topics that have been relevant to the lives of humans since the beginning of time and through her sensitive approach to addressing the challenges faced by both men and women. By analysing how people interact with one another, the works of Mrs. Gaskell offer readers the chance to improve the already strained connections that exist between the various parts of society. When trying to influence what actions will be taken in the future, it is imperative that positive signals be taken into consideration. In this regard, Mrs. Gaskell's books go to great lengths to ensure that tension, arguments, and misunderstandings are avoided where they aren't necessary. The investigation of Gaskell's works would be of great assistance to literary scholars as well as social activists. This is due to the fact that such a study will most definitely shed more light on the significance of man's existence on the planet as well as make our society more desirable to both ourselves and others.



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