

ULUSLARARASI SOSYAL ARAŐTIRMALAR DERGİSİ THE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

Cilt: 13 Sayı: 69 Mart 2020 & Volume: 13 Issue: 69 March 2020
www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581
Doi Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2020.3946>

THE SURVIVAL OF THE WHITEST: SPOKEN AND UNSPOKEN IN NORTH AND SOUTH

Hande KOLAT *

Abstract

The novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, stimulates the reader at the beginning to be ready for binary oppositions with the title, suggesting that the reader will come across contradictions, differences, otherness and various elements that will give away the traces of unbalanced power gained by economic, political, cultural differences, which can be opportunities for some while curse for others. This paper aims at exploring the elements what drives North and South to differentiate from each other and what North and South stand for the time it was written. The struggle of the working class to survive under harsh living conditions and clear depiction of their poverty and hunger suggest that the novel does not only epitomize the agony behind the stage of industrialization but also gives realistic representation of the daily reality of England. *North and South* is not only a love story across a socially divided couple but also a panoramic view of a period reflected through social constructions structured through working class and ruling class. Her realistic representation foresees the construction of Englishness for the time period given, in terms of business, imperial trade and gender roles. *North and South* reveal the direction of business in the 19th century and forewarns the racing thoughts of white man in order to survive in the business for the sake of "the home", who is trying to understand the world and ready to set out for the divine journey to the East.

Keywords: Elizabeth Gaskell, Victorian Literature, class struggle, working class, mystifying East, Orientalism .



1. INTRODUCTION

North and South tells the story of Margaret Hales who had to move from a tranquil, peaceful town of Helstone to an industrialized city of Milton, (what is Manchester in reality) and the story depicts the values that these two places stand for and Margaret Hale's experiences while trying to adapt herself to her new life which dramatically changed from a pastoral to town life. Nicholas Ruddick (2007,190) states that Elizabeth Gaskell was accepted as one of the great Victorian novelists whose name was mentioned among writers as Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, the Brontes, "using a mode of representation designed to reflect the daily reality of their readership. Her realistic representation foresees the construction of Englishness for the time period given, in terms of business, imperial trade and gender roles as well as masculinity. Edward Said asserts that

in projecting what Raymond Williams calls a "knowable community" of Englishmen and women, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Mrs. Gaskell shaped the idea of England in such a way as to give it identity, presence, ways of reusable articulation. And part of such an idea was the relationship between "home" and "abroad." Thus England was surveyed, evaluated, made known, whereas "abroad" was only referred to or shown briefly without the kind of presence or immediacy lavished on London, the countryside, or northern industrial centers such as Manchester or Birmingham (Said, 1993, 72)

Therefore, it could be suggested that identity and presence of Britishness was constructed by the period's novelists through their depictions and portrayals in 'the state of the nation' novels. In addition, it can be said that the work of the time raised consciousness for justification of the exploitation for the sake of development and for saving the business in the name of industrialization.

North and South is not only a love story across a socially divided couple but also a panoramic view of a period reflected through social constructions structured through working class and ruling class (possessors), who can be also called as bourgeoisie, yet to digest the belongings they have had, having left them to be unable to tolerate the class distinction, which is a highly novel concept emerging with the arrival of a revolution, a change in the system of society that was once upon a time seemed to be equal but turned out that 'some happened to be more equal' in social terms.

Written in such a date as 1855, *North and South* portrays a bourgeois character Mr. Thornton, who is not depicted in a hostile way but appreciated for his manners such as recruiting Nicholas Higgins again after his actions in strike, sending a basket of fruit to Mrs. Hale or it evokes pity when he is rejected by Margaret even though he is a boss who does not pay enough and lets his workers suffer. Taking the conditions back then into account makes Mr. Thornton justify what he takes as an action. Mr. Thornton is not condemned by his actions, he was a man of business and what he did was for the sake of his business; letting children work, recruiting Irish men or not giving pay rise seem justifiable looking back the system of industrial life. Mr. Thornton deals with many problems of his time, when there are many coming out from transition from rural to industrial and he is depicted as a character to sympathize with while, in fact, he is paying really a small amount of money to his workers, most of whose family members suffer from severe illnesses as well as trying to survive under harsh life conditions in Milton. Workers go on a strike, want what they deserve but the uprising is suppressed with another threat, threat of Irish workers, who are supposed to replace the workers and won't be willing to get much from their employers, accepting whatever the consequences will take. However, they claim their rights and go on a strike. Susanne S. Cammack states that

By adapting the facts of the Preston Strike into the Milton strike of *North and South*, Gaskell places Irish characters and concerns at the heart of industrial— and likewise, national— concerns. A marginalized, unwilling, and starving Irish workforce is a burgeoning issue that Britain has not accounted for; they have created the issue—"made him what he is"—without



accommodating or ameliorating the situation. The violence at Marlborough Mills is an escalation of what might have happened in Preston. (Cammack, 2016, 122)

Cammack points out that Irish workers were working under harsh conditions and they were left to survive after all, which made them turn into strikers and fight for their lives. They managed to survive no matter what made them turn into rebellions and the attitude of the employers' and harsh conditions for employees brought about the strike. Cammack, in addition, asserts that according to many critics, strikes and riots in *North and South* depict labor struggles which take place in Gaskell's fiction with the aim of epitomizing Condition of England. On the other hand, few critics reviewed same scenes as Irish Question in Britain and the Preston Strike. (Cammack, 2016, 126) Irish characters and the employers' willingness to utilize cheap labor force evokes the idea whether Thornton's working ideology could be read as the construction of Englishness on the way for imperial trade and empire, justification to exploit labor force, which could be reflected as serving for a good purpose.

2. MYSTIFYING THE EAST

It's not a subject matter to directly colonize, suppress or oppress the Eastern but that is the time of mystifying, which was to be followed by the actions taken for people like Higgins or Boucher or Irish people who were brought--- there is something unfair but it will be resolved maybe through intruding other lives rather than capturing their own fellows. In such a period of time, when colonization was something at the phase of mystifying and when Westerners made Eastern popular with its exoticism and imperialism was going up to peak, which is from late 19th century to WWI, when Western political, linguistic and cultural legacy was wide spread, Mr. Thornton's actions towards his workers evokes sympathy on readers as if justifying his deeds since he is the one who deserves loyal workers since he is such a good hearted man.

Since the beginning in his personal life he is such a kind-hearted son and friend, who in the beginning helped his family on business and worked hard to provide a pleasant life to his family, helped Mrs. Hale by providing a doctor and sending her fresh fruit with the hope of her getting any better, covering the murder incident even though he had issues with Margaret at that time. Looking at the big picture, with such kindness and good treats he has, Mr. Thornton is a character to be appreciated even though he is a man ready to oppress any kind of low class he has as a working class, coming from Ireland or the prospect workers, who were to come from Eastern countries.

Mr. Thornton is reviewed according to the circumstances he is surrounded, he is such an employer who came from rags to riches and dedicated his life to his work, which seems to justify his ambition to earn more money and not lose it. Scrutinizing the text to find out the ideological background it seems that there is not much toleration even for their own citizens for middle class or even Westerners such as Irish people, and it makes one think that in the hands of those cruelties how can others survive in such a culture? Ideological contradictions of this text must have served for the good of middle class since Mr. Thornton is such a character that deserves to have a good life having led a harsh life coping with many difficulties out there as well as being a decent man in his personal life. This very idea gives an image of a bourgeois, who has the right to act as a Machiavellian character as hiring child workers, paying less or hiring Irish, to achieve his goal since he gave much effort and sacrifice for his own business. In addition to all, due to the fact that Mr. Thornton can be seen as a symbol of Western man who has had a great endeavor on industrial development, and therefore, on humanity, it is not surprising to see that the East they see is inferior since they did not see any contribution to the relevant developments and that part of the world is put aside to be mystified to be explored for trivial utilities.

The mystifying the 'other' can be seen through a symbol used at the beginning of the novel, when Margaret demonstrates Edith's shawl to the other women visitors who came for Edith's wedding, amazed at the embroidery of the shawl, mesmerized by the distinguishing fabric,



implying how desirable it is to have an Indian shawl, which Margaret How women attributed meaning to that fabric is indicated as Mrs. Gibson verbalize the feelings for her daughter; "Helen had set heart upon an Indian shawl" (Gaskell, 2003, 3) but was refused by her mother upon hearing the price asked for it, recounting diamond ring case, which created trouble among Africans out of nowhere but because of the wish of Western women desire of sparkling stones. Bearing in mind that Gaskell wrote this work in 1855, it is expected to see the traces of mystifying East in those times, when East was the place to explore, when industrial revolution required imperial or capitalist powers to be alert for raw material and prone to find out cheaper labor force for the sake of maintaining the income that was earned painstakingly and not desired to lose any bit of that income. It could be suggested that Gaskell's North and South can be read "as responsive to the fraught relationship between local needs and national interests as the mid-Victorian novel itself." (Hammond, 2018, 408)

The reason why the Hales are leaving Helstone and the motive behind that decision taken by Mr. Hale is mysterious. When Mr. Hale decides to leave the church he cannot completely explain the reason, letting Margaret to think if he is converting into any other religion as Islam. He states, 'Oh Margaret, how I love the holy Church from which I am to be shut out! He could not go on for a moment or two. Margaret could not tell what to say; it seemed to her as terrible mysterious as if her father were about to turn Mahometan. (Gaskell, 2003, 21) This is to mystify the main motive that drove them to leave their hometown, which is intended by Gaskell.

When those mystified 'objects' are eventually obtained, they are to be demystified and degraded. The question 'Why is Mr. Thornton learning Plato and classics?' leads one to answer, under these circumstances, that he wants to explore the world and understand it. He needs to know more and explore more to be powerful and to possess. This answer would satisfy Margaret, asking to her father "What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments?" (Gaskell, 2003, 24), the answer of which is hidden behind being ready to be the 'power'. He seems to have grasped earlier that in order to have power he has to be different from other common man and has to be knowledgeable. On the grounds that he will need more raw material and labor force he will be in search of new horizons and develop new ideas in order to cope with upcoming conditions. He will need the knowledge while searching for exploitation for more money. Since he knows that without knowledge he is nothing he tends to learn with the help of Mr. Hale. Miss Hale also felt like to defend Mr. Thornton when she was in London, amazed by the exhibition items coming from third world and other kinds of places. She stood up for him that he is also understanding the world and trying to keep up with his rivals in North, and Londoners. Because he is seen as 'other' for Londoners as a fellow from Milton, he should not fall behind and should raise his awareness of the world rather than only focusing his own job. He is aware that he cannot achieve his goals only doing his job, but has to give effort to get power through learning and therefore, progressing.

3. SURVIVAL OF THE BUSINESS

A powerful master, as Mr. Thornton, when faces economic problems, tries to act political but cannot risk to lose his capital lest he will not be able to bring up them together. His capital makes him powerful and through his income his mother and sister see their material advantage as to scold others, such as Hale family or any common man in Milton. Existence of a working class and middle class created a huge gap between life styles and struggles of people. When Fanny, chatting to Margaret, talks about her dreams to go to London to have fun, Bessy Higgins talks about her illness saying that " I think I was well when mother died, but I have never been rightly strong sin' somewhere about that time. I began to work in a carding-room soon after, and the fluff got into my lungs and poisoned me" (69), gives a general picture of a class distinction and a class who was 'othered' and left there to their own fate, while masters seek after healthy workers and cheap raw materials. The development and industrialization has been for the advantage of the



capitalist, imperial power, whereas torturing the working class regardless of identity and nationality.

The North and South difference is given with metonyms, Milton and Helstone, Milton representing industrially developing North; Helstone representing tranquilizing but non-progressive South. North is degraded by its portrayal, while South is kept as a heavenly pastoral, peaceful and dreamlike place to live as for Margaret and Mrs. Hale, who longed for it for the rest of her life after having left Helstone. It is a surprising decision that Mr. Hale takes owing to the fact that at such a time when Christians left their countries for the sake of proselytization to Eastern countries as seen in *Jane Eyre* with the character Sir John Rivers, for his austere task, it is interesting to see Mr. Hale giving up England church and having resigned from his job, departing from his town to a progressing city, implying that he is on the side of development rather than only spreading what they have.

The discrimination of the cities is felt through harsh criticism of Mrs. Hale when she first comes to Milton degrading it with its bad smoky weather as well as the people living there, for their manufacturing cotton and looks down on people asking 'who on earth wears cotton that can afford linen?' (29). In addition, having arrived the city they had to do most of the daily chores, which made Mrs. Hale feeling pity for her daughter, which made herself humiliate since they had to be like other people in Milton. When Margaret starts to help Dixon in housework, Mrs. Hale exclaims "if anyone told me, when I was Miss Beresford, and one of the belles of the county, that a child of mine would have to stand half a day, in a little poky kitchen, working away like any servant, that we might prepare properly for the reception of a tradesman,..'' (49), which can be suggested that she is not upset for her daughter to get tired but for descending to a lower class, which not be different from the citizens in Milton. Wilhelm states that "Characters in North and South continually differentiate between the industrialized north and the pastoral south in terms of each region's participation in modern industry." (Wilhelm, 2014, 419) and goes on asserting that "Milton's energy, power, and courage in struggling and fighting are reified in its equation of time with money, but Thornton also racializes the north-south divide by appealing to Darkshite's Teutonic spirit, which regards life as a time for action and exertion and victory over material resistance". (419) Margaret Hale's displacement can be suggested as a passage from a passive to such a energetic and powerful life to lead for more production and achievement. The potential of people would not be wasted and it had to be given a chance to take control and make the most of the business mind as sophistication and intelligence that English man had.

While discussing on the government issues, Mr. Hale and Mr. Thornton talk about the system, which requires despotism for those people who works for him. Although he states that 'On some future day- in some millennium- in Utopia, this unity may be brought into practice- just as I can fancy a republic the most perfect form of government' (80), he continues maintaining that 'despotism is the best kind of government for them; so that in the hours in which I come in contact with them I must necessarily be an autocrat' (81). Seeing that the working class is not mature yet, he feels that it is a must to dictate those.

'What will Mr. Thornton do in the event of another economic crisis; will he get 'hands' from Ireland again or any other cheaper place?' are to be interrogated, having witnessed how Mr. Thornton treated his own workers, as well as his mother's and sister's attitude towards workers and how they despise them. In the course of events it turns out that the whitest will gain and the happy ending will come along with economic advancement. It is a noticeable subject matter that cotton mill gave privilege to Fanny, while taking Bessy's life from her, as well as Mrs. Thornton's prejudice against Margaret as a result of her origin and her otherness is to be noticed and to bring to light the mentality of the Victorian people ready to explore, judge, despise and degrade for the sake of development in sight but for the sake of 'more' deep inside.

Gaskell not only epitomizes the clash between North and South and employers vs. employees but also the clash of John Thornton and Margaret Hale. Eleanor Reeds states that



“Gaskell offers her readers a hero and heroine who embrace the intimate and affective aspects of economic decision-making, and thus asks them to recognize the significance of traditionally feminine sentiments in the pursuit of ethical financial action.” (Reeds, 2014, 56) Thornton was as cruel as any employer could be at those times and Margaret was a woman who could not remain silent witnessing the injustice of the workers. Thornton and Margaret represent two opposite poles, he depicts the ruling man as a tradesman and Margaret is the voice of South. Margaret’s attitudes and inspiration, turns Thornton into an employer who enhances working conditions of his workers. A woman’s conscience enables Thornton to administrate his business more conscientiously.

4. CONCLUSION

The text reveals about the operations of cultural difference in class that combines to form individual identity, in shaping the perceptions of the self and others and the world they live in. Gaskell intertwines the text with future preoccupations of the characters, who seek for a promising future, on the other hand giving different prospects of the characters which arise awareness of class distinctions. Margaret Hale and other Northerners, Mr. Thornton and Margaret Hale, Irish workers and other citizens like Margaret indicate the class distinction of the period given and sets an example of class struggle in the 19th century. Irish workers were working under harsh conditions and they were left to survive after all, which made them turn into strikers and fight for their lives, which eventually forced Mr. Thornton to change his attitude towards them. The need for cheap labor force was met by Irish workers and their rebellion suggests that the potential that bourgeoisie will likely to look for another source for cheap labor force and raw materials, as well. They managed to survive no matter what made them turn into rebels and the attitude of the employers’ and harsh conditions for employees brought about the strike. Mr. Thornton after deterioration of his work changed and accepted the Irish workers could have better conditions. However, this does not mean that white man will not provide himself with cheap labor from any other nationality. It is deliberate that once the powerful gets the authority to rule, they do it to survive either in business or life. *North and South* reveal the direction of business in the 19th century and forewarns the racing thoughts of white man in order to survive in the business. The motifs of shawl and other products coming from East and the reaction of the bourgeoisie to them reminds the Oriental thought of white man, mystifying the East and getting ready to have more of it. Seeing that Mr. Thornton asks for help from Mr. Hale to study classics, suggest that his need for education is the necessity to be powerful through knowledge also and to learn is required as a businessman not to fall behind his counterparts in London. The need for sympathy to the white man to set out for the so-called sacred journey towards the East in order to find raw material might be another cause and/or effect of Gaskell’s *North and South*. The writer’s intention whether to be called justification of white man in the ‘pursuit of happiness’ and wealth or for the need to explain the necessity of work force for the sake of a nation to raise so much as to turn into a never-setting country.

REFERENCES

- Cammack, Susanne S. (2016). You Have Made Him What He Is: Irish Laborers and the Preston Strike in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*. *New Hibernia Review*, Volume 20, Number 4, Winter/Geimhreadh, p. 113-127.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn. (2003). *North and South*. The Project Gutenberg e-book. Web.
- Hammond, Mary (2018). Wayward Orphans and Lonesome Places: The Regional Reception of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. *Victorian Studies*, Volume 60, Number 3, p. 390-411.
- Reeds, Eleanor (2014). The Ethics of Risk in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*: The Role of Capital in an Industrial Romance. *Victorian Review*, Volume 40, Number 2, Fall, p. 55-71.
- Ruddick, Nicholas (2007). *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siecle* Gail Marshall ed. “The Fantastic Fiction of the fin de Sie` cle” Cambridge University Press. p.78.
- Said, Edward (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage.
- Wilhelm, L. (2014) Looking South: Envisioning the European South in “*North and South*”. *Studies in the Novel*, 46 (4), Retrieved February 5, 2020 from www.jstor.org/stable/43151004