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**A Comparative Study of Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South (1855)
and Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth (1905):
A New Historicist Reading**

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To:

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To my dearest princess Angela

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beloved Sabiha*

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Abstract

The present dissertation is a comparative thematic study of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). As a supporting theory, our research paper relies on Stephen Greenblatt's approach of New Historicism because a literary work is not separated from its historical context. The aim of this work is to show that despite the historical and historical differences that exist between the two selected novels, they share many themes in common among which we cite "class division" and "women's status". Following IMRAD method, my dissertation has started with a presentation of the two authors Elizabeth Gaskell and Edith Wharton and their novels *North and South* and *The House of Mirth*. In Method and Materials, we have explained the reason of our choice of New Historicism approach. In our analysis of this topic, our discussion is divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the notion of 'Class division' in *North and South* where the Victorian society was divided into two main classes the 'middle' and the 'working' classes. Also, in the second section of the chapter we have highlighted the issue of 'Women's Question' as a prominent theme in the novel. In its turn, the second chapter deals with the same themes in *The House of Mirth* including the issue of 'Social Class' that divided the American society into the 'upper' and the 'working' classes, and we have also tended to depict the American "ideal woman" and how she struggled to break the traditional values of the patriarchal society.

Keywords: Industrial Revolution, Class Conflict, Social Class, Women's Question, New Historicism.

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I. Introduction

Literature is a work of art; however, it also serves as a mirror that reflects the writer's thoughts on the realities of his society, by using language to convert his ideas into fiction. Literature plays an important role by addressing both the positive aspects of society such as the development and the negative ones such as corruption and racism. Indeed, writers through their literary works tend to give a vivid picture of their period by portraying its cultural events as well as the changes that occurred in their societies. For instance, literature inspired England and America and succeeded to change whether in a positive or a negative way several aspects in the two societies.

Furthermore, the two countries of England and America experienced an immense transformation in the nineteenth-century, particularly marked by the Industrial Revolution. The latter affected all aspects of life, such as the social and economic spheres, and it attracted the attention of many writers urging them to produce a variety of literary works reflecting the reality of their society. Indeed, many authors have described the English and American cultural changes that occurred before and during the nineteenth century, among whom we may cite two major literary figures: the British author Elizabeth Gaskell who has tackled the Victorian society's issues, and the American novelist Edith Wharton who has exposed the hidden aspects of the American society in her works. Their writings have allowed the readers to achieve a deeper understanding of people's living conditions in both England and America during the nineteenth-century.

Thus, our study will mainly focus on Elizabeth Gaskell's novel entitled *North and South* (1855) and Edith Wharton's work *The House of Mirth* (1905). The socio-economic climate of both nineteenth-century industrial England and America is well-explored in these two artistic works. Despite having different settings, these two novels share many themes, including the

impact of industrialization on social classes viewed through the stories of their characters, especially the lives of working-class and poor people, marked by social conflict and exploitation. As a result of their importance, both works draw the reader's attention to understand the effects of the Industrial Revolution.

a. Review of the Literature

Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) are highly regarded as ancient books in English and American literatures. Consequently, these works have attracted the interest of critics and scholars who have analyzed and explored them from various perspectives, focusing on many issues such as the effects of the Industrial Revolution, class conflict and the status of women.

To begin with Gaskell's book *North and South*, Rosemarie Bodenheimer in her article entitled "*North and South: A Permanent State of Change*" perceived the novel from a religious point of view. She claims that the crucial issue in the novel is religious doubt which means a sign of weak faith and questioning of religious beliefs, highlighted by the contrast between northern and southern England. Bodenheimer explains that after the novel's publication, later readers have criticized the portrayal of Mr. Hale's defection from the Church of England as inconsequential and lacks any clear motivation and merely served as a pretext for the family's removal to Milton-northern.¹

She believes that Gaskell intends to show the entrust towards the religion in England during that time through the character of Mr. Hale, who leaves the church in the south to move into the industrialized town of Milton. Yet, his abandonment is not depicted as an obstacle for his Christian beliefs as many doubted him. When his daughter Margaret when has asked him with shock "*Doubts, papa! Doubts as to religion?*"²; Mr. Hale himself affirms that he has no doubt towards religion.³ In fact, his basic religious convictions were revealed when he later

performed the Lord's Prayer with his daughter. According to Bodenheimer, Gaskell considers "*Mr. Hale's decision is not a weakness but a placement of emphasis: his irrevocable change, its statement of doubt in the face of a traditional order*"⁴. She employs Margaret's father migration to Milton as a means to represent the change that is happening in England.

Another illustrative critic of Gaskell's *North and South* is Raymond Williams, who has studied the novel from a psychoanalytic approach in his work entitled "*Culture and Society*" (1958). According to Williams' analysis, the book primarily focuses on the psychological disagreement that exists between the two main characters John Thornton and Margaret Hale; it demonstrates the differences between the two cultures to which both of them belong. Margaret's southern culture is revealed when attempting to reconcile between John and the working men by showing their need for each other, she talks about John's industry telling him "*on the very face of it, I see two classes dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own.*"⁵

In fact, Margaret was right about the dependency of each class on the other. Because of the workers strike, John's industry gradually deteriorates. Raymond argues that Margaret's awareness has influenced John's character and developed on him the sense of humanity. Thus, after his long suffering he started to work on '*the improvement of human relations in industry.*'⁶ Williams believes that the psychological struggle of Margaret and Mr. Thornton is interesting since the misunderstanding between the culture of the industrial north and the culture of the south was resolved through their marriage which "*serves as a unification of a practical energy of Northern manufacturer with the developed sensibility of the southern girl*".⁷ In fact, John's and Margaret's marriage is symbolic, writing *North and South* forms a solid and uncourageous unit in a changing time.

Moreover, August Bebel is another critic who studies *North and South* from a socialist-feminist perspective that addresses the female question, it is an approach with the greatest capacity to illuminate the oppression of women in the world. He focuses on women's status in the English society and their struggle against the male patriarchy. Bebel in his work entitled "Women Under Socialism" argues that the "*women's question is the weakest link in the capitalist armour*"⁸; he has portrayed the working women as being oppressed in the capitalist society in which their wages were lower compared to men. Gaskell in her novel utilizes the character of Bessy Higgins in order to portray the nineteenth-century English working-class women who were suffering silently from the hard living conditions in the patriarchal society. Bessy died after being poisoned by cotton fluff as a result of working in mills since her childhood; thus, she is considered a double victim of capitalism and patriarchy.

Bebel also notes, "*In this capitalist society women and the working men have, since old, had this in common oppression*"⁹. This is exemplified in the book's depiction of a patriarchal gender society in which men consider themselves superior to women and mill owners exercise authority over their workers. Indeed, John Boucher is one of Mr. Thornton's oppressed workers and a poor man who wishes to get a higher wage only to feed his children and his sick wife; however, Mr. Thornton ignores Boucher's demands since he does not consider him as an individual but only as a 'hand'.

Similarly to *North and South*, Wharton's *The House of Mirth* has also been a subject of criticism, especially from the Marxist perspective. Professor Wai Chee Dimock and the leader of innovation in literary studies, in her work entitled "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*" states that the novel reflects the American society mainly the upper class New York in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, when society was a cruel environment manipulated by the Robber Barrons who think that anything can be exchanged for money. Thus, she maintains the idea that money means power in *The House of Mirth*. As Dimock states;

Everything has a price, must be paid for, just as—on the opposite end — everything can be made to “count as” money, to be dealt out and accepted in lieu of cash. Dispensed in this manner, social gestures lose their initial character and figure only as exchange values: the dinner invitations, for Stepany and Rosedale, presumably have no meaning except as surrogate cash payments. A social world predicated on business ethics is an essentially reductive world, and the power of money lies not so much in its pristine form as in its claim as a model.¹⁰

This is very clear, for example, in Rosedale’s marriage proposal to Lily which appears to be as a deal. Even marriage is a deal! Everything is related to money and profit even the institution of marriage during the Gilded Age, and this makes it a materialistic Age where values were lost. He promised to maintain her position in society and afford her the money she needs because Lily would be useful in entering him into the social elite. The latter, thinks that exchange is the most fundamental relation between people who offer nothing for free.

Moreover, in his psychoanalytic interpretation of Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, the Swiss psychiatric and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung claims that Lily's character is portrayed as lacking in strength and identity from the beginning of the novel. According to Jung's theory of development in personality, a mature personality is one that is integrated. In his work "*The Development of Personality*," he asserts that parents are the primary shapers of their children's personalities, referring to them as "'half children themselves'"¹¹. Lily receives her early training from her mother alone, for her father, as seen through her recollection of her childhood, appears as "*hazy outline of a neutral-tinted father*"¹² Lily doesn't remember seeing her father during the day, which highlights her close attachment to her mother until her teenage years. Lily's beauty is her primary means in achieving her aim.

In "*The Relations between the Ego and The Unconscious*", Jung writes that when a person is attracted to "*The power of a collective image can cause such a high degree of inflation that the entire personality is disintegrated.*"¹³ Lily's beauty is precisely the sort of collective image of that Jung refers to, and she feels and uses her beauty as a power for good.

In addition, the novel has been studied from a feminist point of view discussing traditional gender roles in the novel. Elizabeth Ammons in her work entitled “*Edith Wharton’s Argument with America*” (1980) claims that the novel considers marriage as a patriarchal institution that serves to empower men and weaken women. According to her, Lily Bart considers marriage as the only means that would secure her finances and her social position; however, failing to achieve her goal leaves Lily unable to live normally. In addition, Ammons argues that in the novel patriarchy governs in a society where women were not valued and were treated as objects to be owned and exploited stating that the American woman was not free.¹⁴ In Lily’s society, women were measured according to their role as wives of rich men since they become their possession. Ammons points out; “*being a woman in Lily’s world amount to working as a wife, and working hard, to translate financial power into social power by displaying a particular man’s wealth for him*”.¹⁵ Thus, the idea of women as objects to be owned by men has been deeply established in societal norms. For a wealthy man, it is important to possess a woman who would show his elevated position in the elite society.

b. Issue and Working Hypothesis

From the above review of the literature, it becomes apparent that the two novels *North and South* (1855) and *The House of Mirth* (1905) are studied from different angles. In *North and South*, many critics focused primarily on Gaskell’s portrayal of the Victorian society which witnessed the transformation of many social and economic aspects of the nation as a result of the Industrial Revolution. For instance the period saw the British Empire grow to become the first global industrial power, producing much of the world’s coal, iron and textile. Similarly, *The House of Mirth*, too, has received much criticism in terms of the effects of industrialization on the American society during the Nineteenth Century which saw the creation of a modern industrial economy such as the national transportation and communication network. However, no study, as far as we are informed, has yet put the two works together in a comparative way in

order to investigate the issues concerning the impact of the Industrial Revolution on social and economic life. Comparing the two works may seem surprising due to the differences and similarities that exist between them: time, place and writing styles, *North and South* is set in Britain during the Victorian period while *The House of Mirth* is set in America during the Gilded Age. Elizabeth Gaskell is an English novelist; her novel *North and South* depicts the conflict between two classes of the Victorian society while Edith Wharton is an American author, whose novel *The House of Mirth* is regarded as an outstanding reflection of the American society during the Gilded Age; she analyzed the stratified society in which she was raised and demonstrates the reaction to social change.

Therefore, the central aim of the present paper is to read *North and South* and *The House of Mirth* in relation with their historical context by considering the author's lives and the socio-economic issues of their societies. To achieve our purpose, we will rely on the approach of New Historicism, which focuses on the idea that literature should be put within its historical context and the author's life. New Historicism examines literature in a wider historical background, exploring both how the writer's time influenced the writing of his work and how the work reflects the setting and major issues that were relevant to society.

c. Methodological Outline

In our research, we intend to compare Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). To achieve our goal, we will rely on the IMRAD method; therefore, our work will be divided into four parts: an introduction in which we have presented the subject (the review of the literature by some critics who have perceived the two selected novels from various perspectives); and then we have raised the purpose of this dissertation (the issue and working hypothesis). Then will come the "Method and Materials" part in which we will sum up some theoretical concepts that we will be used in our work mainly Stephen Greenblatt's *New Historicism*. Additionally, in 'Materials' we will present some relevant biographical elements about the two authors namely Elizabeth Gaskell and Edith Wharton as well as a brief summary for both novels. The Results part, however, is devoted to summing up the main findings of our discussion. Discussion, is the longest part of our work and will consist of two chapters; each one is divided into two sections. We will try to achieve a comparative thematic study of the two novels focusing on the common issue of the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the English and the American societies (the issue of class, class conflict and women's question).

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II. Method and Materials

1. Method

Through this piece of research, we intend to compare Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* by relying on the approach of New Historicism that emerged in the 1980s. New Historicism was first coined by Stephen Jay Greenblatt in his essay entitled "*The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in the Renaissance*" (1982) in which it was introduced as a literary approach that seeks to understand intellectual history through the relation between literature and historical context. Therefore, we think that such a theoretical framework is relevant to our study since the two selected novels are related to the history and society where they took place

Stephen Greenblatt was born in 1943 in Boston, Massachusetts. He taught at Harvard University, and he is the main founder of the New Historicist approach, which is inspired by the ideas of Bakhtin, Marx, and Foucault. This school of thought asserts that a literary work should be viewed as "*a product of its time, place and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated creation of genius*".¹ which means that there is a direct connection between the real facts in a society and the literary texts that are produced. Indeed, Greenblatt was popular and appealed to many renaissance scholars, who were directly inspired by his ideas. Among them, we may cite Louis A. Montrose, Walter Benn Michaels and Catherine Gallagher.²

In fact, Historicism is a theory or style that emphasizes the importance of history and both Old Historicism and New Historicism focus on the cultural and historical context of the era in which a work of literature was written; however, New Historicists disagree with several aspects of old historicism by establishing new principles; for instance, Old Historicism views the author as a mere reporter, reflecting only the historical events of his time. In contrast, the

New Historicists propose a new way of reading history and literature, considering the author as both a reporter and a subjective translator that took part of society.³ They have also emphasized the link which exists between the historical background of the work and the reader's understanding. Thus, Greenblatt notes in his essay "Resonance and Wonder":

The new historicism obviously has distinct affinities with resonance; that is, its concern with literary texts has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original and conception and to analyze the relationship between their circumstances and our own. New Historicists critics have tried to understand the intersecting circumstances not as stable, prefabricated background against which the literary texts can be placed, but as dense network of evolving and often contradictory social forces.⁴

The above quotation suggests that the time period in which the author lives influences the writing of his literary works. Any literary work is a cultural production; thus, it is important to analyze the relationship between texts and their contexts because the historical and societal features that form a literary work are essential to its quality and meaning. Additionally, New Historicists reject the idea that a text is an isolated piece, as they believe that it is always connected to its historical and cultural contexts to be relevant to the present day. In this regard J. McGann states, "*The core of new historicism centrally concerns with the relationship between history and texts*"⁵. Also, the American professor Aram Veesser introduces New Historicism as "*the attempt to explain facts by reference to earlier facts*"⁶ which means that a literary work is not only the result of its author's personal ideas and imagination, but also of the different conditions of its time.

2. Materials

2.1 The Life of Elizabeth Gaskell

In this section, we have included some biographical elements about both writers namely Elizabeth Gaskell and Edith Wharton that can help us to understand their novels. To start with, the English writer Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson, best known as Elizabeth Gaskell, was born on September 29th, 1810 in Chelsea, London. She is a well-known writer who produced a lot of

literary works during the Victorian era. She was encouraged to read classic literature, which would inspire her writings. In 1832, Elizabeth married a religious man named William Gaskell; like her father, he was a Unitarian Minister and a successful writer who gained recognition in both his profession and the literary field.⁷

2.2 Synopsis of *North and South* (1855)

Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) is a 'social problem' novel that explores different issues in society and critiques the societal structures of the time period. It examines the cultural differences between the North and the South of England as well as the socio-economic tensions of the Industrial Revolution. Gaskell's novel centers on Margaret Hale's life, a young woman of eighteen who has spent her adolescence living with her wealthy aunt Shaw in London; she was a close friend of her daughter Edith and this is what brought up Margaret into the privileged world of middle-class.

Margaret arrives back in her small town of Helstone where she faces an issue with her father Mr. Hale who decides to leave the church. When Margaret's family lose hope of finding another source of income other than tutoring, they have been obliged to move to the Northern industrial city of Milton where Margaret confronts the harsh reality of The Industrial Revolution and discovers that the north differs much from the south. She was also shocked by the unjust inequalities between the rich and the working class; this has urged Margaret to use her intelligence to influence those who consider themselves able to control others' lives, mainly John Thornton, the owner of a local cotton factory and her father's friend. John started to have feelings toward her; however, despite his wealth and good look, Margaret finds a problem with his mistreatment of his workers.

In the North, Margaret befriends Nicholas Higgins, a worker in John Thornton's mill and his family, especially his daughter Bessy who is dying from cotton fluff that affected her

lungs as a result of working in the mill since her childhood. Thus, Bessy created in her a deep sympathy for the working-class citizens of Milton; Margaret then finds herself at a crossroads, while she sympathizes with the workers' problems, who are striking to claim their rights and better their situation, she also finds herself falling in love with John Thornton. This serves as a backdrop for a conflicted love story. In the end, thanks to Margaret, Mr. Thornton realizes that his behavior toward his workers is inappropriate, and he becomes aware of their value as humans.

2.2.1 The Life of Edith Wharton

Edith Wharton, also known as Edith Newbold Jones, was born on January 24th, 1862, into a wealthy New York family. She was the third child and the only daughter of Lucretia Rhinchander Jones and George Frederic. At the age of twenty three, she married Robbins Teddy Wharton, a wealthy Boston banker and a friend of her brother.⁸ Like Elizabeth Gaskell, Edith Wharton was very fascinated with reading stories since she was very young. She is one of America's greatest writers and the first woman awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literature. She wrote forty books in forty years, including *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). She died on August 11, 1937.⁹

2.2.2 Synopsis of *The House of Mirth* (1905)

Edith Wharton's fourth novel, *The House of Mirth* (1905) is a novel that depicts the American society in which Wharton was raised during the Gilded Age. The novel's title suggests the idea of morality and suffering, originating in a biblical quote; "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."¹⁰ The 'mirth' refers to the upper class's obsession with superficiality, materialism and pleasure. The Gilded as a time of excess golden on the surface but corrupt underneath. Since upper class people's energy is focused on empty pursuits and social standing, its members neglect ethical values, a fact which was made them foolish and obsessed by the desire to get rich.

The novel is set mainly in New York City, but a few chapters occurred in Bellemont. It narrates the social decline of the protagonist Lily Bart, a young single American woman who is descended from a wealthy family of New York high society. In Lily's society, women were expected to marry a rich man to secure them a comfortable life; this applies also to Lily; as a woman in her late twenties, she is still looking for a rich husband since she was raised with hate for poverty and love for luxury. More importantly, the book turns around the fact that despite Lily's love for James Lawrence Selden, a modest lawyer, she has to give up that love just because the man is not rich.

As already mentioned, Lily is a popular member of the upper class, but gradually falls into poverty and debt. Despite having numerous suitors around her, she never manages to find a suitable husband. When Lily finally prepares to seduce the rich Percy Gryce, Bertha Dorset, one of the richest women in Lily's circle of friends has ruined her chances by spreading lies of flirting with her husband. Furthermore, Lily has refused Gus Trenor's help for sexual favors; thus, she paid her debts with the money inherited from her aunt. She could not accept her fate of being poor and left. As the novel concludes, Lily died alone with an overdose in her apartment.

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III. Results

From our comparative analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), we have explored two prominent literary figures that have influenced the literary world by addressing the issues of 'Class Stratification' and 'Women's Question' within the patriarchal societies. Therefore, these two novels present a portrayal of the English and the American societies and reflect many images of the real living societies during the Victorian Age and The Gilded Age.

Our study of these two books has been carried out after contemplation and consideration of Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism approach as a suitable framework theory. Therefore, through taking into account the authors' biographies and their works, it becomes evident that both *North and South* and *The House of Mirth* are fictional outcomes of some real experiences of the authors; for instance, Edith Wharton herself being a member of the American Aristocrats who has lived during the materialistic age knows perfectly the Aristocrats' behaviors; thus, she has dealt with this class in her novel.

The Results of our analysis have basically encompassed two main points. The first point is related to the description of the deep tensions that exist between the employers (manufacturers) and their employees (The Working class people) in Britain which is due to a misunderstanding between the two sides. The second reveals that Elizabeth Gaskell represented the role of the Victorian woman as being inferior in the patriarchal society. She has always rejected these social norms; thus, women wanted to become active members in society by breaking their domesticity.

This analysis has also stressed the issue of 'class division' in the American society; for it was stratified into the extremely wealthy and the poor because of Capitalism. It has also shown the extent to which identity is based on social constructs and stereotypes like: for an

American woman, she has to be a passive member in society and her only duty is to obey her husband and take care of her children. All these findings reveal that the above mentioned female writers deal with similar themes within their works. Despite the differences in the geographical areas to which they belong and the historical backgrounds, the two have close visions and have produced similar literary genre, mainly 'social problem' novels.

IV. Discussion

This part of our work is concerned with the thematic analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). We will put emphasis on the historical background of both novels relying on the New Historicist approach in both chapters. In the first one, we shall study Gaskell's realistic portrayal of the issue of class conflict and women's Status in the Victorian society. In the second chapter, we will analyze the same themes of class division and women's question in *The House of Mirth*, which mirrors the dark side of the American society. We aim to highlight the thematic affinities that exist between the two selected books.

Chapter One: The Socio-Economic Impact of the Industrial Revolution in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855)

During the nineteenth century the British Empire grew to become the first global industrial power. The country's success in international trade led to the establishment of an economy based on high wages and cheap energy. This transition to new manufacturing processes, commonly known as industrialization in Britain accentuated when the country and its economy were transformed into a different level, and that was due especially to the development of steam powered machinery and the mass production methods.¹ In this regard, William C. Taylor outlines the change that occurred in England and considers the Industrial Revolution as being a great development which motivated the British economy; especially the new inventions and the technological development that prospered the industry such as the steam engine and coke smelting. Cooke Taylor notes in his book entitled *Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire* "The steam engine had no precedent, the spinning-jenny is without ancestry, the mule and the power loom entered on no prepared heritage: they sprang into sudden existence like Minerva from the head Of Jupiter."² The Industrial Revolution brought many positive

and beneficial changes. For instance, it made Britain the first industrialized country, and the world's leading commercial nation, which involved a major shift in social and economic issues such as: the huge migration from the countryside to the growing towns and cities that led to an unprecedented rise in population growth.³

One of the most industrialized cities in Britain at that time was Manchester where many mills, stores and new streets were built. For instance, the most successful investment there was the cotton industry which became associated with the name of the city 'cottonopolis'. However, this economic progress led to the birth of two different and antagonistic classes that were known as the 'middle' and 'working' classes. The former referred to the rich industrialists while the second class to the workers exploited. As a local newspaper cited in Asa Briggs' work *Victorian Cities*: "*Here there seems no sympathy between the upper and lower classes of society.*"⁴

In fact, the Industrial Revolution had an important impact on British literature, especially in terms of themes such as the economic growth and the migration of people from the countryside to cities. Many writers turned to depicting the socio-economic atmosphere in Britain during this period, Charles Dickens, for example, is a prominent British writer who wrote about the nineteenth-century socio-economic issues. Elizabeth Gaskell is another writer and one of the leading figures of Victorian literature. In her works, she depicts the effects of The Industrial Revolution on society since she was living in Manchester, and she gained insights into the living conditions of the urban poor. This motivated her to write her 'condition of England' novel *North and South* which focuses on the investigation of the important economic and social issues such as class and gender conflict.⁵ In it, she discusses many social problems such as poverty and inequality especially between the employers and the employed who worked in the factories in hard conditions.

As written in our summary of the novel, *North and South* is a novel that reflects the true image of the English society; north means the town of Milton which is the fictional city of Manchester, and south is Helstone. The former city includes different social classes mainly the ‘middle’ and the ‘working’ classes, which are represented by various characters such as Mr. Thornton, and Nicholas Higgins. Indeed, the novel demonstrates the relationship that exists between the manufacturer John Thornton and his workers as being characterized by misunderstanding. In other words, there is a noticeable gap between them that the protagonist Margaret Hale tries to solve in order to satisfy both of them to avoid strikes. This period knew the birth of trade unionism during the Industrial Revolution, and the workers know perfectly that they got power against their masters and their actions disturb the factory’s production.

a. Class Conflict during Victorian England

North and South is rich in terms of its dealing with the theme of ‘class’ that is a system of ordering society where people are divided into different sets. Then we are dealing with ‘class conflict’ that refers to the social tensions that exists between different classes of society, and finally ‘class reconciliation’ that is the process of resolving any issue through the different characters created by the novelist . It is worth mentioning that many thinkers including philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists have discussed the notion of ‘class’ in their books. For instance, the German philosopher Max Weber defines it as ‘*an aggregate of individuals who share a common market situation.*’⁶ In addition, many sociologists detailed the factors that led to the division of societies into ‘classes’. One simple way to understand ‘class’ is to distinguish the rich individuals from the poor ones, the educated from the illiterate, and the differences in life styles in the same society.⁷

In Britain, during the nineteenth-century, society was divided into three main classes namely the ‘upper’, ‘middle’, and ‘working’ classes. The former is also known as the ‘landed’ class whose members are the wealthiest of the society, representing about two percent of the

population of Britain. It consisted of Aristocrats with lands, ducks, and even rich people from the courts. For centuries, many families inherited wealth from their ancestors which would secure them a luxurious life. Some aristocrats did not have to work. Nevertheless, there were some of them who made investments to make money while others were landowners who rented lower workers.⁸ This upper class category is best described in the following quotation:

... definitions of the upper class include the boarder 'squirearchy' who's Income derived from substantial landed estates, and the wider group of younger sons and their offspring inserted because of the restrictions of inheritance of estates and titles to the eldest mal, into positions of profit and authority in the state system, the army come the church and the financial institutions.⁹

Then comes the 'middle' class, also known as the 'industrial interest' because it was mainly the result of The Industrial Revolution, so its source of wealth came from investment in different fields of industry especially manufacturing in the midlands and the north of Britain. In other books about the Victorian age, the 'middle classes' included also people of different professions (merchants, shopkeepers and the 'white collar' professions) and different levels of wealth. It is worth mentioning that the growth of the 'middle' class, also known as the 'bourgeoisie', went hand in hand with the development of some cities that changed remarkably after the Industrial Revolution mainly the city of Manchester. The latter was the model for the economic alterations and industrial problems in nineteenth-century England. In other words, it was the ideal setting for class conflict described in many novels of that period including the novel under study.¹⁰

The 'working' class is the last one to be described in this chapter since it was at the bottom of the Victorian system of classes. It is often referred to as the 'proletariat' that clashed with the previously described class. This class consisted of the majority of people in Britain including individuals who did not have a property, and those who worked in harsh and unsanitary conditions as unskilled laborers especially in farming industries such as sailing,

fishing, and as domestic servants. The second class citizens is characterized by low levels of education, low wages, and low status.¹¹

In addition, 'Class Conflict' is a phenomenon that is set between different classes within a society resulting from different social or economic positions, which in turn leads to opposed interests. There are several forms of class conflict including direct violence (wars and assassinations); and indirect violence (death from starvation and unsafe working conditions). In other words social conflict is the struggle for agency or power in society. According to Karl Marx, Class conflict is the theory that the relationships related to production and exchange serve as the basis for all other sorts of relationships.

As previously written, the issues related to 'class' are well-developed in Gaskell's novel which is a good example of the Victorian lifestyle including the misunderstanding between the two classes of employers (middle class) and employees (working class) which is the central topic of the novel. Even the title shows that at that time, people belonging to the same society did not share the same life conditions and status in the sense that some of them were from the 'North' while so many of them took control of the 'South'. To be more explicit, the north and the south are two opposed facets of the Victorian reality, this idea confirms that it is an era of ambivalence. However, the novel is not about locality but about the rich and the poor, the employers and the employees.

To start with, Elizabeth Gaskell in *North and South* introduces John Thornton as a middle class factory owner in Milton; he is described as a successful producer and a dominant employer and a utilitarian since he is simply obsessed with business success, for instance, when he was preparing to pay high prices for machinery in order to develop his industry. In fact, 'Utilitarianism' is a philosophy in which everything must support the productivity of industry. Typically belonged to the bourgeoisie or capitalists like Mr. Thornton; for them only facts and

reality can ensure success in life.¹² In the novel Gaskell shows that John is proud of the advantages afforded by his class and affirms slave dialectic; as he says;

[...] a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviors; that, in fact, everyone who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks.¹³

Moreover, even the protagonist Margaret finds Mr. Thornton among the factory owners who are “*blind with their total desire to dominate others*”¹⁴, as she introduced him to her father as being an arrogant and a utilitarian man who values only wealthy people by saying;

Oh, papa, by that testing everything by the standard wealth. When he spoke of the mechanical powers, he evidently looked upon them only as new ways of extending trade and making money. And the poor men around him they were poor because they were vicious-out of the pale of his sympathies because they had not his iron nature, and the capabilities that it gives him for being rich.¹⁵

On the other hand, the working class in Gaskell’s novel is represented through John Boucher and Nicholas Higgins. First, Boucher is a working-class man with six children and a sick wife. He works in Mr. Thornton’s cotton mill where he is unfairly treated by the master. Like other workers, he is against the new procedures of the mill’s owners mainly the decision to lower their wages. Worse, the manufacturers threaten them to employ Irish people which caused perturbation for the Milton workers who felt betrayed, so they attacked Mr. Thornton’s factory to demand their rights. However, Boucher is not strong enough to face the hard situation that he is living; he is desperate; therefore, he decides to kill himself. Here, Mrs. Gaskell demonstrates how the extreme inhuman working conditions may lead to the individual’s tragic fate, and how poverty drives one to commit suicide.

Besides, Nicholas Higgins is an active member of the committee organizing the strike against the entrepreneurs, he negotiates with Mr. Thornton to defend factory workers’ rights. However, John knew that he “*is one of the leaders of the union*”¹⁶ thus he rejects his demands. It is clear throughout the novel that both Mr. Higgins and Boucher are oppressed and considered

as inferior by employers like Mr. Thornton who exploit the lower class people. During the Victorian era Trade unions and clubs' role was to protect the workers from exploitation, maintain their customary living conditions, maintain the value of their skills and provide some sort of health insurance. However, trade union's industrial objectives were legally unacceptable, and it is seen as a threat by factory owners during that time.

Importantly, Gaskell in her work shows that 'Class Conflict' is the result of the lack of understanding between employees and masters in the factories. As already mentioned, workers began to go on strikes in the streets of Milton city when Mr. Thornton decides to cut their wages due to a competition in trade. The problem worsens because John believes that he is not obliged to inform his workers about the reasons that lie behind this cut, as he tells Margaret;

'I conjecture, a simultaneous strike. You will see Milton without smoke in a few days, I imagine, Miss Hale'.

'But why', asked she, 'could you not explain what good reason you have for expecting a bad trade? I don't know whether I use the right words, but you will understand what I mean'

'Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditure, or your economy in the use of your own money? We, the owners of capital, have a right to choose what we will do with it'.¹⁷

The above quotation is about the arrogance of Mr. Thornton and the lack of communication, and tension between workers and factory owners. During the fall in trade, John struggles to keep his factories running; however, when the workers continued rebelling against him, he did not stop his fight against them. Although Thornton responds favorably to his workers' demands, their relationship is still stressful for several years. During the strike, Margaret tries to explain the situation of the masters to the workers by saying;

They could not give up their farms all in a minute, however much they might wish to do so; but they would have no hay, nor corn to sell that year; and where would the money come from to pay the labourers' wages the next?¹⁸

However, Gaskell in her novel tries to reconcile between the conflicting sides through the protagonist Margaret Hale who does her best to improve the relationship between the two classes by proposing communication and dialogue as a way to find peace. For instance,

‘Mr. Thornton’, said Margaret, ‘go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly.’¹⁹

Also, Margaret attempts to develop a sense of understanding and sympathy in Mr. Thornton towards his workers’ situation. Initially; he rejects her advice, but over the course of the novel he realizes the value of his workers and admitted that he was wrong when he underestimated their power in developing his industry, so he changes his attitudes towards them. Finally, Margaret succeeds in deleting the enmity between them and establishing ‘clasns reconciliation’. This becomes very clear when Mr. Thornton’s Marlborough mills failed and decides to build his next industrial factory on new relationship with his employees. At the end of the story, Thornton’s primary concern is no longer his own reputation and business success, but a deep interest in workers’ lives by taking some responsibility for their education and welfare outside the factory. Even though the factory system initiates to house the workers with their families in non-hygiene conditions near the factories in order to have them near the factories and not to offer them decent housing conditions, Mr. Thornton tries to offer his employees good living conditions. As far as his relation with Nicholas Higgins, to whom he had been unjust is concerned, Margaret wished that they would find a way to communicate with each other in order to avoid another misunderstanding like the one that occurred between them before,

if he and Mr. Thornton would speak out together as man to man - if Higgins would forget that Mr. Thornton was a master, and speak to him as he does to us - and- if Mr. Thornton would be patient enough to listen to him with his human heart, not with his master’s ears. ²⁰

As a result of Higgins' honesty, which Mr. Thornton admires, he decides to offer him a job. Higgins hesitates at first, then he accepts trying to forget that Thornton had called him 'impudent, a liar and a mischief-maker',²¹ while he had in turn called Thornton 'a tyrant, an' an oud bulldog, and a hard, cruel master;'²² and finishes with saying: 'Measter, do yo' think we can e'er get on together?'²³ Thornton replies they do not need to: 'But there's one comfort on your own showing. We neither of us can think much worse of the other than we do now.'²⁴ Finally, they come to understand each other's point of view about the strike and their relation is getting better. For example, following the start of the communication with Higgins, Mr. Thornton, who generally refers to the workers as only 'hands' begins to humanizing them by calling them 'men'; he has also built a dining-room for them and eats there sometimes; as Margaret claims:

In his position of manufacturer, simply because it led him into such contact, and gave him the opportunity of so much power, among a race of people strange, shrewd, ignorant; but, above all, full of character and strong human feeling.²

To conclude, Gaskell in her novel *North and South* (1855) made it clear that the main solution for class conflict is sympathy, tolerance and communication. Towards the end of the novel, people as different as Mr. Thornton and Mr. Higgins are no longer enemies and an optimistic vision emerges out in the industrial city of Milton.

b- The Status of Women in the English Society during the Nineteenth-Century

Nineteenth-century Britain was an era of progress and reform, which had an important impact on the position of women in society. Before this period, women were considered as being inferior and only good to do domestic tasks; they were subjected to the authority of their men that were identified as being superior, active, and rational. Because of women's financial dependence, they felt less important to men whose role was to promote their countries' economies; in this context, Jean-Jacques Rousseau affirms that "*Women are naturally subordinate to men.*"²⁶ Hence, during that time period, women were not able to demand their rights since they were placed at the lowest position in society.²⁷ Their importance was neglected in all domains, and they have faced different difficulties although England was a powerful and wealthy nation. Women did not have identity nor fair rights because of the Victorian laws which were discriminatory ones contrarily in the Anglo Saxon period where women had the right to a share in control of domestic affairs and of children and to divorce. The Victorians follow their queen and consider her as a great example of loyal and obedient wife 'the ideal womanhood'. However, later on the Victorian era marked the rejection of social limitation that are put on women. Women's conditions were changed by the English Common Law through passing various acts against Victorian customs and the traditional convictions as the Infant's Custody Act.

As a result of their marginalized situation in society, a new kind of literature appeared in the Victorian era known as 'female literature'. Women realized that writing is the best way to challenge and raise their voices against the patriarchal society even if they faced many difficulties when trying to write their novels. Women writers wanted to prove that they were not different to men; they aimed to raise female's awareness through the idea of gender roles. Among the well-known British female writers, we may mention Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell who contributed significantly to the flourishing of women's literature at

that time.²⁸ Based on her own life experiences, Gaskell through her novels created new perspectives for women to give new roles for themselves especially those who struggled to survive in their societies. Compared to Victorian women, Gaskell's heroines are active and powerful; they break the norms of society by trying to be equal to men. To be more specific, in *North and South*, Gaskell rejects the general opinion about the status of women at that time. She attempts to depict their social conditions and defends their rights through her strong heroine Margaret Hale who is an example of an emancipated and new woman.

One of the major topics that are developed in Gaskell's novel is the 'ideology of separated spheres' that controlled the relations between men and women in the nineteenth-century and states that both genders were different. While the male sphere was related to power and work, the female one was referred to as the household activities, motherhood and submission to the man.²⁹ Indeed, Gaskell encourages women to be active in public that was regarded badly in the Victorian society, and tries to give a new identity to the Victorian woman through creating the emancipated Margaret who is introduced to the public world of Milton, which was not common in her time. Margaret is an anti-conformist figure in the novel who behaves the way she does to match with Gaskell's point of view; she rejects the traditional beliefs of her society by entering the public field.³⁰ To illustrate, when she moves to the north, Margaret acts differently from other Victorian women; she shows an interest in activities that were, in the past, exclusively reserved to men such as political and economic domains; therefore. Gaskell gives her heroine a moral space to assert her own 'sphere' of activity since she does not agree that being a woman or a mother is the only duty that a woman has in her life. In so doing, she breaks the gender norms of her society.

Furthermore, in the traditional Victorian family the parents were the natural authority, particularly the father who assumes the responsibility for his family's needs. However, in *North and South*, through the Hales family, we notice that there is a kind of role reversal; Mr. Hale

fails as a parent when he decides to give up his position as a church minister in Helstone and move to Milton; thus, by necessity Margaret, the child takes on many responsibilities that should have been assumed by 'the head of the family', she occupies the "authority gap" left by Mr. Hale thanks to her maturity, like informing her mother about their move to the industrial north and looking for a house to them after their arrival. In addition to that, her role is extended to a nurse to her mother since she decides to take care of Mrs. Hale herself;

Oh, mamma! let me be your nurse. I will learn anything Dixon can teach me but you know I am your child and I do think I have a right to do anything for you...
I know a great deal more than you are aware of. Let me be your nurse. Let me try, at any rate. No one has ever, shall ever try so hard as I will do. It will be such a comfort, mamma.³¹

Following her mother's death, Margaret's father and brother are paralyzed by sorrow "*The father and brother depended upon her; while they were giving way to grief, she must be working, planning, considering.*"³² However, despite her pain of losing her mother, she prepares her funeral ceremony and insisted to attend even though "*women do not generally go.*"³³ Here again, Margaret's strong character is displayed because she does not shy away from the truth. Margaret is, certainly, strong both morally and physically; she tries to help and protect others by risking both her reputation and physical health. On the one hand, her moral courage is shown early in the novel when Mr. Hale asks her to tell her mother about moving to Milton. Her father's weakness is revealed when he says "*I dare not tell her!*"³⁴ Instead, Margaret accepts to inform and tell her mother about moving. Another example of Margaret's inner strength is when the poor working-class father, Boucher, has been found dead and someone has to tell his wife. As a friend and neighbor at the same time, Higgins is the first to be asked but he refuses: "*I canna go, Dunnot ask me. I canna face her.*"³⁵ People then turn to Mr. Hale for help, but he is "*...indeed unable. He was trembling from head to foot*"³⁶ and is clearly powerless to do anything. Again, Margaret accepts the task and declares "*I will go.*"³⁷ From this incident, the two men being clearly better suited for the task than Margaret but lack courage to inform the

widow. As far as, physical strength is concerned, it is shown by her the moment she steps in front of mill's owner John Thornton to protect him from his rioting employees:

Her eye was on the group of lads who had armed themselves with their clogs some time before. She saw their gesture, she knew its meaning, she read their aim. Another moment, and Mr. Thornton might be smitten down, he whom she had urged and goaded to come to this perilous place. She only thought how she could save him. She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond.³⁸

In this excerpt, it is clear that Margaret is a powerful woman, and this image is reinforced as the novel progresses. Margaret steps out of the female's passive and 'private sphere'. In this way, Gaskell "*reverses the conventional understanding of gender relations*"³⁹ that man should protect the woman. By contrasting Margaret's bravery with men's weakness, Gaskell further emphasizes her desire to accept responsibility and interferes in traditional men's roles by mediating between workers and masters. She takes action when necessary, believing that women are as capable as men, rejecting the question of 'separate spheres' and challenging the Victorian gender norms.

In addition to Margaret, Hannah Thornton is the second female character to enter the 'public sphere'. She does not conform to the traditional image of Victorian women that were weak members of society, but she is viewed as "*a woman of strong power and firm resolve.*"⁴⁰ After her husband committed suicide, Lady Thornton didn't expect any help from her society. She becomes the head of her family hoping that her son would be one day a master in the city. Certainly, because of her sacrifice and deviation from the norm, John grew up successful and quite wealthy. She strongly supports him to establish the most important industry during the Victorian Era cotton spinning mill which she runs without neglecting her duty as a mother. She also guides John to make plans especially during the strike, when she wanted to take strict measures by asking the Irish to come to work for them. Unlike many widows at that time, who choose remarriage to secure their emotional, social and economic needs, Mrs. Thornton, after her husband's death, gave up her femininity to enter the industrial masculine world. She takes

decisive actions when things get really hard, and risks everything for her family's interests. Margaret and Mrs. Thornton takes the leadership of the family, thus, the author wants to claim that another world is possible, where women are leaders, powerful and decisive.

On the other hand, both Margaret and Hannah can be contrasted with Margaret's mother, Maria Hale who embodies the Victorian woman definition as 'the angel of the home'. She is described as a traditional woman who takes care of her husband and looks for the happiness of her children Margaret and Frederick. Mrs. Hale's submission is revealed when her husband informs them about moving to Milton; she does not want to go since she knows that the climate in the north can endanger her health conditions, as it is stated in the book "*the near neighborhood of so many trees affected her health.*"⁴¹ However, she cannot oppose Mr. Hale's decision since according to her a woman whatever it takes should obey her husband. Thus, she dies as a result of leaving Helstone and submitting to her husband's will; her only reaction is just crying "*Mrs. Hale sat down, and began to cry.*"⁴²

Another factor that shows Mrs. Hale's weakness is when she eventually got sick; instead of caring about her fate, she is thinking about her son Frederick whom she wants to see before she passes away; again crying '*Frederick! Frederick! Come to me. I am dying. Little first-born child, come to me once again!*'⁴³ However, the idea of Frederick's presence in Milton is not appropriate since he might get arrested. Possibly, Margaret's mother is shown as a weak female character in the novel because she cares about others' lives more than her own in the most delicate moments. She is set as the embodiment of the Victorian ideal of the frail typical Victorian woman.

Along with Maria Hale, Gaskell uses the character of Bessy Higgins as a submissive woman; she is Mr. Higgins' daughter who spent her life working in the factory; however, she is no longer able to carry on work because of her bad health conditions, and the dirty smoke of

mills worsens her situation. In fact, she is utilized as the personification of the female workers' suffering caused by the industrial system in England that is the disastrous impact of Victorian Age. Unfortunately, Bessy believes that low class laborers have nothing to be happy about in life except its end,

And I think, if this should be th' end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to sicken i' this dree place, wi' them mill-noises in my ears forever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o' quiet-and wi' the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air yo' speak on.⁴⁴

From this extract, Bessy's pain and disappointment are revealed as she prefers to die rather than continue to suffer. In her novel *North and South*, Gaskell creates Ms. Higgins to discuss the exploitation and suffering of northern England working-class people.

In brief, in the end of this chapter we come to sum up that Elizabeth Gaskell through her novel *North and South* challenges the norms of the Victorian era by giving her male and female characters opposite roles. Additionally, she portrays the woman as an active person in the 'public sphere' and her role is of a great importance in the development of society. Whereas man as passive and helpless in the presence of a powerful woman. Also, she rejects the traditional female stereotypes of "*The Angel in the house*"⁴⁵ encouraging the woman to have societal roles other than traditional home duties, because according to her a woman is not only meant to be at home but she is a powerful creation that is able to work both out and inside. Finally, Gaskell sheds light on the suffering of female workers in the factories during the nineteenth-century.

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Chapter Two: The Socio-Economic Impact of the Industrial Revolution in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905)

The Gilded Age in the United States from 1870 to the 1890 is referred to as the second Industrial Revolution, or the technological Revolution. In America, as in Britain, it was characterized by a shift from an economy based on agriculture to an industrial one. Consequently, a lot of people from both Europe and South America immigrated to the United States looking for better job opportunities. However, the bitter reality disappointed them after their arrival there; discrimination (between immigrants and native-born workers), low wages, and bad conditions of work in the factories were the common problems immigrants had to cope with at that time.¹ Also, during this second Industrial Revolution, the gap widened between two distinct classes: the rich bourgeoisie grew richer and the poor proletariat grew poorer. This has led to striking differences in the two classes' ways of life.²

In the field of literature, The Gilded Age was the period after the Civil War in America that is described by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in their work *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. This expression referred to the differences that existed between the progress and development of the nation as a result of industrialization (inventions, and urban facilities) and the various negative aspects of society such as corruption and materialism as the Robber Barons, and this work is a good example of this age and its bad sides.³

Besides, American literature during The Gilded Age had shifted from Romanticism to Realism which deals with new themes in a new style of writing. To be more explicit, realism has rejected the traditional American literature, which focused on emotions' expression, and called for reflecting the harsh reality of the American people.⁴ As a consequence, the economic and social issues of this period found full expression in the writings of some writers (realists),

such as William Dean Howells, who have contributed to the flourish of the American literature flourish by focusing on the problems of industrialization and inequality among classes.⁵

Similarly to *North and South* (1855), Wharton's book *The House of Mirth* (1905) is an industrial novel too. Industrial novels deal with the harsh realities of the living society depicting the effects of industrialism. *The House of Mirth* on its turn, portrays the American aristocracy of Wharton's time and deals with social class, class division and women's status through creating various characters that represent different social classes. For instance, the Trenors and the Dorsets are representative of the upper class, while the middle class is portrayed through the characters of Simon Rosedale and Lawrence Selden and finally, the lower class through Nettie Struther.

a- Social Classes in America during the Gilded Age

Many sociologists consider the upper class to be the most successful individuals who stand at the top of the functional class hierarchy, these individuals are leaders in their chosen occupations or professions. The American sociologist Edward Digby Baltzell defines the concept of the 'elite class' as follows,

A group of families whose members are descendant of successful individuals (elite members) of one, two three or more generations ago. These families are at the top of the social class hierarchy; they are brought up together, they maintain a distinctive style of life and a kind of primary group solidarity which sets them apart from the rest of the population.⁶

Thus, the upper class is the highest class in society and represents twenty percent of the American population including government members (politicians, entrepreneurs, and investors) who are the wealthiest people of the nation. Their source of income does not consist of salaries but on investments and capital gains.

Then, unlike Victorian England, the American middle class did not exist until the arrival of the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, its members, also referred to as a 'social' or 'economic'

class, have average income, education and status. They are generally doctors, lawyers, government employees who contributed to the emergence of modern-American society.⁷ However, the working class, also known as the proletariat, is the last class to be described in this part. It is comprised of immigrants and non-white natives who engaged in manual-jobs; they suffered from hard working conditions and were generally discriminated because of their customs, habits and language that were strange to white Anglo-Saxon Americans.⁸

In her novel the *House of Mirth*, Edith criticizes the lack of moral values of the American aristocrats by showing their different attitudes and behaviors such as superficiality, selfishness and arrogance. As a member of the upper class herself, she is familiar with all the traditions of the social ladder. Explicitly, the elite class is the most apparent one in Wharton's work; it is represented through various characters. First, Gus Trenor is an investment adviser who is described as a disgraceful man. He falls in love with Lily; however, as he gets closer to her, he comes to realize that she only seeks to maintain the upper class circle. Thus, Gus proposes financial help to her because he knows that she is going through a financial crisis without informing Lily that she should pay her debts. Actually, Gus believes that he needs to be paid for the favor he offers with another one; he is planning that Lily at last would give up her dignity and has sex with him. He's a dishonest man since he never tells Lily about his purposes;

‘Pay up?’ she faltered. ‘Do you mean that I owe you money?’ He laughed again, ‘Oh, I’m not asking for payment in kind. But there’s such a thing as fair play-and interest on one’s money-and hang me if I’ve had as much as a look from you’
‘Your money? What have I to do with your money? You advised me how to invest mine...you must have seen I knew nothing of business...you told me it was all right’⁹

Through the above conversation, Wharton shows that Gus' influence and power are derived from his wealth, and this was a prominent aspect of the nineteenth-century aristocracy. This dialogue highlights the lack of negotiation between Lily and Gus as he is the only one who takes decision, and Lily has no idea about what he means. According to Wai-Chee Dimock in

her article, "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*", this exchange cannot be a good one since its rules are not known to both sides; she notes,

The principle of exchange, the idea that one has to 'pay' for what one gets [...], this 'fair play', that Trenor demands from Lily, what he does not (or chooses not to) recognize is that what he calls 'fair' is by no means self-evident and certainly not computable on an absolute scale.[...] prices will remain arbitrary as long as the exchange rests on a negotiated parity between the exchange items—negotiated according to the bargaining powers of the contracting parties.¹⁰

In fact, Trenor asks Lily to pay for the money he has lent her in another way than money's return. For sexual favors, he imposes this type of exchange; however, the latter is far from being just since Lily is not informed from the beginning about his intentions until she spends all the money. Gus' interexchange lacks negotiation; it was only based on the power of money.¹¹

In addition to Gus Trenor, Bertha Dorset is also a member of the high society in the novel. She marries the wealthy George Dorset whom she considers inferior and weak comparing to her as an arrogant and manipulative woman. She mistreats George and does not love him; she even cheats on him with other men to please herself at the expense of his suffering. However, she cannot break up with him because he is a rich man. Although George knows about his wife's affairs, he is powerless since, as previously said, he is incapable and weak. The author uses Bertha to reveal the lack of moral values that is characteristic of the elite class. Besides, Bertha is also aggressive towards Lily, and wants to cause her social downfall because of jealousy. She spreads rumors about Lily's adultery with her husband George, saying "*you know, my dear, you're rather a big responsibility in such a scandalous place after midnight.*"¹² After Lily's hearing these threats, she knew perfectly what Bertha was planning for.

Like Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* rejects the capitalists' behavior that is morally unvalued. Lily is exiled from the social order even if she denies the rumors that are spread about her relationship with George; no one believes her:

‘How can you talk so, Lily? Of course the money ought to have been yours, but after all that makes no difference. The important thing’ Gerty paused, and then continued firmly: ‘The important thing is that you should clear yourself should tell you friends the whole truth’

‘The whole truth?’ Miss Bart laughed. ‘What is truth? Where a woman is concerned, it’s the story that’s easiest to believe. In this case it’s great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset’s story than mine, because she has a big house and an opera box, and it’s convenient to be on good terms with her’¹³

Despite Lily’s innocence, the upper class society chooses to trust Bertha over her since she is highly regarded. Lily says “*was it her fault that the purely decorative mission is apt to be hampered by material necessities or complicated by moral scruples?*”¹⁴ With Lily’s expel from the social elite, Bertha succeeds in achieving her aim.

Similarly to Mr. Thornton in Gaskell’s novel who is described initially as a selfish man, Wharton also illustrates the self-interest of the wealthy through Simon Rosedale, a Jewish man who belongs to the middle class and tries to be part of the upper class society. Thus, in order to realize his dream, he believes that he is in need of a wife because according to the elite class people, possessing a wife is important “*to make all the other women feel small*”¹⁵, a woman who would show off the amount of money the man owns “*what I want is a woman who’ll hold her head higher the more diamonds I put on it*”¹⁶ For Rosedale, Lily is the best choice to make him achieve his social status; however, at first she rejects him. After Lily’s social deterioration, she puts down her pride and turns to Rosedale to accept his proposal. At this point, Rosedale, in his turn rejects her, claiming that after she loses her social status, he is no longer in need of her. As it is stressed in the novel, Rosedale’s offer to marry is not sincere, “*I don’t believe the stories about you-I don’t WANT to believe them. But they’re there, and my not believing them ain’t going to alter the situation.*”¹⁷ he says. Here, Rosedale’s hypocrisy is shown to expose the disgusting behavior of the American modern society.

Another middle class character is Lawrence Selden, a lawyer with strong character and much love for ‘personal freedom’ above anything else. Selden claims freedom “*From*

everything- from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety,[...]that's what I call success"¹⁸

Although he deeply cares for Lily, they are not following the same principles in life; she seeks to live in the highest level of society while he prefers to be free in his spiritual world. His beliefs are uncommon in the American society where people are obsessed with money and social position. Thus, he has succeeded in balancing between his poverty and the superficiality of his society. Selden has learnt from his poor family that,

Though many of Selden's friends would have called his parents poor, he had grown up in an atmosphere where restricted means were felt only as a check on aimless profusion: where the few possessions were so good that their rarity gave them a merited relief, and abstinence was combined with elegance in a way exemplified by Mrs. Selden's knack of wearing her old velvet as if it were new. A man has the advantage of being delivered early from the home point of view, and before Selden left college he had learnt that there are as many different ways of going without money as of spending it.¹⁹

According to Wharton, Selden leads a normal life because he is not affected by superficiality and materialism contrary to Lily who is attracted to material luxury that makes her suffer. Lily notices that Selden is detached from the elite social world; that is why she cannot marry him. Despite his understanding of Lily's motives (she wants to be a member of the high society), it is apparent that Selden sympathizes with her and respects her choices.

In contrast to Margaret Hale in *North and South*, who is both self-reliant and perseverant, Lily is depicted as morally weak since she is influenced by people of the highest class, without knowing the dark side of being among them. After Mr. Bart's economic failure, Lily and her mother have become socially 'ruined'. In order to stay in their social circle, Lily intends to use her beauty to marry a rich husband who would secure them. Mrs. Bart all what has taught is to look as an object, they plant in her the idea that to regain their position and reach their aims, she has to rely on her beauty "*But you'll get it all back –you'll get it all back, with your face.*"²⁰ However, in her attempt to attract wealthy men, she loses her human aspect and is treated by them as an object since they become aware of her life plans. Luce Irigaray comments

on this, "*The price of the articles, in fact, no longer comes from their natural form, from their bodies, their language, but from the fact that they mirror the need for exchanging among men.*"²¹ Lily trades with her beauty in order to gain money and social status which made her lose her value as respected woman among the men of her society.

Another factor that has urged Lily more away from the elite class is her addiction to gambling in the parties. She has got this after moving to live with her aunt Mrs. Peniston and could not stop it until it ruined her finances. Also, the spread of the rumors against her by the members of her society made her look as a bad lady which means a woman that is not respected and has no value among those who surround her. Thus, when her presence is no longer appreciated by the upper class, Lily falls to the lowest circles where her beauty is no longer useful to her. She struggles, in vain, to adapt to the new life that she leads this it is seen in her face: "*The lines of worry and disappointment and failure! Every sleepless night leaves a new one*"²²; and then she starts blaming herself stating "*I wasn't meant to be good.*"²³ After Lily's social collapse, she has got depressed about her poor conditions and could not accept her fate unlike Margaret who is able to overtake any hard circumstances like the death of her mother. Thus, she dies as a result of her weakness.

Contrary to *North and South*, the working class in Wharton's *The House of Mirth* is not so noticeable. The writer uses Nettie Struther as an illustration of happiness and modesty of the lower class people in her time. Nettie is a poor woman whom Lily meets in the Girl's Club and is "*one of the discouraged victims of over-work and anemic parentage.*"²⁴ Despite the fact that she does not have enough money, she finds satisfaction in the love of her family, Nettie Struther "*was a poorly-dressed young woman with a bundle under her arm. Her face had the air of unwholesome refinement which ill-health and over-work may produce, but its common prettiness was redeemed by the strong and generous curve of the lips*".²⁵ Edith Wharton creates the character of Nettie to show that despite the harshness of poverty, a poor woman should not

be ashamed neither of working to earn a living nor to show her natural beauty. Nettie is not a prominent character in the story, yet she is important through her relationship with Lily when both of them have saved each other in different situations.

Moreover, the conflict in *The House of Mirth* is rather among individuals who seek to maintain the social ladder and wealth. At the level of classes, it is not very apparent in the novel in comparison to *North and South* where it has been the most prominent factor of the story and is mainly between the manufacturers and the workers. This idea is well illustrated by, Lily Bart and Bertha Dorset who are two characters in conflict. On the one hand, Bertha is a selfish and arrogant woman who does not hesitate in sacrificing other people to please herself. On the other hand, Lily wants to be part of the ‘social elite’, but she is not a strong woman. Indeed, the reason of this enmity is Bertha’s jealousy of Lily’s friendship with Selden since Bertha has an affair with him. The struggle starts when Bertha was looking for a seat on the Bellomont train and says to Lily, “*Oh, Lily-are you going to Bellomont? Then you can’t let me have your seat, I suppose? But I MUST have a seat in this carriage–porter; you must find me a seat at once. Can’t someone be put somewhere else? I want to be with my friends.*”²⁶

Bertha’s provocation to Lily does not stop at this point; she has also invited her into the Dorsets’ yacht in order to distract her husband George, to cheat on him freely with Ned Silverton. Lily is aware of Bertha’s intention to manipulate her, but she accepts her invitation because she finds it a good chance to integrate with the European elites. Unfortunately, things does not go as she expects, when Bertha’s husband starts to show some interest in Lily. As the professor Nancy Bently pointed in her essay, “*Wharton, travel, and Modernity*”;

In the House of Mirth, for instance, Lily Bart is saved by a yacht. An invitation from her friend Bertha Dorset to travel the Mediterranean on the Dorsets’ steam-yacht allows Lily to escape the threat of ruinous gossip in her Manhattan circle. Though she knows Bertha’s social world is ignoble, it is the only world in which Lily can imagine finding security and pleasure [...] Yet at the moment she believes herself most secure, Lily is headed for a fall.²⁷

Thus, Bertha begins spreading rumors that Lily is having an affair with George. In order to protect herself from the scandal of her affair with Ned, she expels Lily from the elite social world to prevent her from succeeding. Through this scene, Wharton portrays the lack of moral values of the aristocrats since as Bertha was ready to betray anyone even her friends for her own interest.

In the following days, Lily has had an opportunity to save her reputation and re-enter her social circle. She wants to take revenge of Bertha who causes her social decline by exposing the love letters she sent to Selden and which a maid in his house gave her. Yet, Rosedale suggests that these letters might be used against Bertha; they would destroy her reputation: “*Why don't you use those letters of hers you bought last year?*”²⁸ However, Lily decides to burn the letters and chooses her friendship with Selden over her revenge since she is worried about his reputation. At this point, Wharton demonstrates us that Lily is loyal to her moral values above all even if she has descended to the bottom of society.

b- Edith Wharton's Portrayal of The Status of Women in the American Society during the Gilded Age

As in Britain, in nineteenth-century America, women were expected to serve as the protectors of religion while men focused on the expansion of the industrialized economy of their country. Thus, women were completely dependent on their patriarch and had to obey their husbands and fathers alike since the latter were considered to be superior in all domains. As a result, the role of women was exclusively on the ‘private sphere’, where they were mainly responsible for domestic tasks such as raising children and housework. Men, on the contrary, had public duties such as politics and commerce. Hence, women’s weakness was considered as an obstacle that prevented them to work outside their homes,²⁹ as the English professor and psychologist Patricia Marks noted;

Exactly those qualities that were said to make women excel at domestic obligations were also said to limit them in the workplace: their emotional, intuitive responses, their innocence, and their lack of education were inappropriate for a hard-bitten business world in which money, rather than personal relationship, was the goal.³⁰

However, many American women, like British ones, rejected their domesticity and gradually engaged in male activities like teaching, writing and government work. Some of them entered the 'public sphere' intentionally while others were forced out by necessity for many reasons such as economic support for divorcees and widows.³¹

Early in the nineteenth-century, the number of female authors has significantly increased. At the beginning, it was believed that women were less intellectually intelligent to compete with male authors in writing since they saw themselves superior to women. Later on, women were provided a better education that had freed them from their domesticity and began to struggle in order to be accepted in the public sphere. However, when publishing their works they faced many difficulties, after long suffering, they became major players in the various publishing of literary works. Among the best known female writers of the American literature: Alice Walker, Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton; all of them aimed to raise women's awareness by writing about their experiences to represent the position of women. They criticized their patriarchal society in which proper marriage was women's greatest achievement.³²

As already mentioned in the Materials section, Edith Wharton inspired by New York women fiction in England, she explores the ways women struggle against male domination and reject social norms to free themselves socially and economically. Indeed, her literary works have challenged the oppressive social codes; for instance, in her novel *The House of Mirth*, Wharton created two categories of female characters. On the one hand, 'The Ideal Women' represents the real image of the American societies' womanhood, and were viewed as passive women, they were called ideal since they have respected the societal codes of their patriarchal

society. On the other hand, we find 'active women'³³ who challenged their patriarchal society by joining the public world; these ones were generally regarded as 'bad women'.

As previously written, women in the nineteenth-century belonged to the household while men were the money-makers who had to take care of their families' finances otherwise they were rejected by their wives. In the novel, this is the case of Mrs. Bart who disrespects her husband after his bankruptcy and shows no other feeling but "*grim unflagging resentment*"³⁴. Lily's mother believes that money is an important thing in life since it raises one's values and position in society. She considers also a good marriage as one of the best ways for a woman to be a respected member in society since her power is linked to her husband's money. Following Mr. Bart's financial ruin, Mrs. Bart started to rely on her daughter's physical appearance to restore their fortune. She raised Lily with the belief that her beauty would be a priority in her life "*Whatever it costs, one must have a good cook*"³⁵ and be "*decently dressed*"³⁶. Lily as most women of the bourgeoisie class, Lily was raised to be passive and taught to marry a man of wealth and social standing. Wharton through Mrs. Bart embodies the attitude of bourgeoisie class women who believe that marrying a rich man gives them wealth and power.

Another female character Wharton uses to clarify the notion of the "Ideal woman" in her novel is Bertha Dorset. Bertha marries George, even though she does not love him, only to secure her position in society. Therefore, in searching for happiness, she has cheated on her husband with other men; this is where Bertha's immature personality is revealed. Moreover, she is jealous of Lily's relationship with the young wealthy Percy Gryce; thus, she does not hesitate to sabotage the chances of their marriage by creating rumors about Lily playing cards for money. Bertha is not courageous enough to assume the responsibility of her mistakes, so in order to save herself and her reputation, she shifts the blame for her mistakes to someone else. As all women of her time, Bertha is dependent on her husband's money for living; she is described as a hypocrite lady since she pretends to love George just because he is of interest on

her. Actually she does not respect him and makes his life a miserable one, as Mrs. Trenor says to Lily, *'Oh, George is not as dismal as you think. If Bertha didn't worry him he would be quite different. Or if she'd leave him alone, and let him arrange his life as he pleases. But she doesn't dare lose her hold of him on account of the money, and so when He isn't jealous she pretends to be.'*³⁷ Wharton criticizes the concept of hypocrisy through Bertha's character, who is ready to sacrifice other people's happiness in order to get what she wants. The upper class people were known of their lack moral values; they are only concerned on their personal interests and profits at the expense of those in lower position to them.

In the climate of transformation, women began to realize that they were not given equal opportunities and rights as men. Consequently, they started to react against some of the traditional ideas that insist about women's staying at home and being away from the outside world of men. Likewise Margaret in *North and South* who was obliged to take men's duties; as the professor Deborah Kolb noted in her work entitled "The Raise and Fall of The New Woman in American Drama" that men are not into the idea of women's entry into manual and intellectual professions since they believe that these occupations are reserved only for them, they fear that it would place men in a secondary financial position and lose their status as heads of their homes. After the access of women into public professions, many changes occurred in society; their traditional roles as ideal women in the home have changed as well as their identity, and they became more conscious of their ability to positively influence their society. As in the case of Nettie Struther who was ready to sacrifice her femininity in order to work outdoor for her family's needs.

Instead of learning some skills for future life use, women have been taught from their birth to be as 'objects' for their men; Lily was not an exception to these women; she too had to marry a wealthy man who would elevate her status in society. After her family loses their fortune, she seeks to get a wealthy husband believing that this is the only way to recover the

money that is lost: “*she remembered how her mother, after they had lost their money, used to say to her with a kind of fierce vindictiveness.*”³⁸ Lily, as a character who is unable to make decisions at the right time, as she had many marriage proposals from those of the elite class; however, she keeps rejecting them because she thinks a wealthier man would come. For instance, her refusal of Rosedale’s proposal more than once even though he has the needed conditions in her man of dreams reflects her lack of personality and ignorance of what she really desires.

As in the British society, the notion of true womanhood in America was established from an early age upon girls who were trained to be obedient and loyal to the rules of their society. In *The House of Mirth*, Lily is initially forced to accept New York’s social expectations; however, she gradually seems to reject the gender norms that society imposed on her;

There were in her at the moment two beings, one drawing deep breaths of freedom and exhilaration, the other gasping for air in a little black prison-house of fears. But gradually the captive’s gasps grew fainter, or the other paid less heed to them: the horizon expanded, the air grew stronger, and the free spirit quivered for flight.³⁹

In fact, to reach the upper class world, Lily had to “*accept its definition of herself and repress her individual self.*”⁴⁰ However, despite her debts Lily tries to balance her desire for freedom between “*a dependent and an independent self*”⁴¹ and the upper class society is to her “*the natural order of things.*”⁴² Lily fears the idea of being a lower-class woman because of the hard conditions in which these women live. However, despite her hesitation, she prefers to be an independent woman who breaks the norms of New York’s high society. Lily is regarded as a ‘bad lady’ as a result of rejecting the identification of ‘The Ideal Woman’ in her society where marriage and motherhood were the most important purposes of women’s lives at that time.

Throughout the novel, Lily, like Margaret Hale, has experienced a huge transformation that has changed her character in a positive way. She first enjoys the rich lifestyle of New York society and then came to realize the importance of moral values, which has developed on her a

strong sense of charity and solidarity with others. She knows that the social rules of the male-dominated society in which she lives does not conform to her and it will not bring her the happiness she seeks for. This is well exemplified when she has received the money inherited from her aunt; she immediately writes a check for the full amount of nine thousand dollars owed to Gus Trenor. Moreover, she becomes more responsible of the decisions she takes and refuses to be treated by men as an 'object', she does not want to engage in a relationship which would force her to offer sexual favors for money. Thus, she succeeds in maintaining her identity and moral dignity by refusing to sacrifice her moral values in order to be accepted by society. In particular, Lily is grateful for Selden for advising her and opening her eyes for that reality by telling him

‘I remembered your saying that such a life could never satisfy me; and I was ashamed to admit to myself that it could. That is what you did for me, that is what I wanted to thank you for. I wanted to tell you that I have always remembered; and that I have tried, tried hard’. ‘I have tried hard that life is difficult, and I am a very useless person. I can hardly be sad to have an independent existence. And just a screw or a cog in the great machine I called life, and when I dropped out of it I found I was of no use anywhere else’.⁴³

According to the professor Barbara Welter, in her work entitled “Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century” four aspects that guarantee happiness and power for a woman. The first element is ‘piety’ which means that religion naturally belongs to women and gives them strength. The second element, ‘purity’, she states that a woman must protect her dignity until marriage; otherwise, she is considered as unfeminine. In addition, ‘Submission’ and ‘domesticity’ are the most feminine virtues which expect a woman to be obedient to her man and stay at home to raise her children.⁴⁴ Welter suggests that a woman in the American society had an important responsibility since she is the center of the family, she notes;

A true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found. If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of

civilization and of the republic. It was a fearful obligation, solemn responsibility, the nineteenth century American woman had to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand.⁴⁵

Welter through this expert highlights how valuable the American woman is; she has to be a good woman and follow the womanhood virtues that God and society has put on her in order to be protected and her femininity would be respected.

With the spread of modernity, a new female identity emerged; they slowly began to challenge the gender norms of their society by entering public spaces, which had later on allowed them to become the leaders of the modern city. In *The House of Mirth* it is illustrated through the characters Gerty Farish and Carry Fisher who represent the image of the new women who are financially independent. These women are different from Lily because they are responsible of their lives without the male support.

According to Wharton, Gerty Farish is a poor and independent new woman, who lives on the sides of the high society. She works for various charitable organizations and helps the less fortunate people. However, Lily at first criticizes Gerty's modest apartment and lack of interest in society saying,

I even know a girl who lives in a flat'.
'Oh, I know-you mean Gerty Farish'. She swelled a little unkindly.
'But I said MARRIGEABLE-and besides, she has a horried little place,
And no maid and such queer things to eat. Her cook does the washing and the
food tastes of soap. I should hate that, you know.'⁴⁶

Lily eventually realizes that she is just jealous of Gerty's freedom to live alone. She is characterized by self-independence that Lily could not enjoy. Even though she is wealthier than her, Gerty is the happiest since she does not relate her happiness into material needs.

Along with Gerty Farish, Carry Fisher is another woman described as "The New Woman" ⁴⁷ in the novel. She is a courageous divorced mother, who lives within the high society

but has a different point of view which frees her from submission and from the rules of patriarchal society. The fact that she has divorced twice is not well-regarded in her society, since marriage is considered as one of the most fundamental values on which society is based. Thus, even in the social occasions, she is unwelcomed as Bertha Dorset alludes to her: "*I think he Has studied the divorce laws. He told me he had promised the bishop to sign some kind of petition against divorce.*"⁴⁸ In fact, Carry is an independent woman who does not need the economic help of a husband because she is capable to earn her own money by helping people to climb the social ladder and by organizing other people's parties.

To conclude, Edith Wharton, in a similar way to Elizabeth Gaskell, portrays the woman in the nineteenth-century America as passive in the domestic sphere while men as active in the public world. Also, she has dealt with the notion of The 'Ideal Woman' in the upper class society that was viewed through women who were trained to be obedient. Finally, Wharton encourages females to reject the traditional values and sheds light on the spread of new female identity and their entries into the public world.

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V. General Conclusion

Elizabeth Gaskell and Edith Wharton are two literary classics which deal with the theme of Industrial revolution in both England and America during the nineteenth century. According to both Gaskell and Wharton the two societies were stratified into two different classes the upper class or the rich and the poor. The former category were the most powerful and took control of all domains of society, while the working class people were the weakest in society and were discriminated by the rich because their lack of power. Additionally, the Victorian rich and the Aristocrats were known with their lack of moral values, contrarily to the poor who have self-esteem and dignity. Both authors described the world in their novels as being a world of materialism and racism. They had the courage to denounce the negative aspects that exist in their societies and seek to raise the voice of the powerless in order to free themselves from the racist societal codes.

In the findings of our dissertation we have stressed two main points. In the first point, we have described the tensions between the employers and the employees and we have highlighted the position of the Victorian woman in the patriarchal society. In the second point, we have stressed the issue of class stratification in America and the passivity of the American woman during the Gilded Age.

We agree with the authors' view about the gap that exists between the two distinct classes because of the Industrial Revolution that was a turning point which transformed the British and the American societies and made the two classes completely different worlds. In addition, Gaskell through portraying her protagonist Margaret Hale as an independent woman asserts that she rejects the traditional Victorian woman who used to be an active member in society. Furthermore, Gaskell created her character Bessy Higgins who died as a result of her obedience and weakness. Yet, Wharton offers a different perspective through creating her

protagonist Lily Bart as an ideal American woman through being submissive and weak; yet, over the course of the novel, she tried to reject her domesticity and wanted to be free. Moreover, Nettie Struther was a strong female character in the novel, despite the hard circumstances she faces, she was described as a brave woman.

Our view, however, Both Gaskell and Wharton have succeeded to portray the reality of the woman of their time, through giving each of her female characters different positions in society and different responsibilities. The two authors achieved their aim to change women's status in their countries by showing the importance of the woman in building a developed society.

Despite the fact that *North and South* (1855) and *The House of Mirth* (1905) are written by authors from different geographical and cultural backgrounds, they share similar themes which are related to the Industrial Revolution. We relied on Greenblatt's theory of New Historicism in order to reflect the dark side of both the English and American societies. Our analysis was also illustrated how industrialization has impacted the social classes in both novels, and we shed light on women's question within this context by demonstrating their roles as well as their position in society. Both novels are important since both works provide the readers' attention to understand the Victorian and the American societies during the nineteenth century.

We started by analyzing the social class differences in Gaskell's novel *North and South* that reflects the real conditions in England during the Victorian period. Gaskell has highlighted two distinct classes the 'middle' and the 'working' class, and ultimately outlined the issue of 'Class Conflict' that affected the relationship between the manufacturers and the employees. In addition, we have studied Gaskell's attempt to achieve agreement between the conflicted sides; consequently, she suggested 'communication' as the only solution to avoid conflict and to achieve an "ideal society". We have also attempted to investigate the Victorian women that

have been treated as second class citizens in comparison with men, by shedding light for women's efforts in breaking the societal norms to create a new image of the Victorian woman.

Similarly, in the second chapter, we have explored society being affected by 'industrialization' in *The House of Mirth*. The novel portrays the American aristocracy of Wharton's society focuses on the theme of class. In this sense, Wharton has demonstrated the lack of moral values of the high class people who live in a corrupt and a superficial world. Contrarily, she views the 'lower' class people as morally strong and less influenced by materialism. In addition, we have highlighted the "Ideal woman" as being passive and submissive in a patriarchal society, while "bad women" are those who tried to break their domesticity and be active members in the public world.

At the end of our dissertation, we would like to notice that the two selected novels cover many other issues that are not expose in our work. We believe that this topic is still an interesting subject that needs further investigation. For example, we recommend other students interested in this sort of literary works to carry out this research from different perspectives such as Marxism, Feminism and cultural Materialism.

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