

Rural, Urban, and Industrial Scenes in Victorian Industrial Novels

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Introduction

The first half of the nineteenth century may be characterised as a period of great social turbulence in England as it saw new rising middle-classes, poverty among the working-classes, and class antagonism. Two important factors in these changes were the process of industrialisation and the transition from a rural society to an urban society. Although changes in society and the subsequent upheaval affected urban and rural areas alike, because of their industrialised character, northern towns such as Manchester came to be seen as being at the heart of these social changes.

Literature came to reflect these developments when novelists increasingly focused on lower-class characters to describe the tensions in society. A new type of novel emerged in the 1840s which focused on poor living conditions and turbulence surrounding industrialisation in England. These novels came to be known as Condition-of-England novels or industrial novels. Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) are clear examples of the genre, as these four novels deal with industrialisation and the social tensions associated with it. These four novels all focus on an industrial town in the north, be it a fictional version or not. However, they present very different views on industrialisation and the social problems in the towns they describe.

Although these four novels primarily concentrate on a northern industrial town, they also depict rural landscapes and refer to London, a city whose character is very different from the northern towns. Throughout the history of English literature, urban and rural landscapes are associated with different values and are usually contrasted to one another. As these landscapes were affected by the changes in the nineteenth century, their depiction in literature also underwent a transformation. For this reason, the present study aims to investigate how the descriptions of rural, urban, and industrial landscapes in the four novels together help

describe the social problems of the mid-nineteenth century, identify the cause to these problems, or provide possible solutions.

As each of the four novels discussed in this study presents a different perspective on industrialisation and changes in society, the descriptions of rural, urban, and industrial landscapes are also expected to play a different role within them. The landscapes in Dickens's *Hard Times* are employed to reveal how industrialisation might affect people's minds. The descriptions of these landscapes create an opposition between industry and nature, suggesting their incompatibility, and simultaneously suggest that the problems of the industrial town, Coketown, are inescapable. In Disraeli's *Sybil* no dichotomy between industrial and rural landscapes is adopted, but rather the contrasting landscapes in this novel imply that the social problems are the result of irresponsible leadership. Furthermore, the descriptions of landscapes help legitimise the type of political representation that the novel as a whole advocates. Finally, Gaskell's two novels refrain from idealising either rural or urban and industrial landscapes, and suggest that each place has its advantages and disadvantages. Together the landscapes support the novels' pleas for collaboration between classes and looking towards a future rather than an idealised past.

The first chapter introduces the historical and theoretical background, focusing on the mid-nineteenth-century socio-political situation and nineteenth-century literature. The three following chapters discuss the four novels that this study focuses on. The second chapter deals with Dickens' *Hard Times*, the third with Disraeli's *Sybil*, and, finally, the fourth chapter discusses both novels by Gaskell.

Chapter 1: The City, the Country, and Industrialisation in the Nineteenth Century

In *The Country and the City* Raymond Williams describes a phenomenon throughout the history of British Literature whereby ‘the country’ and ‘the city’ are contrasted to one another. The two terms are each associated with particular values. The country is traditionally associated with a pure, simple, and harmonious way of life (Williams 1). Often, however, this rural social order is a state in the past or a way of life that is under threat (2). The cause of the change that is lamented is usually perceived to be the influence of people from the city. The tendency that Williams describes often contrasts the idealised rural country and its values of honesty and simplicity to that of the greed and ambition of the city. The city, in this light, is perceived as corrupted. On the other hand, city and country can also be contrasted in another way, in which the city is perceived as a cultural centre, a place of sophistication, knowledge, wealth, splendour and art. The country from this point of view is then observed as crude, unrefined, and naïve.

In *The Country and the City* Williams outlines the literary developments throughout the history of England with respect to oppositions between city and country. He notes the recurring pattern of lamentation for an idealised past consisting of a harmonious rural society (14). To study this pattern more thoroughly he analyses literary works against the background of social history, often from a Marxist perspective. He suggests that the idealised past in these works of art is an unrealistic ideal that overlooks the often similar tensions that existed in that past as well. He argues that that past situation was also preceded by similar changes in the control over the land in which one dominant class was replaced by a new dominant class. Throughout this line of reasoning, Williams tries to describe the intricate link between city and country. Both the city and the country developed over time under the pressure of a capitalist society. The changes in both city and country also influenced one another. Thus, not surprisingly, the relationship between them also underwent transformations (415). In each

stage of these developments, the terms 'city' and 'country' also came to be associated with slightly different values and meanings, and thus the literary expressions relating to city and country and the contrast between them also developed over time.

Change in the Nineteenth Century

As Williams remarks, oppositions between city and country and the idealising of a past rural society in literature are most often expressions relating to periods of more drastic social change. The first half of the nineteenth century, too, may be characterised as a time of rapid and unprecedented developments that resulted in major social and political turbulence. One major contributor to social unrest is undoubtedly what is now known as 'the industrial revolution'. However, as Christopher Harvie points out, the term 'revolution' might be misleading as the process of industrialisation was a gradual one (419). The struggles that the country faced during this period, and which were partly due to industrialisation, affected various areas of the country, not only industrial areas, and many different aspects of society.

The climax of social unrest in the middle of the nineteenth century can already be traced back to developments in the late eighteenth century. Advancements in agricultural techniques, such as improvements "in new crops (especially roots), in drainage and reclamation, in planned soil fertility, and in stock breeding" increased the potential for profits in agriculture (Williams 94). The enclosure of land was carried out to increase the efficiency on a large scale. This, however, led to a greater number of landless and disinherited farmers (95). By the late eighteenth century, rural England was fully incorporated into a system of capitalism. Consequently rises and falls in market prizes not only affected the city but also the country, resulting in instability and poverty among country labourers (141). The process of land enclosure, however, was often regarded as the main cause of these grievances.

Not only developments in agricultural England, but the start of industrialisation can also be traced back to the late eighteenth century. In 1774 the steam engine was patented by Thomas Watt (Harvie 428). This invention was applied to several uses, one of the major industries being that of the cotton mills. Through the steam engine, the textile industry, alongside the coal and iron industries, saw a rapid increase at the end of the eighteenth century, during the Napoleonic wars, and afterwards (427). At the beginning of the nineteenth century the steam engine was also used in modes of transportation, such as the locomotive and steamboats (428). These developments drastically changed traveling within Britain, making distances of less significance.

Because of the boom in the cotton, coal, and iron industries, people's every day environments altered and greatly affected living conditions among the working classes. The rise of industry led to the expansion of manufacturing towns, whose population growth rates exceeded that of London. Indeed, the nineteenth century can be characterised by a transformation from a rural to an urban society, as by the middle of the nineteenth century the urban population in Britain was over half of the total population (Williams 312). The rapid growth of manufacturing towns and the centralised position of factory buildings within these towns resulted in densely populated urban areas, with deplorable housing and sanitation (Harvie 446). London, too, saw a rapid growth while upper classes struggled to restrain the expanding of the city through migration of working-class labourers from the country (Williams 211). This resulted in overcrowding and insecure living arrangements. Such conditions caused epidemics throughout the cities and demanded governmental intervention in the form of administrative reform and regulations (Harvie 446). Often, urban labourers worked in dangerous working conditions, and their personal lives, too, were changed by the city:

Factory work meant getting accustomed to new machines, new spaces and rhythms of labour, and reliance on inadequate wages. The configuration of the family changed as women and older children were hired more readily than their more highly paid husbands and fathers and left the home to work. Wives suffered the humiliation of demeaning work conditions, husbands faced unemployment, and, with mothers working outside the home, babies were farmed out to minders. (Nord 510)

While labourers were facing these struggles, the country also saw political changes, particularly with regard to political representation. Because of the industrial boom, a new class of wealthy manufacturers was on the rise and demanded more political influence. Furthermore, the population densities had shifted throughout the country, with an increase in the urban areas and a decrease in some of the rural areas. However, the electoral districts had remained unchanged (Harvie 441). This resulted in corruption through ‘pocket boroughs’ and underrepresentation of the rapidly growing industrial cities, on which a major part of the economy rested (Smith, “Introduction” vii). Through the subsequent political unrest and prolonged pressure on parliament, eventually the first Reform Act of 1832 was passed, whereby the franchise was extended, and the division of seats was more representative. However, the vote was extended to middle classes only and not yet to the working classes, which caused disappointment among some parts of society (Smith, “Introduction” vii).

Although middle classes gained more political power, conflicts between classes grew more intense towards the middle of the nineteenth century. When the rapid economic growth after the Napoleonic Wars ended, profits dropped in the industrial sectors. Subsequently, wages were lowered and unemployment rates grew. Poverty reached a critical level and led to measures such as the Amendment of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. This is described by Sheila M. Smith as “an attempt to regulate the existing unsatisfactory poor laws by cutting

down on outdoor relief and forcing paupers to submit to the rigorous and inhuman regime of the new workhouses” (“Introduction” vii). In 1833, apart from the Abolition of Slavery, another act was introduced in response to humanitarian movements. This was the Factory Inspectorate, by which child labour would be regulated (Harvie 441). To protect the profits among agricultural landowners, the Corn Law was instituted in 1815, which placed high tariffs on imported grain. However, when food supplies faltered, bread prices were kept high through these Corn Law (Smith, “Introduction” viii). This in combination with lower wages and insecurity among the labourers gave much discontent both in industrial and rural areas. As a result, land workers began to rebel against the landowners and small tenant farmers in the form of Swing riots and rick-burning riots. From the 1820s on trade unions came into existence and in 1833 the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was established, protecting the working man’s interest against the manufacturers, through national holidays and strikes (Harvie 442). During the General Strike of 1842 “Lancashire factory-workers demanded the restoration of the 1840 wage-level, and converged on Manchester [...] knocking out the plugs of the boilers in the mills and so depriving them of power and making them idle” (Smith, “Introduction” viii). The appeal for political power for the working classes was advocated by the Chartist movement, which strove for extending the vote to all classes, anonymous voting, more representative electorate districts and no restrictions for MP candidacy (Harvie 443). The manufacturing classes also collaborated to battle against the market pressures. In the 1840s manufacturers, concerned about their lowering profits, demanded further reduction of wages. These reductions depended on the lowering of bread prices, which was kept high through the effects of the Corn Law. Subsequently a new collaboration known as the Anti Corn Law League came to represent these middle class manufacturing interests and opposed those of the landed aristocracy (442).

During the second half of the nineteenth century the situation in Britain became less critical. Smith describes 1842 as a climax of distress in the whole of the nineteenth century (“Introduction” viii). After that matters improved. A new economy in the form of the railway provided new opportunities for employment. Middle class manufacturers and aristocracy began to work together more closely. Meanwhile, some demands of the working classes were conceded to. The latter group increasingly attained more political influence (Harvie 459). Deborah Epstein Nord claims that the “volatile 1840s gave way to a period of relative stability and prosperity in the 1850s and 1860s” (520).

Nineteenth-Century Literature

In an age of so many disturbances and changes in society it is not surprising that there should also have been changes in literature. Catherine Gallagher explains that in the early- and mid-nineteenth century English intellectual and cultural life was dominated by the so-called Condition of England Debate, and that some novels also engaged in this debate, including the four novels discussed in this study (Gallagher xi). Rosemarie Bodenheimer points out that previous critics usually discuss such novels in comparison to what is reported in nonfiction documentation. She notes that they have found fault with these novelists’ means of portraying the working classes or providing satisfactory solutions to the problems they describe (Bodenheimer 5-6). Bodenheimer argues, however, that it is important to consider that these novels are not necessarily supposed to create a realistic image or solution. What is more revealing is the ideology behind these depictions. She refers to Gallagher who has discussed these novels in view of the underlying ideologies and philosophies. Bodenheimer herself discusses the fantasies of reform or reconciliation that are presented in Victorian novels. She identifies three different strategies. The first concerns women who use their influence to bring

masters and workers in closer cooperation; the second uses rhetorical appeals to nature and pastoralism; the third looks back to an idealised sense of history.

Scholars have noted how writers used new techniques to describe the turbulent pressures they observed in their surroundings, and used more pronounced contradictions and oppositions than their predecessors. Gallagher argues that nineteenth-century novels engaging in the Condition-of-England-debate make explicit the implicit tensions that existed in English novels prior to 1830, for example tensions “between freedom and determinism, between public and private worlds, and between the representation of facts (what is) and of values (what ought to be)” (Gallagher xii). The oppositions that the novelists were compelled to use to describe the radical changes in society also correspond to opposing political philosophies that existed at the time, for example Chartism, Paternalism, Utilitarianism, and Romantic-Conservatism. Shelagh Hunter describes how Victorian literature transformed the traditional pastoral in what she calls the Victorian idyll, a genre that contrasts oppositions “which may be broadly grouped under the simple and the complex – sophisticated and unsophisticated, urban and rural, art and nature, present and past” (6). According to Hunter, contradictions between simple and complex are used to create a world that presents a “way of facing a contemporary reality” (11).

Finally, Williams, Smith and W. A. Craik note another literary development during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely an increased focus on agricultural labourers, factory workers, or the poor. According to Smith and Williams, this development started in late-eighteenth-century poetry (Smith, *The Other Nation* 2-3; Williams 124). Smith points out that “Romantic writers such as Blake, Crabbe, Scot, Clare, Burns, and Wordsworth had extended, in their different ways, the artist’s consciousness, not only to include the poor, but also to make them of central importance” (*The Other Nation* 2-3). This new centre of attention was also adopted in novels, as Smith points out that “Victorian writers – particularly

the novelists – developed this tradition” (*The Other Nation* 3). For example, Williams observes that in Jane Austen’s novels, peasants and country folk are absent from the world that is mainly observed from the perspective of the landowning upper classes, who are the protagonists. Half a century later, the rustic ‘peasants’ appear in narratives and are part of the community that is depicted in the works of George Eliot (Williams 241). Craik notes that George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s work explore “new social milieus and the characters in them” (28). According to Craik, in “this fair-minded assessment of secondary characters,” which he identifies as “one of the rapidly-developing features of the novel,” these authors avoid “any temptation to reproduce old types” (28). Williams, on the other hand, argues that in George Eliot’s work, rural peasants are still part of the background and are usually portrayed using generalized descriptions, not “as the active bearers of personal experience” (244, 250). According to him, it is in the work by Thomas Hardy, that country folk themselves finally become the protagonists and are given fully complex and in-depth characters.

Country Literature

As rural, urban and industrial landscapes changed in the nineteenth century, their descriptions in literary works also developed. Nineteenth-century poems and novels that depict country life build upon a longstanding tradition of country literature and the developments within these traditions. In general, the idealisation of a rural landscape is usually associated with the pastoral. Although various definitions of ‘pastoral’ exist in literary scholarship, traditionally the term is used to refer to poetry that celebrates the life of shepherds (Abrams and Harpham). Williams also begins his analysis of the relationship between country and city in English literature by discussing the original pastoral poetry of the classics, namely Virgil and Theocritus. For the most part these poems celebrate the life of shepherds and goat herders and

look back or forward to a Golden Age in which the land requires no work and provides food in abundance (Williams 20, 24). This life is sometimes contrasted to the “disturbance of war” and politics of the cities (24). It is this celebration of the life of shepherds in a Golden Age that is considered to be the traditional sense of the term ‘pastoral’ (Abrams and Harpham). During the sixteenth century the pastoral underwent a change and was centred on the beauty of nature as seen from the point of view of an outside observer, a “tourist,” or traveller, rather than “the working countryman” (Williams 29). Williams refers to this as the ‘neo-pastoral’ (31). Pastoral scenes of shepherds also became the background of love stories in drama and romances, although country people were usually depicted as dull, coarse and clumsy (29, 72). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the pastoral was converted into an idealisation of English country life and a celebration of particular landlords by the emergence of the country-house poem (37). In these poems the perfect landscape is meant to reflect the good qualities of the landlord.

In the eighteenth century, there was a turning point. As Williams notes, “poems to the happy tenant [...] are succeeded by poems of loss, change, regret” (96). This development starts out by presenting, alongside a celebration of improvement and progress, a realisation that the poor labourers are “the actual producers of wealth” (100). Nature in these poems no longer forms a social order but a lonely retreat. The absence of landlords and the campaign of parliamentary enclosures are often seen as the cause of loss and the destruction of “a traditional and settled rural community (137). The focus on the pain and hardship of country life is what Williams calls ‘counter-pastoral’ (124, 130).

During the eighteenth century there was also a transformation in the way landscapes were being observed (Williams 172-173). Landscapes in themselves began to be perceived as something aesthetic. There emerged a new sentiment with regard to nature, which consisted of “a recognition of forces of which we are part but which we may always forget, and which we

must learn from, not seek to control” (183). Like the counter-pastoral, the poems that expressed this new sentiment sometimes convey a sense of loss, while nature is presented as a retreat from society. These poems also contained more detailed observations of nature, usually from the perspective of a lonely wanderer. This development, which began in the eighteenth century, was continued in the nineteenth century and might be associated with the Romantic movement.

London and City Literature

Not only did life in the country see rapid transformations during the nineteenth century, life in the city also changed drastically. As mentioned above, cities grew rapidly and by the middle of the century the urban population outnumbered the rural population (Williams 312).

People’s perception of these rapid changes of the city also found its way into literature. Nord writes the following in relation to urban literature: “[w]riters, critics, and reformers tried to absorb and make comprehensible the enormous material and social changes within the metropolis and the new industrial towns by representing in literary form the spaces, structures, and types of the urban scene” (510-511). Williams mentions two different views on the city. On the one hand it was seen as “the symbol of progress and enlightenment [...] the school of civilization and liberty,” in short as a civilised order (209); on the other hand there is “the insolence of the mob,” “[t]he thieving-shops,” and “the ‘idle, profligate and debauched’ workmen” (210).

Nineteenth-century urban novels saw their origin in short, literary sketches. As Nord explains, Early Victorian literary renderings of London predominantly consisted of urban sketches. These episodic sketches describe the brief and anonymous encounters that are part of city life and are presented from the perspective of “a lone male walker” (Nord 512). Over time, these types of sketches became more novelistic as the encounters turned into tales.

Sketches and stories of the low-life of London were depicted in the so-called ‘Newgate novels’, while the fashionable aristocratic London was presented in the ‘silver fork’ novels (514). Sketches and encounters from various parts of London also developed into journalistic inventories of the various living conditions, leading to political debates about poverty in the city (515).

In the novels that emerged from the urban sketches, the experience of city life is expressed in various ways. First of all, Nord notes how the idea of the street as a labyrinth is employed to create a sense of mystery (511). Williams, too, describes how novelists like Dickens use images of “obscurity, the darkness, the fog that keep [people] from seeing each other clearly and from seeing the relation between [themselves] and [their] actions, [themselves] and others” (226). Secondly, novelists emphasise the alienation in the city. In his poetry Wordsworth already describes how the uniting and liberating forces in the city are accompanied by loss of connection and identity, thus resulting in a perpetual confusion (Williams 220). Novelists further developed this into a paradox: “[t]his combination of intense, largely unsolicited intimacy and disturbing estrangement produced a dialectic that haunted the nineteenth-century urban evocations throughout the century” (Nord 511). As Nord explains, there was not only estrangement between neighbours, but also between classes (512). She observes how Dickens, one of the novelists discussed in this study, in his later work created plotlines in which the actions of lower classes are intricately connected to those of the higher classes and vice versa, and thus tried to create awareness of the contrasts between the living conditions that existed in close proximity to one another (520). Finally, Nord remarks that city life, specifically in London, is also celebrated for its variety (511). Williams notes how the streets of London are described as randomly arranged, while the vast population is portrayed as a miscellany of characters (223). He remarks how Dickens uses a “hurrying seemingly random passing of men and women, each heard in some fixed phrase,

seen in some fixed expression” (Williams 225). Williams also notes a paradox in relation to the population of the city. While the city-dwellers are presented with a variety of different characters, they are simultaneously also treated as one mass that works as one system. This paradox is often accompanied by expressions of indignation towards the vices of the London crowd, while simultaneously the narrators recognise the human kindness of individual characters (320).

The Industrial City

Williams and Nord both emphasise the difference between London and the industrial cities of the north. Where London could be characterised by variety in trades, the industrial towns were built around one or two specialised industries (Williams 214). Although London, too, had its industrial areas, it was predominantly seen as a financial and political centre. “[S]ocial relations”, too, “were more complex” in London than in industrial towns, as in the latter they could usually be described in terms of employer and employed (316-317). Furthermore, the industrial cities were systematically built with the mills in centre, thus keeping the social relations physically evident. These differences resulted in the fact that the northern cities rather than London were seen as the places of industrial class conflict (315). Therefore, writers of the ‘Condition-of-England’ novels from the 1840s and 1850s turned their attention to these cities. Industrial cities became the new background setting to describe the class struggles, presented in the fictionalised versions such as *Milton-Northern*, *Coketown*, and *Mowbray* (Nord 516). Nord identifies four different aims to this type of novels: “to enlighten southern Britons about a way of life that was unknown to them, to expose the miserable living and working conditions of industrial labourers, to imagine forms of reconciliation between social groups that seemed dangerously at odds, and, at times, to celebrate the inventiveness of

the British spirit” (516). It is in this tradition that the novels discussed in this study are usually placed.

In the industrial novels of the 1840s and 1850s the representation of industrial urban life differed from that of London. The differences between these cities expressed themselves in their physical appearance. Through their rapid growth, and their systematic development, houses and streets looked similar to each other (Williams 224). It is this uniformity, sameness, and rhythm that is often used to describe the overwhelming and dispiriting force of industrialism (Den Tandt 16). The machines and factories, and their visual effects on the surroundings, such as air and water pollution, also lend themselves for descriptions of symbolic value. Christophe Den Tandt explains how with the use of gothic descriptions of manufactories in terms of smoke, fires, and iron, “[i]ndustry is as such characterised as an object worthy of the aesthetic of the sublime: the newly developed human environments elicits the emotions of terror and wonder Romantic artists more commonly attribute to the spectacle of nature” (Den Tandt 3). Den Tandt argues that although the blank hyperboles that are used to describe the industrial areas fall short as a literal description, they are significant in another sense, as he explains that “the intensities of the sublime mark out the areas of social life novelists are unable to explore in the detailed, rational fashion of novelistic realism” (11).

Although the manufactories had much impact on the landscapes, Den Tandt explains that the industrial novelists predominantly focus on describing the conditions of the working class. Next to the unhealthy consequences of the factory smoke, the major threat of industrialism is perceived to be the force of the crowds, such as strikes and riots (Den Tandt 15). Gallagher explains how some of these novels use a paradox: they focus on how the desperation and helplessness of working-class labourers drives them to particular actions, while simultaneously the individual free will of workers is emphasised to support their claims for more political power (34). The novels often aim to generate sympathy for the labourers.

On the other hand, the potential power of the workers in these novels embodied in trade unions and the Chartist movement are often regarded with fear and suspicion (Nord 519). Nord explains that “[n]ovelists expressed middle-class anxieties about working-class unrest by exaggerating threats to social stability and by including these largely uncharacteristic acts of violence in their narratives of industrial life” (519). Often the novels plead for cooperation between classes “by showing both the virtue and the documented misery of the poor and both the unfairness and the potential nobility of the manufacturing classes” (519). In some novels reconciliation between classes is exemplified by a marriage between characters representing opposing views.

Although nineteenth-century industrial fiction often projects the social struggles on cities like Manchester, the machine itself is also often perceived as an isolated cause for the social turbulence. Leo Marx, for example, explains that the image of machines, such as the locomotive, is used as a symbol of industrialisation. Although primarily focusing on American literature, in *The Machine in the Garden* Leo Marx notes a general sentiment that expresses a yearning for a more simple life in harmony with nature. He distinguishes what he calls sentimental pastoral from a complex pastoral. This complex pastoral design consists of an initial harmonious, natural or rural scene, which is then disturbed by a counterforce, bringing the observer back to reality. Usually this counterforce is embodied by a mechanical object that can be symbolically associated with the city and industrialisation. The machine itself is portrayed as disturbing a tranquil social order. Although Marx focuses on this trope in American literature, he traces it back to Wordsworth and Blake, who already placed “the machine in opposition to the tranquillity and order located in the landscape,” and whose repulsion of the “suffering associated with the new factory system [...] sharpened the taste, already strong, for images of rural felicity” (18). Marx, however, notes that contrasting the machine to a pastoral landscape is not wholly similar to the traditional oppositions between

city and country. For example, whereas previously city and country each were physically divided, the emergence of the locomotive presents a physical invasion of the machine in the land and connecting cities and country alike (31-32).

In conclusion, the nineteenth century can be characterised as a period of rapid transformations within society. It is clear that the tensions affected the country in all areas, both urban and rural, and involved all classes. The turbulences also led to developments within nineteenth-century literature. For example, novelists were induced to use stronger contrasts, oppositions, and contradictions in their work than their predecessors. Additionally, working-class characters receive increasing importance in nineteenth-century novels. In these novels, literary descriptions of country life, city life in London, and industrial cities each have their own characteristics and are used to express and make sense of different aspects of the political and social situations. The present study will investigate how these rural, urban, and industrial areas and the oppositions between them play a role in four industrial novels, describing the social tensions in the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter 2: The Effects and Isolation of Industrialisation in Dickens's Coketown

The first novel to be discussed with regard to urban, industrial and rural landscapes is Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854). This novel was first published in instalments in the magazine *Household Words* and afterwards as a single book in 1854. The novel features the lives of Mr Gradgrind's children, who are brought up with their father's utilitarian philosophy, and Stephen Blackpool, a working-class labourer who is employed in Mr Bounderby's mill.

Typical of *Hard Times* is that the novel isolates the problems of industrialisation to one single place, namely the fictional northern industrial town called Coketown. As Gorman Beauchamp, Rosemarie Bodenheimer, and James Roderick Burns argue, some critics, therefore, have complained that the novel fails to provide an accurate representation of the working classes in the industrial cities of the north. However, both Beauchamp and Burns point out that *Hard Times*, instead of presenting such an accurate picture, attempts to show the effects of machinery on mankind. According to Burns, it is one of the few industrial novels that portray the psychological effect of industrial work on the mental state of people. Thus, *Hard Times* isolates industrialisation and machinery as the cause of the problems in the Coketown community.

The landscapes described in the novel play an important role as they both emphasise the damaging effects of industrialisation and create a sense of isolation and inescapability. Firstly, not only are the physical descriptions of Coketown contrasted to nature to emphasise how industry dominates the town, the industrialisation of Coketown is also shown to be harmful to its natural environment. Furthermore, the mechanical landscapes of Coketown also greatly affect the inhabitants' lives and ways of thinking. The factual world-view that Gradgrind adheres to in the novel is associated with the mechanisation in Coketown. It is contrasted to emotions, which are associated with nature, and, like the factories, it is shown to be detrimental. Finally, the descriptions of rural, urban, and natural landscapes in *Hard Times*

support the idea that the problems of Coketown cannot be solved or escaped from, while outsiders are blind to its problems.

Throughout the novel the physical descriptions of Coketown depict the industrial factories and their surroundings as something both fearsome and fascinating. Images of smoke and fire, accompanied by references to the hissing and clanking sounds of engines and machines, predominate. One passage that illustrates the immensity of the factories describes how “the moon shone – looking down the high chimneys of Coketown on the deep furnaces below, and casting Titanic shadows of the steam engines at rest” (Dickens 76). Words like “Titanic” suggest an awe-inspiring enormity. Indeed, these industrial landscapes might trigger both the terror and wonder that Christophe Den Tandt associates with what he calls the “industrial sublime” (1). The perception of these factories as something intriguing is also sometimes expressed in the novel. For example, Bounderby’s mother, Mrs Pegler, is quite ecstatic about her son’s mill and everything to do with it. Throughout the novel, the mills are often described as Fairy Palaces, as this is how they are perceived by train-passengers travelling by. These praises might allude to the celebration of “the inventiveness of the British spirit” in other contemporary literature concerning industrialisation (Nord 516). For example, referring to the factories as Fairy Palaces echoes the comparisons between Manchester’s factories and scenes from exotic fairy tales that the narrator in Benjamin Disraeli’s *Coningsby* draws. It is important to note, however, that these praises come from outside the Coketown community.

Although the industrial scenes in *Hard Times* might evoke fascination in the minds of outside observers, these landscapes mostly emphasise the harmful effects of industrialisation on its direct environments. This effect is first of all produced by the opposition between industry and a more beautiful nature. Like Beauchamp argues, “Dickens emphasizes the mechanicity of Coketown by contrasting its ugly artifice with the world of nature, invoking that

opposition between the mechanical and the organic that served as a crucial motif for the Romantics” (71). The disparity between nature and industry is suggested by the fact that “in the innermost fortification of that ugly citadel [Coketown] [...] Nature was strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in” (Dickens 72). The toxic airs suggest the unhealthy nature of industry. In addition, when summer is described in *Hard Times*, Coketown is contrasted to more traditional descriptions of a fine summer day: “[t]he measured motion of [the steam engines’] shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while, for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, [...] the whirr of shafts and wheels” (Dickens 126). As Stephen Blackpool leaves Coketown, the narrator emphasises the change in landscape: “[s]o strange to turn from the chimneys to the birds. So strange to have the road-dust on his feet instead of the coal-grit” (184-185).

Apart from contrasting the mills with nature, the industrial scenes in *Hard Times* particularly show the damaging effects that industry has on nature. First, the machines of the Coketown mills are often described in terms of animals. The smoke is usually imagined as serpents, while the monotonous movement of the steam-engine is compared to a mad elephant’s head:

[i]t was a town of machinery and tall chimneys out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled [...] and vast piles of building full of windows where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholic madness. (Dickens 26)

These metaphors are repeated throughout the novel. Especially the image of a melancholy elephant suggests that Nature is forced to adapt to the rhythm of the machines and is driven to desperation. Burns argues that Dickens reverses the more common trope to compare the state

of factory workers to animals by projecting those animals upon the machines instead, with the “suggestion of perversion and insanity” (105). By transforming these industrial surroundings “into a place of torment rather than nurture,” Burns argues, Dickens blames industry in itself for the problems in Coketown (105).

The landscape around Coketown, too, is ruined by the town’s industry. From the distance Coketown is seen as “[a] blur of soot and smoke [...] that showed nothing but masses of darkness” (Dickens 125). When Sissy and Rachael take a country walk, the narrator observes the effects of the mining industry upon the landscape. The natural landscape in these scenes is “blotted here and there with heaps of coal” (292). Furthermore, they encounter “[e]ngines at pits’ mouths and lean old horses that had worn the circle of their daily labour into the ground,” or sometimes “a wreck of bricks and beams” (292-293). Presumably the horses are lean because of their hard labour, while the ground likewise is affected by it. Wherever Sissy and Rachael go, they are reminded of the mining industry in the country around them.

Not only does *Hard Times* show how industry affects landscapes, the novel also reveals how the rhythm and monotony of the machines in industrial settings dominate people’s private lives. Beauchamp argues that *Hard Times* differs from other industrial novels in that it does not focus primarily on the conditions of the classes, but dramatises the effect of machines on people themselves. Burns notes that this novel is one of the few industrial novels that confronts “the human consequences of industrial work” and “the extent to which the industrial atmosphere permeated life” (102-103). For example, the rhythm of the machines is carried over to the rhythms of daily life. Gradgrind’s house and its family life is mechanised as “life at Stone Lodge went monotonously round like a piece of machinery” (Dickens 64). Gradgrind’s personal preference for a tight schedule is emphasised by the occasional reference to his “deadly-statistical clock” (107, 108, 238). Clocks and bells also affect the

lives of the workers, as they govern the start and end of their shifts. The following passage reveals how Coketown's inhabitants are governed by rhythm and monotony:

It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (26)

As is clear from this passage, these people all live a similar and repetitive life. The physical environment of people's private lives is also dominated by sameness and rhythm, as all the streets are similar and regular. Beauchamp remarks that "the monotonous regularity of the streets, of the architecture, of the workers' routines is meant to reflect the inflexible rhythms of the steam engine" (71). It is interesting that the narrator should call the families that work in the factories and live in the identical streets "unnatural," thus further emphasizing the contrast to nature (Dickens 72).

The effects of machinery on mankind, described in *Hard Times*, go even further as people themselves are likened to machines, their fuel, and their produce. Den Tandt argues that "Dickens is unique among the authors of this corpus by his choice to associate the spectacle of industry with dehumanized dullness" (16). Beauchamp notes out that this novel ties in with contemporary observations by for example Thomas Carlyle and Heinrich Heine that in the age of machinery men were turned into machines both in their behaviour and their mind (61). Already very early in the novel, the comparison between man and machine is made when Gradgrind finds his children at Sleary's circus and wants them to come away: "Thomas did not look at him, but gave himself up to be taken home like a machine" (Dickens 15). Catherine Gallagher points out that contemporary political writers argued that by reducing people to machines, the factory system deprives workers of their "status as a free human

being, an ‘accountable agent’” (25). Later on in the novel, Thomas also denies being personally accountable for robbing the bank. Further comparisons between men and machines occur in descriptions of the physical aspects of Bounderby and Gradgrind. Everything about Gradgrind is described as square, a hard, geometrical, inorganic shape. Bounderby’s physical features echo that of machinery, as, for example, his “metallic laugh” (Dickens 18). Not only is there a resemblance between men and machines in *Hard Times*, Patricia E. Johnson also compares Louisa and Stephen with the coke that is used in the mills of Coketown. She explains that coke refers to both “the fuel and eventually the waste products, of the factory system” (Johnson 132). Both characters are stuck in the factorial system of Coketown and in the end they are left defeated and exhausted by it, like burned-up coal. Johnson argues that Louisa’s habit of staring into the fire, and the connection between Stephen and Louisa with images of smoke and fire emphasise their association with burning fuel (134). Finally, a comparison between men and the produce of industry is drawn when the narrator likens Gradgrind’s attempt to form the minds of children to the “manufacture of the human fabric” (Dickens 103).

The rhythm and predictability of machines in *Hard Times* not only affect people’s experience of daily life, they also affect the ideologies of the Coketown inhabitants. The novel begins by introducing Gradgrind’s school of facts. In Gradgrind’s utilitarian world-view, everything can be described in facts, figures, and numbers. Subsequently, both his own children and the children at school are taught to think facts. Beauchamp points out that “with Gradgrind, [Dickens] creates the satirical archetype of a generic intellectual figure, the modern social scientist, or Social Newtonist” (68). Inspired by Isaac Newton’s mechanical laws that describe physical movement by means of fixed laws, intellectuals also began to see people in terms of mathematical formulas. Beauchamp argues that in this respect “Dickens parodies the writings of economists like Adams Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo, who treated

mankind only in the aggregate, as masses subject to inexorable laws” (73). Throughout the novel, people are often described as general masses rather than as individual people. For example, the factory workers are occasionally referred to as “the Hands,” a term that denies the workers’ individual agency (Dickens 72). When Louisa visits Stephen Blackpool, the narrator explains that she had only known the working class as a crowd of insects (177).

One of the novel’s main concerns is to show the shortcomings of Gradgrind’s utilitarian philosophy as it suppresses and overlooks emotions. Raymond Williams points out that Dickens uses the town’s physical appearance to suggest uniformity among its inhabitants, but that his story also reveals that these people are “clearly” not like one another (223). The novel emphasises the difference in morality between its characters. The narrator explicitly criticises Gradgrind’s ideology by contrasting moral values to machines and calculations:

[i]t is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. (Dickens 78)

These shortcomings in his philosophy are also shown in Gradgrind himself. For example, Gradgrind does not know how to answer Louisa’s questions about love after he told her of Bounderby’s marriage proposal (109). After giving his advice, based on facts, Gradgrind is blind to the fact that Louisa almost bursts into tears: “[b]ut, to see it, he must have overlapped at a bound the artificial barriers [...] between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra” (111). Additionally, Beauchamp argues that Gradgrind’s philosophy is presented as flawed when Gradgrind’s educational practices backfire on him in the characters of his son Tom and Bitzer (74). Young Tom is guilty of the bank robbery, but excuses himself by saying his father’s own universal laws state

that “so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest” (Dickens 312). He asks his father “[h]ow can I help laws?” and suggests that his father take comfort in his statistical facts (312). When Gradgrind tries to have his son escape, he is hindered by Bitzer, who only answers to reason and facts. Finally, Paul Schacht argues that *Hard Times* warns against suppressing natural emotions and that these feelings “will find some explosive release from containment,” which is presented in the form of Thomas Gradgrind’s gambling, Louisa’s adulterous feelings and “the unionism of the Coketown hands” (80). Schacht remarks how Louisa herself implicitly warns against this suppression when her father told her of Bounderby’s marriage proposal: “when the night comes, Fire bursts out” (Dickens 111).

Similar to the way in which the physical industrial landscapes are contrasted with nature, the utilitarian philosophy that is inspired by industrialisation is contrasted with human emotion, which in this novel is associated with nature. The most important counterforce to Gradgrind’s beliefs is formed by the characters from Sleary’s circus and Sissy Jupe. An association between the circus and nature is created by the fact that their daily lives involve working with horses and performing “equestrian Tyrolean flower-act[s]” (Dickens 14). Beauchamp also notes this contrast between the circus and Coketown: “where one is hard, ‘rational,’ and mechanical, the other is warm, imaginative, and organic. Coketown’s alienation from nature contrasts with the incorporation of nature into the circus” (75). The people from the circus have brought up Sissy with natural feelings, according to the narrator: “[t]hen they pressed about her, and bent over her in very natural attitudes, kissing and embracing her” (Dickens 45). This is in contrast with Tom Gradgrind, who is brought up in his father’s factual world-view and whom the narrator calls “unnatural” (57). Because of her upbringing, it is Sissy Jupe who is able to provide comfort to the other characters and help them when necessary.

Bodenheimer notes another difference between the members of the circus and the factual characters, namely their relationship with the past. To Gradgrind the past is irrelevant, while Bounderby presents a fictional story around his past to create his own status. The circus, on the other hand, acknowledges and celebrates the past. It is telling, as Burns argues, that in the end it is Sleary who is able to outwit Bitzer in order to have young Tom Gradgrind escape. Beauchamp notes that it is the symbiosis of man and nature that allows him to do so. Bodenheimer remarks that in *Hard Times* only the plans aimed at helping others unselfishly in the end succeed, because they are based on intuition about individual feelings and characters rather than generalised calculations.

The disparity between industrialised rational thinking and individual human emotions is emphasised in *Hard Times* by references to nature and agriculture. One interesting metaphor carried throughout the novel shows how Gradgrind's rational thinking might be harmful, while it simultaneously associates feelings with nature. This metaphor involves the comparison between raising children and growing plants. First of all, when Louisa returns home to visit her dying mother, she looks back on her childhood and realises that

[h]er remembrances of home and childhood were remembrances of the drying up of every spring and fountain in her young heart as it gushed out. The golden waters were not there. They were flowing for the fertilization of the land where grapes are gathered from thorns, and figs from thistles. (Dickens 219)

Schacht points out that the grapes, thorns, figs, and thistles warn against Gradgrind's mode of thinking by echoing a biblical warning against false prophets in Matthew 7:16 (Schacht 83).

Later in the novel, when Louisa returns home after Harthouse tried to seduce her, she reproaches her father for her upbringing, by comparing her mind to a flowering garden:

“[w]here are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here”

(Dickens 239). Through Gradgrind's suppression of her emotions, the flowers that represent those graces and sentiments have not been able to bloom. The metaphor of growing plants can also be found in the titles of the three parts in which the novel is divided: *sowing*, *reaping*, and *garnering*. These words might refer to the biblical parables in which sowing and reaping are compared to people's faith (Mt. 13, Mc. 4, and Lc. 8:4-15). As the first part of the novel describes the education of Louisa and Tom, *sowing* implies the enforcing of Gradgrind's rational thinking upon both his children. At the end of the second section, entitled *reaping*, Gradgrind is faced with the results of this education in the forms of Harthouse's attempts to seduce Louisa and Thomas's bank robbery. In the third part Gradgrind realises his shortcomings and tries to mend the problems posed in the previous section. Thus, Gradgrind collects the harvest of his rational education. Schacht argues that the sowing and reaping metaphor might not only be a biblical reference but that it also refers to an article titled "Nature's Changes of Dress" that was published in *Household Words* during the time that *Hard Times* was published in instalments in the same magazine (Schacht 82). The article argues that the growth of plants is highly influenced by their physical environments. In *Hard Times* Dickens extends these conclusions to a contemporary political debate about the behaviour of the working classes by emphasizing the influence of the poor living conditions on people's behaviour. In the novel, Gradgrind suggests that his factual thinking provides the solution: "[f]acts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts" (Dickens 3). His approach, however, proves a damaging one and, instead, the novel opts for imagination and natural emotions.

Similar to how industrial landscapes are presented as damaging nature, the natural settings in *Hard Times* also emphasise the incompatibility between industrial thinking and nature. One natural landscape that plays a significant role is the garden and landscape around

Bounderby's country retreat. After the marriage between Bounderby and Louisa, Bounderby buys himself a country house near Coketown. The house is surrounded by a garden and a natural landscape. The narrator explains that "[i]t was among the leafy shadows of this retirement, in the long sultry summer days, that Mr Harthouse began to prove the face which had set him wondering when he first saw it, and to try if it would change for him" (Dickens 189). The face that Harthouse is fascinated by reveals no emotions (except for her brother), because she was taught not to feel any. Harthouse tries to prove, in other words to test, the face and thus to elicit the feelings that have been hidden beneath for so long. As a result Louisa seeks shelter at her father's house and reproaches him for the way in which she was brought up. It is interesting that these seduction scenes take place in gardens and forests, given that, as explained above, nature in the novel is associated with emotions. It suggests that the nature that surrounds Louisa compels her to face the fact that her emotions and feelings have been suppressed. The incompatibility of the 'unnatural' upbringing and the natural surroundings eventually cause Louisa to collapse in front of her father.

Louisa's brother Tom's character, too, seems in conflict with nature in the country house garden. On one occasion when Louisa and Harthouse walk through the garden, they meet Tom who is "beating the branches" and stooping "viciously to rip the moss from the trees with his stick" (195). When he walks further on with Harthouse, he starts "plucking buds and picking them to pieces" (196). As his frustration increases, so too his violence towards nature increases: "[h]e took to biting the rosebuds now, and tearing them away from his teeth with a hand that trembled like an infirm old man's" (196). The behaviour described in these passages is accompanied by Tom's expression of selfish and unloving sentiments towards his sister. Thus, he rejects the natural brotherly affections, while he simultaneously destroys the nature that symbolises those natural feelings. The roses in the garden are also interesting in another respect, as the narrator remarks the following: "[t]hey had stopped among a disorder

of roses – it was part of Mr Bounderby’s humility to keep Nickit’s roses on a reduced scale” (196). Although Bounderby chose to keep roses in his garden, they are reduced and in disorder. This suggests that Bounderby, himself a manufacturer, is not able to successfully keep a garden, suggesting that industrial life and mentality are not compatible with harmonious nature.

The discussion so far suggests that industrial and natural landscapes form a contrast and warn against the consequences of industrialisation. However, the settings in the novel, both outside and inside Coketown, also create a sense that Coketown and its industry are isolated and cannot be escaped from. The isolation of Coketown from the rest of the country is suggested when the narrator points out how nature is “bricked out” from the factories and its gases “bricked in” (Dickens 72). Furthermore, the descriptions of Coketown perceived from a distance suggest that Coketown is invisible and inaccessible from outside. For example, the narrator points out that the town is covered in its own smoke through which the town cannot be seen: “Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun’s rays. [...] Coketown in the distance was suggestive of itself, though not a brick of it could be seen” (125). As discussed above, those that pass Coketown by train, only see the mills as Fairy Palaces, while Mrs Pegler can only express her admiration on seeing the mills. Other scenes that are outside Coketown emphasise that, apart from being isolated, Coketown is inescapable. For example, Gradgrind’s house is situated on a moor just outside Coketown. On a few occasions, Louisa and Gradgrind look out the windows of this house. Instead of viewing a natural landscape of the moor, they watch the chimneys and lights of Coketown, suggesting they are never really away from Coketown. Furthermore, both Mrs Sparsit and Bitzer try to prevent other characters escaping from Coketown. Mrs Sparsit follows Louisa through the wilderness around Bounderby’s house, but only loses sight of her

in Coketown. Bitzer follows Tom to Sleary's circus elsewhere in the country. Only through the help of the circus, Coketown's symbolic counterpart, is Tom able to escape.

The landscapes involving Stephen Blackpool's fate most clearly illustrates that one cannot wholly escape the problems of industrial Coketown. After having left Coketown he is accused of having robbed the bank and he is asked to return to clear himself. In his hasty return he falls into an old mine shaft in the countryside. During their country walk Rachael and Sissy find Stephen in the shaft. Eventually, Stephen dies from his injuries. The settings of these events are significant. Firstly, Johnson remarks that through Stephen's death the novel illustrates that there is "'no way out' of the system" (133). By falling into the mine shaft, Stephen literally falls into the remnants of industrial labour. Stephen himself also makes the connection between his fall and the many lives of labourers that were taken during the work in these mines: "I ha' fell into th' pit, my dear, as have cost [...] hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives – [...] When it were in work, it killed wi'out need; when 'tis let alone, it kills wi'out need" (Dickens 300). Johnson also points out that in these mines the coals for the steam engines are collected. Thus, the rural landscape that Blackpool turns to after leaving Coketown is still affected by the influence of Coketown's industry, because it is filled with dangerous pits that are built to maintain that industry.

The idea that Coketown is an isolated community, invisible from outside, is further emphasised by references to London. London is only occasionally mentioned in *Hard Times*, but through these references, the novel associates London with indifference. London is a political centre, to which Gradgrind goes as a Member of Parliament. In describing this parliament the narrator touches on the variety of the London crowd that, according to Williams, makes it different from the sameness of Coketown (223). The narrator points out that Gradgrind, by becoming an MP, is "one of the deaf honourable gentlemen, dumb honourable gentlemen, blind honourable gentlemen, lame honourable gentlemen, dead

honourable gentlemen” (Dickens 103). The enumeration of idiosyncrasies among honourable gentlemen suggests diversity, unlike the ‘Hands’ of Coketown. Deborah Epstein Nord and Williams argue, however, that in London urban literature this diversity is often accompanied by estrangement and indifference (Williams 223, Nord 511). This is expressed by the fact that the characteristics of these honourable gentlemen might also symbolise blindness, deafness, and dumbness of parliament in general. Thus, parliament is blind to the problems elsewhere in the country, like in Coketown. In the novel, London is particularly symbolised by the idle Harthouse. Harthouse himself expresses the indifference of London people: “I am going in for your respected father’s opinions – really because I have no choice of opinions, and may as well back them as anything else” (Dickens 145). He further reasserts his nonchalance by saying “I attach not the least importance to any opinions” (145). His carelessness leads him to seduce Louisa without considering the consequences for her position. The narrator even professes that “it were much better for the age in which he [Harthouse] lived, that he and the legion of whom he was one were designedly bad, than indifferent and purposeless” (200). The legion that is referred to is likely to refer to the London ruling classes.

The general sense that Coketown is inescapable and that ruling classes from outside do not care ties in with the fact that *Hard Times* provides no solution to the problems it faces. Several scholars have noted that *Hard Times* refrains from suggesting a way to solve the problems of industrialisation (Burns, Bodenheimer, Gallagher, Johnson). According to Burns, in one passage, in which Stephen Blackpool refuses to provide Bounderby with information about Slackbridge’s trade union, the novel even rejects the solutions that are provided in other industrial novels, like those by Gaskell or Disraeli. The solution seems to be, Burns argues, “the idea of awareness itself” (107). Johnson argues that Dickens “does not provide us with an escape from the system but instead holds us to a strict accounting of what it costs to maintain it” (136). Bodenheimer agrees that the novel does not provide a solution for the system as a

whole, but argues that it does provide a solution for the individual characters to escape from the system: “Disraeli wants to save the state; Dickens wants to save lives from the state” (207). Gallagher, too, notes that *Hard Times* conveys a sense of hopelessness. She discusses the novel in terms of the paternalist view, a view that suggests that the relationship between fathers and children should serve as a metaphor for the relationship between employers and workers. However, in order for the Gradgrind family to form a good example of the father-children relationship, it needs to separate itself from society. Thus, Gallagher argues, the novel reveals the paradoxes of such a paternalist view. The problems, therefore, remain unresolved.

In conclusion, it can be said that the landscapes in *Hard Times* create a warning against the negative effects of industry on its environments and people’s daily lives, and present it as an insoluble problem. The novel presents the industry of Coketown and the modes of thinking associated with that industry as damaging by illustrating its contrast to and incompatibility with nature and natural feelings. In general, the landscapes both outside and within Coketown suggest that the town is isolated from the rest of the country. Outsiders do not perceive its problems, while the people from Coketown cannot escape from them. This emphasises the fact that the novel in general provides no solution to the problems of the industrial town.

Chapter 3: Landscape and Leadership in Disraeli's *Sybil*

Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) is very different from *Hard Times*. Where Dickens in *Hard Times* focuses on the community of Coketown, Disraeli widens his scope to England as a whole nation. In an episodic style he describes various scenes from across the country, urban, rural, and industrial alike. In *Hard Times*, the focus on one industrial town enabled Dickens to point out the effects that machines and factory work might have on people. In *Sybil*, on the other hand, by using the descriptions of the country as a whole, Disraeli does not point to machines as a single cause of the struggles, but puts the blame on leadership and politics. Robert O'Kell argues this novel should be seen as a way to promote Disraeli's own political views "in the form of an allegorical romance" (257).

When *Sybil* was published in 1845, Disraeli was a Member of Parliament, and would eventually become Prime Minister (Smith, "Introduction" ix). He was considered the leader of Young England, a small political coterie that existed from 1842 to 1846. This group consisted of young Tory aristocrats who "despised utilitarianism, middle-class liberalism, and centralized government," and "yearned for an idealized feudal society in which Church and aristocracy combined to protect the people's rights" (Schwarz 81; Smith, "Introduction" xii). As Catherine Gallagher points out, "Disraeli's ideas about political representation" are influenced by Burke and Coleridge, who argued for Parliamentary representation by "a small group of well-educated men," who, unlike the majority of the people, were not influenced by their own trade interests (192-193; 201). Gallagher also points out that "[l]ike Bolingbroke, [Disraeli] calls on the Tory party" to restore "the full power of the monarch" (201). Although Disraeli was not in favour of the Chartists' plea for extending the franchise to the working classes, he was sympathetic to their cause to improve the living conditions of these classes, and believed that his own political vision would remedy the working-class plight. Disraeli wrote *Sybil* as the middle part of a political trilogy, written after *Coningsby* and before

Tancred. Gallagher argues that *Sybil* attempts to “discredit the model” that is presented by the Utilitarians and Chartists, while promoting Disraeli’s own model of Tory Democracy (217). The plot is told through a narrator whose political views are very close to those of Disraeli himself.

In *Sybil*, Disraeli addresses the struggles in England between 1837 and 1842, and identifies the cause of these problems as a lack of responsible leadership. Interestingly, unlike other industrial novels, *Sybil* “does not blame the industrial middle class for the plight of the poor” (Vanden Bossche 90). Instead, the novel strongly attacks the self-interested aristocrats (both Tories and Whigs) who enter into politics for their own material gain and neglect their duty to serve the nation (Vanden Bossche 86). However, as Chris Vanden Bossche points out, the novel does not “define self-interest as the consequence of belonging to a heritable-landowning class but rather as the displacement of the traditional hierarchical aristocracy” (87). History is relevant in this respect, as the novel criticises the self-interested landowners by tracing back their ancestry, and exposing them as frauds and false leaders whose ancestors gained their wealth through dishonourable means (O’Kell 263). Instead, the novel pleads for responsible leaders, the promise of which is presented in the protagonist, Charles Egremont. As a younger brother of Lord Marney, he is brought up in the luxurious life of the London upper class. However, he meets with Chartist leader and factory worker Walter Gerard and his daughter Sybil and pursues his friendship with them by adopting the identity of a journalist named Mr Franklin. Through the Gerards he learns of the condition of the working classes, a world that hitherto he did not know, and begins to realise the responsibilities in this matter lie with his own class.

The main plot in *Sybil* not only revolves around promoting responsible political representation by a rightful aristocracy and the denouncement of both self-centred aristocrats and the Chartist movement, but the rural, urban and industrial landscapes in the novel are also

employed to support these political views, as they delegitimise unfavourable representatives on the one hand and legitimise rightful representatives on the other. First of all, the consequences of the neglect of duties on the part of self-centred aristocrats are presented through the juxtaposition of rural, urban and industrial scenes that depict the rich and the poor. The view that these representatives are responsible for the poor living conditions is further supported by the description of the rural area around the town of Marney. Other types of government and political representation are also depicted as unfavourable by filthy or unpleasant landscapes. These scenes are contrasted to the more beautiful landscapes that are associated with rightful leadership. Interestingly, these beautiful landscapes are infused with harmonious nature, as if the harmony of nature is the result of harmonious leadership. Finally the promise of a rightful political representative is presented in the protagonists Egremont and his marriage to Sybil. In this love plot, scenery plays an important role as both characters learn from traveling to another landscape and thereby ultimately arrive at the same political view. Furthermore, just like the rightful leaders are associated with natural scenery, their marriage is also sanctioned by natural landscapes, while urban landscapes separate them.

One way in which the novel questions the self-interested aristocracy is the juxtaposition of upper-class and lower-class scenes. Many scholars have noted Disraeli's episodic style, in which the narrator moves to a different scene in each chapter. Daniel R. Schwarz for example notes that "Disraeli creates an elaborate canvas where the meaning of each episode depends upon its relation to the whole" (114). Sheila M. Smith points out that Disraeli bases most of these various scenes on parliamentary reports, also known as Blue books (Smith, *The Other Nation* 150-151). Because of this, Smith argues, the scenes provide a realistic image of people's lives. Throughout the novel, scenes depicting rich aristocrats are immediately followed or preceded by scenes depicting the working class. For example, the scene in which Sybil traverses the Seven Dials, a part of London "where the dog-stealer and

the pick-pocket, the burglar and the assassin, found a sympathetic multitude of all ages,” is immediately followed by a chapter describing a luxurious party at Deloraine House (Disraeli, *Sybil* 313). Furthermore, the evening at Lord Marney’s is preceded by a scene in which miners discuss their difficulties. Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues that these episodic scenes “leap from one self-enclosed social world to another [...] each obsessed with the particular politics of its own condition,” and thus lead to a sense of fragmentation (178). Such fragmentation also suggests that the aristocracy does not look beyond their own class and thereby neglect their duty. This suggestion is supported by the fact that during the very same party at Deloraine House a group of homeless are gathered in a park just outside the house (Disraeli, *Sybil* 316).

Initially, the stark contrast between the riches of the one class and the poverty of the other seems to refer to the novel’s subtitle: *The Two Nations*. The idea that there is a divide between rich and poor is first introduced in the novel by Stephen Morley. Subsequently, the juxtaposition of scenes depicting upper and lower classes is often taken to refer to this. However, as Bodenheimer, Gallagher, O’Kell and Vanden Bossche all observe, the juxtaposition of these scenes not only emphasises the contrast between rich and poor, but also show the similarities between the two classes. For example, Gallagher notes that the dinner party at Mowbray Castle and the group of working-class people enjoying themselves in the Temple of the Muses reveal that “the behaviour of the de Mowbrays is just as pretentious as that of Dandy Mick and the factory girls” (204). In comparing the scene in the Seven Dials and the party at Deloraine House, O’Kell notes that “[t]he members of the beau-monde are shown to be every bit as morally depraved as are the denizens of the criminal slums” (276). As Bodenheimer and Gallagher argue, the mirroring of the “pretension, selfishness, and ignorance” of both classes suggests that the separation between the two nations is an illusion and that both depend on one another (Gallagher 205). More importantly, O’Kell argues that

“[b]y such means Disraeli is constantly making the point that ‘the degradation of the people’ is the result, not of economic circumstances, but of immoral leadership” (276).

One instance in *Sybil* in which a contrast between two rural scenes more specifically criticises the neglected duties of the aristocracy involves the description of the rural town of Marney. The person who is criticised here is Lord Marney, Charles Egremont’s elder brother. Vanden Bossche notes how “[t]he Marney family obtained its lands (Marney Abbey) through the dissolution of the monasteries, became part of the Whig oligarchy, and then, as a matter of political expediency, joined the Tories” (90). Thus, Marney’s rulership is already denounced by his ancestry. Marney’s indifference and even contempt for his tenants is revealed in the conversations at Mowbray Castle, when Lord de Mowbray asks him after the situation on his estate. Marney replies: “[w]e continue reducing the rates, and as long as we do that the country must improve” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 108). Later on, Marney argues: “I have generally found the higher the wages the worse the workman. They only spend their money in the beer-shops” (109). Abbey farm, which belongs to his estate, is threatened by rick-burnings. Lord Marney, however, dismisses these as mere accidents that have “nothing to do with wages,” and thus denies the problems for which he is responsible (108). Apart from paying low wages, Lord Marney also drives his tenants away by destroying their cottages.

The consequences of Lord Marney’s practices are evident in the description of Marney town. The narrator begins his sketch of Marney from a distance, from where the rural area looks like an ideal idyllic village: “[t]he situation of the rural town of Marney was one of the most delightful easily to be imagined. In a spreading dale, contiguous to the margin of a clear and lively stream, surrounded by meadows and gardens, and backed by lofty hills, undulating and richly wooded” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 51). The narrator continues, however, by saying: “Beautiful illusion! For behind that laughing landscape, penury and disease fed upon the vitals of a miserable population!” (51). The narrator subsequently gives an account of the real

situation in Marney village. For example he notes the “sombre mansions, a dingy inn, and a petty bourse” and describes how the dilapidated houses “looked more like the top of a dunghill than a cottage” (51-52). The stark contrast between the actual situation in the town and the idyllic village described at first emphasises the discrepancy between Marney’s behaviour towards his tenants and what it should have been.

Although the urban scenes of the London aristocracy and the rural area around Marney reveal that the aristocracy have neglected their duty towards the nation, other social structures are also delegitimised through landscapes in *Sybil*. One such example is the urban description of Wodgate. This town is introduced when Stephen Morley visits Bishop Hatton in order to inquire after his brother Baptist Hatton. Wodgate is a town of locksmiths and ironmongers, and is described as a “land without an owner; no one claimed any manorial right over it; they could build cottages without paying rent. It was a district recognized by no parish; so there were no tithes, and no meddling supervision” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 161). Furthermore, there are “no landlords, head-lessees, main-masters, or butties in Wodgate, [...] [n]o church, [...] no municipality, no magistrate, [...] no local acts, no vestries, no schools of any kind” (162). Thus, this town is not controlled by any social institution. Bodenheimer notes that “[t]he brief fantasy is an attempt to imagine a society developed apart from any traditional human institutions of culture or civil polity, a society in which there is no basis for usurpation” (176). Freedom and individualism is illustrated in Wodgate by the narrator’s account that “every man lights his own house; nor does anyone know anything except his business” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 162). As Bodenheimer remarks, “[i]n Wodgate, then, Disraeli posits an extremity of laissez-faire individualism that must end in dictatorship” (177). Indeed, the narrator remarks that the masters who employ workers are the “ruthless tyrants” in this town, who form an oppressive “aristocracy” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 163). Their cruelty towards their workers is expressed through their “beating them with sticks or flogging them with knotted ropes [...]

felling them with hammers, or cutting their heads open with a file or lock” (163). The Wodgate population in general is portrayed as vicious animals who take to drinking, but their vices are being excused by the narrator on account of their ignorance. The physical appearance of the town itself is as unfavourable as its inhabitants as it is described as a “squalid suburb” with “dingy tenements, [...] coarse and grimy shops, [...] alleys [...] streaming with filth” (164-165). Furthermore, “the sound of the hammer and the file never ceased, amid gutters of abomination and piles of foulness and stagnant pools of filth” (164-165). Therefore, the town that lacks any type of government seems to have “the most miserable tenements in the most hideous burgh in the ugliest country in the world” (162).

Not only does the description of Wodgate condemn the laissez-faire economic system there, but together with other scenery in *Sybil*, Wodgate also plays a role in denouncing the Chartist movement. A great part of the novel revolves around this working-class movement, which strove to extend the franchise to all classes. Although Walter Gerard, one of the most important advocates of the Chartist movement is sympathetically presented, the legitimacy for working-class political agency is cancelled by the scenes that are associated with it. First of all, one principal leader of the riot in 1842 is Bishop Hatton. He earned the title of Bishop through his prominent position as a master in Wodgate. His leadership qualities are therefore intrinsically linked to this violent place. Already in the description of Wodgate, his violent practices towards his employees are revealed when Morley witnesses how Hatton punishes them by wringing their ears until they bleed. These violent practises are transported onto the violent nature of the riot he leads, in which he and his Hell-cats “destroyed and ravaged; sacked and gutted houses; plundered cellars; [...] burned rate-books in the market-place, [...] cheering and laughing amid flames and rapine” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 376). Moreover, the riot led by Bishop Hatton also disturbs the idyllic landscape of Mowedale: “[s]uddenly the tramp and hum of a multitude broke upon the sunshiny silence” (394). Other events involving the

Chartist movement are also placed within filthy or ominous landscapes. One such scene is the torch-meeting on the moor amid “the dusk wilderness” near a pile of rock which is called the “Druid’s Altar.” (215). The leaders of the people are announced through the sound of “martial music” (215). This ties in with Nord’s observation that industrial novelists “looked at working-class mobilization, whether in the form of trade unions or Chartist campaigning, with suspicion” (519). Another instance occurs in London, where the meeting between the Chartists in which they form plans against the state is located in the criminal slums of the Seven Dials, in which Sybil searches for her father while encountering all kinds of disreputable characters.

Although the working-class political movements are associated with vice and violence, the description of Mowbray and its people suggests that in themselves the working-class people are good-natured and that the violence is the result of improper leadership. Unlike Wodgate, the industrial town of Mowbray, although it has its “dank and dismal dwellings,” has shops and market which are characterised as “bright and lively” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 86). The inhabitants, too, are described as good-natured. For example, when the Temple of the Muses, Mowbray’s main place for public entertainment, is described, the narrator notes that “[n]othing, however, could be more decorous than the general conduct of the company, though they consisted principally of factory people” (91). Bodenheimer compares this scene with the immediately following dinner party at Mowbray Castle, and suggests that “[i]t is difficult to read this scene without feeling that Dandy Mick, Devilsdust, and their girlfriends are more alive and more honest in their pretensions than the aristocracy” (179-180). She notes that in general “the poor are more attractive, energetic, and public-minded than the aristocrats” (Bodenheimer 180). Whereas Smith criticises the conversations between working-class people as unnatural and having an “air of fabrication,” Bodenheimer argues that these dialogues make “the workers seem more real – that is, more equal in rhetorical status to the

other sets of characters – than do the more carefully realistic dialects or sentimental portraits of the other social novelists” (Smith, *The Other Nation* 150; Bodenheimer 180).

Bodenheimer notes that such a depiction of the working classes induces the readers to sympathise with them and the Chartists movement. She argues that *Sybil* ties in with Carlyle’s “view of Chartism as an assembly of People in search of their leader” (Bodenheimer 180). That the working classes are waiting for leadership, is already suggested by the juxtaposition of self-centred aristocrats and the working-class people who mimic their behaviour. During the 1842 riots, two alternatives for leadership are presented to the Mowbray people, Bishop Hatton and the Gerards. Bishop Hatton and his Hell-cats convince the Mowbray people to attempt to break down Trafford’s Mill. When they stand before the gates at Trafford’s, Walter Gerard dissuades them from using violence. Stephen Morley takes the opportunity to divert the anger of the mob to attack Mowbray Castle instead. Again, the Mowbray people go along with the rioters, but on seeing Sybil and the vicar Mr St Lys, they refrain from joining in the violence and help the Mowbray family escape. Bodenheimer remarks that “[v]iolence is isolated and confined to the Antichrist Bishop Hatton, who has already been firmly set beyond the pale of human society” (182). However, good-natured in themselves, the Mowbray people have the potential to become violent under the guidance of one like Bishop Hatton, while the Gerards and Mr St Lys direct them to a more peaceful path.

In *Sybil*, although he is a Chartist leader, Walter Gerard’s leadership is presented as natural and legitimate, which is supported by his natural surroundings. Despite being a Chartist advocate, Gerard’s natural leadership underpins rather than undermines the novel’s general argument in favour of responsible political representation by a rightful aristocracy. Throughout the novel, the audience is given to understand that the Gerards are descendants of nobility through their aristocratic and noble appearance, remarked upon by the narrator and other characters. This suspicion is more explicitly confirmed when Gerard tells Sybil and

Morley that his “fathers fought at Azincourt,” and also when the audience is introduced to the fact that Walter Gerard is the rightful inheritor of Mowbray (Disraeli, *Sybil* 83). Later in the novel, the deed stating his right to Mowbray Castle is retrieved, and subsequently Sybil is restored to her rightful position. O’Kell’s suggestion that they are of “an ancient family, probably of Saxon roots” is supported by the fact that Sybil’s dog is named Harold (263). Thus, although Walter Gerard is a Chartist, the emphasis on his rightful claim on the Mowbray estate suggests that his natural position as a leader stems from his inherited right to rule.

The potential harmony and orderliness that Gerard might incite as a leader are also projected onto his surroundings. Rather than living in Mowbray, Gerard instead lives in the idyllic rural Mowdale. The garden around his house is rich and harmonious, as “every bed and nook [...] teemed with cultivation; flowers and vegetables both abounded” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 133). The fruits in his orchard are compared with rubies, amethysts, sapphires, emeralds, and gold (168). Thereby, the splendour of Walter Gerard’s surroundings seems to reflect the nobility of his character.

Another example in which harmonious surroundings reflect the generosity of a rightful leader is the description of Trafford’s Mill. During his stay in Mowdale, Egremont, as Mr Franklin, is invited to see Trafford’s factory, where Walter Gerard works. Trafford is described as having “gentle blood in his veins, and old English feelings” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 181). These characteristics already qualify Trafford for the ideal type of leadership that the novel promotes. Indeed, Trafford, the audience learns, has “a correct conception of the relations which should subsist between the employer and the employed,” which “should be other ties than the payment and the receipt of wages” (181). The narrative moves from describing Trafford himself to describing his mill, which is located in the country, rather than a manufacturing town. The narrator gives an account of the interior of the factory and remarks

how the set-up of the factory has both physical and moral advantages for the workers. James Roderick Burns notes that this is one of the rare instances in industrial novels in which the actual interior of the factory is described (82). Near the mill, the manufacturer built a small village “where every family might be well lodged” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 182). This village is “surrounded by beautiful gardens, which gave an impulse to the horticulture of the community,” and located near a “sparkling river and [a] sylvan background” (182-183). Not only is the village beautiful, there is also a beneficial effect on its inhabitants. The narrator explains that “[t]here was not a single person in the village of a reprobate character” (183). Furthermore the people are “well clad” and have “a blooming cheek” (183). Even the children are all “beautiful” (183). This description of the village echoes the seventeenth-century country house poems, in which a landlord is celebrated by the way in which the people and nature on the estate are perfectly harmonious. In discussing Trafford’s Mill, O’Kell notes that “[h]ere the true ‘baronial principle’ has been revived in the practice of industrial feudalism to create an idyllic village where the moral and physical well-being of the whole population is the result of the proprietor’s paternal, loving concern” (268-269). Interestingly, unlike *Hard Times*, this passage in *Sybil* suggests that industry and nature need not be in conflict but can exist in harmony with each other, provided there is a responsible and noble leader.

Next to Trafford’s Mill, another image of an ideal feudal society is presented by the ruins of the old Marney Abbey, the landscape around which both celebrates the feudal society of the past and laments its present forlorn state. Early on in the novel, Egremont visits the old ruins of Marney Abbey where he meets Walter Gerard and Stephen Morley for the first time. With them he discusses the old feudal society that existed when the abbey was still inhabited by monks. The narrator notes how the old abbey was “a place where all the rights of hospitality were practised; where the traveller from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim, asked the shelter and the succour that never were denied, and [...] the peasants on the Abbey

lands, if in want, might appeal each morn and night for raiment and for food” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 57). Gerard argues that the lord abbot was the ideal feudal landlord, because, as he says, “[t]he Monastics could possess no private property; they could save no money; they could bequeath nothing. They lived, received, and expended in common” (61). This is contrasted to the family histories of Lord Marney and Lord de Mowbray, whose ancestors advanced in rank through usurpation. Gerard here also refers to his own rightful claim on land that has been taken from him. The abbey is located in an idyllic landscape, near a river that “ran through meads, soft and vivid with luxuriant vegetation, bounded on either side by rich hanging woods” (56). With Gerard and Egremont’s admiration for this old medieval feudal structure and its idyllic location, the abbey might be associated with the nostalgic longing for an idealised past that Raymond Williams notes in *The Country and the City*. The landscape around the ruins of the abbey, however, simultaneously suggests lamentation of its dissolution. For example, the narrator points out that in “the garden of the monks [...] all that remained of that fair pleasaunce was a solitary yew in its centre” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 58). Thus, the landscape around the abbey both emphasise its once ideal state, but also the sadness relating to its dissolution. The abbey itself, like Trafford’s, provides a model for an ideal feudal system: Vanden Bossche argues that “[w]hile the novels’ heroes seek to restore the conception of social order manifested by the monasteries, they do not aim to revive monastic institutions but merely take them as models for a reformed social order” (99).

Apart from Trafford’s Mill and Marney Abbey, rural landscapes are relevant in the way Egremont becomes a model for the type of leader that *Sybil* promotes. In the novel, Egremont goes through a transformation, in which he changes from a self-indulgent aristocrat to a responsible political representative for the nation as a whole. Part of this transformation is the result of his friendship with the Gerards, whom he first meets near the ruins of Marney Abbey. Their conversations about the ancient monastic structure is Egremont’s first step to

awareness about the condition of the poor. The way in which his first encounter with Sybil is described as a divine revelation also suggests that their acquaintance opens Egremont's eyes to look beyond his own luxurious world. The narrator points out that, through his new friends, "the horizon of his experience had insensibly expanded" (Disraeli, *Sybil* 132). Thus, Egremont's personal development is strongly linked to the abbey. Indeed, the "silent and secluded scene screened from every harsh and angry wind" in which the abbey is located also creates a retreat for Egremont to reflect (56). After his encounter with the Gerards, he visits them in Mowedale, taking on the identity of Mr Franklin. Mowedale is described as an idyllic landscape of "meads of a vivid colour" (130). Amid the "sunshiny gardens and the voices of bees and birds" Egremont's transformation is continued (175). Schwarz notes that "[i]n the first stage of Egremont's metamorphosis [...] he is rather like a Wordsworthian stereotype when he responds to the sublimity of rural life. But after his self-enforced rustification, he sympathises with the physical conditions and psychological lives of others" (109). It is clear, therefore, that Egremont's leadership qualities are strongly linked to rural areas. His tie to nature is even more strongly emphasised when, as he leaves Mowedale, the landscape is suddenly "dull and hard; the trees dingy, [...] the distant hills rough and austere" (Disraeli, *Sybil* 196). The narrator uses the *ubi sunt* motif when he asks "[w]here was that translucent sky [...] those bowery groves" (196). Disraeli here adopts *pathetic fallacy*, as nature resembles the state of Egremont's mind on leaving his beloved Mowedale.

Sybil, too, is transformed, and likewise, this transformation is the result of her traveling to another type of landscape. At the start of the novel, Sybil is quite convinced of Morley's notion that rich and poor are two divided nations and that this gap cannot be overcome. When she and her father move to London and Egremont reveals to her his true identity, she wants nothing more to do with him, as she says "I am one of those who believe the gulf is impassable" (Disraeli, *Sybil* 246). However, in London she undergoes a

transformation: “the experience of the last few months had operated a great change in these impressions” (289). During these months Sybil hears of violent riots breaking out in Birmingham as part of a working-class strike. Furthermore, as O’Kell points out, “Sybil learns that her father has become entangled in a conspiracy against the state,” and that Morley, “advocate of moral power,” uses blackmail against her (275). These events lead Sybil to question the legitimacy of the Chartist plea for working-class political agency. Sybil’s London experiences reach their climax in her search for her father through the criminal Seven Dials, where she is harassed and deceived by the London low-life.

Finally, rural and urban landscapes are also relevant in relation to the union between Sybil and Egremont, which symbolises the novel’s view on ideal political representation. Their first encounter is among the ruins of the Marney Abbey, surrounded by nature. Subsequently, Egremont stays in the idyllic Mowdale to continue their acquaintance. In London, however, they are separated when Sybil rejects him after Egremont reveals his true identity. They meet again in St James’ Park, where “[t]here was a bloom upon the trees” (Disraeli, *Sybil* 288). Amidst “the freshness and fragrance of nature” their friendship can be renewed (288). However, as they approach “the gate of the gardens [...] she paused and said with a soft and sad smile, ‘Here we must part’” (294). This suggests that they can only be together in the natural area of the garden, but not in the urban area of London. They do not meet again until the very end of the novel, where Egremont saves her from the assailants at Mowbray Castle during the riot, while Sybil sought shelter “in a corner of the flower-garden” and in the park around Mowbray Castle (416). In the same way that Trafford and the feudal system embodied by Marney Abbey are celebrated through harmonious nature around them, the union between Sybil and Egremont is also sanctioned by nature, whereas the urban area of London, home to the gossiping aristocrats and the Seven Dial populace, separates them. O’Kell argues that critics have often misinterpreted the marriage between Sybil and Egremont

as a union between rich and poor, and that they have criticised the fact that Sybil is eventually restored to her aristocratic status. However, as Bodenheimer also points out, the true purpose of the marriage between Egremont and Sybil is to unite “[r]eal talent and real claims to hereditary dignity,” the combination of which forms the ideal political representative that the novel promotes (173).

In conclusion, it can be said that the rural, urban and industrial landscapes in *Sybil* together help to promote responsible aristocracy as rightful leaders of the nation, and denounce other leaders and political views. The self-centred aristocrats are denounced through the contrast between their luxury and the poverty of the people they ought to have taken care of. Furthermore, the working-classes are also shown to mimic the vices of the aristocrats. The description of the filthy urban area of Wodgate condemns the laissez-faire political economy realised there through the absence of any governmental institution. Moreover, both Wodgate and other urban areas in London delegitimise the Chartist movement. Ideal forms of social harmony, like Trafford’s, Marney Abbey, and Walter Gerard and Egremont’s leaderships, are celebrated through the harmonious nature that surrounds them. Unlike *Hard Times*, this novel does not suggest the incompatibility between nature and industry, but suggests that the harmony between them depends on responsible leadership. Finally, nature is also important in the union between Sybil and Egremont, who form the hope of a reformed government and nation, and it is only amidst nature that they are united, while the urban area of London separates them.

Chapter 4: Rural Pasts and the Industrial Future in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and *Mary Barton*

A third novelist who discusses the social struggles of the mid-nineteenth century and is to be discussed in this study is Elizabeth Gaskell. Her novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) both focus on Manchester, which is fictionalised as Milton-Northern in *North and South*. Elizabeth Gaskell was the wife of a Unitarian Minister in Manchester, and through her husband's position she came into personal contact with both working-class people and the middle-class manufacturers, which according to W. A. Craik gives her an advantage over other novelists dealing with the same topic (2). In all of Gaskell's work there is an emphasis on the inevitability of change, something which both Shelagh Hunter and Craik have observed. According to Chris Vanden Bossche, Elizabeth Gaskell's novels promote cooperation between classes, based on mutual understanding and recognition of their interdependence (177). To this end, Hunter argues, the narrator adopts a certain neutral position to describe both workers and manufacturers and elicit sympathy for both, while simultaneously mediating between the characters' (sometimes illogical) reasoning and "a sophisticated readership" (Hunter 104). However, Lynette Felber points out that this "intrusive narrator" has been "frequently criticized" (67).

In both novels landscapes play an important role in supporting the novels' general messages and the eventual solution to the problems. *Mary Barton* resembles Dickens's *Hard Times* in that no immediate solution is provided. The urban landscapes of Manchester are there to emphasise the condition of the working classes, while rural landscapes, though not idealised, provide an escape for almost all characters. The novel provides a glimmer of hope towards a solution that consists of mutual understanding and respect between the classes, which is extended in the later novel *North and South*. In *North and South*, landscapes embody different values which are eventually merged in the union between the main characters.

Margaret's rejection of her idealisation of Helstone also symbolises the embracing of change rather than looking to the past, which the novel advocates.

The main focus of *Mary Barton* is on the condition of the working classes. The story revolves around Mary Barton and her father, the Chartist advocate John Barton who kills Harry Carson, the son of a manufacturer, while Jem Wilson, Mary's childhood friend, becomes the primary suspect. In the descriptions of the poor living conditions of the working class, which dominate *Mary Barton*, the novel attempts not only to create sympathy for such wretchedness, but mainly provides an explanation of how such circumstances drive men to behave as they do (Smith, *The Other Nation* 42). For example, the narrator asks, "can I wonder that many of them, in such times of misery and destitution, spoke and acted with ferocious precipitation?" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 98). While sympathising with the working-class plight, the narrator identifies the separation between classes as one of the major problems in Manchester: "[t]he most deplorable and enduring evil that arose [...] was this feeling of alienation between the different classes of society" (Gaskell, *MB* 97). Although the novel does not immediately present a solution, the path to a solution is provided by Carson's forgiveness, his conversation with Job Legh, and the narrator's allusion to Carson's contributions to improving the conditions of the working class in the future.

One of the most important types of scenery in *Mary Barton* consists of the streets in Manchester where the conditions of the working class are displayed. The most unfavourable parts of Manchester are described when George Wilson and John Barton go to Mr and Mrs Davenport, to help the dying Mr Davenport. The streets they pass have gutters filled with "household slops of every description" that ran "into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated" (Gaskell, *MB* 67). From the dirty streets they go down into a "foul area" with a "damp muddy wall" from which they can enter the cellar where the Davenports live (67). In the cellar "the smell was so foetid as almost to knock the two men down" (68). Through the

“wet, brick floor [...] the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up” (68). The narrator observes that “[t]he very smoke seemed purifying and healthy in the thick clammy air” (69). These descriptions clearly illustrate the wretched conditions in Manchester. Interestingly, as Craik and Sheila Smith observe, Gaskell does not adopt symbolism and metaphors like the other novelists to describe the poverty, but stays with the physical facts from her observations (Craik 20; Smith, *The Other Nation* 88).

The poverty of the working class in Manchester is immediately juxtaposed with manufacturer Mr Carson’s wealth, which illustrates the alienation between rich and poor. Mr Carson’s house lies two miles from where the Wilsons and the Davenports live and is situated “almost in the country” (Gaskell, *MB* 75). George Wilson visits Mr Carson there immediately after spending the night at the sick Mr Davenport’s to ask for an Infirmary order for the sick man. Carson’s house, the reader is told, is “furnished with disregard to expense” and contains “many articles chosen for their beauty and elegance” (76). The “roaring fire” in the kitchen and the breakfast that is prepared is in stark contrast to the “unused chimney” and absence of food at the Davenports’ (76, 69). The “appetising” smell contrasts to the “foetid” smell in the cellar (76, 68). Craik points out that the narrator “avoids any explicit condemnation, leaving the facts and the dialogue to make the point” (27). Rather than that this juxtaposition suggests the unwillingness to help, the narrator here explicitly points to the servants’ ignorance of the poverty outside the house: “the servants [...] would have willingly given him meat and bread in abundance; but they were like the rest of us, and not feeling hunger themselves, forgot it was possible another might” (Gaskell, *MB* 76).

The descriptions of Manchester life not only depict the poverty among the workers, but also reveal respect and sympathy for the working-class. Apart from describing the wretched surroundings, the narrator takes great care in describing the details of the working-class households, for example Mrs Barton’s tea-set and furniture or Alice Wilson’s kitchen.

Smith argues that the narrator “establishes herself as the curious visitor but sympathetic, familiar with the scene, not the bewildered, assaulted stranger” and shows respect for this “routine of life” (*The Other Nation* 86). As Raymond Williams and Deborah Epstein Nord have noted, urban scenes are often accompanied by the sense of estrangement among the inhabitants. Such estrangement is hinted at in the novel when the narrator describes John Barton’s difficulty of finding Esther in “the wilderness of a large town” (Gaskell, *MB* 149). However, most of the novel depicts the readiness of the working-class families to help each other despite their own situation. For example, George Wilson and John Barton go to the Davenports to help them, Mary Barton and Margaret Legh both help old Alice Wilson and Mrs Wilson, and Margaret helps Mary financially. The narrator remarks how a neighbour was there to help the dying Mrs Barton “in less than five minutes” in the middle of the night (19).

Although *Mary Barton* depicts the poverty of a manufacturing town, industrialisation itself is not depicted as the cause of disharmony, as is the case in Dickens’s *Hard Times*. The iron factory where Jem Wilson works is described in two scenes, and its interior inspires both fear and fascination. For example, when the policemen visit the factory to arrest Jem Wilson, the narrator remarks how “a deep and lurid red glared over all” and “the furnace roared with mighty flame” (Gaskell, *MB* 264). The workers are described as “demons, in their fire-and-soot colouring” (264). The narrator describes how “the policemen stood awed with the novel sight” (264). Despite the reference to demons, there is no negative tone in this account. The awe-inspiring scenery here fits in with Christophe Den Tandt’s idea of an “industrial sublime” (3). Will Wilson, Jem’s cousin, also reacts both positively and negatively to Jem’s factory. He first calls it “a noisy black hole” and “a place to craze a man” (Gaskell, *MB* 176). However, he also says that “[t]here were one or two things worth looking at, the bellows for instance,” and argues that he “could ha’ stood near it a whole day” (176). The depiction of the factory as something awe-inspiring ties in with the fact that industrial work is not portrayed as the cause

of the problems in this novel. Indeed, it is not the work, rather the absence of work that causes poverty. Carson's delay of rebuilding his mill after a fire leaves people out of work, "to whom leisure was a curse" (65). Like in *Hard Times*, people are occasionally likened to machines, but it does not serve as an argument that industry is harmful. Mary and John Barton are both referred to as an "automaton," and the narrator once remarks how John's Barton body "went on with the same measured clock-work tread" (Gaskell, *MB* 19, 424, 415). However, rather than that these comparisons are a reflection on how industry affects human nature, these characters are turned into machines through the devastating events in their life, caused by poverty. Finally, Job Legh professes to Mr Carson that he believes "power-looms, and railways, and all such-like inventions, are the gifts of God," thus tying in with the suggestion that industry is not necessarily harmful in itself, but that people need to find new social structures (463).

London and Liverpool provide the characters with a glimpse into other worlds, allowing the characters to compare their own Manchester to these other cities. Like in *Hard Times*, references to London in *Mary Barton* suggest that improvement of the situation in Manchester is not to be expected to come from parliament. At one point in the novel John Barton travels to London as a Chartist delegate to speak before parliament. However, he and the other delegates are rejected and his journey was in vain. He describes the splendour he encountered in the smarter areas of London, but in his description it is clear that he prefers his own city, Manchester. He criticises the houses in London for being "built without any proper shape for a body to live in" (Gaskell, *MB* 116-117). Furthermore, he remarks how the less favourable areas of London consist "o' holes o' iniquity and filth, such as Manchester knows nought on" (116). Liverpool, on the other hand, seems to be more beautiful. It is interesting, too, that it is in Liverpool that Jem is cleared, whereas in Manchester no-one but the main characters believe he is innocent, even after the hearing. When Mary goes to

Liverpool to find Will Wilson she sees a “forest of masts belonging to the vessels in dock” and “the glorious river” (347). The ships come from “distant lands, spicy or frozen” and Mary hears a “variety of languages” (347). The narrator also notes that “she also saw such puffs and clouds of smoke from the countless steamers, that she wondered at Charley’s intolerance of the smoke of Manchester” (347). Mary does not accept Charley’s dislike of Manchester on account of the smoke as she sees that Liverpool also has smoke. Therefore, despite the poverty that they see in their own city, both father and daughter feel defensive of their own Manchester.

Although most of the events in the novel take place in urban areas, rural landscapes provide an escape to almost all characters. The novel opens with the Wilsons and the Bartons who go to Green Heys Fields as a holiday pastime. The charming fields have the elements of a pastoral landscape: “the lowing of cattle, the milk-maid’s call, the clatter and cackle of poultry in the old farmyards” (Gaskell, *MB* 2). It is these “delicious sounds of rural life” that “the artisan, deafened with noise of tongues and engines, may come to listen” to, while “the country business of hay-making [and] ploughing” are described as “pleasant mysteries for the townspeople to watch” (1-2). The pastoral landscape thus forms a pleasant diversion from their daily lives. Other references to country life are Alice Wilson’s memories of her childhood, such as the “purple heather, smelling sae sweet and fragrant, and the low music of the humming-bees for ever sounding among it” (36). After her stroke, Alice imagines herself to be back in her childhood, and notices nothing of the troubles around her. In this way the rural landscape of her childhood shields her from the worries of daily life. Similarly, Will Wilson’s fantastical stories of the animals in distant places and at sea also provide a distraction from daily life for Mary and Margaret. Another more literal form of escape provided by nature is the fact that John Barton hides in a field with a “hawthorn-hedge” to shoot Harry Carson and crosses the field to escape (277-278). The escape is successful, for

no-one except Mary seems to suspect John Barton. Finally, even the narrator interrupts the story and retreats to a rural area, as she observes how Manchester is “[v]ery different to this lovely night in the country in which I am now writing” where “the nearer trees sway gently to and fro in the night-wind” (293). A similar landscape reappears at the end of the novel when Jem, Mary, and Mrs Wilson move to Canada. No longer accepted by his fellow-workers through his connection with a trial of murder, even after his innocence was proven, Jem is compelled to move elsewhere for his work. Rejected by the industrial system, he moves to a pastoral scene in Canada. The final chapter foretells that the rest of the remaining characters in *Mary Barton* also travel to Canada.

Apart from the suggestion that rural landscapes are an escape from the problems of industrial Manchester, there is also a suggestion of incompatibility between country and industry in *Mary Barton*. In the description of Green Heys Fields the narrator explicitly notes a contrast between city and country, or between “these commonplace but thoroughly rural fields” and “the busy, bustling manufacturing town” (Gaskell, *MB* 1). That nature and city or industry are not only contrasted but are also incompatible is suggested by the narrator’s remark that in “Manchester, [...] alas! There are no flowers” (113). Rural characters, too, do not fit in with industrial life. For example, Mrs Barton as a “beautiful rustic” is said to be “far too shiftless for the delicate factory work” (21). Her incompatibility with Manchester is emphasised by her early death. Furthermore, Felber notes that Alice Wilson, who is originally from the country, is “[a] relict of agrarian culture” and “functions as an icon of the past who cannot be integrated into the present” and cannot “adapt to the ways of the city” (61-62). The suggestion that country life is a remnant of the past is also mentioned in the description of Green Heys Fields, where the farms “speak of other times and other occupations” (Gaskell, *MB* 1). Thus, the opposition between city and country is also one between future and past.

Although the country and nature are part of a rural past and provide an escape from Manchester, *Mary Barton* by no means idealises the country. Both Hunter and Felber argue that the idyllic landscape of Green Heys fields is not wholly idealistic. Hunter notes that this rural area “is compromised by the proximity of the city,” and that only a few “untouched patches” of countryside exist among an area that is transformed through the influence of industry (106). According to Felber, the idyllic scene contains “discordant elements,” for example threatening clouds (59). Felber observes that rather than enjoying the landscape the Bartons and the Wilsons are occupied in discussing their problems, such as poverty, unemployment, and Esther’s elopement, “introducing into this would-be Edenic scene the reality of the fallen woman” (59). When Mary travels to Liverpool and passes the beautiful landscapes and “picturesque old houses” of the country, she feels homesick on leaving “the factory-chimneys, and the cloud of smoke” of Manchester (Gaskell, *MB* 338). Additionally, the rural people fall short in comparison to factory workers. For example, Mrs Barton is described as having “the fresh beauty of the agricultural districts,” but also “the deficiency of sense [...] which is likewise characteristic of the rural inhabitants in comparison with the natives of the manufacturing town” (4). Finally, the novel refrains from idealising the country when Job Legh tells of his journey from London to Manchester “under the distant hedge-rows and beneath the flowering sycamores” (128). When he rests at a cottage, he sees a drawer with “child’s clothes” and “a broken rattle,” and guesses that his hostess had lost a child in infancy (126). This episode reveals that grief exists just as much in the country as it does in Manchester. Thus, as Felber notes, in general, the novel “reveals a degree of nostalgia,” but “refuses to privilege an illusory pastoral idyll” (60).

In conclusion, although the characters in *Mary Barton* retreat to a rural landscape, the landscapes refrain from idealising either other places or the past, and point to alienation between classes and absence of work as the main cause of the social problems, rather than

industry itself. As both Felber and Hunter argue, the novel refrains from providing a satisfactory solution to the problems in Manchester, as Jem's only option is to move away from Manchester (Felber 59; Hunter 106, 110). However, a hint towards a solution is provided at the end of the novel as manufacturer Carson and working-class Job Legh acknowledge each other's viewpoint. After their conversation the narrator explains that Carson is reformed and now wishes "that a perfect understanding [...] might exist between masters and men" (Gaskell, *MB* 467). The narrator further notes that "[m]any of the improvements now in practice in the system of employment in Manchester, owe their origin to short, earnest sentences spoken by Mr. Carson" (467).

The themes present in *Mary Barton* are expanded in *North and South*. Vanden Bossche points out that with *North and South* Gaskell sought to improve on the criticism she received with *Mary Barton* (176). The novel tells the story of Margaret Hale, who moves from her rural childhood home to the manufacturing town of Milton-Northern. In Milton Margaret becomes acquainted with manufacturer Mr Thornton and the Higginses, a working-class family. Through the interaction between these families, *North and South* more explicitly adopts the promotion of a mutual understanding between classes, which is already hinted at in *Mary Barton*. According to Craik, unlike in *Mary Barton*, in *North and South* "[t]he owner's views are as cogent and pertinent as the workers', and fully set forth, while their attitudes to each other, and the nature of both their conflict and their mutual understandings, is more fully revealed" (93). Eventually, "solidarity" between the landed gentry and manufacturers is embodied by the marriage between Margaret and Thornton, while collaboration between Thornton and Higgins results in concrete initiatives towards improvement, such as a dining-room for the workers (Gallagher 178). According to Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *North and South* contains "a gradual breakdown of traditional ways of thinking about society" and challenges "the assumptions of both paternalism and laissez-faire," initially advocated by

Margaret and Thornton (54-55). In all this, landscapes play an important role as each geographical place, London, Milton, Helstone, and Oxford, stands for different approaches to the social situation in Manchester (Craik 112). In *North and South* an initial opposition between country and the industrial city is drawn. However, like in *Mary Barton*, the country's defects are also revealed and eventually the idealisation of a rural past is abandoned in favour of social experimentation in Milton.

The rural landscape around Helstone, one of the most important geographical places in *North and South*, is idealised by Margaret, but the description of the landscape itself dismisses this idealisation. Helstone is first introduced when Margaret tries to describe it to Mr Lennox in London. She describes it as a hamlet which consists of a church and cottages "with roses growing all over them" (Gaskell, *North and South* 13). As both Daniel Brass and Felber observe, Helstone embodies an idealised rural past that is associated with the innocence of childhood (Brass 62; Felber 62). Thus, the image of rural Helstone symbolises Margaret's clinging to the past. However, according to Brass, the idealisation of this rural village is already undermined by Mr Lennox's mocking remark that "it really sounded like a village in a tale rather than in real life" (Brass 64; Gaskell, *NS* 14). Margaret acknowledges that "Helstone is like a village in a poem" and then gives up the attempt of describing it by saying that she cannot "put its charm into words" (Gaskell, *NS* 14). This introduction already hints at the idea that Margaret's perception of her childhood home is an illusory ideal. During her country walks after her return to Helstone, Margaret's "cares were all blown away as lightly as thistledown, and she thought of nothing but the glories of the forest" (23). However, this ideal is disturbed by threatening elements, such as "the soft violence of the west wind" and the "autumnal rains and storms," which compel her to remain inside (20-21). Negative attitudes to rural Helstone are revealed when Margaret finds herself disappointed in daily life at Helstone. She observes her father being worn with care, listens to her mother's complaints about how

“the near neighbourhood of so many trees affected her health,” and is bored with the “monotonous sound” of rain (19-21). Thus, the descriptions of Helstone reveal the reality behind the illusory image that Margaret had pictured to herself and Mr Lennox.

Margaret’s personal social development and her ability to adapt to a new future is symbolised by her conscious rejection of the glorification of her childhood home. Initially, Margaret seems to be blind to the hardship in the country. For example, Margaret considers Old Isaac, a rural labourer stiff with rheumatism, and his dilapidated cottage merely as picturesque rural elements that she wishes to sketch (Gaskell, *NS* 26). On her removal to Milton, Margaret continues to idealise Helstone, suggesting her ignorance to the real circumstances. For example, she claims to Mr Thornton that the south has less suffering, which she later revokes (82). In contrasting the quietness of Helstone to the noise in Milton to Bessy Higgins, she remarks how she only “used to hear a farmer speaking sharp and loud to his servants” which “only reminded [her] pleasantly that other people were hard at work” (101). However, her awareness of the reality of the country develops as her character develops during her time in Milton. When Bessy Higgins at one point professes that she wished she lived in the south, Margaret corrects her by pointing out that the agricultural labourers have “hard bodily labour to be gone through” in “heavy rain, and sometimes in bitter cold” and have “very little food to give strength” (133). Later on, Margaret advises Nicholas Higgins against seeking agricultural work (299). Her criticism of the south marks the transition in Margaret herself and her developing social awareness. Bodenheimer argues that “[o]nce she has been educated by the forthright class antagonism of the north, the social realities of the south emerge from behind the picturesque sketches” (56). This transformation is completed when Margaret eventually returns to Helstone with Mr Bell, where she observes that everything has changed, just like she herself has changed (Gaskell, *NS* 391). After her visit, Margaret continues to cherish her fond memories of the place, but refrains from

idealising her home. Felber points out that “Margaret’s realization articulates Gaskell’s plea for reform within the industrial city. The answer is not to return to the past but to accept that there ‘is change everywhere’” (65).

Although idealisation of the countryside is discarded, the old rural values that Margaret brings from the country are relevant in Thornton’s development. Margaret learns to see the true conditions in the country at Helstone, to accept change, and move forward, but her initial reaction to Milton makes Thornton realise his social responsibilities towards his workers. It is through Margaret’s influence that he eventually befriends Nicholas Higgins. As Felber observes, his movement towards social consciousness, advocated by Margaret, is dramatised by Thornton’s trip to the country after Margaret rejects his marriage proposal (66). Later on, Thornton’s incorporation of rural values into his own commercial views is symbolised by the rose he took from his visit to Helstone to “see the place where Margaret grew to what she is” (Gaskell, *NS* 425). As Felber points out, the only “‘return’ to the agrarian south Gaskell can foresee” is the transfusion of “human values traditionally associated with the agrarian past into the industrial society” (66).

In *North and South*, London, too, plays a role in its comparison to both Helstone and Milton, in which London is criticised for its idleness and indifference. The novel begins in London, where Margaret is busy preparing for her cousin Edith’s wedding. Margaret is surrounded by people who focus on Indian shawls and “extra delicacies of the season” for a dinner-party (Gaskell, *NS* 8). Having grown up in London with her aunt Shaw from the age of nine, Margaret is used to these luxuries in London. However, she takes “pride in being able to do without them all” (20). Thus, already from the beginning it is clear that Margaret feels disconnected with London life. Still, her London upbringing has influenced her character. For example, when she observes the Milton dinner-party “with her London cultivated taste,” Margaret “felt the number of delicacies to be oppressive” (159). Vanden Bossche also notes

that her initial disregard for people in trade reflects the aristocratic discourse that is represented by her aunt and cousin in London (181). Despite her prejudices, Margaret finds the conversations at the Milton dinner-party more interesting than those “in the used-up style that wearied her so in the London parties” (Gaskell, *NS* 162). Although Margaret knows many people in London, she is also aware of the shallowness of such acquaintances. When her family stop in London on their way to Milton, she knows that “[i]f they came sorrowing [...] they would be felt as a shadow [...] not friends” because “London life is too whirling and full to admit of even an hour of that deep silence of feeling” (58). When Margaret returns to London after both her parents have died, she feels an “unsatisfied vacuum” and is bored with the “dwelling on outside effects” she observes in her London acquaintances (397). Although Margaret does not identify herself with London life, both Craik and Brass have noted how London forms a neutral meeting-ground “between the extremes of Helstone and Milton” and it is significant that Thornton and Margaret are finally united in London (Brass 75).

Although Oxford is not described in detail in *North and South*, it plays a role within the main structure of the plot in that it embodies classical learning and a longing for the past. The two characters that are connected to Oxford are Mr Hale and Mr Bell. Mr Hale becomes Thornton’s private tutor in the classics. According to Brass, “Mr Hale unquestioningly accepts the role of the classics in informing an understanding of the present” (Brass 69). For example, on discussing the situation at Milton with Mr Thornton, he suggests reading “Plato’s Republic” (Gaskell, *NS* 120). While Thornton learns from the classics and begins to accept his social responsibilities, Margaret and Mr Hale learn from Thornton’s more practical commercial theories (Vanden Bossche 183; Brass 69). Mr Bell, on the other hand, continues to cling to the past, as he laments the ever-changing nature of Milton, and maintains that “every stick and every stone” in Helstone is still standing “as it has done for the last century”

(Gaskell, *NS* 372). Unlike Mr Bell, Margaret accepts the change both in Milton and in Helstone and uses the past to shape the future.

The industrial landscape of Milton, which is contrasted to both Helstone and London, embodies the change and negotiations that the novel promotes. Already in the small, northern sea-side resort Heston, Margaret notices the “busy mind” of the “more ‘purposelike’” people in the north (Gaskell, *NS* 59). On approaching Milton, Mr Hale and Margaret see “a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon,” while within the town, the air “had a faint taste and smell of smoke” (60). Margaret and her father observe the “regularly-built houses” that characterise the industrial towns of the north, and among them “a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens” (60). These observations reveal how industry is interwoven with and inseparable from the town. Hunter, too, remarks how this description suggests the “interdependence of house and factory, man and manufacturer” (118). The narrator observes how the lorries in London “seemed various in their purposes and intent,” whereas in Milton “every van, every waggon and truck, bore cotton” (Gaskell, *NS* 60). The description of Milton thus reveals the difference between London and industrial towns that Williams also observes in *The Country and the City*, namely a focus on one or two trades rather than a variety of trades (214). The interdependence between town and industry that Hunter observes is also symbolised by Mrs Thornton’s preference to live near the factory rather than outside the town, unlike Mr Carson in *Mary Barton*, as she had not “become so fine as to desire to forget the source of [her] son’s wealth and power” (Gaskell, *NS* 159). The location of the house also foretells Thornton’s awareness of the interdependence of workers and manufacturers that Hunter points out as one of the main themes of the novel.

Although Margaret and Mrs Hale are not initially fond of Milton, many of the other characters admire it. Mrs Thornton is proud of Milton, and argues that the noise of her son’s factory is not worse than the “noise that was called music” and the “continual murmur of the

work-people” is no more disturbing than “the humming of a hive of bees” (Gaskell, *NS* 160). Moreover, Mr Hale and later on Mr Lennox, are impressed with the “dazzling” energy, “the power of the machinery” and “the men in Milton” (70). Eventually Margaret, too, prefers the energy in Milton to London. The energy and bustle in Milton also symbolise its continual change, which Mr Bell so laments when he mentions “the warehouses that are built upon [his] father’s orchard” (372).

Other scenes in Milton deal with the poverty among the workers, but these scenes also reveal the sense of community among the workers and the legitimacy of their causes. Like in *Mary Barton* this novel depicts poverty, hunger, and sickness among the workers, but unlike *Mary Barton* this is not the novel’s main focus. Similar to the earlier novel, *North and South* reveals a sense of community among the workers, explicitly so when Bessy points out: “if neighbours doesn’t see after neighbours, I dunno who will” (Gaskell, *NS* 155). The despair among some of the workers returns in the character of Boucher, who is involved in a violent riot and eventually commits suicide. The suggestion in *Mary Barton* that circumstances drive people to unreasonable action is also depicted in the “demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening” with which the narrator in *North and South* describes the rioters at Thornton’s mill (Gaskell, *NS* 175). According to Bodenheimer, Nicolas Higgins in *North and South* differs from John Barton, as the novel depicts Higgins as “an intelligent, idealistic, and flexible union leader whose plans for a peaceful strike are undermined by desperate members such as John Boucher” (60). Thus, as Craik points out, Higgins and Thornton have equally cogent views and counterbalance each other in their intelligence (93).

In conclusion, in *North and South* and *Mary Barton* landscapes play a role in promoting collaboration between classes and embracing change, rather than looking towards an idealised pastoral past. *Mary Barton* describes the poor living conditions in Manchester

and creates sympathy for the working classes. The comparison of Manchester to other cities or the country suggests that poverty and grief is not specific to Manchester. The description of the factory does depict industry as harmful in itself, but the contrast between Carson's wealth and the Davenports' poverty suggests estrangement between the classes. Although *Mary Barton* does not idealise the country, it does adopt a retreat to the country at the end of the novel. In *North and South* similar themes are used, as the main character consciously moves away from idealising her rural childhood home. Furthermore, *North and South* makes elaborate use of landscapes to promote collaboration between different classes and the interaction of different perspectives to open up new ways of thinking and new solutions, as each landscape embodies different values that are merged in Margaret and Thornton.

Conclusion

Dickens's *Hard Times*, Disraeli's *Sybil*, and Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South* all discuss the social situation in industrialised England of the mid-nineteenth century. The present study aimed to investigate how the descriptions of landscapes in these four industrial novels play a role in illustrating the social tensions of the mid-nineteenth century and suggesting a possible solution. The four novels all contain descriptions of rural, urban, and industrial landscapes that support each novel's specific perspective. In *Hard Times*, landscapes predominantly illustrate how industrialisation affects and is damaging to people's surroundings, their daily lives, and their ways of thinking. The landscapes also suggest that problems caused by industry cannot be escaped from, tying in with the fact that the novel provides no satisfactory solution. *Sybil* takes a more political angle and advocates responsible political representation by a rightful aristocracy as a solution to the social problems in urban as well as industrial areas. In this novel landscapes play an important role in that both the legitimacy of rightful leaders and the illegitimacy of other forms of political representation are projected onto the landscapes. Landscapes in Gaskell's novels support the general plea for collaboration between classes. In *Mary Barton* different landscapes in Manchester emphasise the alienation that exists between classes, while in *North and South* each type of landscape embodies different values that come together at the end of the novel. Both novels discourage idealisation of a rural past or any type of landscape, and thus advocate the embracing of change, while looking towards the future.

All four novels are (for the most part) set in an industrial town in the north of England, such as Manchester, and the fictionalised cities of Coketown, Mowbray, and Milton-Northern. In *Hard Times* the description of the industrial landscape of Coketown reflects on the great impact industry has on people's daily lives. The narrator uses metaphoric descriptions that emphasise the enormity, unrelenting rhythm, and devastating effect of machines. In *Sybil*, the

industrial Wodgate is described as the epitome of filth and violence. However, these unfavourable descriptions do not reflect the effects of industry, but rather criticise the absence of any form of governmental institution in Wodgate. The more important industrial city in this novel, Mowbray, is portrayed in a more positive light. Despite its poor areas, Mowbray and its inhabitants are described as bright and lively. Finally, the descriptions of Manchester and Milton-Northern in Gaskell's novels depict the poor living conditions among the working classes, more so in *Mary Barton* than in *North and South*. In *Mary Barton* this poverty is contrasted to the wealth of the manufacturers. Yet, both novels also convey sympathy for the way of life of the working classes and the sense of community among them. Unlike in *Hard Times*, the industry in Manchester, Milton, and Mowbray are by no means described as the cause of harm.

Although all four novels focus on an industrial town, they also include other landscapes, such as rural areas or other cities. All four novels refer to London, often observing the difference between the variety in London and the systematically built industrial towns. However, in all four novels, the inhabitants of London are described as idle, indifferent, or vicious. In *Hard Times* the members of parliament are blind and deaf, while the Londoner Harthouse does not care to have any opinions. In *Sybil*, the upper-class Londoners are self-centred and neglect their duties towards the lower classes, while the lower-class Londoners are presented as thugs. John Barton in *Mary Barton* travels to London and is not admitted to speak before parliament. He criticises both upper classes and lower classes in London. Finally, in *North and South* Margaret's London acquaintances are described as idle and shallow.

The novels discussed in this study also all contain rural landscapes. In *Hard Times* natural landscapes are contrasted with industrial landscapes and emphasise the incompatibility between nature and industry and the philosophies associated with industry. *Mary Barton* and

North and South also employ an opposition between the country and the industrial city. In *Mary Barton* rural landscapes form an escape from the problems of Manchester, while in *North and South* Margaret compares her idealised rural Helstone with Milton. However, both novels reveal that rural landscapes are not ideal either. In *North and South* the plot explicitly moves away from idealising a rural past. Finally, in *Sybil* no clear-cut opposition between nature and industry is drawn. Rather, Trafford's Mill exemplifies how both can exist in harmony under the guidance of a responsible leader. Other instances of harmonious nature reflect the legitimacy of rightful leaders, while the contrast between an idealised country village and the actual wretchedness in the rural town of Marney reflects the devastating effects of irresponsible leadership.

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