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Torture and Objectification of Pain in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*

Abstract

Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) portrays the "Condition-of-England-Question". As an industrial novel, *North and South* demonstrates the problems in Victorian society caused by industrialism, and offers solutions, in order to educate the middle-class reader about the conditions of the poor. As such, the novel employs characters who represent their social classes. Bessy Higgins, for example, can be considered as a spokesperson for the working class, and her status is illustrated by her pain and suffering body, the result of the disease she has developed while working in unhealthy conditions in the factory owned by Hamper. Within this framework, her illness becomes the signifier of industrialism. Her pain and bodily suffering might be regarded as "torture" since she had no other option than to work in terrible conditions. Even though torture is marked by corporeal or psychological suffering, I am also considering it metaphorically to understand Bessy's status. In other words, she is not tortured directly and literally with the aim of torment, still, she is in pain and becomes a manifestation of it. Thus the torturer becomes the factory owner, who stands for the capitalist system, and the tortured is Bessy, whose objectified pain is denied as pain, thereby revealing the power of the torturer. As a result of this objectification, while Bessy's tortured body becomes more apparent, her "self" becomes more and more absent. In this respect, the aim of this paper is to analyse the pain of the working-class characters, especially Bessy, in *North and South* to explore their objectification through the "torture" that becomes a symbol of the power of the industrial system, and highlights the disruption of their "selves".

Keywords

Working Class, Industrial Novel, Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, Torture

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Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, which was published from September 1854 to January 1855 in *Household Words*, narrates the effects of industrialisation by portraying the conflict between the working-class and middle-class factory owners. That *North and South* is an industrial novel¹ foregrounds its didactic characteristics and Gaskell's objective of representing the problems of industrialism. Kathleen Tillotson argues that industrial novels "were intended to open people's eyes to certain evils of the time. The ignorance they enlightened was indeed widespread in the novel-reading public" (1965, 78). It is true that the industrial novel has a specific aim, to educate the middle class about social and economic problems, since the gap between the working class and middle class had grown wider in nineteenth century Britain. Such novels drew much attention for they were perceived as "records" of real industrial events and "novelists found an audience interested in learning more about the plight of the working classes, and the novel became a method of teaching the middle and upper classes about the 'real' condition of England" (Simmons 2002, 336). In industrial novels like *North and South*, problematic industrial issues are fictionalised under the main theme of the "Condition-of-England Question", an expression coined by Thomas Carlyle.² The representation of social, economic, and political problems is not, however, the only objective of these novels. By portraying such problems, they also provide solutions. Josephine M. Guy indicates that the industrial novel "shows us a group of writers using the resources of literary representation in order to try to resolve some large-scale problems in their society" (2001, 11).

¹ Industrial novels deal directly with social and political issues by focusing on social class, labour relations, social unrest, and the gap between rich and poor. As Josephine M. Guy states in *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel*, the social and economic problems of Victorian society is the subject matter problematised in these novels: "The terms 'social-problem' or 'industrial' novel are generally used to refer to a body of English fiction written in the late 1840s and 1850s which allegedly takes as its subject-matter large-scale problems in contemporary British society, problems which in turn were the product of changing demographic patterns and changes in work practices associated with the accelerating industrialization of the British economy" (1996, 3).

² In *Chartism*, within the concept of the "Condition-of-England Question", Carlyle describes the conditions of the poor and their problematic relationship with the middle class, both of which are the result of industrialisation. In this sense he criticises certain economic theories. Carlyle explains that "utilitarianism" and "laissez-faire" are the causes of the "Condition-of-England", and adds that money had become "the sole nexus between man and man" (1885, 52). Thus, according to Carlyle, the condition of the working class is the result of the capitalist economy.

In *North and South* Gaskell dramatises the lack of communication and tensions between workers and factory owners, as well as the former's poor working conditions. One of the critical issues employed in the novel is the "factory question", which refers to the discussions about the working conditions in factories which were common in the nineteenth century. It is significant that industrial novels emphasise the representation of certain social classes rather than character development since "the primary function of these scenes is [...] to exhibit the constancy and universality of human nature, for it is only from such a redescribed human nature (and not from individual difference) that a new form of social life will be possible" (Guy 2001, 121). Gaskell's principal purpose in her novels was to "defamiliarize otherness through stressing that sameness of human suffering and emotions was the most important factor in harmonizing class relations" (qtd. in Foster 2002, 37). Thus, as an industrial novel, *North and South* illustrates characters that reflect their social class, like Higgins and his daughter Bessy, who are the principal working-class characters, and Mr. Thornton, who stands for the middle class. Gaskell's work also elucidates the conflict between the industrial North represented by mill owners and workers, and the pastoral South represented by the protagonist, Margaret Hale.³

Much research has been done on the main characters and events such as the conflict between Higgins and Mr. Thornton, and the relationship between Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton. Dorice Williams Elliott, for instance, emphasises Margaret's role as a mediator by stating that Gaskell employs the marriage metaphor⁴ as a solution to these conflicts. Elliott points out the

³ Margaret Hale and her family move from Helstone, a southern village, to the industrial town of Milton due to a change in her father's work status. Whereas Helstone represents the nostalgic and pastoral South, Milton stands for the industrial North. The contrast between Helstone and Milton provides the basis for the criticism of industrialisation and urbanisation in the novel.

⁴ *North and South* revolves around the relationship between Margaret Hale, the main character, and Mr. Thornton, a factory owner. The conflict between these two characters reflects the clash between the industrial North and the old aristocratic South. Furthermore, their disagreements about the working conditions in the factory reveal the oppression of the working class. The reason for this is that both Margaret and the lower class are oppressed by the patriarchal and capitalist society. While Margaret, as a woman and a southerner, is excluded from this patriarchal society, the lower class is economically and socially oppressed. As Margaret Hale acts as a mediator between Thornton and the workers, her possible marriage with Thornton implies the reconciliation between the workers and factory owners, and the unity between the "new" North and the "old" South.

connection between the workers and female characters by suggesting that “like women, the working classes were represented as unruly, ignorant [...] and sexual” (1994, 45). Also, Kate Flint exposes Margaret Hale’s critical role, asserting that she is the “notably active heroine” given that the reconciliation of the workers and Mr. Thornton is the result of her actions (1995, 40). Flint adds that the novel exhibits a kind of “social maternalism” as Margaret steps outside the domestic sphere and takes actions in the public sphere of patriarchy (1995, 42). Similarly, Patricia Ingham specifies Margaret’s power stating that “by stepping out of her class to defend the workers and then Thornton, she has stepped out of her gender” (2003, 67). Apart from discussions of Margaret Hale’s role as a mediator, the significance of her and Mr. Thornton’s relationship is also addressed by certain critics such as Catherine Gallagher and Eleanor Reeds. Gallagher analyses the family-society relationship to claim that the novel connects public and private spheres metonymically by focusing on Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton’s personal relationship and its social implications (1985, 168). In addition, she compares Margaret and Thornton’s relationship to that of the industrial north and aristocratic south, and argues that their marriage reveals the new unity of the north and south (1985, 177). Reeds, on the other hand, underlines Margaret’s investment of capital in Thornton’s business⁵ in order to manifest Gaskell’s social critique (2004, 55). Even though the main characters have a significant function in terms of the representation of the “Condition-of-England Question”, it is possible to further improve the discussion of industrialism through one of the minor characters, Bessy Higgins, whose position in the novel has not to date been much discussed in relation to industrialism, pain, and torture.

Based on the notions of pain and torture, this study analyses Bessy’s physical pain and discusses the notion that her pain is the signifier of industrialism. It is significant to note that although torture is defined as an act of physical torment with the aim of forcing the tortured person to act in a certain way or to give specific information, this study employs the term “torture” metaphorically to analyse the suffering of Bessy and the working-class characters in Gaskell’s novel. In this sense, it is not my intention to generalise about the concept of torture by applying it to the working class but rather to read the term as a means of analysing power relations between the Victorian factory owners and the lower-class characters in the novel. Despite the fact

⁵ Towards the end of the novel Mr. Thornton is on the edge of bankruptcy as a result of the strike of the factory workers. Margaret invests in Thornton’s business in order to save him from bankruptcy.

that she is a minor character, Bessy's pain, which is described in such dramatic terms, haunts the novel. As Patricia Johnson states, in industrial novels "there is a struggle to come to terms with her [the factory girl], to write her out of the novel or to rewrite her, but her story remains a stubborn shadow that haunts and disrupts their resolutions" (2001, 35). Bessy's pain haunts the novel, for it represents the huge gap between the conditions of the workers and the middle class. Athena Vrettos argues that stories of illness told by Victorians represent cultural patterns and thoughts in the period since they "served to inscribe cultural values on the most basic physiological level. They addressed the human need to transform the abstract into concrete" (1995, 4). This essay also pins down how Bessy's abstract pain is transformed into a concrete aspect as a result of the narration of her suffering. As Javier Moscoso asserts, "pain mobilizes all the elements of theatrical representation. The experience of harm has its actors, plot, stage, costumes, props, scenography, and, of course, its audience" (qtd. in Ablow 2017, 21). In this sense, the middle class characters and readers become the audience of Bessy's pain.

Although Bessy's condition can be described more as suffering rather than an instant physical pain, it can be claimed that suffering is also a part of torture. Paul Kenny remarks that while it cannot be argued that each suffering person is tortured, suffering can be regarded as an outcome or element of torture, and he also adds that suffering means the experience of something unpleasant; thus, it may be caused by either physical or by psychological aspects (2010, 148-150). Bessy's suffering is the symbol of industrialism as it is principally the result of her working conditions in the factory. At the same time, it can be read that the mill owners such as Mr. Thornton and Hamper, the owner of the factory where Bessy has worked, are the torturers who inflict pain on workers such as Bessy. Within this framework, Bessy's pain will be discussed with regards to the elements of torture in order to argue that her "self" becomes disrupted because her pain becomes objectified and, consequently, symbolises the industrial system.

Prior to the analysis of Bessy's pain in relation to the concept of torture, it is critical to explain the notion of pain. The British Pain Society defines pain very radically: "Pain is what the person feeling it says it is" (qtd. in Norridge 2011, 209). Zoë Norridge highlights that this description "foregrounds both the alterity and subjectivity of the person who suffers and asserts his or her right to self-representation" (2011, 209). Regarding the representation of pain, Elaine Scarry articulates that the most important factor of physical pain is that it is "unsharable" since the person who is told about the pain has

no “certainty” of the pain as it is endured by the teller experiencing the pain (1985, 4). Susannah Mintz criticises Scarry’s notion that pain cannot be described through language, claiming that it *can*, however, be expressed (2013, 4). Mintz states that rather than the exact naming of pain or the “language-destroying” aspect Scarry discusses, a deeper relationship between pain and language should be highlighted. In this sense, Mintz refers to Arthur W. Frank’s thoughts that literature about pain or illness can be considered as a counter-discourse which challenges the authority of medicine. The reason for this is that as a result of the narration of pain the individual becomes the narrator of their own pain rather than an object in a medical pain-chart (2013, 5). Thus Mintz elucidates the critical function of patient stories of pain with the aim of exposing the idea that pain can be defined.

As to the pain-language relationship, Ann Jurecic asks: “[W]hy, if there is a significant body of writing about pain, have critics been so convinced that it is beyond language?” (2012, 43-44). For Jurecic, the first reason behind the idea that the expression of pain is impossible is that it is subjective and one cannot know the inner life of another person, and the second, which has affected the perception of physical suffering among the critical community, is Scarry’s theory that pain is unspeakable (Jurecic 2012, 44). Jurecic, though, differentiates between “naming” and “narrating” pain by referring to research with pain patients and while critics such as Scarry try to “name” pain, Jurecic highlights the narration of pain by emphasising the “narrative of a life in pain” (Jurecic 2012, 53). Considering the link between pain and language, Veena Das discusses how the world is first unmade by pain and then remade by focusing on how definitions of pain move from the body into language. She states that when someone says “I am in pain”, this does not mean that the person is understood but rather that the pain is acknowledged: “Pain, in this rendering, is not that inexpressible something that destroys communication or marks an exit from one’s existence in language. Instead, it makes a claim asking for acknowledgment” (1996, 70). According to Das, this acknowledgement can be represented in literature since “some realities need to be fictionalized before they can be apprehended” (1996, 69). Briefly, while Scarry claims that pain can only be partially expressed through language; Mintz, Jurecic, and Das contend it *can* be displayed by means of language.

As for the definition of torture, there are many discussions which try to clarify the concept. According to Scarry, the difference between pain as a result of torture and pain as a result of other incidents, such as old age or attempts to improve health, is that torture is a repeated act, it is not the will

of the tortured person and it has no benign aim (1985, 34). Scarry implies that torture is not perceived as a whole act but as a deed which should be analysed step by step and categorises torture into three phases. First, pain is inflicted, which means that pain is imposed on the body of the person. Then, it is objectified through the destruction of language, which makes it visible to the audience. Finally, objectified pain is rejected as pain and read as the power of the torturer (Scarry 1985, 50). Richardson argues that Scarry's description of torture and pain is limited. He emphasises the fluid relationship between language and pain by challenging Scarry's idea that pain caused by torture is inexpressible and isolating. Despite Scarry's perception of the incommunicable aspect of torture as a tragic effect, Richardson asserts that the indefinable nature of pain reflects the unsteady relationship between language and pain (2016, 54). Moreover, he renders that the pain experienced by victims is not always world-destroying and isolating, as it is "relational" in certain situations. Torture generates a connection to other bodies since "pain can call us to attend to our bodies, to their surfaces and contact zones with others. Pain is thus relational, contingent on the other and upon the world in which it occurs" (Richardson 2016, 55).

In an attempt to define torture, Paul Kenny focuses on three other elements of torture: the features of the torturer, the purpose of torture, and its instrumentality. In relation to the identity of the torturer, despite the much accepted belief that torture is only carried out by agents of the state, Kenny suggests that certain non-state organisations such as the Irish Republican Army also engaged in punishments that can be defined as torture (2010, 136–138). Therefore, it can be argued that he objects to Darius Rejali's description, which refers to the physical and institutional aspects of torture: "the systematic infliction of physical torment on detained individuals by state officials for police purposes, for confession, information, or intimidation" (2009, 35). Kenny goes on to state that identifying torture through considering only the aim of the action leads to certain difficulties. Kenny denounces critics who suggest that torture's aim is only to make the subject confess, stating that "if torture was limited to this purpose alone, it would exclude cases in which pain was inflicted in order to deter undesired behavior, to extort money or services, or to obtain a subject's conversion" (2010, 139). He concludes that while, clearly, the purpose of torture should be included in its definition, it should not be the main or only focus of the description of the term (Kenny 2010, 140). In order to explain the significance of the final element of torture, its "instrumentality", he asserts that the infliction of pain is not the goal of torture; on the contrary, pain is used as a means to

achieve a certain end (Kenny 2010, 142). Control over one's body is another issue that Kenny feels should be discussed in relation to torture. When a victim is unable to fight back, and does not have the freedom to leave or to shield themselves, this can be categorised as torture. Indeed, he considers that this feature is what separates torture from domestic and other kinds of violence (Kenny 2010, 153). After a detailed discussion of how to define torture, Kenny comes to the conclusion that "torture is the systematic and deliberate infliction of severe pain or suffering on a person over whom the actor has physical control, in order to induce a behavioural response from that person" (2010, 154).

Following Kenny, Bessy's working conditions and the industrial system per se can be interpreted as the "actor" or torturer that is behind her pain and suffering. Bessy herself acknowledges that she suffers, saying that she was born to "sicken i' this dree place, wi' them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o' quiet—and wi' the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air [...]" (Gaskell 1994, 118). From the beginning of the novel she is described as extremely ill, weak, and dying from the tuberculosis, or "consumption", she has developed as a result of working (Gaskell 1994, 186). Although Bessy's illness is referred to as "consumption" in the novel, critics such as Louise Penner identify her disease as "brown ling" (Penner 2013, 223). Brown lung disease or byssinosis is defined as "an occupational respiratory disease associated with inhalation of cotton, flax, or hemp dust and characterised initially by chest tightness, shortness of breath, and cough and eventually by irreversible lung disease" (*Merriam-Webster*). Mary Lee Gosney explains that even though brown lung disease was first documented in 1700, it was only in the nineteenth century that the disease was understood to be respiratory in nature and a result of working in cotton mills (1979, 104). Gosney goes on to explain that it was very difficult to diagnose brown lung disease, even into the mid-twentieth century; "[T]hirty years ago, it was thought that brown lung was actually a form of asthma [...]. Byssinosis has also been strongly linked to chronic bronchitis and emphysema" (Gosney 1979, 105). Significantly, in relation to Bessy's "diagnosis" in the novel, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* states that the term byssinosis was first used in 1881. Thus, although brown lung disease was documented before the publication of *North and South*, it is clear that it was confused with other lung diseases such as tuberculosis, which was also not fully understood at the time. This allows the conclusion that Bessy's symptoms and working conditions suggest she in fact has brown lung disease, even though it is not clearly identified.

Bessy's illness symbolises the harsh industrial system and the exploitation of the working class. In this sense, Byrne asserts that "tuberculosis functions as a signifier for capitalism in *North and South*" (Byrne 2011, 63). As Athena Vrettos suggests, "in the process of exploring this instability [the potential instability of human identity] through medical and literary narratives, Victorian culture confronted the otherness of disease and its capacity to reconfigure conceptions of the self" (1995, 4). As a result of her illness, Bessy's character is positioned outside the boundaries of both the working-class environment and the public sphere; consequently Bessy becomes an observer of industrial life rather than a partaker. Though Bessy's pain diminishes her status as she becomes a passive person, she constructs a realistic portrayal of the condition of the workers for the middle-class reader through the reflection of her pain. As Norridge argues, "literary texts are uniquely placed to represent pain because they excel in the creation of new systems of meaning—vocabularies, grammars and image libraries of emotion—which render intelligible multifaceted and deeply personal beliefs and sensations" (2011, 221). In this vein, Bessy's attempt to narrate both her own pain and the suffering of the working class as having parallels can be considered (an element of) Gaskell's method of demonstrating the miseries of industrialism.

The paradox of the inability to tell and demonstrate one's physical pain discussed earlier here can be traced in Bessy's pain. To explain this paradox, it is crucial to go back to the relationship between language and pain one more time. For Scarry, what characterises pain is that it has no referential object attached to it, so it cannot be expressed through language (1985, 162). In order to express pain or to "share" it with the outsiders, it needs to be connected or related to an object since only then can it be perceived in the outer world (1985, 15–16). Bessy explains her indescribable pain by attaching it to certain objects that signify industrialism. She describes the fatigue caused by her illness by stating that "I used to think once that if I could have a day of doing nothing, to rest me [...] But now I've had many days o' idleness, and I'm just as weary o' them as I was o' my work. Sometimes I'm so tired out I think I cannot enjoy heaven without a piece of rest first" (Gaskell 1994, 117). In this way Bessy expresses her fatigue and pain in relation to the long working hours that wore her out, although, interestingly, her desire to rest clashes with her current resting state which, in itself, continues to exhaust her. Thus, while her bodily pain is expressed through industrial objects, it is implied that her body is a reminder of her inability to escape the effects of industrialism.

Returning to Mintz's idea that pain can be expressed through patient stories (2013, 4), it can be discussed that Bessy narrates her pain and suffering rather than naming it, which can also be explained in Jurecic's views, as seen above (2012, 53). Indeed, Bessy's disease is in fact only "named" once in the novel as "consumption" (Gaskell 1994, 186), which demonstrates that the naming of the disease is less important than its narration. In this sense, Bessy's pain, which she relates to her desire for fresh air and her inability to breathe properly because of her illness, is made "sharable" through her "stories". To illustrate this, when Margaret tells her about the peaceful and fresh atmosphere of the country village, Helstone, where she spent her childhood, Bessy displays her pain by narrating it in detail: "I've always wanted to [...] take a deep breath o' fullness in that air [...] I think the sound yo' speak of among the trees, going on for ever and ever, would send me dazed; it's that made my head ache so in the mill" (Gaskell 1994, 117). Her unspeakable experience is thus externalised through her stories, which portray her thoughts that she cannot imagine a quiet place and that she will never rest again. As such, in line with Mintz's argument that the literature of pain and illness challenges the idea that pain is simply a point on a chart by making the individual the narrator of his/her pain (2013, 5), Bessy here can be seen to become the narrator of her illness despite the fact that her body has become a commodity of industrialism and capitalism.

Bessy's pain can also be discussed within the context of torture in terms of Scarry's classification of the elements of torture and Kenny's definition. Scarry, as mentioned earlier, sees torture as a forced act (1985, 34); thus, we can interpret that it is not Bessy's will to work in the factory, but rather that she had no other choice than working in those terrible circumstances. She herself clarifies her reasons for working in the factory by stating that, "Mary's [Bessy's sister's] schooling were to be kept up, mother said, and father he were always liking to buy books [...] all which took money—so I just worked on till I shall ne'er get the whirr out o' my ears, or the fluff out o' my throat i' this world" (Gaskell 1994, 119). Torture, Scarry also asserts, is a repeated act (1985, 34); thus, the continual long working hours when Bessy is repeatedly exposed to the circumstances that renew her pain imply that her experience can be named as industrial torture. In addition, Kenny's thought that the deliberate infliction of pain is a major aspect of torture (2010, 154) supports the interpretation that Bessy is tortured deliberately by the mill owners since they do not accept responsibility for taking actions to improve working conditions. For Kenny, torture also includes a victim who is unable to shield themselves and fight back (2010, 154), which can

also be seen in Bessy's case. Finally, torture has no benign aim according to Scarry, and Kenny proposes that torture seeks a behavioural response (1985, 34; 2010, 154). In this respect, the only aim of the mill owners is to gain money at the expense of the working class; in other words, the production of capital is the behavioural response the employers expect.

The "weapon" of torture is also a significant factor that makes Bessy's illness a signifier of industrialism. During torture, the real aim of objects that cause pain is not emphasised since they are de-objectified and perceived as weapons (Scarry 1985, 41). In Bessy's case, the industrial objects that cause her pain are represented not as machines making products to create a profit but as the weapons used to torture her. For instance, when Mr. Thornton's difficult economic conditions are narrated, it is stated that "a good deal of his capital was locked up in new and expensive machinery" (Gaskell 1994, 378). On the other hand, this machinery that spins cotton into thread is de-objectified by Bessy and delineated as a weapon that tortures her:

"Fluff", repeated Bessy. "Little bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff" (Gaskell 1994, 118).

While the machinery in the industrial system functions as weapon, the factory owners or the leaders of the capitalist system appear to be the torturers. Scarry puts forth that the torturer can endure the pain of the tortured, and is not able to identify with their pain since "however near the prisoner the torturer stands, the distance between their physical realities is colossal, for the prisoner is in overwhelming physical pain while the torturer is utterly without pain; he is free of any pain originating in his own body; he is also free of the pain originating in the agonized body" (1985, 36). In this case, the torturing mill owners ignore the circumstances that cause the physical pain of the workers, to the extent that although they work in the same place, they are themselves free of pain as they cannot identify with the suffering of their workers. This fits with Kenny's definition of torture not being carried out only by state agents (2010, 154), and the consciousness of the mill owners actions can be seen in the fact that the workers' pain can be relieved by buying a wheel that carries off the dust;⁶ however, as Bessy

⁶ The air in the factory is choked with dust and fluff as a result of the lack of ventilation. The wheel serves as a ventilator that blows away the dust in the air so that the workers may inhale less fluff during their working hours.

states, “that wheel costs a deal of money—five or six hundred pound, maybe, and brings in no profit”, and she adds, “I’ve heard tell o’ men who didn’t like working in places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it made ‘em hungry, at after they’d been long used to swallowing fluff” (Gaskell 1994, 119). This illustrates the ways in which the wheel is a symbol of the mill owners’ lack of empathy. In Scarry’s words, for the torturer, in this case the mill owners, “voice, world, and self are overwhelmingly present” and for the tortured—Bessy and the workers—“the body and its pain are overwhelmingly present” (1985, 46). While her suffering body identifies Bessy, industrialism, profit and production are present for the mill owners. In short, by de-objectifying industrial tools and implying them as the weapons of factory owners, Bessy underlines the effect of industrialism on her physical pain.

The final phase of torture is that the body in pain begins to represent the power of the torturer, which reveals that Bessy’s body becomes the symbol of the industrial system. For Scarry, the pain the tortured person endures is not perceived as pain anymore, because “the objectified pain is denied as pain and read as power” (1985, 45). In this sense, Bessy’s pain transmutes into the symbol of the power of industrialism and capitalism. Also, by representing pain as the power of the torturer, torture disrupts the “self” of the tortured because “the goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it” (Scarry 1985, 49; emphasis in the original). Thus, the “I” of the tortured person is fragmented and destroyed, and the body is foregrounded. In *North and South*, Bessy and the other working-class characters are not regarded as individuals since only their suffering “bodies” are present for the capitalist mind. Mr. Thornton, for instance, refers to them as “hands” and he thinks that “the time is not come for the hands to have any independent action during business hours” (Gaskell 1994, 142). For Mr. Thornton, workers are only a part of a body—“hands”—which represents the absence of their “selves” and the presence of their bodies. To exemplify, the hunger of Boucher, one of the workers, is highlighted throughout the novel. His desire to feed himself, his children, and his sickly wife is not seen by the factory owners; therefore, he remains as yet another starving body that desires more wages. Although torture turns individuals into bodies for Scarry, it is crucial to note that pain as a result of torture connects the tortured body to other bodies. In the same way as Jurecic suggests that the language of pain connects others and the world outside pain (2012, 69), the tortured body of Bessy connects her to the middle-class world of Margaret Hale where she can tell her story and make it heard. Richardson also makes

the point that pain resulting from torture is relational because it connects the victim to other bodies (2016, 55). In this framework, the tortured bodies of the workers are connected to each other, which clearly leads to the formation of the union and the strike. During the strike, when the angry mob wants to confront Mr. Thornton, the situation is described as “an increasing din of angry voices raged behind the wooden barrier, which shook as if the unseen maddened crowd made battering rams of their bodies” (Gaskell 1994, 206). As a result of the disruption of their “selves”, their human voice cannot be heard from the middle-class point of view. Thus, diminished into “hands”, their voice can only be heard through their bodies. On the other hand, their suffering does not isolate them from the outer world as Scarry would suggest, but instead, it makes them relate to the outer world through the connection of their bodies as stated by Richardson.

North and South not only narrates the physical pain of the characters but also offers a solution to the tension between the workers and their employers, which, interestingly, is related to the “making” of the disrupted “self”. The “man to man” relationship proposed by Margaret as a solution for the unrest⁷ (Gaskell 1994, 367) is reached in the end. Gallagher states that the parent-child metaphor in *North and South* makes “the masters more responsible for the well-being of their workpeople, but the comparison also degrades the workers and could justify arbitrary authority” (1985, 168). Therefore, unlike other industrial novels, Gaskell’s novel does not propose the parent-child relationship as a solution for the problems between the workers and employers. Arthur Helps, in *Claims of Labor*, offers the “family model” to call for the reconciliation between the employers and the labourers. He argues that the relationship between the worker and the employer should be like that of a parent and a child. He suggests that the employer should be like a loving but ruling father. On the other hand, the labourer is regarded as a dependent child (qtd. in Gallagher 1985, 11). Industrial novels, such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849), offer a parent-child relationship between the labourers and employers. Notwithstanding, “by demolishing the parent-child metaphor, *North and South* argues for adult-to-adult interactions on common ground” (Elliott 1994, 44).

⁷ Rather than the criticised relationship between the workers and the factory owners, which is perceived as the interaction between masters and “inferiors”, Margaret suggests Mr. Thornton to communicate with the workers as fellow human beings. Therefore, the “man to man” relationship implies that the employers and the workers would form a relationship beyond the cash nexus. This also suggests that they will solve their problems only when they communicate outside the money relations reinforced by capitalism.

In order to solve the lack of communication between the working class and the factory owners or, in other words, to lessen the problems of industrialisation, Gaskell seems to change certain signifiers. To clarify, at the end of the novel, Mr. Thornton and Higgins begin to communicate and understand each other. Mr. Thornton builds a dining-room for the workers where they can have their lunch, and Thornton begins to eat with them sometimes (Gaskell 1994, 431). Following the start of his communication with Higgins, Mr. Thornton, who used to refer to the workers as only “hands”, begins to call them “men”. After the workers and Mr. Thornton form a stronger relationship during their dinner times, he begins to refer to Higgins as his “friend” (Gaskell 1994, 432). In this regard, while “food” signifies the hunger of the workers in the beginning of the novel, as in the case of Boucher and his family, it comes to signify the reconciliation between the workers and the employers towards the end. Food does not represent the absence of the “self” anymore, but rather it displays the presence of the “self”. Thus, the goal of torture, which is to make the body present and the “self” absent, is reversed and, as a result, the “self” is solidified. The workers are regarded as individuals at the end of the novel:

He and they had parallel lives—very close, but never touching—till the accident (or so it seemed) of his acquaintance with Higgins. Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him, and (take notice) out of the character of master and workman, in the first instance, they had each begun to recognise that “we have all of us one human heart” (Gaskell 1994, 500).

Although all the factory owners are reflected as selfish capitalists, Mr. Thornton is portrayed as more likely to improve because, as Higgins states: “He’s worth fighting wi’, is John Thornton. As for Slickson, I take it, some o’ these days he’ll wheedle his men back wi’ fair promises; that they’ll just get cheated out of as soon as they’re in his power again” (Gaskell 1994, 159). Therefore, Thornton is the only mill owner in the novel who manages to form a relationship with the workers that exceeds that of the cash-nexus.⁸ He gets rid of his harsh capitalistic point of view including utilitarianism⁹

⁸ In *Chartism*, Thomas Carlyle states the problem of the “sole nexus” indicating that labour relations became the only connection between workers and employers. He criticises the idea of “Cash Payment as the sole nexus between man and man” (1885, 52).

⁹ The notion of “utilitarianism” was first used by Jeremy Bentham and later developed by John Stuart Mill. The purpose of “utilitarianism” according to Bentham “was to ensure a right or ‘good’ society where ‘good’ was defined in terms of the principle of utility or ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’” (Guy 2001, 16). Bentham

and laissez-faire.¹⁰ Veena Das asserts that the world is first unmade by pain but then remade after pain moves from the body into language (1996, 70). In other words, pain does not destroy communication, instead, it calls for acknowledgement: “Unlike Scarry, however, Das emphasises that the construction of pain in language—the remaking of the world—involves attending to the pain of others in ways that take into account its full historical and social complexity” (Jurecic 2012, 65). In this sense, the suffering and the pain of the workers in relation to their working and living conditions is acknowledged in the end as a result of the narration of their pain. Consequently, not the body but the “self” of the worker becomes apparent. While the objectified pain of Bessy represents industrialism, the de-objectified pain of the workers represents hope for the solution of industrial problems.

In conclusion, *North and South* portrays the results of industrialisation through Bessy’s physical pain and torture. The fact that Bessy is positioned outside the public sphere because of her illness is what enables her to narrate the “tortures” of industrialism. Bessy’s narration is very convincing since she speaks outside the boundaries of both the working class and the middle class. Sontag explains that “narratives can make us understand” illness (2003, 89). Although she denotes that outsiders cannot imagine or know the pain experienced by others, she indicates that stories can make us see the subject from a new perspective (Sontag 2003, 126). As a result, Bessy does not come across as merely a suffering body, she gains an identity through the narration of her pain, and the workers are also identified as individuals rather than “hands” as a consequence of the narration of their sufferings. By narrating Bessy’s pain dramatically, Gaskell achieves her aim of educating the middle-class reader about the conditions of the working class. Although Bessy dies in the middle of the novel, her narration of industrial torture haunts Margaret and Nicholas Higgins, who signal the hope for a solution to the suffering of the workers. Admittedly, Gaskell reverses the process of torture to offer a solution to the problems between the workers

supports the idea that each human being seeks pleasure, which leads to his/her happiness. Additionally, Mill emphasises that actions are right when they result in happiness. “What use is it?” is the basic question of this philosophy; in other words, it includes the idea of making decisions by considering the profits (Mill 2001, 41).

¹⁰ “Laissez-faire,” which means “let them do,” was an expression coined by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations* and signifies the idea that the market is self-regulating. Smith suggests the idea of minimal government involvement stating that freedom of trade will always supply the country with goods (2005, 346). Self-reliance and a free market were the main tenets of the “laissez-faire” approach. The middle class used the theory of minimal government involvement in their economic affairs against their own workers.

and factory owners at the end of the novel. The “self” of the worker is re-made in the end by the transformation of the signifier of food and by reaching a state of acknowledgement of his/her pain. To be specific, the goal of torture, which is to make the body present and the “self” absent, is reversed in order to make the “self” of the labourer present. By reflecting the de-objectification of the pain the working class endures, Gaskell’s fiction strives for a sense of hope regarding industrial problems.

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