



# How does Elizabeth Gaskell's novels portray changes made by Victorian industrialisation?

## Introduction

With the new technological advancements, such as the invention of the steam train and the first factory, the period of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain was deeply defined by the Industrial Revolution. Novelist, and short story writer, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), having lived in both the country town of Knutsford and the large manufacturing city, Manchester, has paid witness to how industrialisation was changing a variety of areas. The various locations are reflected in the settings of her novels.

## Rationale for Study

- To gain a better understanding of Gaskell's opinions of the changes in her lifetime

## Method

- Reading and analysing Gaskell's novels, in particular **North and South**, which is set in a factory town.
- Researching criticism of the novels, especially in regards to the theme of industrialisation.
- Researching relevant information on geographical, historical and social aspects of the time.

## Key Readings by Gaskell

- North and South
- Ruth
- Cranford
- Sylvia's Lovers
- Mary Barton



### North



North and South is mostly set in the factory town, Milton-Northern.

#### The Pros:

- Advanced technology (progressive)
- Workers are independent and strong-willed
- Lower classes can work their way into positions of power and wealth

#### The cons:

- Conflict between Masters and Workers
- Poor working conditions
- Less emphasis on community and charity

### South



Helstone is a southern rural village where the main character, Margaret Hale, originates from.

#### The Pros:

- Beautiful with lots of nature
- Focus on good taste and comfort, rather than money

#### The cons:

- Poorer conditions for working class, with less wages earned
- Slow and dull lifestyle (stagnant)
- Superstitious Traditions



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Knutsford, on the outskirts of Manchester and where Gaskell grew up, is used as inspiration for Cranford.

Cranford is an example of the traditions of a town in decline. The upper class citizens are learning to perform menial jobs, whilst the traditionally feminine town learns to embrace masculine intruders.

Monkshaven is based on the coastal town of Whitby. Formerly famous for its whaling industry, the traditional employment went into decline, and it became a bath town.



## Mrs Gaskell's Guide to Industrialisation Improvement

"Work with the community to improve the lifestyle of those less fortunate."

"Embrace technological progress and try to adapt, if you can."

"Don't judge a person by class, community or career!"

## Conclusion

The industrial towns are described as grim, smokey, masculine, and destructive to traditional values; suggesting a personal distaste. Conversely, there is individuality and potential for lower class citizens to reach higher social standings.