

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Research

The Victorian Era was the era where Queen Victoria became the ruler of England spanned from 1837 to 1901 (Paterson, “Introduction”). Paterson stated that the term ‘Victoria’ was associated with “decency, modernity, a humane and progressive spirit, and mechanical advance” (“Introduction”). In this era, there was a lot of development in almost all aspects of life. There was development in technology, industry, economy, society, politics, science, and literature. In his book, Joel Mokyr characterized this era by the expansion of railroads, massive iron and steel production, large-scale use of machinery in manufacturing, significantly increased use of steam power, rife use of the telegraph, use of petroleum, and the rise of electrification (*Lever of Riches*). Furthermore, Sussman called this rapid development “the age of invention” (1) because there were many technologies that facilitate human work and engender factory production is invented. With the advancement of industry and the rise of the economy, Britain became the most prosperous industrial country in the world.

In addition to developing technology and increasing production, industrialization gave an impact on the social conditions of British society in the Victorian Era. Society was still highly stratified. According to Mitchell, British

society in the Victorian Era was divided into three social classes, specifically the working class, the middle class, and the elite or upper classes (18).

In broad terms, the working classes did manual or physical work and were often dirty; it showed in their clothes and their hands. They were paid a small wage, daily or weekly. The middle class included successful industrialists and crazy rich bankers. Men of the middle classes did clean work that usually involved mental rather than physical effort. They earned a monthly or yearly salary. The elite or upper classes did not work for money. They included the aristocracy and the landed gentry. Their income came from inherited land or investments (Mitchell 18).

Meanwhile, according to Marx and Engels, every society is separated into two classes based on the ownership of the assets and facilities of production (tools, factories, and the like), namely the slaves and slave owners in the slave-owning system, lords and serfs in the feudalism system, and bourgeoisie (capitalists) and proletariats (laborers) in the capitalism system (Akujobi 9). In a capitalist society, the bourgeoisie owns the means of production while the proletariat does not own the means of production and instead is oppressed and exploited by the bourgeoisie. Consequently, this stratified society in Victorian Era led to social inequality, especially towards the working classes who worked as laborers. The laborers were living in poor conditions that led to many problems in their life.

Originally, the working class was the people from the rural area who moved to cities and factory towns looking for a better life. They turned from agricultural life

to being a worker in the factory. The industrial advancement in the city and the increase in living standard was the trigger of this urbanization trend in this era. Khan displayed that between 1680 and 1820, the population of England increased 133 percent. Next, between 1820 and 1900 it rose another 166 percent (12). Jefferies showed that the population of England rose from 13.9 million in 1831 to 32.5 million in 1901 (3). This situation ultimately resulted in overpopulation. Uncontrolled industrialization led to aggravating living conditions for urban laborers and the working poor. They suffered from poor living conditions, poor health conditions, and poor working conditions.

The writer decides to study the labor problem for some reasons. First, in this era, Britain was in a period where the industries were growing rapidly and many wealthy people became industrialists with the capitalist system. Consequently, this situation affected many aspects of life in society. Among its effects was the emergence of social classes in society. This situation created inequality in society. The working class which consisted of workers or laborers was the most affected in this era. They were trapped in poverty, suffered from health problems, and were treated unjustly. As Mitchell stated in her book: “Most working people earned just enough to stay alive and could be thrown into poverty by illness, layoffs, or a sudden misfortune such as a factory fire that caused even short-term unemployment” (18). In other words, industrialization in this era worsened workers. The condition of these workers also can be found in Engels’ book entitled *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). He argued that the industrial workers were

helpless, received very low wages, and were unhealthy. It was because the bourgeoisie (the business and factory owner) monopolized what the proletariat (the working class) needs and it was also protected by the power of the state (Engels, “Competition”).

Second, the labor problem had become a serious problem that needs serious attention and is still an ongoing issue. Howerth argues that the labor problem is “primarily and essentially a social problem” (168). As a social problem, the labor problem can be a serious issue that causes the impossibility for the laborers to reach their full potential. Fundamentally, according to Adams, this problem is “arising from the strikingly unequal distribution of wealth” (6). This economic difference triggers more problems and inequalities in social life, especially among the working class.

The conditions above were well described in Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel entitled *North and South* where the working class had to endure poor living and working conditions. Based on William J. Long’s book, *English Literature: Its History and Its Significance for the Life of the English Speaking World* (1909), Gaskell was known as one of the leading female Victorian English novelists and a social reformer (538). It was because her novels presented a detailed picture of the life of social classes of Victorian society and expressed a lot of messages about the need to reconcile social classes. Besides *North and South*, Gaskell also wrote some famous novels such as *Mary Barton* (1848), *Ruth* (1853), *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), and a biography of Charlotte Brontë entitled *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857).

In the “Afterword” of the novel *North and South*, White said the *North and South* novel was originally published in serial form in Charles Dickens's *Household Words* magazine between 1854 and 1855. The author of the novel was inspired to write this novel based on her observation of life in Manchester and the wider England between the late 1840s and early 1850s, the turbulent period following the Industrial Revolution at the beginning of the century (641). Belonging to the genre known as ‘social novels’, Gaskell's *North and South* is a story that contrasts the realism of the grim mill chimneys, manufacturing wealth, and hacking coughs of the industrialized north with the softer, class-conscious environments of London and the rural south of England, and exploring the prejudices of characters from two seemingly opposing worlds (White 641). This novel was also adapted on BBC Television twice: in 1975 and 2004 (White 649).

The story of *North and South* is located in the north of England, in the fictional industrial town of Milton. It tells about a woman named Margaret Hale who is forced to leave a privileged life as a clergyman's daughter in the south to an alien environment in which everything (social and physical) is different from her previous experience. Gaskell draws Margaret as the character of an explorer. In this story, Margaret explores the life of the Milton community and meets the mill owners and the workers. Through her exploration of the Milton community, Margaret discovers several labor problems.

Based on the explanation above, the writer aims this research to identify the labor problems in Gaskell's novel, *North and South*, and to find the pattern of

similarity with the condition of Britain during the Victorian Era. Thus, this research will apply mimetic theory supported by a sociological approach.

## 1.2. Identification of the Problem

Gaskell's *North and South* novel is presenting the life of British society in the Victorian era around 1837-1901. This era was marked by the climax of the industrial revolution, capitalism, and the changes in many aspects of life, particularly social, economic, and technology. The novel also portrays the life of British society and the problems of the laborers during the Victorian era.

Therefore, the writer will analyze the labor conditions and problems during the Victorian era as seen in the novel entitled *North and South* written by Elizabeth Gaskell. In analyzing the novel, the writer focuses on the problems of the laborers during the Victorian Era, especially poverty, health problem, and unjust treatment.

## 1.3. Review of Related Studies

The writer presents some previous studies that are related to this research, which can be seen as follows:

The first previous study was conducted by Kalpakli (2002) from Giresun University entitled "Elizabeth Gaskell's questioning of the Victorian attitude towards class and gender: *North and South*." In her article, Kalpakli emphasized the importance of communication as a solution to abolish conflicts and boundaries between the classes. She stated that even though the class boundaries are very strict and the gap between the working class and the middle class is very wide, still there

is a way to achieve a harmonious life between them. She concluded that cooperation and communication are a peaceful solution to “softened” the class struggle although it can not be extinguished totally. The similarity between her study and the writer’s study is that both studies analyze the social condition during the Victorian era. The difference is that she focuses on class conflict and struggle while the writer focuses on labor problems.

The second previous study was conducted by Colly Asfatach (2017) from Universitas Negeri Semarang entitled “The Dehumanization of English Working Class the Impact of Industrial Revolution as Depicted in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*.” In this thesis, he investigated the values of the British Industrial Revolution according to the expectation and irony which led to the dehumanization experienced by the English working class. He found three forms of dehumanization towards the working class during the progress of the industrial revolution, specifically, the alienation which was done by the master upon the working class, the masters refused to listen to the worker’s miseries, considering the workers only as machines to pile up the master’s fortunes and seeing them as a rough uncultured beast. At the end of his analysis, he also found that the working class creates a union and tries to have good communication with the masters in an attempt to gain their humanity back. The similarity between his study and the writer’s study is that both studies focused on industrialization’s impacts on the working class. The difference is that he analyzed how the working class experienced dehumanization by the

master while the writer focused on the condition and the problems faced by the working class.

The next research was conducted by Hasrida Ardin (2021) from Universitas Muslim Buton entitled “Social Impacts of Industrial Revolution in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*.” Ardin described the social impacts of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century and portrayed how the living conditions during the time. In this research, he found that Industrial Revolution impacts the standard of living, population growth, and labor condition. The similarity between his study and the writer’s study is that both studies focused on the issue of industrialization. The difference is that he analyzed the social impact of industrialization and the writer analyzed the labor problems as an effect of industrialization.

Lusianus Laia, *et al.* (2022) from Universitas Darma Agung Medan conducted research entitled “The Impact of Industrial Revolution towards Children as reflected in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*.” This research tries to scrutinize the negative impact of the Industrial Revolution on children and how these negative impacts affect children. There are two negative impacts of the Industrial Revolution. First, there is poverty which is characterized by family low incomes, food shortages, poor living conditions, and poor health. Second, there is child labor, where children are involved in many different forms of work and they paid low wages. Consequently, these negative effects caused children to be a criminal, children are exploited, children get abused, and babies are turned into businesses. The similarity between their study and the writer’s study is that both studies focused



on the impact of industrialization. The difference lies in the different impacts of industrialization. The previous study analyzed how industrialization caused so many problems for children while the writer's study will analyze the labor problems as the impact of industrialization.

The fifth comes from the research "Social Classes in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* Novel" by Elizabeth Ruby Palar (2016) from Universitas Sam Ratulangi. Three purposes were stated in her research: to identify, describe, and analyze the social class classification and the effects as found in the *North and South* novel. She portrayed three families in the three different social classes, Mr. Thornton's family as the high class, Hale's family as the middle class, and Higgin's family as the working class. She found that social classes have an impact on social conflict and disintegration. Besides, these impacts lead to frustration and aggressiveness. The difference between Palar's research with the writer's research is the objective. Palar focuses on showing the social classes in the novel while the writer focuses on analyzing the labor problems in the novel.

The sixth is research by Mohamad Hani (2019) from the University of Muhammadiyah Bengkulu entitled "Analysis of Social Problem in *A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor." He used the sociological approach to describe the issue of social problems in the short story. He found three social problems, they are family disorganization, crime, and social classes. Then, he explained the cause of these problems. Lack of communication and lack of social relations within the family can cause family disorganization, a lack of good people

can increase the growth of criminals, and the pursuit of social status creates social classes that eliminate equality in society. There is a difference between Hani's and the writer's research. In his research, Hani focused on the problems in the family. While the writer focused on the problems in working-class society.

The last is a thesis "An Analysis of Social Problems of *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens" by Nurul Faiza (2007) from the State Islamic University of Malang. In this thesis, she used a structural approach to study the social problems in the work itself without studying the author's life, the background of the society, or the background of the work. The objective of her research was to find the kind of social problem found in the novel such as the gap between the social classes, poverty, discrimination, and unfair treatment in the working class. There is a difference between Faiza's research and the writer's research. In her research, Faiza's analysis focused on the social problems while the writer's analysis focused on the labor problems as an effect of capitalism.

From these previous studies, it will also be used as sources to understand deeper about the novel and the issue to make the writer easy to analyze the object of the research. Despite the difficulties in searching the previous studies related to the labor problems, some of the studies above indirectly have already shown the labor problems that occurred as the impact of industrialization. Although similar topics may have been brought to attention, the analysis that the writer wants to emphasize has not yet been explored. Thus, the writer is interested to do another research about the problems in the working class or the labor problems in British Victorian society

in the novel *North and South* written by Elizabeth Gaskell by using Abram's mimetic theory, combined with a sociological approach, specifically Marx and Engels' conflict theory.

#### 1.4. Research Questions

Based on the explanation of the problems above, this research will focus on:

1. How does poverty happen to the labourers during the Victorian Era?
2. How do health problems happen in the labourers during the Victorian Era?
3. How does the unjust treatment towards the labourers happen during the Victorian Era?

#### 1.5. Scope of the Research

In analyzing Gaskell's *North and South* novel, this research will focus on how the *North and South* novel portrayed the labor problems during the Victorian Era. Therefore, this research will be divided into three main topics. Firstly, about the poverty in the working class. Secondly, about the health problems in the working class. Lastly, about the unjust treatment towards the working class. The mimetic theory by Meyer Howard Abram is used to process the analysis. This theory also will be combined with a sociological approach.

#### 1.6. Objectives of the Research

1. To reveal how the poverty of the working class occurred in Victorian British society as reflected in the *North and South* novel written by Elizabeth Gaskell.

2. To reveal how the health problems occurred in British working class society during the Victorian Era as reflected in *North and South* novel written by Elizabeth Gaskell.
  
3. To figure out how the unjust treatment towards the working class during the Victorian Era as reflected in *North and South* novel written by Elizabeth Gaskell.

