

Class Struggle Portrayed in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*

THESIS

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Class Struggle Portrayed in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*

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2026

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I state that the thesis entitled “**Class Struggle Portrayed in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South***” is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

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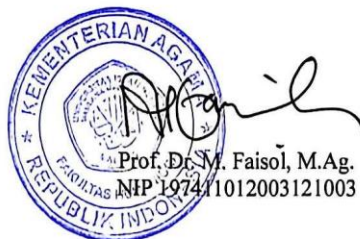
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MOTTO

“And whoever puts all his trust in Allah. He will be enough for him” [63:3]

“And that there is not for man except that (good) for which he strives” [53:39]

“If you can't be the best, don't be the worst.”

(KH. Hamidurrahman Syuhud)

DEDICATION

There is no most beautiful sheet in this thesis report except the dedication sheet. Here, the researcher dedicates this thesis to the kindest and dearest people, namely:

1. To my beloved parents, Bapak Suadi and Ibu Saudah. Thank you for all the sacrifices and sincerity you have devoted to me. Although you never had the opportunity to attend college, you have always done your best- tirelessly praying for me, working hard, and providing both moral and financial support, while always prioritizing your children's education and happiness.
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Malang, April 15th, 2026



Endang Susilawati

ABSTRACT

Susilawati, Endang (2026). Class Struggle in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Asni Furaida, M.A.

Keywords: Class struggle, Bourgeoisie, Proletariat

Class struggle is a structural conflict between social classes determined by different relations of production. This study aims to analyze the class struggle portrayed in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* using Karl Marx's theory of class struggle. The method employed in this study is literary criticism, utilizing a literary sociology approach and applying marxist of class struggle and also Dahrendorf's theory of class conflict. Data were collected from quotations in the form of words, sentences, and dialogues that indicate the existence of conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This study concludes that the novel depicts a class divide between the bourgeoisie, represented by John Thornton and Mrs. Thornton, and the proletariat, represented by Nicholas Higgins, Bessie Higgins, and John Boucher. Furthermore, the class struggle that occurs is caused by exploitation, economic inequality leading to starvation, and the importation of workers from Ireland by the bourgeoisie. The novel depicts class struggle through workers' solidarity and resistance against capitalist authority, such as rejection of exploitation and labor strikes. Although the novel shows negotiations between workers and factory owners, economic power remains controlled by the bourgeoisie.

مستخلص البحث

سوسيلواتي، اينداغ (٢٠٢٦). الصراع الطبقي في رواية «الشمال والجنوب» لإليزابيث غاسكل. أطروحة البكالوريوس، قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية في مالانج. المشرفة: أسني فورابدا، ماجستير.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصراع الطبقي، البرجوازية، البروليتاريا،

الصراع الطبقي هو صراع هيكلي بين الطبقات الاجتماعية، تحدد معالمه علاقات الإنتاج المختلفة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الصراع الطبقي الموجود في رواية «الشمال والجنوب» للكاتبة إليزابيث غاسكل باستخدام نظرية الصراع الطبقي لكارل ماركس. الطريقة المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة هي النقد الأدبي، مع الاستفادة من المنهج السوسيولوجي الأدبي وتطبيق نظرية الصراع الطبقي الماركسية ونظرية الصراع الطبقي لدهرن دورف. تم جمع البيانات من الاقتباسات في شكل كلمات وجمل وحوارات تظهر وجود صراع بين البروليتاريا والبرجوازية. تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن الرواية تصور الانقسام الطبقي بين البرجوازية، التي يمثلها جون ثورنتون والسيدة ثورنتون، والبروليتاريا، التي يمثلها نيكولاس هيغينز وببسي هيغينز وجون بوشر. علاوة على ذلك، فإن الصراع الطبقي الذي يحدث ناتج عن الاستغلال، وعدم المساواة الاقتصادية التي تؤدي إلى المجاعة، واستيراد العمال من أيرلندا الذي تقوم به الطبقة البرجوازية. تصور هذه الرواية الصراع الطبقي من خلال تضامن العمال ومقاومتهم للسلطة الرأسمالية، مثل رفض الاستغلال والإضرابات العمالية. على الرغم من أن الرواية تظهر وجود مفاوضات بين العمال وأصحاب المصانع، إلا أن السلطة الاقتصادية لا تزال تحت سيطرة البرجوازية.

ABSTRAK

Susilawati, Endang (2026). Perjuangan Kelas dalam novel *North and South* Karya Elizabeth Gaskell. Skripsi, Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Dosen Pembimbing: Asni Furaida, M.A.

Kata kunci: Perjuangan Kelas, Borjuis, Proletariat

Perjuangan kelas merupakan konflik struktural antarkelas sosial yang ditentukan oleh hubungan produksi yang berbeda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perjuangan kelas yang ada dalam novel *North and South* karya Elizabeth Gaskell dengan menggunakan teori perjuangan kelas Karl Marx. Metode yang digunakan dalam studi ini adalah kritik sastra, dengan memanfaatkan pendekatan sosiologi sastra dan penerapan teori perjuangan kelas Marxis serta teori konflik kelas Dahrendorf. Data dikumpulkan dari kutipan dalam bentuk kata, kalimat, dan dialog yang menunjukkan adanya konflik antara proletariat dan kelas borjuasi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa novel ini menggambarkan perpecahan kelas antara borjuis, yang diwakili oleh John Thornton dan Nyonya Thornton, dan proletar, yang diwakili oleh Nicholas Higgins, Bessie Higgins, dan John Boucher. Selanjutnya, class struggle yang terjadi disebabkan oleh eksploitasi, ketidaksetaraan ekonomi yang menyebabkan kelaparan, dan impor pekerja dari Irlandia yang dilakukan oleh kelas borjuis. Novel ini menggambarkan perjuangan kelas melalui solidaritas para pekerja dan perlawanan terhadap otoritas kapitalis seperti penolakan terhadap eksploitasi dan pemogokan buruh. Meskipun novel ini menunjukkan adanya negosiasi antara para pekerja dan pemilik pabrik, kekuasaan ekonomi tetap dikendalikan oleh kaum borjuis.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains several key components, including the background of the study, research question, significance of the study, scope and limitations, and the definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

Class struggle is a central social problem in industrial societies, arising from unequal economic relations between social classes. Karl Marx asserted in his book, *The Communist Manifesto*, that the history of society is a history of class struggle stemming from unequal ownership of the means of production (Marx & Engels, 2002). According to Marx, the bourgeoisie seek to maintain their dominance by exploiting the surplus value from the proletarian labor, while the proletariat is forced to work to survive. This relationship gives rise to ongoing conflict, as workers struggle for better working conditions and the bourgeoisie aim to maintain profits and economic power (Hainaya & Dinanti, 2025; Wright, 2000).

Class struggle is not only a historical or economic phenomenon, but also a frequently discussed theme in literary works, especially after the Industrial Revolution. Wellek and Warren (1949) state that literature is a representation of complex social realities. Literature attempts to capture the human dimension of class conflict by depicting how individuals experience inequality, exploitation, and resistance (Williams, 1960). Eagleton (1976) also notes that literary texts frequently

represent social conflict and class relations through narrative structures and character interactions.

Class struggle remains a fundamental conflict that shapes social relations in capitalist societies (Ismail et al., 2012). Based on Marxist theory, class struggle is not only a historical phenomenon but also an ongoing process that stems from economic inequality and unequal control over the means of production (Ngo, 2025). Class struggle in literary works is analyzed to see how social conflict and exploitation are represented through the narrative, characters, and plot of the novel. From a Marxist perspective, literary texts function as a representation of social reality that exposes unequal power relations between social classes (Eagleton, 1976).

Literary texts are positioned as a crucial medium for understanding and questioning the real social conditions that continue to exist in contemporary society (Ulviani, 2025). One of the literary works that highlights the issue of social class conflict is Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South*. This novel portrays the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat class. The conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat gave rise to class struggle, particularly through the proletariat class's resistance to industrial exploitation.

The harsh working conditions, unequal power relations, and economic dependence depicted in the novel *North and South* show how the proletariat class is subordinated in the capitalist system. The struggles faced by the proletariat class, such as labor strikes and group resistance, represent not only individual struggles but also structural tensions that stem from class inequality. From a Marxist

perspective, these tensions reveal how capitalist modes of production generate exploitation and social conflict, which is why it is important to analyze this novel through the lens of class struggle in the context of industrial society.

Previous studies on *North and South* have explored various thematic concerns. Uysal and Tezcan (2021) examined the working class's struggle for survival through a Darwinian and Marxist perspective, while Lestari (2023) focused on forms of economic oppressions experienced by workers. Chen (2024) employing an ecocritical approach, it demonstrated how industrial dominance in both the *North and South* contributes to environmental degradation. In addition, Alano (2023) highlighted Margaret Hale's ability to navigate social conflict, while Kotik and Aras (2025) argued that her mediating role symbolizes interclass reconciliation and reflects progressive gender values.

Beyond *North and South*, several studies have applied Karl Marx's theory of class struggle to analyze literary and cinematic works. Mursyidah (2023) examined Ben Okri's novel *The Famished Road*, Putri et al. (2022) examined Charles Dickens' novel *Tale of Two Cities*, and Ashari and Raisah (2020) examined Victoria Aveyard's novel *Red Queen*. Other studies that also use class struggle theory include Mayarusyadi et al. (2022), who analyzed the film *Upside Down*; Alfarizi (2021) chose to analyze the film *American East*; Bustammmi and Kasprabowo (2025) analyzed *The Purge: Anarchy*; and Doni (2025) analyzed the films *The Hunger Games* and *Mad Max*. Although using different research objects, these studies reveal the same issues through the framework of Marxist class struggle theory.

Based on the research mentioned above, studies employing the theory of class struggle have been conducted using various objects of study, including films and novels. Several previous studies have discussed the *North and South* focus on themes of social conflict, gender issues, and economic expression. However, to date, there has been no research that specifically highlights the issue of class struggle in the novel *North and South* using Karl Marx's theory of class struggle combined with Dahrendorf's theory of conflict. Meanwhile, this novel portrays the proletariat's struggle against the bourgeoisie in their pursuit of justice and better living conditions. This reason prompted the researcher to conduct research using Karl Marx's theory of class struggle and Dahrendorf's theory of conflict to analyze the novel *North and South*. In addition, this research is important because it examines class struggle as a social conflict inherent in industrial society, demonstrating how economic inequality and social relationships shape social interactions in capitalist societies.

B. Research Question

Related to the background of the study above, this research was designed to answer the question: How is class struggle carried out by the proletariat class against the bourgeoisie as portrayed in the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell?

C. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to enriching literary studies by applying Karl Marx's theory related to class struggle and Ralf Dahrendorf's theory of social class through

an analysis of the novel *North and South*. In addition, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of class struggle, and the results of this research can serve as a reference for future studies interested in Marxist literary analysis and the examination of class struggle in literary works.

D. Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on the class struggle depicted in the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, published in 1955 by Penguin Classics Edition. Furthermore, the scope of this study focuses on the forms of class struggle and their depiction in the novel *North and South*. This research is limited to five characters in the novel, namely Nicholas Higgins, Bessy Higgins, John Boucher, John Thornton, and Mrs. Thornton, who are classified into two social classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Class struggle: refers to the structural conflict between social classes determined by different relations of production. According to Marx, class struggle is the driving force behind social change and the historical development of society (Marx, 1990).
2. Bourgeoisie: refers to the class of modern capitalist owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour (Marx & Engels, 2002).
3. Proletariat: refers to the class of modern wage labourers who have no means of production of their own and are reduced to selling their labour power to live (Marx & Engels, 2002)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the theories used in the analysis of this study. First, it explains the sociological approach to literature, then it outlines social class, and concludes with an explanation of the Marxist theory of class struggle.

A. Sociological Approach in Literature

Sociology is basically concerned with the study of society and social relations. Several sociologists provide distinct definitions of sociology. Weber (1978, as cited in Baharuddin, 2021) argues that sociology is “science concerning itself with interpretative understanding of social action and theory by a causal explanation of its course and consequences”. Furthermore, Emile Durkheim defines sociology as the science of institutions, while George Simmel states that sociology is the science that studies human relationships (Baharuddin, 2021).

Similar to sociology, literature is also related to human life and society. Damono (2002) states that sociology and literature actually share the same issues. Sociology studies social phenomena and human interactions scientifically, while literature represents social reality through characters, events, and conflicts. The fundamental difference between the two lies in their understanding of society. Sociology analyzes social life scientifically and objectively, whereas literature explores social reality more deeply by depicting how individuals experience and interpret life through their feelings and experiences. Consequently, sociology and literature are closely interconnected, as both focus on human life and social

relations. Through a sociological perspective, literary studies can facilitate a more nuanced interpretation of literary works as reflections of social life and human experiences.

The sociological approach is a method that utilizes sociological concepts and theories to analyze literary works. According to Kennedy, as cited in Yaris (2014) the sociological approach is a critique that examines literature based on its cultural, economic, and political context at the time it was written or received. Literary works analyzed through the discipline of sociology reveal the meaning and uniqueness contained in literary texts, which reflect the economy, attitudes, morals, and religion of the society that produces the text (Sharma, 2018). Therefore, the sociological approach demonstrates the relationship between sociology and literature, illustrating how these two fields influence each other.

Based on Swingewood's (1972) sociological approach, which shows the complex relationship between sociology and literature, and how they influence each other. On the one hand, literature also acts as a mirror that reflects the reality of social life, documenting cultural values, economic conditions, and political struggles of a particular period (Wellek & Warren, 1949). On the other hand, literature actively influences society by shaping public awareness, criticizing social norms, and inspiring change (Endraswara, 2013).

Wellek and Warren (1949) divide the sociology of literature into three parts: the sociology of the author, which relates to the social background, the status class of the author, the economic basis of literary production, and the author's ideology,

which impacts the writing process. The sociology of literary work focuses on the content and other implicit elements within the literary work that are related to social issues. Finally, the sociology of the reader examines how literary work is received, interpreted, and given meaning by readers in different social contexts (Damono, 2002; Safari, 2018). One of these three divisions, this research primarily focuses on the sociology of the literary work.

This approach is relevant in analyzing *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell. This literary work is known as a powerful representation of social and economic conflict in England during the Industrial Revolution, which was marked by conflict between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Through her depiction of industrial life in Milton, Gaskell reveals class inequality, labor exploitation, and the impact of capitalism on industrial society. The novel shows how the capitalist system causes structural conflict between factory owners and workers, resulting in economic injustice and suffering of the working class.

The sociological approach in literary works is very appropriate for analyzing the relationship between literary texts and the social reality that underpins them. In the novel *North and South*, this approach plays a crucial role in illustrating how the social reality of industrial society is represented through the class struggle experienced by characters such as Nicholas Higgins and factory workers. This analysis is further reinforced by Karl Marx's theory of class struggle, which views class conflict as a consequence of the capitalist system. Therefore, *North and South* can be interpreted and understood as a form of social criticism of class inequality

as well as a depiction of the ideological tension between economic interest and human values in a capitalist society.

B. Marxist Theory

1. Marxism

Marxism was first conceived by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 19th century. This theory emerged as a critique of liberals who believed that the economic system would benefit those involved more than those who invested in it. Marx argued that the liberal economy was a place of class differences and human exploitation (Hendriwani, 2020). Marxism not only serves as an economic doctrine but also as a method of analysis for understanding social and historical change that focuses on social, political, and economic dimensions. Marx argued that the history of society is essentially the history of class struggle (Marx & Engels, 2002; Ngo, 2025).

Based on the Marxist perspective, the structure of society is the result of production relations that place individuals into conflicting social classes. These relations create power imbalances between groups that control the means of production and groups that only have labor power. Thus, Marxism functions not only as an economic critique but also as a method for understanding social change in society through the conflict of interest between classes (Eagleton, 1976).

Marxism views the main conflict in capitalist societies as class struggle between socioeconomic classes. Marx divided society into two major groups: the bourgeoisie, who own capital and the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor power (Eagleton, 1976). According to Marxism, this unequal

relationship between classes enables the capitalist system to produce social inequality, alienation, and various forms of exploitation in human life (Kien, 2025).

The concept of Historical Materialism became the main ideology of Marxist theory, which then gave rise to the concepts of class, class relations, and class struggle. Based on this ideology, society is understood through the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. Changes in these relationships will influence the overall visual and cultural structure (Ismail et al., 2012; Marx, 1990). Therefore, literature is viewed as part of the superstructure that is not independent but reflects the conditions and ideology of the class of its time, and the author acts as a social subject who carries class consciousness through their works (Eagleton, 1976).

In Marxist literary criticism, there are two main approaches used to understand literary works. First, literature is seen as a reflection of social reality. According to Lukács, the value of literary works lies in their ability to represent social life as a whole, especially in terms of showing the conflicts and class structures that form the backdrop of society. Second, literature as ideology, literary works not only reflect social reality but also serve as an ideological practice. (Alves, 2024; Hamadi, 2017). Literature not only serves to reproduce the values and interests of the dominant class, but also acts as a critical space to reveal differences and power relations within society (Eagleton, 1976).

Marxism views economic structure as the basis that determines the form of social, political, and cultural relations in society. Inequality in the ownership of the means of production creates class differences between the bourgeoisie and the

proletariat, which then triggers a conflict of interest between the two classes. This conflict is seen as a form of class struggle that is the main driver of social and historical change. In literary studies, works are positioned as part of the superstructure, representing the material conditions and ideology of the class at that time. Therefore, in literary analysis research using this Marxist perspective, it is basically used to read literary works as representations of the dynamics of class struggle.

2. Social Class

Social class has been extensively studied in sociology and related disciplines. The definition and understanding of social class can vary depending on the theoretical approach and analytical methods used to analyze the structure of society. However, the concept of social class basically refers to groups of people who belong to different strata based on their level of power, privilege, and access to resources.

Lenin, as cited in Muepae (2011) defined social class as social groups in society determined by their position in the production process, or in other words, a person's social class is determined by their profession. Furthermore, Marx argued that the stratification system depends on people's relationship with the means of production. He divided capitalist society into two main classes, namely the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This division not only shows economic differences but also the relationship of domination and exploitation that occurs between the two classes (Adeliana et al., 2025; Muepae, 2011).

a. Bourgeoisie class

The term "bourgeois" refers to the class of modern capitalist owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour (Marx & Engels, 2002). Dobby, as cited in Nurhajjah et al. (2023) also states that the bourgeoisie controls the means of production by owning natural and human resources. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels emphasize the terms bourgeoisie and capitalist interchangeably because both are owners of social means of production and pay wages. This social class depends on market changes to survive (Marx & Engels, 2002; Muepae, 2011).

b. Proletariat class

The proletariat is the class of modern wage labourers who have no means of production of their own and are reduced to selling their labour power to live. (Marx & Engels, 2002). The proletariat class does not own the means of production; they survive by selling their labor to the bourgeoisie in exchange for wages. They provide the labor that enables the bourgeoisie to generate profits and accumulate wealth from the property they own. McLellan, as cited in Nurhajjah et al. (2023) argues that the proletariat class in Marxist theory is the object of the bourgeoisie's expenditure and production process. In addition, they are treated badly and oppressed, and also have no freedom to create a social class (Hendriwani, 2020; Muepae, 2011; Nurhajjah et al., 2023).

3. Class Struggle

The concept of class struggle is a key component of Marxism's critique of capitalism. Marx, as cited in Singh (2015) argues that conflicts within social classes over production, labor, and resources have consistently driven human history. Struggle is rooted in the division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in society (Nurhajjah et al., 2023). Class struggle is a common issue in Marxist theory, referring to the conflicts that occur between different social classes. According to Marx, class struggle is a phenomenon that will never end (Ramadhan, 2019).

Bottomore (1983) defines class struggle as a conflict between classes that arises due to conflicting interests rooted in production relations. This struggle arises because they fight for the interests of their respective classes. In addition, class struggle also occurs as a result of production relations, culture, and status hierarchy (Harnecker, 1969b). Class struggle is an ongoing process in life as a form of resistance by the working class against capitalist domination (Bell & Cleaver, 2002). Thus, class struggle can be understood as a structural conflict that arises due to inequality of ownership in the capitalist production system to maintain or oppose the existing domination.

Marx and Engels (2002) asserts in his book that human history is the history of class struggle, which means that since the dawn of human civilization, society has always been divided into conflicting social classes, and this is what drives human history. In modern capitalist society, Marx distinguishes two main classes that are in conflict with each other, namely the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The

bourgeoisie is the social class that owns the means of production, while the proletariat is the working class that has nothing but their labor to sell (Marx, 1990).

According to Marx, the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is exploitative, and this gives rise to class antagonism, which ultimately fuels the proletariat's desire to free itself from oppression (Zahra, 2025). This relationship creates structural inequality and gradually fosters class consciousness among the proletariat. As this consciousness develops, workers begin to resist capitalist domination, which forms the basis of class struggle (Harnecker, 1969a; Marx & Engels, 2002).

In this study, the concept of class struggle is used to analyze Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South* because the novel portrays social conflict that occurred as a result of the development of England's industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century. This novel presents the conflict between two opposing social classes: factory owners as representatives of the bourgeoisie, and industrial workers as representatives of the proletariat. Through depictions of strikes, labor unrest, and unequal power relations, this novel illustrates how economic domination produces class conflict.

The conflict between the working class and factory owners in the novel *North and South* aligns with Marx's assertion that conflict between the class that owns the means of production and the working class will always give rise to class struggle. Therefore, the theory of class struggle is very appropriate for analyzing class conflict and struggle in the novel *North and South*.

C. Ralf Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is a sociological perspective that views conflict as an inevitable part of society. This conflict arises because individuals or social groups have differing interests, power, and authority. Conflict is viewed as a struggle between two opposing forces seeking to advance their own interests (Dewi & Rahayu, 2020). Ralf Dahrendorf is one of the sociologists who developed this theory. According to him, society consists of dominant and subordinate groups, and the unequal relationship between them can lead to social conflict and class struggle (Dahrendorf, 1959). In industrial society, this conflict arises between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The differences in interests and power between the two groups can spark resistance, protests, and various other forms of social conflict.

Worker solidarity is often evident during industrial revolutions and the emergence of the factory system (Art & Turner, 2002). Based on Dahrendorf's theory of class conflict, the solidarity that emerges represents a significant transition from a quasi-group to an interest group. Dahrendorf, as cited in Izza (2020) states that individuals in similar subordinate positions initially form a quasi-group with only latent interest. Worker solidarity emerges when these individuals become aware of their position within the authority structure, thereby developing a concrete interest.

It is this awareness that unites them and drives them to take collective action (Politi et al., 2022). This solidarity is then manifested through the formation of labor unions that organize strikes and demonstrations to combat injustice and fight for rights (Gaong et al., 2022). Therefore, workers' solidarity not only reinforces Marxist class consciousness but, according to Dahrendorf, also serves as a

fundamental mechanism that organizes latent grievances into effective, structured conflict groups capable of challenging authority (Kühne, 2020).

Resistance to authority also includes class conflict that arises when workers oppose the power and domination exercised by superiors within an organization. Dahrendorf in Izza (2020) stated this resistance occurs due to the inherent inequality imperative coordination, in which superiors have full authority to command while subordinates are expected to obey. This resistance emerges when workers no longer accept the norms that legitimize the authority structure. This resistance can take various forms, such as refusal to comply with imposed rules, strikes, protests, or other actions aimed at challenging the power of superiors (Politi et al., 2022). Through these actions, workers aim not only to address material grievances but also to transform the structure of authority, shifting from a unilateral command system to one that allows for negotiation, joint decision-making, and the institutionalization of industrial conflict.

In this study, in addition to Karl Marx's theory of class struggle, Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory is also employed as a supporting framework. This theory supports the analysis of workers' resistance against the capitalist class in the novel *North and South*, particularly as it relates to strikes and the struggle against the dominance of factory owners.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter explains the research method used in this study. This research method includes the research design, data sources, data collection, and data analysis.

A. Research Design

This study employs literary criticism as its research method, which is applied with the aim of understanding and evaluating literary works and the issues they contain (Muhlisin & Rahayu, 2024). Herawati (2021) defined literary criticism as the act of seeking and determining the intrinsic value of literary works through critical understanding and interpretation in written form. Therefore, this study is classified as literary criticism because it employs critical and objective analysis to interpret and evaluate the meaning and various aspects contained in the literary work *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, which is the subject of this study (Juliananda & Furaida, 2024). A sociological approach is used in this study, specifically by applying Karl Marx's class struggle as the main theory and Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory as a supporting theory to analyze the research object. This study aims to analyze the depiction of class struggle and the struggle of the working class against industrial capitalists in the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell.

B. Data Source

The data source in this study is a novel entitled *North and South*, written by Elizabeth Gaskell. This study utilizes a reprinted edition published by Penguin Classics in 1955. This novel consists of 496 pages, 52 chapters, and was published in London. All data in this study are taken from excerpts from Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and presented as words, phrases, or sentences. The data source in this study is a printed book.

C. Data Collection

The researcher took several steps to collect research data. The first step was to carefully read the entire novel to gain a comprehensive understanding of the story. Second, the researcher highlighted words, sentences, or dialogues relevant to the conflict between the capitalist class and the working class. Third, the researcher classified the collected data into those needed for the analysis of class struggle as depicted in the novel.

D. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researcher continued with data analysis. The researcher started by reviewing and checking the collected data to ensure its relevance to the research question. Next, the data was prepared for analysis. In this study, the data analyzed were all moments of class struggle in the novel *North and South*. The researcher then identified social classes in the form of the bourgeoisie class represented by the characters John Thornton and Mrs. Thornton, and the proletariat class reflected by the characters Nicholas Higgins, Bessy Higgins, and

John Boucher in the novel *North and South*. Next, the researcher analyzed the existing class struggle based on Karl Marx's theory of class struggle and Dahrendorf's theory of class conflict. Finally, the researcher interpreted the analyzed data to conclude the class struggle depicted in the novel.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings and data analysis regarding the depiction of class struggle in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South*. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses class divisions, focusing on the classification of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, as well as the background to the conflict depicted in the novel. The second part examines the class struggle depicted in the novel.

A. Social Class Division in *North and South*

In this sub-chapter, the researcher explains the social class division present in the novel *North and South*. This class division is based on Karl Marx's concept of social class, which categorizes society into two primary classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These class divisions arise from differences in ownership of the means of production, which ultimately form the basis of social stratification in society. It is within this context that class struggle takes place. From a Marxist perspective, progress is seen as the result of the struggle for power that occurs between various social classes (Barry, 2017).

1. Bourgeoisie Class

In the *North and South*, the researcher identified characters who embody the capitalist or bourgeois class: John Thornton and Mrs. Thornton. This serves as evidence that they are members of the bourgeoisie:

a. John Thornton

John Thornton serves as the influential owner of a cotton mill throughout the story. Like many members of the bourgeoisie, he is a capital owner who influences the production process and working conditions of the laborers in Milton. Here are several examples and explanations quoted from the novel that demonstrate that John Thornton is part of the bourgeoisie class:

"...Mr Thornton, the wealthy manufacturer." (Gaskell, 1955, p. 66)

The phrase "the wealthy manufacturer" identifies John Thornton as a member of the bourgeoisie, the social class that possesses economic power through ownership of the means of production. As the owner of a cotton mill in Milton, John Thornton represents the industrial bourgeoisie class described by Marx & Engels (2002). Furthermore, the word 'wealthy' emphasizes that Thornton's social status and financial success are closely connected to industrial capitalism. His wealth is generated through factory production sustained by wage labor, reflecting the Marxist idea that the bourgeoisie's profit depends upon the labor of the proletariat class. Therefore, John Thornton's position as a manufacturer illustrates the economic dominance of the bourgeoisie within capitalist society (Marx, 2000).

"Thornton's house is three times as big." (Gaskell, 1955, p. 155)

Next is the description of John Thornton's house. This quotation emphasizes his bourgeois status and material privilege. Thornton's residence, located within an industrial district alongside a factory and business office, symbolizes the close relationship between industrial ownership and social power in a capitalist society. The large and well-maintained house contrasts sharply with the harsh, polluted

environment surrounding the factories, highlighting the social gap between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the industrial world.

Based on Marxism, the luxurious size and condition of Thornton's home can be interpreted as a material representation of capital accumulation. While the working class experiences difficult living and working conditions, the bourgeoisie enjoys comfort and authority derived from ownership of industrial production. Thus, in *North and South*, Thornton's residence is a symbol of class inequality within the industrial capitalist system (Marx & Engels, 2002).

b. Mrs. Thornton

The next character is Mrs. Thornton. She is portrayed as a member of the bourgeoisie through her association with industrial wealth, social authority, and ownership of a capitalist enterprise within the Thornton family. Here are some quotes and explanations from the book that depict Mrs. Thornton as a member of the bourgeoisie:

"In Mr Thornton's house, at this very same time, a similar, yet different, scene was going on. A large-boned lady, long past middle age, sat at work in a grim handsomely-furnished dining-room. Her features, like her frame, were strong and massive, rather than heavy. Her face moved slowly from one decided expression to another equally decided. There was no great variety in her countenance; but those who looked at it once, generally looked at it again; even the passers-by in the street, half-turned their heads to gaze an instant longer at the firm, severe, dignified woman, who never gave way in street courtesy, or paused in her straight-onward course to the clearly-defined end which she proposed to herself. She was handsomely dressed in stout black silk, of which not a thread was worn or discoloured. She was mending a large long table-cloth of the finest texture, holding it up against the light occasionally to discover thin places, which required her delicate care. " (Gaskell, 1955, p. 79)

"Do you have anything of Milton, Miss Hale? Have you seen any of our factories? our magnificent warehouse. " (Gaskell, 1955, p. 101)

In the first quotation, Mrs. Thornton's domestic life reflects the material power and social status of the bourgeoisie. The "handsomely-furnished dining-

room” and her “stout black silk” dress without “a single frayed thread” symbolize economic stability and wealth associated with ownership of the means of production. Through these details, Gaskell portrays Mrs. Thornton as a representative of the bourgeois class within industrial capitalist society. Mrs. Thornton’s discipline, firmness, and strong sense of control also reflect bourgeois values that support the maintenance of social and economic dominance.

Her orderly household contrasts sharply with the difficult living conditions commonly experienced by the working class during the industrial era. This contrast emphasizes the social division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. From a Marxist perspective, Karl Marx (1990) explains that the capitalist functions as the personification of capital and is primarily driven by capital accumulation. Therefore, Mrs. Thornton’s domestic environment can be interpreted as a representation of bourgeois comfort and authority produced by the capitalist system.

In the second quote, Mrs. Thornton’s reference to “our factories” and “our magnificent warehouse” illustrates the bourgeoisie’s ownership and control over the means of production. The possessive word “our” emphasizes the collective identity of the Thornton family as owners who benefit from industrial capitalism. Through this language, Gaskell portrays the Thorntons as members of the ruling class whose social status is closely connected to industrial wealth and economic power. Furthermore, Mrs. Thornton’s description of the warehouse as “magnificent” suggests her admiration for industrial and capitalist achievement. The focus on the grandeur of the factory and warehouse also obscures the labor of

the working class, whose efforts sustain such economic success. From a Marxist perspective, the quotation reflects how the bourgeoisie maintains economic dominance through ownership and control of production (Marx, 1990).

2. Proletariat Class

In the novel *North and South*, the researcher identifies three characters of the proletariat class: Nicholas Higgins, Bessy Higgins, and John Boucher.

a. Nicholas Higgins

The first character is Nicholas Higgins, a factory worker living amid the harsh realities of the industrial system in Milton. Higgins represents the reality of the proletariat class life, whose lives are marked by economic hardship and oppression within the capitalist production system.

“..but don't yo' think I can keep three people -that's Bessy, and Mary, and me -on sixteen shilling a week? Why are we to have less wage now;?” (Gaskell, 1955, p. 141)

“He was rather disorderly, to be sure, with a black unshaven beard of several day's growth, making his pale face look yet paler, and a jacket which would have been all the better for patching.” (Gaskell, 1955, p. 301)

Nicholas Higgins is portrayed as the proletariat, the class that owns no means of production and must survive by selling their labor to the bourgeoisie (Marx & Engels, 2002). As shown in the first quotation, Higgins explains that he must support himself and his two daughters, Mary and Bessy, with only sixteen shillings a week. This reflects Karl Marx's concept of wages under capitalism, in which workers are paid only enough to maintain their basic survival and continue

producing labor power. Meanwhile, the profits generated through their labor are controlled by the bourgeoisie class (Nasution et al., 2025).

Furthermore, Higgins' complaint about wage reduction highlights the proletariat's vulnerability to the economic decisions of factory owners. The decrease in wages demonstrates how the bourgeoisie prioritizes profit accumulation over the welfare of workers. Higgins also realizes that resistance against wage cuts cannot be carried out individually, but requires collective action among workers to challenge capitalist exploitation. Through this depiction, Gaskell illustrates the unequal power relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in an industrial capitalist society.

The second quotation further illustrates the material consequences of economic exploitation experienced by the working class. Higgins's pale face, unshaven beard, and worn jacket symbolize poverty and physical exhaustion caused by harsh industrial labor conditions. Unlike the bourgeoisie, who enjoy comfort and wealth derived from industrial profits, the proletariat struggles to fulfill even basic needs. Higgins's deteriorating appearance reflects not personal neglect, but the effects of a capitalist system that suppresses workers' wages while extracting profits from their labor. From a Marxist perspective, this condition reflects the unequal class structure of capitalism in which the bourgeoisie accumulates wealth through the labor of the proletariat (Marx, 1990). Therefore, Higgins's condition represents the severe class inequality that exists between factory owners and workers in Milton's industrial society.

b. Bessy Higgins

Next is Bessy Higgins, the daughter of Nicholas Higgins. In *North and South*, Bessy is described as a working-class girl who has worked in the factory since a young age following her mother's death. Her character represents the suffering experienced by the proletariat under industrial capitalism.

"I think I was well when mother died, but I have never been rightly strong sin' somewhere about that time. I began to work in a carding-room soon after, and the fluff got into my lungs, and poisoned me." (Gaskell, 1955, p. 106)

'But now I've had many days o' idleness, and I'm just as weary o' them as I was o' my work. (Gaskell, 1955, p. 106)

The first quotation illustrates the dangerous working conditions experienced by factory workers during the industrial era. After entering the factory, Bessy's health gradually deteriorates because of the cotton fibers she inhales while working in the carding room. From a Marxist perspective, her illness can be interpreted as a consequence of the capitalist system, which prioritizes profit and production over workers' safety and well-being. According to Karl Marx (1990) capitalism is driven by the pursuit of surplus value, which leads the bourgeoisie to maximize production while neglecting the physical well-being of the proletariat. Therefore, Bessy's deteriorating body symbolizes how industrial labor exhausts and destroys the working class for capitalist profit.

Furthermore, Bessy's statement that she is "weary" of her idleness reflects the dehumanizing effects of wage labor within capitalist society. Her identity and existence are closely tied to her ability to work, yet the factory system simultaneously destroys her physical strength. When illness prevents her from working, she experiences helplessness and suffering because the capitalist system

values workers primarily for their labor power. Through Bessy's condition, in the novel *North and South* illustrates how the proletariat becomes physically and emotionally trapped within the industrial system.

Bessy's suffering is further connected to the economic struggles experienced by her father, Nicholas Higgins. As shown in the following quotation:

“He laughed grimly. ‘My lass,’ said he, ‘yo’re but a young wench, but don’t yo’ think I can keep three people -that’s Bessy, and Mary, and me -on sixteen shilling a week? (Gaskell, 1955, p. 141)

The wage of sixteen shillings a week represents what Karl Marx (1990) describes as a subsistence wage, in which workers are paid only enough to maintain basic survival and continue working. Such wages leave little opportunity for workers to improve their living conditions or afford proper medical treatment. As a result, the working class remains economically dependent and vulnerable within the capitalist system. Bessy's illness, caused by hazardous factory conditions, demonstrates how the proletariat suffers the physical consequences of industrial production, while the bourgeoisie continues to profit from the profits generated by the workers' labor.

Meanwhile, Nicholas Higgins must support his family on meager wages while caring for his terminally ill daughter. This situation reflects the unequal structure of capitalism, in which the working class experiences poverty, disease, and insecurity, while the bourgeoisie maintains economic comfort and control. Ultimately, Bessy's deteriorating health and death symbolize the exploitation and suffering experienced by the proletariat in an industrial capitalist society.

c. John Boucher

Lastly, there is the character of John Boucher. In *North and South*, Boucher is a member of the proletariat class who is highly vulnerable to the economic pressures of the capitalist system. His character reflects the severe poverty and insecurity experienced by the working class in the industrial area.

“I take up John Boucher’s cause, as lives next door but one, wi’ a sickly wife, and eight childer; none on ‘em factory age;” (Gaskell, 1955, p. 141)

“‘It’s no use, Higgins. Hoo cannot live long a’ this ‘n. Hoo’s just sinking away – not for want o’ meat hersel’ – but because hoo cannot stand th’sight o’ the little ones clemming. Ay, clemming! Five shilling a week may do well enough for thee, wi’ but two mouths to fill, and one on ‘em a wench who can welly earn her own meat. and there’s our lile Jack lying a-bed, too weak to cry, but just every now and then sobbing up his heart for want o’ food, – our lile Jack, I tell thee, lad!(Gaskell, 1955, p. 162)

Boucher is depicted as a struggling worker who must support a sick wife and eight children with extremely limited financial resources. From a Marxist perspective, his family situation reflects the vulnerability of the proletariat within capitalist society. According to Karl Marx (1990) the working class depends entirely on wages for survival because it does not own the means of production. As a result, workers become economically powerless when wages are reduced or employment becomes unstable.

The second quotation illustrates the severe effects of poverty experienced by the Boucher family during the strike in Milton. The description of the children starving and becoming “too weak to cry” emphasizes the extreme suffering caused by economic hardship. This situation demonstrates how the capitalist system places workers in conditions where even basic human needs, such as food and health, cannot be adequately fulfilled. While the bourgeoisie possess economic security

through ownership of capital, the proletariat faces constant insecurity and the threat of starvation.

“Yo ’see, Boucher’s been pulled down wi’ his childer; – and her being so cranky, and a’ they could pawn has gone this last twelvemonth.” ’ (Gaskell, 1955, p. 163)

Finally, the last quotation illustrates the material deprivation experienced by the Boucher family. The statement that they have pawned everything they owned symbolizes the complete loss of economic security and the deepening poverty of the proletariat. Their inability to maintain even basic living conditions reflects the unequal structure of capitalism, in which workers remain trapped in cycles of hardship and dependency. Karl Marx (1990) argues that capitalism enables the bourgeoisie to accumulate wealth through the exploitation of labor, while the proletariat receives only limited wages necessary for survival. As a result, workers remain economically vulnerable and dependent upon the bourgeoisie class for their livelihood.

Moreover, the physical and emotional suffering experienced by Boucher and his family demonstrates the dehumanizing effects of capitalist exploitation. Boucher’s eventual suicide can be interpreted as the tragic consequence of a system that reduces workers to mere labor power while providing no protection when they can no longer survive economically. Thus, in the *North and South* portray Boucher as a symbol of the suffering and desperation experienced by the proletariat under industrial capitalism.

B. Class Struggle Portrayed in *North and South*

1. Background of Class Struggle

After identifying the social class division in the novel, the researcher further explains the background of the class struggle portrayed in *North and South*. The conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat emerges from exploitation and the domination exercised by factory owners over workers. These conditions eventually lead to resistance and collective struggle among the proletariat class.

“They’d tell us to mind our own business, and they’d mind theirs. Our business being, yo’ understand, to take the bated wage, and be thankful; and their business to bate us down to clemming point, to swell their profit.” (Gaskell, 1955, p. 141)

Based on this quotation, the novel *North and South* highlights the exploitative relationship between the factory owner and workers within a capitalist society. Nicholas Higgins’ statement reflects the unequal power relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The distinction between “our business” and “their business” emphasizes the class division inherent in capitalism, in which workers are excluded from control over the means of production and economic decision-making.

Moreover, the expectation that workers should remain grateful despite wage reductions demonstrates the ideological control exercised by the bourgeoisie over the proletariat class. This reflects how capitalist ideology functions to maintain social order and suppress resistance among workers. Higgins’s phrase “to bate us down to clemming point” reflects the tendency of capitalism to reduce workers’ living conditions to the minimum level necessary for survival to maximize profit (Marx, 1990).

“State o’ trade! That’s just a piece o’ masters’ humbug. It’s rate o’ wages I was talking of. Th’ masters keep th’ state o’ trade in their own hands; and just walk it forward like a black bug – a - boo, to frighten naughty children with into being good. I’ll tell yo’ it’s their part, - their cue, as some folks call it, - to beat us down, to sweel their fortunes; and it’s our ti stand up and fight hard, - not for them round about us – for justice and fair play. We help to make their profits, and we ought to help spend ‘em. It’s not that we want their brass so much this time, as we’ve done many a time afore. We ‘n gotten money laid by; and we’re resolved to stand and fall together; not a man on us will go in for less wage that th’ Union says is our due. So I say, “hooray for the strike,” and let Thornton, and Slickson, and Hamper, and their set look to it!” (Gaskell, 1955, p. 141)

“... being women, kept plaining, plaining (wi’ the tears running down their cheeks, and never wiped away, nor heeded), of the price o’ meat, and how their childer could na sleep at nights for th’ hunger.” (Gaskell, 1955, p. 158)

The conflict portrayed in the novel *North and South* emerges from the structural exploitation inherent in the capitalist system. The statement “State o’ trade” reflects the way factory owners use economic conditions as justification for lowering wages and maintaining control over workers. According to Karl Marx (1990) capitalism enables the bourgeoisie to maintain dominance by extracting surplus value from the labor of the proletariat.

Furthermore, Higgins’s realization that workers contribute directly to the profits of factory owners demonstrates the growth of class consciousness among the proletariat. Rather than accepting exploitation individually, workers begin to recognize the importance of collective resistance through labor unions and strikes. The phrase “hooray for the strike” symbolizes the workers’ attempt to challenge bourgeois control by disrupting the production process. Through this portrayal, Gaskell illustrates the emergence of collective struggle as a response to capitalist exploitation.

Next, the second quotation demonstrates the social consequences of economic inequality. The women’s complaints about hunger and the inability to

afford food reveal that workers' wages are insufficient to meet basic human needs. These conditions reflect how capitalism not only exploits labor in the workplace but also undermines the workers' ability to sustain themselves and their families (Marx, 1990). As a result, the proletariat experiences continuous poverty and insecurity despite contributing to industrial production.

"Perhaps you know my brother has imported hands from Ireland, and it has irritated the Milton people excessively – as if he hadn't right to get labour where he could; and the stupid wretches here wouldn't work for him. (Gaskell, 1955, p. 182)

The last quotation illustrates another form of capitalist domination through the importation of Irish workers into Milton. From a Marxist perspective, this situation reflects the concept of the "reserve army of labor," in which unemployed or economically vulnerable workers are used to maintain competition within the labor market and suppress wages (Marx, 1990). By referring to workers merely as "hands" the quotation reduces laborers to economic instruments whose value is measured only by their productivity.

Furthermore, the factory owners' belief that they have the "right" to obtain labor wherever they choose reflects the bourgeois ideology that prioritizes capital accumulation over workers' welfare. The anger directed toward Irish workers also demonstrates how capitalism creates division among members of the proletariat. Instead of uniting against the bourgeoisie, workers are encouraged to compete with one another for employment and to struggle for survival. Therefore, *North and South* portray capitalist society as a system that maintains bourgeois dominance not only through economic exploitation, but also through the fragmentation of the proletariat class solidarity.

2. Class Struggle Portrayed in *North and South*

This sub-chapter examines the class struggle portrayed in the *North and South*. Based on the social class division and the background of the social conflict discussed previously, the researcher further explains the form of class struggle as directly portrayed by the proletariat characters in the *North and South*. The forms of class struggle carried out by the proletariat class against the bourgeoisie class are categorized into two main forms: worker solidarity and resistance to capitalist authority. Each of these forms of struggle is discussed in the following sections.

a. Worker solidarity

“Dun yo’ thin it’s for mysel’ I’m striking work at this time? It’s just as much in the cause of others as yon soldier -only m’appen, the cause he dies for is just that of somebody he never clapt eyes on, nor heerd on all his born days, while I take up John Boucher’s cause, as lives next door but one, wi’ a sickly wife, and eight childer, none on ‘em factory age; and I don’t take up his cause only, though he’s a poor good-for-nought, as can only manage two looms at a time, but I take up th’ cause o’ justice. Why are we to have less wage now, I ask, than two year ago?”
(Gaskell, 1955, p. 141)

In this quotation, the class struggle in *North and South* is portrayed as a collective struggle rather than an individual effort. Nicholas Higgins explicitly rejects individualism when he explains that the strike is not only for his own benefit, but also for the welfare of other workers, such as John Boucher and his family. Higgins’s statement portrays the emergence of solidarity among the proletariat in response to capitalist exploitation. From a Marxist perspective, this solidarity reflects the development of class consciousness among workers.

According to Karl Marx and Fredich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (2002), the proletariat must unite collectively in order to resist bourgeois

domination. Higgins's willingness to fight not only for himself but also for other workers demonstrates the transformation of workers from isolated individuals into a unified social class with shared interests.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Dahrendorf's conflict theory, the workers' solidarity illustrates the transformation of subordinate groups into organized interest groups. Initially, workers such as John Boucher experience economic hardship individually. However, through shared experiences of exploitation, workers begin to recognize their common position within the capitalist power structure. This awareness encourages collective action against the authority exercised by factory owners. According to Dahrendorf (1959) social conflict emerges when subordinate groups organize themselves to challenge dominant authority. Therefore, the workers' strike in the novel reflects the emergence of organized resistance against capitalist domination.

Moreover, the workers' struggle for justice is not merely based on personal emotion or moral sympathy, but on a collective awareness of structural inequality. Higgins's statement demonstrates that the proletariat realizes that exploitation is rooted in the capitalist system itself. Through collective solidarity, workers attempt to challenge the unequal distribution of economic power controlled by the bourgeoisie.

"I know nought of your ways down South. I have heerd they're a pack of spiritless, down-trodden men; welly clemmed to death; too much dazed wi' clemming to know when they're put upon. Now, it's not so here. We known when we're put upon; and we'en too much blood in us to stand it. We just take our hands fro' our looms, and say, "Yo' may clem us, but yo'll not put upon us, my masters!" and be danged to 'em, they shan't this time!" (Gaskell, 1955, p. 139)

The next quotation demonstrates that workers' solidarity functions as a collective rejection of capitalist oppression. Higgins contrasts the workers in the South, whom he describes as passive and powerless, with the workers in Milton who are fully aware of the exploitation they experience. From a Marxist perspective, this contrast reflects the difference between false consciousness and class consciousness. The Southern workers are portrayed as accepting oppression passively, while the Milton workers recognize the injustice of the capitalist system and actively resist it.

Marx and Engels (2002) argue that capitalism reduces workers to instruments of production and alienates them from their humanity. However, the repeated use of the word "we" in Higgins's statement emphasizes collective identity and solidarity among workers. Their refusal to accept oppression demonstrates an attempt to reclaim dignity and resist bourgeois domination. In addition, this quotation also reflects Ralf Dahrendorf's theory that social conflict emerges when subordinate groups reject the legitimacy of dominant authority. Higgins's declaration that workers will no longer tolerate oppression symbolizes the proletariat's refusal to remain submissive to capitalist control. The strike, therefore, represents not only an economic struggle, but also a broader social conflict between the dominant bourgeoisie and the subordinate working class (Dahrendorf, 1959).

b. Resistance to capitalist authority

In *North and South*, class struggle is also portrayed through workers' resistance against exploitation by the bourgeois class and labor strikes.

1) Rejection of economic exploitation

"We just take our hands fro' our looms, and say, "Yo' may clem us, but yo'll not put upon us, my masters!" and be danged to 'em, they shan't this time!" (Gaskell, 1955, p. 139)

"'.Why are we to have less wage now, I ask, than two year ago? '" (Gaskell, 1955, p. 141)

One form of resistance portrayed in the novel is a rejection of economic exploitation and oppressive authority. Nicholas Higgins' statement, "Yo' may clem us, but yo'll not put upon us, my masters!" demonstrates that workers are not only protesting against poverty and wage reduction, but are also rejecting the authority of the capitalist class. Through this resistance, the workers challenge the legitimacy of factory owners who control wages and working conditions. This resistance reflects the proletariat's struggle against capitalist exploitation and dehumanization. According to Karl Marx (1990) capitalism enables the bourgeoisie to maximize profit by extracting surplus value from workers' labor while suppressing wages. Therefore, the workers' refusal to accept wage cuts represents an attempt to defend their labor and survival against capitalist oppression.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), this condition reflects the transformation of a subordinate group into active groups that challenge dominant authority. The workers no longer remain passive recipients of bourgeois decisions, but instead begin to resist the unequal power structure imposed upon them. Their protest against wage reduction reflects a growing awareness of their subordinate position within capitalist society.

The workers' question, "Why are we to have less wage now?" also demonstrates the emergence of class consciousness. Workers realize that wage

reduction is not simply an unavoidable economic condition, but part of the capitalist system that prioritizes profit accumulation over workers' welfare. Through this awareness, the proletariat increasingly recognizes the structural inequality that exists between labor and capital.

2) Labor Strike

In the novel *North and South*, class struggle is portrayed through the workers' strike at John Thornton's factory. The strike was sparked by demands for fairer wages amid the high cost of living in Milton. From a Marxist perspective, the strike represents collective resistance against capitalist exploitation and the bourgeoisie's attempt to suppress wages to maximize surplus value (Marx, 1990). The strike also reflects the unequal distribution of power between factory owners and workers. The capitalist class possesses authority over production and economic decisions, while workers are excluded from meaningful negotiation. This imbalance of authority intensifies social conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

"‘This is th’ third strike ...’ ‘Well, third time pays for all. See if we don’t dang th’ masters this time..’”(Gaskell, 1955, p. 138)

The quotation illustrates the workers' growing determination and radicalization in their struggle against capitalist authority. The fact that this is the "third strike" indicates that previous conflicts between workers and factory owners remained unresolved. According to Ralf Dahrendorf's (1959), repeated industrial conflict reflects an ongoing struggle between dominant and subordinate groups within society. The refusal of factory owners to negotiate fairly forces workers to organize repeated collective resistance.

Moreover, the workers' belief that they will eventually defeat their employers demonstrates the development of class consciousness among the proletariat. Workers increasingly recognize that their exploitation is systemic rather than temporary. From a Marxist perspective, the strike becomes an organized effort to challenge bourgeois domination and reclaim economic rights that have been denied under capitalism (Marx, 1990).

"...was heard just right outside the wall, and 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, and retreated a short space only to come with more united steady impetus against it, till their great beats made the strong gates quiver." (Gaskell, 1955, p. 183)

"Many in the crowd were mere boys; cruel and thoughtless, – cruel because they were thoughtless; some were men, gaunt as wolves, and mad for prey. She knew how it was; they were like Boucher, – with starving children at home – relying on ultimate success in their efforts to get higher wages, and enraged beyond measure at discovering that Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of bread (Gaskell, 1955, p. 186)

The conflict in the novel eventually escalates into open confrontation and violence during the strike at Thornton's factory. The workers' attempt to force open the gates symbolizes the eruption of social conflict caused by prolonged economic oppression. From Dahrendorf's perspective, this violence reflects the consequences of an authority system that continuously suppresses subordinate groups without providing space for negotiation or participation (Dahrendorf, 1959). When workers are denied legitimate channels to express their interests, conflict intensifies into direct resistance against the dominant authority.

Furthermore, the description of starving workers and children highlights the severe material suffering experienced by the proletariat. Their anger toward the importation of Irish workers demonstrates how economic insecurity intensifies class conflict within capitalist society. From a Marxist perspective, the bourgeoisie

maintains control by creating competition among workers through the use of a reserve army of labor, which weakens proletarian solidarity and suppresses wages (Marx, 1990). Therefore, the strike in *North and South* represents not only an economic protest but also a broader class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Meanwhile, Thornton's decision to bring Irish workers into Milton reflects what Karl Marx (1990) describes as the "reserve army of labor," in which capitalists use unemployed or economically vulnerable workers to weaken strikes and suppress wages. The workers' anger toward the Irish laborers, whom they believed would "take the bread from their children's mouths," illustrates how capitalism creates competition among members of the proletariat itself. Rather than directing their resistance entirely toward the bourgeoisie, workers become divided by economic insecurity and competition for survival. This condition benefits the capitalist class because it weakens proletarian solidarity and strengthens bourgeois control over labor.

"What do you want, Mr Higgins? That's the question." "I want work." "Work! You're a pretty chap to come asking me for work. You don't want impudence, that's very clear." "His blood was a little roused by Mr Thornton's manner; more than by his words. Mr Thornton saw a letter addressed to himself on the table. He took it up and read it through. At the end, he looked up and said, 'What are you waiting for?'. 'An answer to the question I axed.' 'I gave it you before. Don't waste any more of your time.' 'Yo' made a remark, sir, on my impudence: but I were taught that it was manners to say either "yes" or "no," when I were axed a civil question. I should be thankfu' to yo' if yo' give me work. Hamper will speak to my being a good hand.' (Gaskell, 1955, p. 332)

After the strike, the relationship between workers and factory owners began to shift from confrontation toward negotiation. This interaction between Nicholas Higgins and John Thornton reflects what Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) describes as the

institutionalization of conflict, in which social conflict gradually moves into more structured forms of negotiation between dominant and subordinate groups. Unlike the earlier violent clashes, the conflict here is expressed through dialogue regarding work, authority, and dignity.

Initially, Thornton's accusation of Higgins's "impudence" reflects the bourgeois tendency to expect obedience from workers and to maintain hierarchical authority over the proletariat. From a Marxist perspective, this attitude demonstrates how capitalism positions workers as subordinate laborers whose value is determined primarily by their usefulness within the production system (Marx & Engels, 1888). However, Higgins's polite yet firm response demonstrates the development of class consciousness and self-respect among the working class. Higgins refuses to accept humiliation and instead demands recognition as a human being deserving of dignity and fair treatment. Furthermore, Higgins's insistence on receiving a direct answer illustrates a transformation in the workers' position within the authority structure. According to Dahrendorf (1959) subordinate groups eventually organize and challenge dominant authority rather than passively accepting it. Although Higgins approaches Thornton to ask for employment, he no longer behaves as a completely submissive worker. Instead, he engages in dialogue with Thornton on more equal terms, indicating that the previous class conflict has altered the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

"I've a notion you'd better not send me to Hamper to ask for a character, my man. I might hear more than you'd like." 'I'd take th' risk... I'd promise that when I seed yo' going wrong, and acting unfair, I'd speak to yo' in private first; and that would be a fair warning. If yo' and I did na agree in our opinion o' your conduct, yo' might turn me off at an hour's notice.'" (Gaskell, 1955, p. 332)

'Upon my word, you don't think small beer of yourself! Hamper has had a loss of you. He crossed to the porter's lodge: 'How long has that man Higgins been waiting to speak to me?' 'He was outside the gate before eight o'clock, sir. I think he's been there ever since.' 'And it is now—?' 'Just one, sir.' 'Five hours,' thought Mr Thornton: 'it's a long time for a man to wait, doing nothing but first hoping and then fearing.' (Gaskell, 1955, pp. 333–334)

The class struggle in *North and South* gradually develops from open confrontation into negotiation and compromise. Higgins's willingness to discuss problems directly with Thornton demonstrates an effort to establish a more organized and legitimate form of resolving industrial conflict. From Dahrendorf's perspective, this reflects the institutionalization of conflict, in which dominant and subordinate groups begin to negotiate their interests through communication rather than violence alone (Dahrendorf, 1959). Nevertheless, from a Marxist perspective, the fundamental structure of capitalism remains unchanged. Thornton still possesses the authority to hire or dismiss workers, meaning that economic power continues to belong to the bourgeoisie.

Higgins's acknowledgment that Thornton could "turn me off at an hour's notice" demonstrates that workers remain dependent upon capitalist control over employment and production. Thus, although communication between the two classes improves, structural inequality persists within capitalist society. At the same time, Thornton's realization that Higgins waited five hours to speak with him marks an important change in his perception of the working class. Higgins is no longer viewed merely as a rebellious worker but as a human being struggling to survive and support others. This shift illustrates how prolonged class conflict forces members of the bourgeoisie to recognize the realities faced by the proletariat.

"It was the five hours of waiting that struck Mr Thornton. He had not five hours to spare himself; but one hour – two hours, of his hard penetrating intellectual, as

well as bodily labour, did he give up to going about collecting evidence as to the truth of Higgins's story, the nature of his character, the tenor of his life. He tried not to be, but was convinced that all that Higgins had said was true. And then the conviction went in, as if by some spell, and touched the latent tenderness of his heart; the patience of the man, the simple generosity of the motive (for he had learnt about the quarrel between Boucher and Higgins), made him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice, and overleap them by a diviner instinct. He came to tell Higgins he would give him work;" (Gaskell, 1955, p. 338)

The final quotation demonstrates that class struggle in *North and South* ultimately transforms the relationship between workers and factory owners. Thornton's effort to investigate Higgins's background and understand his motives reflects a significant shift in the structure of authority between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. According to Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) social conflict can lead to adjustments and modifications within authority structures when dominant groups are forced to recognize the interests of subordinate groups.

Furthermore, Thornton's growing empathy toward Higgins can be interpreted as the result of the workers' earlier resistance and collective struggle. From a Marxist perspective, the bourgeoisie does not voluntarily abandon its authority; rather, changes in social relations emerge because the proletariat continuously challenges capitalist domination (Marx, 1990). Although Thornton still retains economic authority as the factory owner, the relationship between him and Higgins becomes less rigid and more humane. Therefore, the novel suggests that class struggle does not destroy capitalist structures, but it can pressure the ruling class to negotiate and partially recognize the humanity and interests of the proletariat class.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This final chapter consists of two sections: the conclusion and the suggestion. The summary of this discussion examines the class struggle portrayed in the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell. In the following section, the researcher offers recommendations for future researchers interested in exploring this same field and for literature students.

A. Conclusion

Based on the research conducted, the novel *North and South* clearly depicts social class divisions and class struggle in an industrial capitalist society through a Marxist perspective. The social structure depicted in the novel is divided into two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie is represented by the characters John Thornton and Mrs. Thornton. Meanwhile, the proletariat is represented by the characters Nicholas Higgins, Bessy Higgins, and John Boucher. The background of the conflict in the novel *North and South* comes from the unequal economic relationship between factory owners and workers. The bourgeoisie maintains its dominance by controlling wages, production, and working conditions, while the proletariat suffers exploitation and economic hardship. Low wages, dangerous working conditions, and the use of Irish labor as a reserve army exacerbate the tension between the two classes.

Furthermore, this study finds that class struggle in the novel *North and South* emerges in two main forms: worker solidarity and resistance to capitalist

authority. Worker solidarity is the mutual support among workers that serves as a collective resistance to capitalist oppression. Meanwhile, resistance to capitalist authority is depicted through protests against wage cuts, strikes, and confrontations with factory owners. The strike at the Thornton factory symbolizes the proletariat's efforts to challenge bourgeois domination and demand justice and fair treatment.

However, the novel also depicts how prolonged social conflict gradually leads to negotiations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Through the relationship between John Thornton and Nicholas Higgins, *North and South* illustrates the possibility of a more humane relationship between factory owners and workers. However, even though social relations have become less hostile, the fundamental structure of capitalism remains unchanged, as economic power and ownership of production continue to be vested in the bourgeoisie.

B. Suggestion

Based on the findings of the analysis, the study of class struggle in literature continues to develop, encompassing not only the novel *North and South* but also various literary works that address social issues to examine how class struggle is represented within capitalist society. Future researchers are encouraged to employ more contemporary objects of study to better illustrate how class struggle evolves in modern capitalist society.

Furthermore, readers and future researchers may also consider applying theoretical frameworks beyond Karl Marx's theory of class struggle to produce more diverse and comprehensive analyses. In conducting similar research, it is highly recommended that researchers engage in careful and repeated readings of

literary works to gain a thorough understanding of the narrative before proceeding with analysis. Finally, this study is expected to serve as a useful reference for students of English literature, particularly in analyzing literary works through a sociological approach, with a focus on social class and class struggle.

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