

NAVIGATING VICTORIAN CITY SPACE: ARTIFICIALITY IN AUSTEN'S *NORTHANGER ABBEY* AND GASKELL'S *NORTH AND SOUTH*

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Abstract

This research investigates the themes of artificiality and social alienation in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, examining how urban settings in Bath and Milton encapsulate the social complexities of Victorian society during the Industrial Revolution. Employing a comparative literary analysis, grounded in urban and social theory as articulated by experts such as Simmel and Parkins, this study highlights how city spaces both reflect and reinforce societal constraints and individual behaviours. Data was gathered through close readings of the primary texts, supported by secondary sources, and analysed to explore patterns of social interaction and urban influence on character development. The findings reveal how Bath's societal superficiality shapes Catherine Morland's experience, while Milton's industrial harshness impacts characters like Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton, illustrating the varied ways urban settings foster artificiality and exacerbate social divides. This research contributes to understanding Victorian literature's critique of societal structures, emphasizing the value of authenticity and human connection amid social pressures.

Keywords: *Artificiality, City Space, Victorian Era, Social Alienation, Comparative Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century witnessed profound social, economic, and technological changes, most notably with the advance of the Industrial Revolution in England. This era of rapid industrialization brought about significant shifts in societal structures and norms which led to both advancements and challenges in various aspects of life. The industrialization of the nineteenth century reshaped urban landscapes and social dynamics, particularly impacting marginalized communities such as factory workers

and the urban poor. In literature, authors often used their works to reflect and comment on these societal changes of Victorian society. Through literary works, authors offered valuable insights into the complexities of Victorian society to shed light on the ways in which individuals coped with the challenges of navigating rapidly changing social landscapes. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* stand as significant literary works of the nineteenth century, each offering unique perspectives on the social dynamics of

their time. While Austen's novel is renowned for its satire and critique of societal conventions, Gaskell's work delves into the complexities of class conflict and industrialization in the northern English city of Milton. One running theme in both novels is the portrayal of artificiality and social alienation within Victorian society. While Austen's *Northanger Abbey* explicitly explores the theme of artificiality through the experiences of its protagonist, Catherine Morland, Gaskell's *North and South* subtly depict this theme through the description of city spaces and social interactions (Dennis, 2009; Parkins, 2004; Zemka, 2009). City space serves as a crucial backdrop for understanding the dynamics of social relations in both novels. Austen and Gaskell utilize their respective urban settings to illustrate the dishonesty and lack of knowledge prevalent in Victorian society. The bustling city environments of Bath and Milton have become symbolic representations of the artificiality and superficiality that permeate social interactions during this era of industrialization. Furthermore, the works highlight the importance of honesty and self-awareness in fostering genuine human connections. Despite the prevalent artificiality, characters in both works strive to attain a deeper understanding of themselves and others, emphasizing the significance of authentic relationships amidst the societal changes of the time. Through a comparative analysis of Austen's and Gaskell's depictions of city space and social relations, this research aims to shed light on the broader themes of artificiality and social alienation in Victorian literature. This study introduces a novel perspective on Victorian literature by juxtaposing Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and

Gaskell's *North and South* to highlight the impact of urban spaces on social dynamics and individual behaviors within Victorian society. Unlike previous studies that often focus on single texts or themes, this research provides a comparative analysis that bridges the differing social landscapes of Bath and Milton, thereby revealing how Austen and Gaskell uniquely critique artificiality and social alienation. By employing urban and social theory as a framework, the research sheds new light on the interplay between space, class, and personal identity, positioning the city as a transformative force in character behavior and social interaction. Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of Victorian studies by expanding the discourse on how urban settings influence literary narratives and character development. It aligns with and extends the works of social theorists such as Simmel, who addressed the psychological effects of urban life, and contemporary scholars who examine the societal implications of city spaces in literature. This study provides a deeper understanding of how city spaces can reflect broader societal tensions and pressures, offering a unique lens through which to examine themes of authenticity, societal expectations, and personal identity. Practically, the findings may inform current discussions on urbanization and social dynamics, offering parallels between Victorian urban landscapes and modern cities. By exploring the impacts of social stratification and industrial pressures on individual behavior, this research holds value for sociologists, urban planners, and scholars interested in the psychological effects of city environments. Additionally, educators and students in literature and social sciences can use this comparative

analysis as a framework for examining the role of setting in narrative structure and character relationships.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Artificiality in Victorian literature has been extensively analyzed as a reflection of societal norms and values. Jones (2015) delves into the portrayal of female characters navigating social constraints by manipulating objects associated with feminine culture to access public spaces. Similarly, Adams (2012) explores the theme of artificiality in Victorian literature within the context of rapid industrialization and urbanization, emphasising its role in shaping societal norms. In Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, the critique of societal conventions is evident through the experiences of the protagonist, Catherine Morland. Austen utilizes the urban setting of Bath to underscore the artificiality prevalent in high society, as highlighted by Byrne (2004) in her analysis of Austen's satirical portrayal of the city. Through Bath's city space, Austen exposes the artificiality inherent in Catherine's interactions and social circle. Likewise, Gaskell's *North and South* delves into the tensions between social classes and the impact of industrialization on urban dynamics. Wynne (2006) examines Gaskell's depiction of the fictional industrial town of Milton, interpreting it as a metaphor for the social and economic disparities of the time. Gaskell's portrayal of Milton reveals the artificiality of class distinctions, and the alienation experienced by characters like Margaret Hale. Furthermore, the concept of artificiality extends beyond individual behavior to encompass broader societal structures and values. Gallagher (1985) in her work also explored how Victorian novelists, including Gaskell, utilized their works to critique the artificiality of

social hierarchies and advocate for social reform. Through these analyses, it becomes evident that the themes of artificiality, social relations, and urban dynamics are interlinked within Victorian literature. Austen's and Gaskell's works serve as good reflections on the complexities of Victorian society and shedding light on how individuals navigated the challenges posed by rapid societal changes during the Industrial Revolution.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach through a comparative analysis of Austen's and Gaskell's depictions of city space to examine the themes of artificiality, social interaction patterns, and urban dynamics in nineteenth-century Victorian literature by focusing specifically on Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. For data collection, the study uses textual analysis to extract key scenes and descriptions illustrating the influence of Bath and Milton on character behavior and social interactions. Secondary sources, including the works of Jones (2015) and Adams (2012), supplement the analysis by providing context within Victorian literary studies. A comprehensive analysis of primary literary texts, secondary scholarly sources, and critical interpretations will be carried out to examine the themes of artificiality, social relations, and urban dynamics in Victorian literature, with a particular focus on Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Gaskell's *North and South*. Specific passages and scenes within the texts are scrutinized to discern how characters engage in artificial behavior, navigate social constraints, and interact within urban environments. The analysis pays

particular attention to the portrayal of city spaces and their role in shaping social dynamics, as well as the nuances of character interactions that reveal underlying tensions and complexities within Victorian society. This study builds on prior analyses of artificiality, social alienation, and urban influence in Victorian literature, drawing particularly from research that examines how city spaces shape social dynamics. Notably, Jones (2015) explores the portrayal of female characters navigating social expectations within urban spaces, highlighting how social constraints foster artificial behaviors. Adams (2012) addresses artificiality in Victorian literature within the context of industrialization, emphasizing the broader societal impact of rapid urbanization. In a similar vein, Byrne (2004) discusses Austen's satirical depiction of Bath in *Northanger Abbey* as a setting that amplifies societal superficiality. Meanwhile, Wynne (2006) investigates Gaskell's depiction of Milton as a microcosm for class conflict, suggesting that the industrial cityscape itself becomes a catalyst for social alienation and tension.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In *Northanger Abbey*, Bath emerges as a focal point where societal norms and expectations exert significant influence on social behavior (Benis, 2015). The portrayal of Bath as a fashionable city highlights the adherence to rigid conventions that are prevalent among its high society. Characters within this urban landscape are compelled to conform to predetermined roles and appearances to foster a culture of artificiality. As in chapter eight of the novel, there is a conversation among Catherine, Isabella, and James when they are in the ballroom. “. . .what your brother wants

me to do? He wants me to dance with him again, though I tell him it is the most improper thing, and entirely against the rules. It would make us the talk of the place. . .”

"Upon my honor," said James, "in these public assemblies it is as often done as not." (Austen, 2020, p. 21-22). Isabella and James have a competing view about the rules of dances in the pump room. Isabella's statement is dishonest and so artificial. She really hopes she can dance with James Morland again. As a matter of fact, she can do so, but she carefully declines James' offer because she worries about people's perception in Bath. In the other scene, chapter thirteen also depicted the condition in the same way. "*These schemes are not at all the things. Young men and women driving about the country in open carriages! Now and then it is very well; but going to inns and public places together! It is not right.*" (Austen, 2020, p. 30) Mr. Allen's insecure act is portrayed as an explanation to what extend people's anxiety about the other's perception of them. He worries a lot about people's views about Bath's social rules. In Bath, people have their own rules on how to build interaction between men and women. Mr. Allen regards that Catherine's habit which always go out with a man for many times as a shameful act

The pressure to maintain social status and propriety inhibits genuine expressions of identity and fosters superficial interactions. Consequently, individuals navigate the social terrain of Bath with a sense of apprehension, constrained by the need to adhere to societal expectations. Similarly, *North and South* presents Milton as a backdrop characterized by stark socioeconomic divisions and industrialization. The industrial

cityscape of Milton reflects the harsh realities of Victorian urban life, where economic disparities and class distinctions are pronounced. Inhabitants of Milton, particularly the working class, struggle with the challenges of urban existence, including alienation and distance from their acquaintance. As Engels (2009) pointed out in *Condition of the Working Class in England* that the bourgeois does not care about what will happen to his working people. It is all about money and measured all the things only by money. If the working people do not come with money, it will be useless. Thus, the industrial environment fosters a sense of detachment and impersonality, hindering the development of genuine social connections. As a result, individuals in Milton's urban landscape are constrained by the socioeconomic structures that dictate their interactions and shape their behavior.

The portrayal of city spaces in both novels serves as a reflection of broader societal dynamics and concerns prevalent during the Victorian era (Wheeler, 2014). Bath and Milton function as microcosms of the social hierarchies, cultural norms, and economic realities that defined Victorian urban life. Austen's *Northanger Abbey* masterfully portrays Bath as more than just a setting, but it serves as a vivid microcosm reflecting the intricate web of societal expectations prevalent during the Victorian era. Bath, renowned for its social scene and high society, becomes a stage where characters navigate the labyrinth of social hierarchies, cultural norms, and economic aspirations. In Austen's narrative, Bath emerges as a city where conformity to societal norms is not merely a choice but a prerequisite for social acceptance and approval. The

palpable pressure to adhere to established standards pervades every interaction, shaping characters' behaviors and aspirations. This resonates with Mazar's (2008) assertion regarding the internalization of societal norms, wherein individuals strive to emulate prevailing standards to secure their place within the social fabric. Characters navigate the intricacies of high society, where conformity to social norms is paramount for acceptance and approval (Mazar, 2008). The city's emphasis on appearances and status fosters a culture of artificiality, wherein individuals feel compelled to mask their true selves in favor of societal acceptance. This culture of artificiality leads to dishonesty and superficiality and prevents the real connections which make characters feel isolated (Simon, 2019). Moreover, Bath's emphasis on appearances and status fosters a culture of artificiality, where individuals feel compelled to project an image that aligns with societal expectations, even at the expense of authenticity. Austen exposes the facade of artificiality that shrouds the interactions and behaviors of Bath's inhabitants, revealing the inherent tension between societal conformity and personal authenticity. This culture of artificiality not only breeds dishonesty and superficiality but also inhibits the formation of genuine connections among characters. The relentless pursuit of social approval leads to a sense of isolation and alienation, as individuals grapple with the dissonance between their true selves and the personas they present to society. Simon's (2019) observation regarding the detrimental effects of artificiality on interpersonal relationships finds resonance in Austen's portrayal of Bath, where genuine connections are stifled by the pressure to maintain appearances. Conversely, *North and South*

investigate the complexities of urban life within the industrial city of Milton. The portrayal of Milton as a hub of industrial activity highlights the stark socioeconomic disparities and class divisions inherent within Victorian society. Characters within Milton struggle with the harsh realities of urban existence, navigating the challenges posed by industrialization and economic exploitation. The city's industrial landscape even exacerbates the feelings of alienation and distance among its inhabitants. Consequently, individuals within Milton are constrained by the socioeconomic structures that govern their interactions.

In the examination of Catherine's experience in the city of Bath as portrayed in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a pertinent theme emerges regarding the social pressures and expectations imposed upon individuals as they navigate new environments. This analysis delves into the notion that individuals, in their quest for acceptance and assimilation into social communities, often undergo significant adjustments in behavior and appearance. However, such endeavors can lead to a sense of alienation and disillusionment, particularly when confronted with artificiality and pretense prevalent in certain social circles. Austen masterfully illustrates Catherine's journey from a rural setting to the sophisticated milieu of Bath, highlighting her attempts to conform to the standards of the high-class society prevalent in the city. Catherine's initial enthusiasm to adapt manifests in her meticulous attention to grooming and attire, indicative of her desire to be accepted within her new social sphere. However, as Catherine becomes increasingly immersed in the social intricacies of Bath, she begins to discern the facade of artificiality that shrouds

the interactions and behaviors of its inhabitants. The characterization of Catherine as a naive and inexperienced protagonist serves as a lens through which Austen critiques the societal norms and expectations prevalent in urban centers like Bath. Through Catherine's interactions with various characters and her observations of their behaviors, Austen exposes the superficiality and hypocrisy that underline the social fabric of Bath. Catherine as a protagonist in the novel portrayed as an inexperienced girl and incapable of reading people's motives in the artificial environment around her. She is a girl who migrates from a small town in Fullerton to the sophisticated city of Bath. So, she does not have any awareness about people's motive in that new place. When Catherine moved to Bath for the first time, she met many new people with many characteristics and different backgrounds, and she also met some hypocritical people around. As the City of Bath always associated with the high-class community, Catherine tries to act like a high-class woman as well and adjust with the situation of Bath. It is in chapter two of *Northanger Abbey* that Catherine for the first time attends the upper room with Mrs. Allen and she has her first experience as a part of Bath's high-class society. She tries to adjust to the fancy situation of society in Bath to be accepted by people. Austen initially defines the adjustment of Catherine towards the city of Bath through her attitude. "*Catherine too made some purchases herself, and when all these matters were arranged, the important evening came which was to usher her into the Upper rooms. Her hair was cut and dressed by the best hand; her clothes put on with care.*" (Austen, 2020, p. 13). On her first time socializing in Bath, Catherine tries hard

to change her appearance better when the first time she migrates in order to adjust to the high-class situation in that city. She pays more attention to the way she dresses and how she cuts her hair. But then, later she feels disappointed with the people in Bath. The atmosphere in the city is full of artificiality. People seem to be different from their real personality because the city of Bath seems already set for those who are in a high social status. There seems to be a sort of course for people on how they are supposed to interact with other people while in Bath. It is in chapter ten where there is a scene when Henry Tilney satirizes this condition at the beginning of chapter ten when he responses to Catherine's agreement about Bath. "*Take care, or you will forget to be tired of it at the proper time.*" (Austen, 2020, p. 62) Through Henry's mockery of Bath's social interaction, Austen depicted the city as a space which allows artificiality among citizens who dwell within the city. People were being forced pretending to act as a nobleman so other people will like them.

This is exemplified in Henry Tilney's satirical remarks, wherein he humorously alludes to the performative nature of social interactions in the city. The concept of individuals striving to conform to societal norms and expectations, particularly in the pursuit of wealth and social status, is examined by both Mazar and Henrich. Mazar emphasizes the role of socialization in shaping behavior and attitudes, noting that individuals internalize societal norms to gain social acceptance. Similarly, Henrich argues that people imitate the behaviors and practices of their peers to achieve equal standing or superiority within their social group. In the context of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine's efforts to adapt to the

societal norms of Bath reflect this broader phenomenon as described by Mazar and Henrich.

Her actions underscore the pervasive influence of socialization in shaping individuals' behaviors and aspirations, as well as the inherent pressures to conform to prevailing standards of wealth and status. However, Catherine's disillusionment with the artificiality and pretense of Bath's social elite highlights the potential consequences of such conformity, namely, the alienation and estrangement experienced by individuals who find themselves at odds with their authentic selves.

4.1 Influence of City Space on Characters' Behavior

The depiction of city spaces provides a profound influence on the behaviour of characters in both *Northanger Abbey* and *North and South* which ultimately leading to the emergence of dishonesty and lack of knowledge within Victorian society. In *Northanger Abbey*, characters such as Catherine Morland struggle with the expectations and conventions imposed by Bath's high society (Fleishman, 1974). The city's emphasis on appearances and social status compels individuals to adopt artificial personas to fit in and gain acceptance. Catherine, initially portrayed as naive and inexperienced, finds herself navigating the complexities of Bath's social hierarchy by conforming to societal expectations. However, in doing so, she is forced to suppress her true self and lead her to misunderstandings and superficial interactions. The pressure to maintain appearances fosters a culture of insincerity and deceit, where individuals like Catherine are compelled to engage in dishonest behaviour to uphold the facade of social propriety.

Similarly, in *North and South*, characters like Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton are shaped by the harsh realities of the industrial city of Milton. The city's industrial landscape, characterised by economic disparities and class divisions, breeds a culture of mistrust and hostility among its inhabitants. In such an environment, personal integrity often takes a backseat to economic interests and survival. Margaret, portrayed as principled and compassionate, finds herself confronting the ethical dilemmas posed by Milton's industrialisation. Her interactions with characters like Mr. Thornton are fraught with tension and misunderstanding, as the city's socioeconomic dynamics foster an environment where honesty and transparency are compromised in favour of self-preservation. In *North and South*, Gaskell depicted the social interaction of people shaped by city space through the description of social daily life. She manifests the daily life of society in the city of Milton to represent the conditions faced by the working people to portray the changing society. Milton in the Northern part of England is illustrated as an industrial city with very poor conditions. “*But the October morning of Milton, whose silver mists were heavy fogs, and where the sun could only show long dusky streets when he did break through and shine*” (Austen, 2020, p. 247).

“*You can't think the smoky air of a manufacturing town, all chimneys and dirt like Milton-Northern, would be better than this air, which is pure and sweet, if it is too soft and relaxing. . .*” (Austen, 2020, p. 46). In the novel, the situation of Milton is characterized by heavy fog and dusky streets. The air was filled by the heavy smoke from the chimneys of the factories and people almost never seen the bright sun due to

those heavy fogs. Workers in the North suffer from poverty because many owners of the factory always put profit above the health and safety of their workers in the mill. As Engels pointed out in *Condition of the Working Class in England* that the bourgeois does not care about what will happen to his working people. It is all about money and measured all the things only by money. If the working people do not come with money, it will be useless.

There will be no social interaction except purely doing by economic motives. The condition in the North is described as literally deadly to the people who are stuck in it. This kind of condition seems deliberately set up by the bourgeois to segregate the different levels of social class in the city which enable the upper class to ignore the lower class's existence. As a result, this kind of discrepancy allows people to behave differently towards others because this circumstance made people possible to do so. It is in chapter eight of the story when she first encounters Milton, Margaret feels scared and disoriented by the condition of the city as well as scared by its inhabitants. She regards the city as a set of unfamiliar social relationships among the people. “. . . *The tones of their unrestrained voices, and their carelessness of all common rules of street politeness, frightened Margaret a little at first.*” (Austen, 2020, p. 71) and “. . . *loud spoken and boisterous though they might be. But she alternately dreaded and fired up against the workmen, who commented not on her dress, but on her looks, in the same open fearless manner. . .*” (Austen, 2020, p. 72). The way the Northern factory behaves can be categorized as lack of knowledge, because they behave in a barbaric way towards strangers. They do not have any respect towards other people because

they think that Margaret Hale is only a girl which probably just the same as other people who come from the middle or upper class.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the portrayal of Bath as a fashionable and socially stratified city highlights the pervasive influence of societal expectations on individual behaviour. Characters like Catherine Morland are compelled to navigate the intricacies of high society, where conformity to social norms is paramount for acceptance and approval. The city's emphasis on appearances fosters a culture of artificiality, wherein individuals feel compelled to conceal their true selves to fit in. This pressure to conform leads to the emergence of dishonest behaviour and superficial interactions as characters like Catherine struggle with the tension between societal expectations and personal integrity (Simmel, 2003). Similarly, in *North and South*, the depiction of Milton as an industrial city underscores the harsh realities of urban life during the Victorian era. The city's landscape, how the fast-paced, densely populated, including socioeconomic and culturally diverse setting of the city shapes the behaviour and psychological development of characters like Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton (Choi, 2006). In Milton, the pursuit of economic interests often overrides considerations of personal integrity, leading to a culture of mistrust and hostility among its inhabitants. As characters navigate the complexities of industrialisation, they are confronted with ethical dilemmas and moral compromises.

4.2 Reflection of Victorian Society

The portrayal of city spaces in both *Northanger Abbey* and *North and South* serves as a reflection of broader themes and concerns within Victorian society. The rigid social hierarchies and cultural

norms depicted in Bath and Milton mirror the societal divisions and tensions prevalent during the Victorian era, particularly amidst the backdrop of industrialization and urbanization. In *Northanger Abbey*, Bath emerges as a symbol of societal stratification and the pursuit of social status. The city's high society is characterized by rigid class distinctions and strict cultural norms, where individuals must conform to predetermined roles and appearances to gain acceptance. This portrayal reflects the hierarchical structure of Victorian society, where one's social standing often dictated one's opportunities and interactions (Austen, 2008). The emphasis on artificiality within Bath highlights the challenges faced by individuals in maintaining authenticity and integrity amidst societal pressures to conform. Meanwhile, in *the North and South*, the industrial city of Milton serves as a microcosm of the socioeconomic disparities and class tensions of Victorian England. The city's industrial landscape is marked by stark divisions between the working class and the industrial bourgeoisie, reflecting the broader societal shifts brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Within this context, characters like Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton navigate the complexities of urban life and grapple with the moral dilemmas posed by industrialization and economic exploitation. The emergence of dishonesty and lack of knowledge within Milton's city spaces reflects the social upheaval and moral ambiguity of the Victorian era where individuals were often forced to compromise their principles in the pursuit of survival and success.

4.3 Role of Honesty in Social Interaction

In examining the themes of artificiality and lack of knowledge within the city spaces of *Northanger Abbey* and *North and South*, it becomes evident that honesty plays a pivotal role in shaping social interaction and character development. Despite the prevalence of societal pressures and cultural norms dictating conformity, both novels underscore the enduring importance of honesty in fostering genuine human connections and meaningful relationships. Within the confines of Bath's high society in *Northanger Abbey*, characters like Catherine Morland navigate a world rife with artificiality and superficiality. The city's emphasis on appearances and social status compels individuals to adopt false personas and conform to societal expectations, leading to a culture of insincerity and deceit. However, during all this pretense, Catherine stands out as a symbol of truthfulness and genuineness. Despite her initial naivety and eagerness to fit in, Catherine remains true to herself and refuses to compromise her principles for the sake of social acceptance. Her journey towards self-discovery and moral enlightenment serves as a powerful testament to the enduring significance of honesty in navigating the complexities of societal expectations and forging genuine human connections. In the same way, in the industrial city of Milton depicted in *North and South*, characters like Margaret Hale and Mr. Thornton confront the harsh realities of class divisions and economic exploitation (Gaskell, 1996). The city's tumultuous social landscape breeds distrust and hostility among its inhabitants which lead to an environment where honesty often takes a backseat to self-interest

and survival. However, in the middle of the moral ambiguity and social upheaval, both Margaret and Mr. Thornton exemplify the importance of integrity and honesty in their interactions with others. Despite their differing backgrounds and ideological perspectives, both characters demonstrate a commitment to truthfulness and ethical conduct, even in the face of adversity. Through the journey of characters like Catherine Morland and Margaret Hale, readers are reminded of the enduring value of authenticity and integrity in navigating the complexities of social dynamics and upholding moral principles in the face of societal pressures.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the urban settings in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* serve as compelling reflections of the complexities and constraints of Victorian society, vividly illustrating themes of artificiality and social alienation through their respective city spaces. Bath, as portrayed by Austen, symbolizes the superficiality, rigid class hierarchies, and restrictive norms of high society, pressuring characters like Catherine Morland to conform to the social expectations of status and appearance, often at the expense of personal authenticity. Austen critiques these societal pressures by revealing how Bath's fashionable, yet insincere environment fosters superficial relationships, leaving individuals in a cycle of artificiality and disconnection. In contrast, Gaskell's depiction of the industrial city of Milton in *North and South* captures the harsh realities of class division, economic struggle, and moral conflict that arose from rapid industrialization. Through characters

like Margaret Hale and John Thornton, Gaskell highlights the effects of industrialization on social dynamics and personal values, illustrating how economic hardship and class disparity contribute to social alienation and individual moral dilemmas.

This study finds that both authors use city spaces not merely as settings but as active forces that shape characters' behaviors and identities, offering broader critiques on the social conditions of their time. Limitations encountered in this research included restricted access to some rare secondary sources, which limited the depth of exploration into lesser-known perspectives in Victorian studies, as well as the inherently interpretive nature of literary analysis, which leaves room for subjective interpretations that may differ across theoretical frameworks. Future researchers are encouraged to build upon this comparative approach by examining additional Victorian authors, such as Charles Dickens or George Eliot, to explore how diverse urban settings affect character development and societal commentary across different literary voices. Furthermore, incorporating newer methodologies, such as digital humanities or spatial analysis, could yield fresh insights into how urban environments influence literary representation, allowing for broader, data-driven analyses that reveal new dimensions of social critique within Victorian literature. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the enduring relevance of authenticity in navigating societal pressures, suggesting that Victorian literature continues to offer valuable reflections on the complexities of modern urban life. By highlighting how Victorian authors used urban spaces to criticize social norms, this study underscores literature's role in

fostering awareness and understanding of societal issues, making the reflections found within *Northanger Abbey* and *North and South* both historically significant and continually resonant for contemporary readers.

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