

Candidate 2 evidence

A comparative literary study examining the portrayal of social class conflict, the miscommunication this brings and how this is overcome in Elizabeth Gaskell's '*North and South*' and Jane Austen's '*Pride and Prejudice*'.

"*Pride causes disunity among different classes*"¹ writes Michael Eneyo in his book '*Philosophy of Unity: Love as an Ultimate Unifier*'. These words are applicable to the respective novels of Jane Austen and Elizabeth Gaskell, '*Pride and Prejudice*' and '*North and South*'. Heroines Elizabeth Bennet and Margaret Hale display prejudice against certain classes and their corresponding lifestyles, creating class antagonism. Both Elizabeth and Margaret are sympathetic characters due to their propensity to judge others too quickly based on appearance and their inability to recognise their own moral blindness- the clarity of the latter being dependent on rectifying the former. Social class conflict is a central motif in both texts and the heroines have similar experiences in overcoming it. Elizabeth and Margaret of the middle-class must reassess their prejudices of their wealthy social superiors, Darcy and Thornton, by re-evaluating their opinions of them and wonder if they judged them too quickly and harshly on the appearance of class. In order to explore the portrayal of social class conflict and the miscommunication this brings, Austen and Gaskell use characterisation, irony and narrative voice to create misunderstanding as their heroines, as well as their readers, must assess if they lacked moral scrupulosity to judge Darcy and Thornton without effective insight.

In '*Pride and Prejudice*', the reader firstly becomes acutely aware of class conflict when we are introduced to Elizabeth Bennet; she is a lively, spirited girl and her view of the world is so compelling, filtered through Austen's narrative voice that first-time readers are likely to blindly follow her misconceptions about the characters in the story, notably Wickham and Darcy. Elizabeth prides herself on her "*discernment*"² and her ability to analyse others, but she is often mistaken in her conclusions about their motivations. The reader learns that her future is

¹Eneyo M, *Philosophy of Unity: Love as an Ultimate Unifier*, Xlibris AU, 2019, pg 96

² Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 177

economically uncertain; her father's estate is bequeathed to the next male heir and the family's lack of connections diminish their prospects, ensuring one of the five daughters will have to marry well to raise their fortunes. Darcy, who could offer Elizabeth and her family significant financial security, repels her, because she does not place importance on affluence when it comes to matrimony, even if accepting Darcy could accelerate her social standing and alleviate her family's financial concerns. However, Elizabeth's repulsion of Darcy is based on something less materialistic, since she knows the value of marrying well; she despises him at first encounter, labelling him as "*the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world*"³. His prideful manner and social ineptitude she mistakes for rudeness, and this dislike only heightens when he snubs her, deeming her "*not handsome enough to tempt me*"⁴. Elizabeth's judgement of Darcy is based wholly on a bad first impression, and this prejudice hardens into a firm dislike that causes her to create a preconceived notion of his character which she will later admonish herself for. Like Margaret, she will have to learn a valuable lesson in the virtue of humility, and to refrain from judging others too quickly based on the superficial disparity appearance of class brings.

In '*North and South*', the reader is first introduced to Gaskell's protagonist Margaret Hale as plans commence for her return to her parents' country parsonage in the small Southern village of Helstone after spending the last ten years with the Shaws. Margaret's upbringing has affected her perception of social class; she remarks that "*I don't like shabby people,*"⁵ and prefers people "*without pretence*"⁶. Living in London has left Margaret with an innate sense of superiority over her position- she only has respect for specific professions and their corresponding lifestyles. Immediately, we know that Margaret will face off against Thornton, who retains a scholarly thirst for education despite his status as

³ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 12

⁴ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 13

⁵ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 18

⁶ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 18

manufacturer, and her prejudices- believing that all tradesmen are dense and ignorant- will be challenged. Similarly, Margaret will be challenged when the snobbery that she exhibits as a Southerner with her delicate sensibilities and educated background will have to conquer when she is subjected to class injustice in the North; she will have to associate with those she thinks below her. Margaret also displays a similar disregard for marriage as Elizabeth; she rejects Henry's proposal; despite the financial security he could offer her. Both Margaret and Elizabeth favour love and affection in matrimony, as opposed to financial advantage or social advancement; however, whilst Elizabeth regards marriage as an unsurmountable obstacle due to her circumstances, Margaret's rejection of Henry signifies there is a displacement about her. Even though she displays prideful qualities that serve as a reflection of her upbringing, she feels at home in the uncivilised Helstone where she came "*untamed from the forest*"⁷. Despite these prideful qualities, Margaret's childhood spent in Helstone also characterises her as anti-snobbish too; her family come from humble circumstances, like Elizabeth's. Margaret will have to harness these qualities if she wishes to plead on behalf of the injustice she faces in Milton.

Following several encounters with Elizabeth, Darcy wrestles with his attraction towards her and his contempt towards her social inferiority; however, Elizabeth's dislike of Darcy heightens to disdain. They are derisive towards each other: "*and your defect is a propensity to hate everyone*"⁸ and "*and yours, is wilfully to misunderstand them*"⁹. Their astute assessment of each other's character is contrasted in their inability to diagnose their own capacity for judging each other based on the appearance of class; Darcy is revolted by Elizabeth's lack of connections, and Elizabeth feels is supercilious about his elevated class position among the "*savages*"¹⁰ of Hertfordshire. Wickham, adept in the mastery of first

⁷ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 5

⁸ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 52

⁹ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 52

¹⁰ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 24

impressions, serves as the foil to Elizabeth's belief that she can read people well, discern when they are lying and uncover the truth of things. Mesmerised by Wickham's pleasing external qualities, Elizabeth is predisposed to believe the injustice perpetrated against him by Darcy; this story fits perfectly with her already existing prejudices of Darcy's character. Wickham and Elizabeth are of similar social standing; their intimacy is founded on their mutual disregard of Darcy, their social superior. Various sources claim the same outcome refuting Wickham's tale- that Darcy is the innocent party- but Elizabeth accuses Bingley of misjudging Wickham on the account that "*he is unacquainted with several parts of the story...*"¹¹ and fails to recognise that she is no better. Austen's shifting, ironic narrative voice, favouring Elizabeth's perspective and making us think that her view of others is unbiased and unprejudiced allows us to ascertain, on a second reading, that we, like Elizabeth, were too easily led astray by Wickham's appearance of congeniality. Every effort is made by Wickham to taint Darcy's character and reputation, making him appear oppressed¹². Along with being painted as a malicious oppressor, Darcy appears conceited; he is disgusted by the "*total want of propriety*"¹³ the Bennets convey. Darcy despises mingling with the socially disadvantaged company he finds in Hertfordshire; if he was not so appalled by Elizabeth's family and her deplorable connections, he might allow himself to fall in love with her. Darcy's contumelious albeit justified comments towards the Bennet family only serve to inflame Elizabeth's prejudices against him¹⁴.

Margaret and her family are uprooted from their circumstances upon their move; Margaret continues to regard the manufacturing class with spite, prejudiced against "*the North of England, the manufacturers, the people, the wild and bleak*

¹¹ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 84

¹² Gray M and L, 'Pride and Prejudice' *York Notes Advanced*, York Press, 2004, pg 29

¹³ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 169

¹⁴ Zimmerman E (1968), 'Pride and Prejudice in *Pride and Prejudice*', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 23(1), pp. 70-71, doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2932317>

country”¹⁵. Even though her social standing is compromised upon her father’s occupation change- she bemoans the loss of their social status - Margaret continues to possess an air of her own self-importance. Having been raised as a clergyman’s daughter, aware of her own respectability, she tends to view others of an unfamiliar social group in disparaging generalisations¹⁶. Margaret is scornfully dismissive of the “*factory people*”¹⁷ she will have to associate with; Gaskell elucidates Margaret’s inherent prejudice of the working and manufacturing class, believing herself so haughty that she cannot expect herself to have personal contact with them. Upon Margaret and Thornton’s first meeting, the reader becomes acutely aware of the difference in class of them both; to Thornton, Margaret seems to be an educated, cultured misfit in such a destitute environment, but Margaret cannot categorise him, as he is “*not quite a gentleman*”¹⁸ largely due to his rank and background¹⁹. Thornton also misinterprets her proud demeanour as “*superciliousness*”²⁰. This incident is pivotal; Gaskell contrasts their assumptions about each other, solely based on their appearance of status and rank. Thornton is initially prejudiced against the Hales because of their status, but unlike Darcy who disdains Elizabeth’s middle-class background and disregards her at first encounter, Thornton is only affronted that this educated Southerner may look down on him. Whilst Thornton’s assumptions are based on his own self-consciousness, Margaret’s assumptions are based on her own self-importance. Margaret’s appearance of pretension is contrasted with her genuine concern, unaffected by snobbery, for the Higgins family. Margaret is intrinsically

¹⁵ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 42

¹⁶ Anderson K and Satalino K (2013), “An honest up and down fight’: Confrontation and Social Change in ‘North and South’”, *The Gaskell Journal*, 27, pg 27. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45179639> (Accessed: 11 February 2024).

¹⁷ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 50

¹⁸ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 73

¹⁹ Melikian A, *Elizabeth Gaskell ‘North and South’ York Notes*, York Press, 1980, pg 83

²⁰ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 71

compassionate; she thrives upon finding a “*human interest*”²¹ in her solicitude for Bessy, of whose friendship will soften Margaret’s prejudices. The purpose Margaret finds in this human attachment begins to cohere her role as mediating figure between warring employers and employees.

Elizabeth ignores the caveats of Wickham’s misconduct because there is “*truth in his looks*”²². Elizabeth’s naiveté, unable to see Wickham as the corrupt, directionless opportunist he is, suggests her pride about her ability to read others well is too easily influenced by personal feeling (especially surrounding class). Elizabeth’s preconceptions about Wickham and Darcy differ; immediately, Elizabeth is attracted to Wickham’s lively, amiable demeanour and repulsed by Darcy’s pretentiousness. Very little evidence of Wickham’s misdeeds, despite their authenticity, can sway her prejudices of him. Meanwhile, Darcy illustrates his prejudice against Elizabeth’s family by preventing Bingley from entering a “*most imprudent marriage*”²³. Darcy objects to the Bennets’ tastelessness, but also misinterprets Jane’s reserved demeanour for Bingley’s affections being unrequited “*without any symptom of peculiar regard*”²⁴. Darcy, unbeknownst to himself, admits his prejudice against Jane; from viewing her countenance from afar, Darcy’s feelings are based on no material evidence and rather the flimsy speculation of his own assumptions. Darcy’s haughtiness, and his superior status clashes against Jane’s humility, as well as her inferior status, and so interacting with Jane to learn of her true feelings would have been inconceivable to him. Darcy’s contemptuousness blinds him to the truth that his interference was untoward; his interference heightens Bingley and Jane’s pain and incenses Elizabeth’s disdain. Darcy brandishes his prejudices in his thoroughly offensive proposal to Elizabeth, demeaning the “*inferiority of her connections*”²⁵ whilst

²¹ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 84

²² Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 74

²³ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 159

²⁴ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 169

²⁵ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 166

revealing his love that he found “*impossible to conquer*”²⁶. Darcy’s prideful demeanour, content in his position, wealth and circumstances has blinded him to the truth of Elizabeth’s character- she is unimpressed by his “*arrogance*”²⁷. Elizabeth too is challenged by the revelation of Wickham’s true character; at first, she has a “*strong prejudice against everything he might say*”²⁸, but her appraisal of Darcy’s letter and the truth of its material forces her to revise her attitudes and understanding; up until this point, she had been misapprehending the situation²⁹. Elizabeth realises she has been “*blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd*”³⁰ and the reader must share in her process of re-enlightenment to assess if we have lacked moral scrupulosity and looked past Wickham’s inconsistencies, judging him based on his appearance. Realising her judgement is erroneous, Elizabeth rebuilds her character, loosening her prejudices of Darcy and spends more time investing in maturation of private judgement. Likewise, Elizabeth’s animosity towards Darcy serves to revitalise him, to challenge his own behaviour and to reconsider his former conceptions about her and his social inferiors.

Thornton and Margaret’s respective views about the world differ as their motives and values clash, contrasting their backgrounds. Thornton is contemptuous of the South’s “*slow days of careless ease*”³¹ and describes the economy as an automatic, unstoppable force where progress and industry are vital. He clashes with Margaret, who possesses her own sweeping judgement of his ‘territory’; as they interact, they lack the mutual understanding to communicate in an inoffensive way. Thornton thinks she is a “*proud, disagreeable girl*”³²; Margaret evaluates Thornton’s standards as merciless and that he measures everything by the standard

²⁶ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 163

²⁷ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 166

²⁸ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 173

²⁹ Gray M and L, ‘Pride and Prejudice’ *York Notes Advanced*, York Press, 2004, pg 50

³⁰ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 177

³¹ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 93

³² Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 99

of wealth, judging others because they lack his own character and capabilities, calling them his “*enemies*”³³. Margaret, like Elizabeth to Darcy, manages to diagnose Thornton’s blind spot (that as one who has made his fortune through resilience, his self-sufficiency undermines the mutually dependent nature of human interactions³⁴). At mention of an imminent strike, Thornton and Margaret clash again. Margaret, persistent that God created men “*mutually dependent*”³⁵, seems to proclaim an urgent appeal for compassion and mercy between workers and masters; interestingly, her attitude is inconsistent with her own narrow-mindedness, and filtered, cynical view of Thornton and his views on despotism. This appeal is due to her relationship with Bessy Higgins, who softens her haughtiness. Thornton is prejudiced against the “*pack of ungrateful hounds*”³⁶ which are the striking millworkers. He is antipathetic; convinced that his way of dealing with things is justifiable, Thornton belittles his workers, antagonising them as well as Margaret. Margaret’s relationship with the Higginses is a crucial plot device; through this breaking down of social barriers, Margaret encourages Thornton to realise that personal relationships are the only bridge across the class divide. This divide becomes increasingly more apparent as the novel progresses; it reaches its climax during the confrontation at Thornton’s mill. Margaret’s implores Thornton to “*speak to your workmen as if they were human beings*”³⁷; Margaret’s slow growth and alteration of character allows her to perceive that a humanising approach is the only way to pacify the impasse. Margaret is solidifying her role as mediating figure as she defends the workers’ plight to their masters.

Elizabeth’s opinion of Wickham is revised; her address and manners are more impassive as she realises she no longer desires his good opinion. In contrast, she

³³ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 97

³⁴ Anderson K and Satalino K (2013), ‘An honest up and down fight: Confrontation and Social Change in North and South’, *The Gaskell Journal*, 27, pg 111. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45179639> (Accessed: 11 February 2024).

³⁵ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 143

³⁶ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 135

³⁷ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 209

finds Darcy's "*disposition was better understood.*"³⁸ Misunderstanding is averted and also eradicated when Darcy and Elizabeth take the time to communicate with each other. Elizabeth now respects Darcy due to his honourable character, choosing to obscure Wickham's transgressions to protect Georgiana's reputation. At Pemberley, Darcy is presented as an ideal upper-class gentleman, balancing power and compassion, community involvement and dedication to family. His employees have "*never had a cross word*"³⁹ from him in their lives. This persona is flatly opposite to Elizabeth's former convictions about him. However, the reader cannot chastise Elizabeth about her misapprehensions or judge them too harshly; this side of Darcy's character does not align with the artifice he shows in Hertfordshire. In the comfort and ease of the resplendence of his estate, his natural surroundings, Darcy lacks his characteristic pride. Pemberley forces Elizabeth to reimagine who Darcy is. She must reassess her perception of Darcy's character, and this modification is externalised in a gracious affability to her and the Gardiners. Darcy is unaffected by- and seemingly ignorant of- the Gardiners' middle-class prospects. The Hertfordshire Darcy would have scorned such an alliance; the Pemberley Darcy receives his social inferiors with deference. The Gardiners, whose perception of Darcy was inveigled by Elizabeth's negative opinion of him, leave having revised their understanding of him. Elizabeth's prejudices and her "*unjust accusations*"⁴⁰, based on the appearance of class, manipulated her relatives' opinions and created substantial misunderstanding. Georgiana, who exhibits a reserve that Elizabeth realises could easily be misinterpreted for pride, helps Elizabeth acknowledge she had overlooked a significant aspect of Darcy's character due to his appearance of pride; without bothering to interact with him, she condemned and misjudged him. Likewise, Wickham's opinion of Georgiana manipulated hers before they were even acquainted. Moreover, Darcy's attitude towards Elizabeth's relatives seems to have shifted from derision to goodwill; he

³⁸ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 200

³⁹ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 208

⁴⁰ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 222

chooses to engage with the Gardiners hospitably, rather than merely tolerating them. Darcy's generosity elucidates that he is trying to make amends for how insufferably he insulted Elizabeth's connections; his prejudice against her relatives, because of their class position, blinded him to the nature of the Gardiners' amiability and prudence. In this, Darcy makes a valuable assessment about the world- that being of a higher class and status does not equate to a higher superiority.

Notwithstanding Margaret's rejection of his proposal, Thornton's persistent compassion and charity towards her and her family shows the influence she has on shaping his view of the world. Convinced that his workers require attention instead of hostile ignorance, Thornton urges his workers to "*kill me, if it is your brutal will*"⁴¹. Margaret's assertiveness allows Thornton to realise that he should respect his workers enough to face them himself, rather than hiding behind an intermediary. Aware of the physical threat the striking millworkers pose, literally and figuratively as a strong, cohesive force, Thornton acknowledges his workers as autonomous individuals capable of harming him. It is Margaret, who sees the intrinsic value of the workers as humans, who urges Thornton to do likewise; the social classes are shifting, and boundaries are slowly being broken down. Thornton's cooperation with Higgins is also significant; even though Margaret has spurned him, he still respects her enough to heed her advice. Their conversations, slowly loosening the ties of misunderstanding, have borne fruit, and caused Thornton to change policy. Thornton reforms not only as an individual but as a businessman and master; his interactions with Higgins causes both to reassess their prejudices about the other. Thornton admires "*the patience*"⁴² of Higgins as he cares for Boucher's children; for the first time, Thornton perceives Higgins' compassionate streak, a trait he overlooked due to his rebellion. Thornton realises he can no longer treat his workers in such an impersonal manner; he learns to extend mercy to those he has ill-treated and use his new humanitarian feeling for

⁴¹ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 213

⁴² Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 387

social good. This shift in Thornton's character provokes a shift in Margaret's perspective and her opinions about him begin to modify. Like Elizabeth and Darcy, who acknowledge their flaws openly, Margaret and Thornton must learn to overcome their prejudices, based on their disparity of class, to truly understand each other.

Lydia's transgressions leave Elizabeth feeling remorseful for how foolishly she accepted Wickham's fabrications based on his appearance of geniality, as well as his class. Darcy seeks to secure Lydia and Wickham's marriage, saving Elizabeth's family from significant disgrace. Darcy fought hard to protect the reputations of the family he once scorned. This earns him her love and affection in fulfilment but Elizabeth's reflections about her feelings for him are placed in ironic counterpoint with the knowledge that Lydia's transgressions have "*polluted*"⁴³ her and now made it impossible for him to return her feelings⁴⁴. Unbeknownst to Elizabeth, Lydia's infamy does not rebuff Darcy. Despite the Bennets' insolence, he "*respects them*"⁴⁵. This accepting, considerate Darcy is a far cry from the Darcy at the beginning of the novel. At the end of the novel, Darcy and Elizabeth climactically and emotionally admit their flaws and how profoundly their opinion of each other has changed. The necessity for explanation, confession and apology is fulfilled; Elizabeth acknowledges she misjudged Darcy and overinflated her discerning abilities. Likewise, Darcy is ashamed of his contempt towards Elizabeth's inferiority of class. Like Margaret, Elizabeth's growth and dimension of character is elucidated as she bridges the divide between Darcy and her family. Elizabeth had to overcome her own prejudices to help her family overcome theirs. Ironically, Austen suggests that consciousness about class and plans revolving around selfish ambition in the novel only backfire. Lady Catherine and Caroline Bingley, who place emphasis on both, disapprove of Darcy and Elizabeth's union, which only

⁴³ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 299

⁴⁴ Gray M and L, 'Pride and Prejudice' *York Notes Advanced*, York Press, 2004, pg 67

⁴⁵ Austen J, *Pride and Prejudice*, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993, pg 306

makes it seem like a true confluence of equals- intellectually instead of socially-based on respect, love and commitment.

Margaret, her view of Thornton reformed due to his persistent compassion, his desire to help Higgins and his avoidance of “ruining many for my own paltry aggrandisement”⁴⁶, defends him against Frederick’s “shopman”⁴⁷ allegations, because this derogatory stereotype does not befit the manufacturer whose “respect and good opinion”⁴⁸ she values. Like Elizabeth to Darcy, Margaret is able to recognise that she once shared this disparaging opinion of her love interest, and swayed others’ opinions about him. She is rueful; this tolerant and open-minded version of Margaret, capable of diagnosing her faults and misjudgements in a mature and reasonable way, is a far cry from who she was at the beginning of the novel. However, misunderstanding continues cloaks their relationship; Margaret believes Thornton considers her a liar by falsifying her connection to Frederick and subsequently Leonards’ death. To him, she is indiscreet and wanton, but there is a lack of enlightenment between them and so again, he misunderstands the situation. However, following several encounters where communication and interaction is underlined, and misunderstanding straightened out, Thornton and Margaret restore their relationship. Their new relationship, full of enlightenment and mutual understanding, is more receptive and forbearing. Thornton no longer solely dependent on abstract economic theory, makes room for ventures based on personal attachment beyond the “cash nexus”⁴⁹. Thornton’s shift in outlook is symbolised when he presents Margaret with a dried rose. The rose symbolises Thornton’s newfound ability to see Margaret, as well as the millworkers, as more than mere stereotypes⁵⁰. At first, Thornton objectified Margaret and flaunted his

⁴⁶Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 506

⁴⁷ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 305

⁴⁸ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 337

⁴⁹ Gaskell E, *North and South*, Penguin Group Publishers, 1994, pg 515

⁵⁰ Kanwit JP, “Mere Outward Appearances”? Household Taste and Social Perception in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*, *Victorian Review*, 23(1), 2009, pg 191. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27793711> (Accessed: 22 March 2024)

prejudice of her based on her appearance of class and circumstances, but Thornton comes to appreciate her compassionate and complex care for the workers as she shows him the value of communication and interaction between individuals regardless of distinction.

In conclusion, both '*Pride and Prejudice*' and '*North and South*' follow characters who need to undergo a shift in perspective in order to bridge the social class divide, a barrier strengthened by misunderstanding. At the beginning of both novels, the heroines' judgemental attitudes, condemning Darcy and Thornton's treatment of others, ensures they fail to recognise the hypocrisy of their own actions. For the majority of both novels, until their satisfying ends, misunderstanding cloaks Elizabeth and Margaret's relationships with their love interests. Prejudice and preconceptions surrounding class and contrasting backgrounds create an impenetrable barrier. It is only when this barrier is broken down through communication, as Elizabeth and Margaret learn, that the reconciling power of human interaction can unite a world divided by class disparity and snobbery. Readers of Austen and Gaskell are taken on an emotional journey of self-enlightenment, as we assess if we have been swayed by the appearance of class like Elizabeth and Margaret have. By realising this, and starting afresh without prejudice, both couples can live in harmony with each other and their class subordinates or superiors, content in the knowledge that they are equals, regardless of class or background.

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