

ABSTRACT

Bergmann, H. 1979. *Between Obedience and Freedom: Woman's Role in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Industrial Novel. Gothenburg Studies in English* 45.170 pp.

The purpose of this study is to explore the roles of women in the industrial novel of the early Victorian era. The major aim is to show the significance of female characters in relation to the recognizable social and political themes of the works. The novels dealt with are: Frances Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, Charlotte Elizabeth, *Helen Fleetwood*, Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil*, Elizabeth Gaskell *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke*, Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, and furthermore a few of Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* are included.

Female characters are shown to have an essential part in expressing the major ideas of the writers concerning social reform. All works deal with social crisis and unrest. A major theme is the striving for a peaceful reconciliation of the classes to which the female characters contribute greatly through their attitude of non-violence. Philanthropy is a vital concept in the works which is communicated through female figures. The pronounced religious message is also above all expressed by female characters.

The importance of the female characters is established through the study of four major aspects of woman's role within the stories. First of all the image of the working-class woman is discussed. The second section concerns the widespread social involvement of women from the higher strata of society. Thirdly, the beginnings of a modern, independent female figure found in the novels are dealt with. The last major aspect concerns the relationship between men and women and the relevance of romantic issues to the social topic of the works.

While contributing to the social and political themes of the works the function of the female characters is shown also to bear witness to contemporary ideals of womanhood.