

ABSTRACT

ELIZABETH GASKELL AND THE STRUGGLE OVER FREE WILL

My thesis combines ideas concerning the elevated author in Victorian fiction and ideas concerning an ever-changing view of the idea of free will in Victorian fiction. The confusion that comes from a society struggling to understand how to take control over the course of their lives merges with an authorial position that enables the writer to balance out that struggle with the author's own sense of responsibility and power. The author becomes a middleman between God and the world, seeking to fix the wrongs of society while giving unprecedented control over to individuals to lead their lives as they wish. Gaskell, as I will show, uses her authorial power, or control, over her texts to balance the struggle over dependent and independent will in a world in which fewer and fewer responsibilities are attributed to God.

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