

Rewriting the Myth of Female Chastity: A Case Study of E. Gaskell's *Mary Barton*

Myths are employed to enforce on women a man-made sexual identity that perpetuates the double-standard of morality. Built upon this claim, this paper sets forth to examine E. Gaskell's narratives presenting images of re-visited female chastity. Built upon this claim, the current study attempts to examine the representations of female characters as subversive patterns of conventional femininity through the lenses of a new critical perspective. Given the controversial issue of myth and feminism, it is of importance to draw upon the findings of R. Barthes' *Mythologies* in which the term myth is associated with the "illusory" aspect of the text. That is to say, re-reading the myth of female sexual identity from a feminist perspective allows us to unveil the concealed or sham truths about women's subjugation in the narrative under investigation. Due to the oppressive Law of the Father, sexually-deviant characters internalize the masculine discourse of the norms that marginalize them but, they reject redemption. Thus, this paper falls into three main sections: first, we present the genesis of the myth of female sexuality in the Victorian culture. Second, we examine Gaskell's mechanisms of re-writing the myth through the exploration of contemporary theoretical postulations. Third, we show that the fact of rewriting the myth of female sexuality represents an audacious writing strategy to transcend myths towards the establishment of gender-equality.

Key words: myth, angel, chastity, femininity, sexuality, double-standard.