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A Comparative Analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's Shorter Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis analyses four short stories written by Elizabeth Gaskell, one of the most prominent female writers of the 19th century. All the short works analysed were published in serial publications surged in popularity during the Victorian period of the English literature. Gaskell's short story *Lizzie Leigh* was the first short story which she contributed to Dickens' periodical. Afterwards she submitted *Poor Clare*, *The Old Nurses's Story* and *Lois the Witch* which all feature Gothic elements and show the author's tendency towards supernatural and mystery. The position of women in the 19th century is another important trait which is present throughout these short stories, paying special attention to the sexually and spiritually fallen women portrayed by Gaskell. These elements were analysed in respect to Unitarianism which was a major part of Gaskell's fiction and life. All the elements that were compared in this thesis add to the strength of Gaskell's voice on the women's question in the 19th century.

Key words: serialisation, short story, Gothic fiction, fallen women, Unitarianism

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I. Introduction

This thesis deals with four short works of fiction written by Elizabeth Gaskell.

Firstly, I introduce the topic by pointing out some basic traits of the Victorian period. In this chapter, I put the emphasis on female writing, its importance in the Victorian period and the struggles that Victorian female writers dealt with. Respectively, I wrote about the life and biography of Elizabeth Gaskell by placing her in the context of the Victorian period. This part deals with her most prominent works, her influence on other Victorian writers and the relationship between Gaskell and Dickens in terms of serial publications and the emergence of short stories.

After serial publications, I introduce the Gothic genre which is the main point of interest in this analysis of the following works: *Lizzie Leigh*, *Poor Clare*, *The Old Nurse's Story* and *Lois the Witch*. The majority of these works have the elements of Gothic tales with supernatural elements which will be analysed and compared, paying special attention to Gaskell's attitude towards supernatural and pagan traditions. Gaskell does not exclusively use Gothic imagery in her 'Gothic stories', but also in her other works of fiction which proves her tendency toward using such imagery and symbolism.

The issues of women, their relationship to men and how they are perceived in society are all important constituents of the works in question. The themes of fallen women, spiritually or sexually, are portrayed in a manner characteristic for the Victorian period. This theme in her fiction was analysed by referring to Unitarianism and Foucault's gaze.

1.1. Victorian Age – Context

The Victorian Age was marked by the economic and technological advances of the United Kingdom, social changes and the peak of the industrial revolution. During the Victorian era, the United Kingdom made a big step forward in terms of human rights, one of the most important being the right to vote. “The move towards democracy, giving the vote to all men over 21 continued after the First Reform Act of 1832 with another act in 1867 - but the slow process was not completed until women got the vote in 1928” (Carter and McRae, 126).

Queen Victoria reigned for almost seven decades, from 1837 until her death in 1901 and it was a period of numerous changes in Europe and in the World. The earliest phase of changes and growth was partly shadowed by depression and demonstrations of workmen, especially in the 1840s which “mark a period of civil unrest, characterized in the Chartist protests of the working classes, amidst economic depression, bad harvests, and outbursts of cholera” (Davis, 5). National prosperity approximately began at the time of The Great Exhibition in 1851 which demonstrated British wealth and industrial achievements just a few years before Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species* was published in 1859. At that time England was the leading industrial power and the country’s confidence was at its highest point. The third quarter of the century was the period of great social reforming governments and the 1870 Education Act which declared education as a national public service (*ibid*, 6). Still, rapid industrialisation that happened in the 19th century brought along many negative sides such as poverty, alienation and injustice. Moreover, Christian faith was shaken by Darwin’s theory of evolution and natural selection.

On the other hand, this period of reforms, discovery and invention witnessed some changes regarding the position of women. In the 19th century, there were many controversies over women's rights to property ownership, custody of children, divorce and the right to vote.

The Victorian era brought reforms which gave women significantly more rights. The Custody of Infants Act 1839 gave divorced women the right to have custody of their child until the age of seven, the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 removed the Church of England from divorce cases and made it the duty of barristers, and therefore made it an easier process for women. The final act was the Married Women's Property Act 1874 which allowed divorced women to keep their earnings (Shanley, 138).

It is also a period of growth in professional writing when women, alongside men, wrote reviews, books for children, novels and became journalists. Women in the 19th century used writing as the only way for their voices to be heard, to take control of their lives and to change their position in society. Moreover, they made their fiction “the vehicle for a dramatization of wronged womanhood, they demanded changes in the social and political systems that would grant women male privileges and require chastity and fidelity from men” (Showalter, 29). In the mid-century, the boundaries between men and women slowly began to fade; women were gradually gaining more rights, schools for women were opened and more women started writing. They wrote about everyday life, their own position in society, their relationship with men and they became active in political pamphlets. They wanted to change tradition, erase stereotypes with their actions and show that women as artists were not frustrated, disturbed, without talent, but were creative, ingenious and brought a fresh wave of literature and art in general. During the 1840s the job of a novelist was becoming a recognizable profession: “one of the many indications that this generation saw the will to write as a vocation in direct conflict with their status as women is the appearance of the male pseudonym” (*ibid*, 19). Female writers were mostly writing under pseudonyms in order to protect their families and for their works to be perceived as pure literature without any gender connotations. According to Showalter, there were three generations of the 19th century feminine novelists. The first, born between 1800 and 1820, included the Brontës, Elizabeth

Gaskell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot, who were often called “female role innovators” (*ibid*, 20). The second generation, born between 1820 and 1840, included Charlotte Young and Margaret Oliphant and the third generation born between 1840 and 1860, included sensationalist novelists and children’s books writers (*ibid*).

In the sphere of literature and readership, at the beginning of the Victorian era, only the minority of literate people could afford to buy books. High prices of books set by Sir William Scott were partly reduced by the foundation of The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1827, fighting for equal rights for culture among all classes. It was in 1836 that the newspaper tax was reduced to a penny stamp, therefore the production of newspapers and periodicals grew rapidly (Davis, 202). The rise of the novel brought along another problem which was that most potential readers found it too complex to grasp, setting grounds for the popularisation of trivial literature and periodicals. The market expanded with the development of new social structures in England, the rise of “the professions: physicians, teachers, civil servants, and other professional or commercial white-collar workers which numbered over 300,000 in the census of 1851 and estimated at well over 650,000 by 1881” (*ibid*). By the end of the century, literacy increased and publishers could distribute more materials at cheaper prices. Novels and longer literary works were published in serial forms, providing literature for wider masses at significantly lower prices. Victorian literature stood as a reflection of people’s mindset of that age, describing the consequences of industrialisation, women’s question, social classes and religion (*ibid*, 212).

The emergence of chapbooks, later called “penny dreadfuls” (Richardson, 1), happened in the 19th century alongside the rise of shorter fiction published in periodicals and magazines. Chapbooks were small, affordable books usually sold on the streets and covered a range of subjects, such as politics, crime, children’s stories and ghost stories. They were largely read among the poor and the middle classes because they were affordable

and passed from hand to hand (*ibid*). Their success encouraged editors to publish both short Gothic fiction and novels within periodicals and magazines. “The periodicals brought together literature, philosophy, history, sociology, and politics - without fixed lines of demarcation. Serialized fiction existed alongside the world of social policy, current affairs, and science” (Davis, 211). Moreover, female writers found the form of short stories an appropriate way of communicating the strong feminist themes of the decade. In *Literature of Their Own*, Showalter states that “the best women’s writing of the 1890s is in the short story rather than in the novel” (21) and that themes such as “the rebellion of the muse, the exploration of a New Woman’s language, and the protest against the appropriation, even theft, of women’s stories by men” (*ibid*) describe the struggle for new words and new stories through short stories better than through a novel.

Elizabeth Gaskell, who was primarily famous for her novels, wrote many short stories and contributed to Victorian periodicals as well. Her shorter fiction will be analysed in this thesis.

II. Elizabeth Gaskell

2.1. Biography

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell was born in London in 1810 into the family of Unitarian minister William Stevenson and his wife, as their eighth child. Gaskell's mother died shortly after her birth. She grew up in Knutsford, an idyllic and inspiring background for her novels and pastoral tales, where she was looked after by her aunt and her immediate family. When she was young, influenced by her family's Unitarian beliefs, she went regularly to Church and taught in Sunday Schools for girls. After moving a lot, she finally settled in Manchester where she married Reverend William Gaskell, also a Unitarian minister, and had four children (Uglow, 8). Until 1845, Gaskell's main duty was the upbringing of their children, but it was shortly after their son's death that she began to write her first novel *Mary Barton*, published in 1848, to occupy her mind. In Gaskell's biography, Jenny Uglow refers to this particular moment by pointing out the preface of *Mary Barton* where Gaskell writes: "Three years ago I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a work of fiction" (153). At that time, Manchester was under the influence of an industrial boom that hit the city and its impoverished population. In her later novels, *Ruth* and *North and South*, she compared the industrialized north to the agrarian south. Her novel *Cranford* was published in eight parts in Charles Dickens' journal *Household Words*. The first installment appeared in 1851 with more following in 1852 and finishing in 1853 and soon it evolved from "a quietly comic memoir to a more searching, but still humorous consideration of the relationship between old and new ways of life in a society that was rapidly changing" (Gilbert and Gubar, 421). Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë met in 1850 and it was then when Gaskell decided to write *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* with the aim "to make the world... honour the woman as much as they

have admired the writer” (Stoneman, 39). In the meantime, she contributed her shorter works to periodicals such as Dickens' *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, and later *Cornhill* and other periodicals or magazines. She died in 1865 after a short illness, as she was writing her last novel *Wives and Daughters*, and was buried in Knutsford in the ground of the Unitarian Chapel (Uglow, 615).

2.2. The issue of serialisation - Dickens and Gaskell

Most of Gaskell's shorter works were published by Dickens in *Household Words* or in *All the Year Round*. Her novel *Cranford* was published as a set of stories, alongside many supernatural and mystery tales. Gaskell wrote for Dickens for thirteen years, from the inception of *Household Words* in March 1850 to the Christmas number of *All the Year Round* in 1863, submitting a total of more than thirty titles; essays, reviews, tales, novels and novelettes (*ibid*, 246). *Lizzie Leigh* was the first story she contributed to *Household Words*. Dickens was eager to provide a successful medium for spreading the literature among all spheres of society through his periodicals. He saw the prospect of such a narrative pattern, based on episodes, favourable to the writer, to him as an editor and publisher, and to the reader. For him, it all depended on the following factors: “a loose, rather episodic pattern that lends itself to convenient breaks at the end of the number, each installment being, of course, of a nature to whet the reader's appetite for more” or, on the other hand “an involved plot of rapidly moving incident where each portion works up to a breath-taking climax of doubt, suspicion, mystery, or discovery, and leaves the reader hanging in mid-air until the next week or month” (Hopkins, 136). Dickens studied the pattern in order to gain success: both facts and numbers concerning a number of periodicals published and money gained prove that he succeeded, at least for some time (*ibid*). Income

from periodicals was crucial for the existence of many contributors of short stories. It is no wonder that Victorian serial publication had such a success at the time, precisely because of the dialogue that was established between the reader and the writer, and the reader's anticipation of the sequel. According to McCord Chavez, serial publication hides within itself similarities with a Gothic genre. She emphasizes that “serialization elongates a narrative, allowing for its development over time, this publication strategy emphasizes process not product. The result is a wandering, meandering structure that produces a generative reading experience” (798).

In 1850 Dickens invited Gaskell to contribute to the inaugural number of the *Household Words* and shortly after, she submitted *Lizzie Leigh*. He sent her an invitation saying: “I do honestly know that there is no living English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of *Mary Barton* (a book that most profoundly affected and impressed me)” (Hopkins, 88). In 1852, Gaskell wrote *The Old Nurse's Story* for the *Extra Christmas Number* and it was when they first had a minor disagreement about the visibility of the spectres appearing in the story. Gaskell won the argument, but Dickens replied: “I don't claim for my ending of the Nurse's Story that it would have made it a bit better. All I can urge in its behalf is that it is what I should have done myself. But there is no doubt of the story being admirable as it stands” (*ibid*, 128). They had an even bigger argument concerning the publication of Gaskell's novel *North and South* in *Household Words*. The novel was not written appropriately for serialisation because of its special emphasis on detailed descriptions of characters and the complications of the plot. There was a long period of quarrels between them which resulted in an unstable relationship (*ibid*, 130). In the following years, Gaskell made twenty contributions to periodicals, mostly to Dickens' among which are her shorter tales *My Lady Ludlow*, *A Dark Night's Work* and *Poor Clare* in 1856. Even though Gaskell was one of the most productive writers for

Dickens' periodicals, they kept stumbling upon some problems. “While serial writing seems to have worked marvelously for Dickens, Gaskell found it to be taxing and frustrating due to Dickens's editorial ‘interference’ and their differences of opinion about the ideal serial form” (McCord Chavez, 801). She also began contributing to other periodicals such as *Harper's*, *Cornhill*, *Fraser's Magazine*. In 1859, Dickens published her *Lois the Witch* in three parts, even though she wanted it to be published in America. Two years later, her short story *The Grey Woman* was printed in three parts in *All the Year Round*. She soon entered the circle of writers such as Matthew Arnold, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, John Ruskin, A. L. Tennyson and W. M. Thackeray whose works were also published in the *Cornhill*. Her longest novel *Wives and Daughters* was published in *Cornhill* from 1864 to 1866 posthumously. The difference with *Cornhill* was that it was a monthly magazine that “could afford the far more satisfactory method of printing in large sections that would invite the reader into the atmosphere of a story with a leisurely opening and hold his interest until the time was ripe for something to happen” (Hopkins, 155).

Dickens and Gaskell's philosophies regarding the serialisation were different. Dickens wanted to emphasize the necessity of each installment being a coherent unit but at the same time part of the larger whole. “While encouraging the author to craft a ‘complete’ number, something like a Gothic artisan crafting a finished sculpture for the facade of a building, serial publication presupposes a fluid element of composition that allows the discrete installments to combine with a sense of gentle and not unnatural progress” (McCord Chavez, 801). He was passionate about the fact that readers had to wait for the next sequel, making the demand for the next issue bigger. “Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait” was Dickens's famous advice to his writers (Davis, 231).

In one of the most important works on the Victorian serial published in 1991, Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund argue that “this genre's enforced oscillation between text

world and real world provided an opportunity for readers to become secondary producers who 'enriched the imagined world' with their lived experiences" (McCord Chavez, 802).

III. Gothic genre

3.1. Victorian Gothic

The usage of the word *Gothic* has been discussed over the centuries in various fields. Fred Botting introduces the Gothic by explaining the transformations of the genre, tracing origins of the form and looking at the cultural and historical location of the Gothic. It was first used to denote the Germanic tribes that invaded Europe between the third and the fifth century. The common name for all of them was the Goths. It is exactly from that point in the past that the term *Gothic* gained pejorative connotations of cruelty, savageness and barbarity. The Goths aroused fear and anxiety while conquering Europe, therefore it is not strange for a literature of fear to eventually be referred to as Gothic (23). Later on, the term *Gothic* was introduced as the specific medieval style of architecture especially common for the period of the late twelfth century up to the fifteenth century. The style was characterized by irregularity and exaggeration in terms of huge buildings and ornamentation which stood out against the Renaissance aesthetics (*ibid*, 41).

In *The Nature of Gothic* Ruskin "champions the irregular aspects of this (Gothic) architecture, and reveals the potential power of resisting order, regularity, and centralization figured as perfection". Moreover, Ruskin adds that "irregular architectural forms can be read as an embodiment of freedom because perfection necessarily carries with it the specter of limitation" (McCord Chavez, 793). Ruskin's theorisation serves as a powerful tool for understanding the Victorian serial publications because it is implicitly referring to the reading experience and brings us closer to the analysis of the term *Gothic* as a genre.

The general attitude towards the meaning of the word *Gothic* changed in the mid-eighteenth century when it was attributed to the era of the Middle Ages. Gothic art, in all its manifestations, represented the grandeur of wildness and the novelty of extravagance in architecture, style, and manner, therefore, it lost its negative connotations.

For this thesis, the last and the most important usage of the word *Gothic* is in literature. It was Horace Walpole who first used the term *Gothic* in 1764 as a subtitle for his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, labeling it *A Gothic Story*. His work still had the connotations of medievalism with the dark atmosphere of lonely castles, haunted towers and knights (Botting, 48). The authors of Gothic novels that followed Walpole started using supernatural elements and focused on the sensation of fear and anxiety, introducing the uncanny as the new way of bringing these elements into their work. With the development of that genre, the term *Gothic* lost its link to medievalism, but served as a synonym for the “grotesque, ghastly, and violently [supernatural] or superhuman in fiction” (Longueil, 459).

Despite the prominence of science and the rise of social realism in literature, the Gothic spirit in Victorian England remained strong due to society’s interest in the occult and the supernatural. Many Victorian authors also shifted the Gothic practice from novel to the genre of short fiction; novellas, tales and short stories which were an experimental genre at the time. Gothic fiction has not been defined by formal or thematic elements, but by “the production of concern, suspense, terror and...horror, deriving from a plot turning on what the reader is meant to perceive as the supernatural” (McCord Chavez, 796). It is most often described as excessive and exaggerated, moreover it “appears in the awful obscurity that haunted eighteenth-century rationality and morality. It shadows the despairing ecstasies of Romantic idealism and individualism and the uncanny dualities of Victorian realism and decadence” (Botting, 1).

There are two types of Victorian Gothic narrative that are common to the period; the

first being the Gothic tale of supernatural and the second, the Gothic tale of mystery and suspense. The supernatural is defined as an event out of the natural order of things, unexplainable and without any scientific proof. The supernatural elements are mostly incorporated into unearthly creatures such as demons, witches, wizards, vampires, ghosts, and *doppelgängers* and include prophetic dreams, visions, curses and mirrors. Moreover, the Gothic tales of mystery and suspense are connected to the domestic sphere dealing with numerous issues such as power abuse, mostly concerning the relationship between husband and wife, siblings or parents and children. They incorporate fears and anxieties of human nature, connected to scientific progress and discoveries, but also to the psychological aspect of mind. It mostly refers to the depiction of madness and delusion, psychological illnesses which served as an unexplainable trigger for plot development in tales of mystery and suspense. In his article on supernatural realism, with special emphasis on the nineteenth-century British novel and based on Todorov's theorisation, Srđan Smajić argues that "supernaturalism is not disruptive but consistently and overtly constitutive of its realism" (3). Moreover, the term supernatural realism is "a compromise - a pleonasm, really - intended to bypass binary thinking and inject into critical discourse a dose of awareness about the complex relationship between the natural and supernatural, normal and paranormal" (*ibid*, 20). This brings us back to Tzvetan Todorov and his famous definition of the fantastic by placing it in between the uncanny and the marvellous, specifically because it relies on reader's belief or non-belief in a supernatural event. In all three literary forms, as Todorov puts it, "an event occurs in the 'real' world which cannot be explained by the laws of reality" (25). If the supernatural event is explained in such a way that it is subject to "laws of reality", the text is uncanny. If the event is accepted as supernatural, the text is marvellous. Only if the narrative treatment of the event causes the reader to hesitate between a rational and supernatural explanation is the text fantastic (*ibid*).

3.2. Male and female Gothic tradition

In Gothic literature, there is a distinction between male and female Gothic. The term *female Gothic* was coined by Ellen Moers who defined it as “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth-century, we have called the Gothic,” and in which the “woman is examined with a woman's eye” (90, 109). However, critics have added the meaning to Moers' term based on the writing of Ann Radcliffe, an influential Gothic novelist, by saying that the female Gothic plot is about “an orphaned heroine in search of an absent mother, pursued by a feudal (patriarchal) father or his substitute, with the whole affair monitored by an impeccable but ineffectual suitor” (Miles, 96). The female Gothic focuses on the young heroine experiencing certain difficulties in life such as domestic abuse or suffering from inequality in the society in which she lives. In the *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Milbank notes that Gothic fiction would most often “register the psychic disturbance of the Victorian middle-class wife, who was confined to the domestic realm at the very time in which that locale ceased to be productive or economically active” (Hogle, 155).

Although it portrays fearful experience, the female Gothic tradition tends to have a happy ending, with a story shifting its course toward a domestic security and matrimonial happiness. According to Coral Ann Howells, it is due to the fact

that Gothic novelists didn't know what to do with their feelings of frustration and rebelliousness. Many of them were middle-class women and “all they knew was that they were dissatisfied and anxious. Their fiction is both exploratory and fearful. They are not always totally in control of their fantasies, for having opened up new areas of awareness,

they then retreat from their insights back into conventionality with the rescue of a heroine into happy marriage and the horrible death of a villain (6).

On the other hand, the *male Gothic* plot is about political, metaphysical and philosophical issues, and quite often involves issues based on Oedipal or fraternal antagonism.

In 1995, Anne Williams wrote an immensely significant book called *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* where she theorises and classifies the difference between female and male Gothic. These two types of Gothic tradition differ in certain aspects of the text connected with the narrative technique, assumptions about the supernatural, plot type, narrative closure and fear-evoking devices (103).

In her theory, she writes that the female Gothic “generates suspense through the limitations imposed by the chosen point of view; we share both the heroine’s mistaken perceptions and her ignorance,” while the male Gothic “derives its most powerful effects from the dramatic irony created by multiple points of view” (102). When she writes about the assumptions about the supernatural in the stories, she posits that the female Gothic tradition chooses to explain the supernatural elements, which is different from the male tradition where supernatural elements become part of the reality (103). Plot type in the female Gothic tradition is usually a happy one, focusing on a happy ending, with the heroine experiencing a rebirth by being “rescued at the climax from the life-threatening danger of being locked up, walled in, or otherwise made to disappear from the world” (103, 104). The male protagonist, on the other hand, is “usually an isolated overreacher punished for his hubris, his violation of the Law. He destroys himself, whether losing his kingdom [. . .] or his very life” (103). The only way he can survive is through a kind of a “spiritual inoculation” (104).

Narrative closure is another aspect that is analysed when contrasting male and female Gothic plot. Female Gothic tradition demands a happy ending with the affirmative plot, while the narrative closure in male Gothic is uncertain and open-ended. Williams adds the fear evoking devices and states that: "...whereas Female Gothic is organized around the resources of terror, of an imagined threat and the process by which that threat is dispelled, Male Gothic specializes in horror—the bloody shroud, the wormy corpse" (105). Anne Radcliffe, one of the most significant Gothic novelists of the late eighteenth-century, distinguished the difference between horror and terror. "An explicit representation of threat induces horror, whereas terror depends on obscurity. The difference turns on materiality. Terror is an affair of the mind, of the imagination; when the threat takes a concrete shape, it induces horror or disgust" (Miles, 93).

After this short analysis of Williams' theory of male and female Gothic tradition and its differences, it is visible that Gaskell uses male Gothic tradition on the surface level, yet the deeper levels of meaning in her novels are concerned with issues of women in the patriarchal society.

3.3. Gaskell and Gothic literature

In her works, Elizabeth Gaskell experimented with both Gothic tales of Mystery and Suspense and Gothic tales of Supernatural, so the classification of each will be discussed later in the work.

Out of her thirty works of short fiction, nine of them are Gothic or contain Gothic tropes. Among those, *The Old Nurse's Story* (1852), *The Squire's Story* (1853), *Poor Clare* (1856), *The Doom of the Griffiths* (1858), *Lois the Witch* (1859) and *The Grey Woman* (1861) are technically the most successful.

When Gaskell started writing her short stories, she transformed her usual topics into highly symbolical ones. By introducing supernatural elements, building a plot around a world of mystery, she was expressing her opinion on the sexual and social powers of the patriarchal society of the age. Although she was praised by her contemporaries and publishers her ghost stories were considered an attempt to entertain the public and satisfy its need for adventure and mystery. Even in the book completely devoted to Gaskell, Yvonne Ffrench writes that: “Of the bulk of her short stories there is little to be said. She wrote them assiduously, and when they were finished threw them into the ready maw of Household Words and its successors. They were easily thrown off, and as easily digestible” (73). Still, in one of his letters, Charles Dickens pays tribute to Gaskell’s unique storytelling power when he addresses her with the following: “My Dear Scheherazade,—For I am sure your powers of narrative can never be exhausted in a single night, but must be good for at least a thousand nights and one” (Dickens, “To Elizabeth Gaskell”, 1850). In an introduction to the first collection of her tales of mystery and macabre, editor David Stuart Davies writes that: “She was a strong woman with a fierce independent streak and was not all at impressed or flattered by the famous author’s overtures. But Dickens persevered and she succumbed to his entreaties” (8).

During the Victorian period, ghost stories became popular through literary magazines and periodicals. “Generically more contained, the ghost story presents a more definite idea of reality in order to evoke a specifically uncanny effect by the appearance of supernatural figures: as realism’s uncanny shadow, the ghost story produces gentle tremors along the line separating the supernatural world from that of Victorian empirical and domestic order” (Botting, 126). Gaskell as well had a strong affinity towards the folk origins of the ghost story which, as Henson states, “had a major influence on nineteenth-century literary endeavor, particularly on the historical novel and the ghost story” (251). She

was aware of social issues of the era and “her longer ghost tales demonstrate not only her skill as a raconteur, but also her concern with social issues. Like many other Victorians, she saw fiction as a way of leading people to unpalatable truths, of extending their awareness and understanding of those around them” (Martin, 32). Gaskell's strong interest in the macabre was present in many of her shorter works, and she used to sit by the fire with her friends and tell ghost stories.

The telling of tales around the fireside makes explicit a particular aspect of the ghost story which depends upon a tension between the cosy familiar world of life (associated with *Heim* and *heimlich*- home and the domestic) and the mysterious unknowable world of death (*unheimlich*, or uncanny) (Briggs, 181).

Gaskell found it hard to share her passion for ghost stories with her friend Charlotte Brontë mentioning that particular fact in her biography: “One night I was on the point of relating some dismal ghost story, just before bed-time. She shrank from hearing it, and confessed that she was superstitious and prone at all times to the involuntary recurrence of any thoughts of ominous gloom which might have been suggested to her” (*Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 501).

Still, Gaskell was fearless and felt comfortable in such a genre, especially while expressing her own profound discontent with the condition of women in the patriarchal society through her Gothic tales. The witch-figures who appear in her fiction are essentially victims, with no actual magical ability. Most often they are witches demonised by others, moreover, women become demonic in their double self which unintentionally hurts the innocent. As Briggs states “women writers have felt some special affinity with freer and more imaginative modes of expression: Gothic, in particular, often includes some element of rebellion against or resistance to existing social norms” (182). Gaskell's interest in the Gothic, especially in its supernatural, mystery and suspense forms, might seem unexpected from a person with such a strict Unitarian background. The way it reflects the ambiguity of

Victorian age and cooperates within Gaskell's narrative is going to be discussed in one of the following chapters. A.W. Ward notes that

The supernatural always had a strong attraction for Mrs. Gaskell, and her imagination could not fail to concern itself with those human delusions which are closely connected with the terrors largely fed by an instinctive tendency to which her own mind was no stranger (Martin, 29).

3.4. Gothic elements in Elizabeth Gaskell's shorter fiction

In the following chapters, the Gothic elements of Elizabeth Gaskell's short stories will be analysed through short summaries of the story plots. *Poor Clare* and *The Old Nurse's Story* are ghost stories, *Lois the Witch* is a Gothic story of supernatural and *Lizzie Leigh* has never been listed among Gothic fiction, but my aim is to interpret it regarding the Gothic genre.

Lizzie Leigh

Lizzie Leigh was the first story that Gaskell contributed to Dickens' periodical. In one of her letters, she wrote: "Do you know they sent me 20 pounds for Lizzie Leigh? I stared, and wondered if I was swindling them but suppose I am not; and William has composedly buttoned it up in his pocket. He has promised I may have some for the refuge" (Letter to Eliza Fox. April 26 1850). This statement carries a strong meaning for the economic status of women in the Victorian patriarchal society. A married woman did not own any property and everything she owned was automatically passed on to her husband on the day of their engagement. Harrison states that "During the engagement period, her manacles were tried on for size in that she was forbidden to dispose of any of her possessions without her fiancé's

permission. When she married, the fetters were firmly clamped on” (7). Moreover, married women did not have any rights, they were powerless, without earnings and without any rights to leave their husband in case of any disagreement. Single women, on the other hand, were kept powerless in terms of being silenced and ignorant of taboo topics such as sex, prostitution or diseases in order to preserve their chastity. The issue of prostitution is essential for the plot development in Gaskell’s short story *Lizzie Leigh*.

Lizzie Leigh has never been classified as one of Gaskell’s Gothic short stories. The supernatural elements in *Lizzie Leigh* are not present, but the atmosphere and the topic at stake can relate to the Gothic genre functioning as “warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form” (Botting, 7).

At the beginning of the story, the reader learns that Lizzie was fired from her position in Manchester three years ago, after she had found out she was pregnant. Members of the Leigh family, who live in the countryside, find out about her situation when a letter to their daughter Lizzie is returned with an attached note from her former employer. Upon finding out, her father James decides that they should forget they ever had a daughter and Lizzie’s name was never uttered in their home again. The eldest Leigh son, Will, is aware of the shame and disgrace Lizzie brought upon her house and the younger son Tom thinks she had died. While their mother Anne wants to save their daughter, James forbids it and this creates tension between the spouses. Three years after Lizzie's fall from grace, James dies, and shortly before his death, he forgives Lizzie. Now free to find Lizzie, the remaining Leighs move to Manchester where Anne searches for her lost daughter at night since Lizzie is presumed to be a prostitute. Will, the eldest son, falls in love with a girl named Susan Palmer but thinks their future would be affected by his association with his disgraced, missing sister. Anne, who often refers to Lizzie as her prodigal child, visits Susan and tells her about her, expecting Susan to understand and empathise. Susan reveals that a child

named Nanny, whom she has been taking care of, is quite likely Lizzie's child. Another proof comes from a piece of clothing Anne finds and thus confirms her daughter is still alive. Lizzie has been putting money under the door of Susan's house, as a token of gratitude for raising her daughter. Later that same night, Susan's father comes home drunk. Susan leaves the child to help her father get inside and in doing so, leaves young Nanny alone upstairs. The child tries to reach her caretaker and falls to her death down the stairs. Susan leaves to fetch the doctor, only to find Lizzie outside. The three of them return to Susan's house, but it's too late and little Nanny has passed away. Susan calls for Anne and the mother and daughter are finally united in their grief. Following the terrible events that led to Nanny's death and family's reunion, Lizzie and Anne move back to the countryside. Lizzie finds redemption in nursing the ill and by visiting Nanny's grave every Sunday. Susan and Will get married and they move back to Leigh's farm. The two of them have children, one of whom they name Nanny.

The story starts with the death of the patriarch of the Leigh Family. As Hopkins describes it, the story begins "with death on Christmas Day and ends with bitter tears shed over a child's grave, somber to a painful degree" (Hopkins, 88). The death of Lizzie's illegitimate child occurs in strange circumstances. Moreover, she has to be buried in the hills, in isolation, away from the family's grave. The final scene, in which Lizzie takes the child to the sunny burial place in the hills where children make daisy chains and Lizzie weeps at the grave side, surely has elements of a dark and terrifying setting characteristic for Gothic stories. This scene is brimming with Lizzie's tears of regret.

This story could be characterised as a tale of mystery and suspense, especially having in mind the circumstances of Nanny's death. Since the story does not feature any supernatural elements it cannot be classified as a ghost story. However, some elements of both female and male Gothic can be found in the plot. In the book *Gothic literature*, in a

chapter about the horror of childhood, Kileen Jarlath writes about female Gothic “defined as a version of the Gothic depicting the vulnerable and sexually naive woman vigorously pursued by the forces of lust and emotional avarice, as personified in the villain of the tale” (61) and that is easily translatable to *Lizzie Leigh*. Moreover, the tropes of an absent mother and a patriarchal father are commonly used in the female Gothic plot. Lizzie is absent from Nanny’s life; therefore, the course of her life is consequently going in a different direction and is predestined to experience some kind of a trouble as in typical Gothic stories. James Leigh, Lizzie’s father is a strong patriarchal figure who banishes his own children because of their deeds. On the other hand, fraternal antagonism falls into a sphere of male Gothic, but that is not the only reason why it could be considered male Gothic fiction. Williams states that “The Male Gothic plot takes it for granted that a woman's virtue is her most valuable asset and then places her in a situation where it will be threatened or destroyed. Ultimately she must be punished as a ‘fallen woman’” (Williams, 105) as is the case with Lizzie Leigh who lives the rest of her life in repentance.

Gaskell not only gave thematic relevance to the Victorian anxieties about social disorder and control, but she condensed different motifs into short narrative spaces. “In so doing, she contributed to the evolution of a highly flexible genre that, in the Victorian market of literature, was expected to meet the changing exigencies of publishers, authors and readers alike” (Costantini, 52). *Lizzie Leigh* was published before her novel *Ruth* which has a sexually fallen women as its protagonist as well. Since *Lizzie Leigh* was the very first story that she contributed to Dickens' periodical it might have been a moment when she only tackled with the Gothic genre and later on decided to explore it in depth.

Poor Clare

The first Gothic tale by Elizabeth Gaskell to be discussed in this thesis will be *Poor Clare*. It was originally published in three separate installments in the *Household Words* in December of 1856. This story is removed in time, talking about the events that occurred 30 years before the narration, in 1747. The tale is about an old woman named Bridget Fitzgerald and the entanglements that happened after her daughter Mary decided to leave her after one of their many conflicts. The moment when Mary's letters from Europe stop coming, Bridget decides to go and search for her daughter. All that she has left of Mary is her little dog, called Mignon. Soon after she comes back from her unsuccessful quest, Mignon gets shot by a frustrated hunter called Gisborne, upon whom she utters a curse because by losing him, she lost the only connection to her daughter. Bridget uses her witchcraft knowledge to enhance the curse. It is later revealed that the hunter is Mary's lover with whom she has a daughter, a young child named Lucy. The hunter deceived Mary into believing that he married her lawfully, and when she discovers that he didn't, she commits suicide. When Lucy grows older, her father tells her that she is the most cherished being in his life and that he adores her. That is when Bridget's curse starts causing the materialisation of a mischievous double of Lucy, evil and wicked. Bridget learns about the identity of the curses' recipient from the narrator, a London lawyer who is in love with Lucy and pleads for mercy for his loved one so they can live happily ever after. When she hears that, she repents her sin and joins the order of the Poor Clares as a nun. The curse is not removed until Bridget, truly seeking redemption, helps save Gisborne's life by sacrificing her own. On her deathbed, the curse is finally lifted.

Witchcraft is the tale's main supernatural element, although Bridget Fitzgerald is never portrayed as a witch. From the very beginning she is surrounded by atmosphere of mystery, but only later in the text does the reader find out about her curse. The first such peculiar incident is connected to Bridget carrying Madam Starkey over the threshold of her

new house “uttering a passionate and outlandish blessing” (*Poor Clare*, 39). The custom of carrying a wife over the threshold in order to prevent evil spirits from harming the wife was also a ritual at the time, but performed by the husband. The fact that Bridget did it implies that she had an unusual power of restraining evil spirits by knowing the “outlandish blessing”. Another indication of Bridget's mysterious character is the fact that she had a lot of influence on her employers, Mr. and Mrs. Starkey, and on the other servants of the household who were afraid of her and her daughter because they were “wild and passionate” and they could not but “yield” to Bridget’s “magic of superior mind” (*ibid*, 41).

Another incident concerning Bridget's extraordinary character was the one connected to her long absence from her house when her neighbours wanted to save the goods from rusting. They remember the “tales of her masterful spirit, and vehement force of will, (. . .) the very thought of offending her, by touching any article of hers, became invested with a kind of horror: it was believed that, dead or alive, she would not fail to avenge it” (*ibid*, 44) and that stops them from doing it. When she returns from the long journey of searching for her daughter, her physique is described as if she “had been scorched in the flames of hell”, moreover, “so brown, so scared, and fierce a creature did she seem” (*ibid*, 44).

Because of her mysterious and strange behaviour she acquired reputation of a witch, especially because she began talking to herself as if she was having a proper conversation with someone who was not present in her proximity. The villagers also noticed that those people who would do her harm would suffer, while those who would please her would prosper.

The first real encounter with Bridget's dark side occurs moments after her daughter's dog Mignon is shot, when she is shown using her supernatural powers for evil purposes. The cursing scene lasts for a long time because it is interrupted by her inner battles between

the restraint of Christian patience and the temptation to revenge. While cursing Gisborne, she starts uttering the following words:

I'm alone in the world, and helpless; the more do the saints in heaven hear my prayers. Hear me, ye blessed ones! Hear me while I ask for sorrow on this bad, cruel man. He has killed the only creature that loved me the dumb beast that I loved. Bring down heavy sorrow on his head for it, O ye saints! He thought that I was helpless, because he saw me lonely and poor; but are not armies of heaven for the like of me? (*ibid*, 45)

After a while she addresses him:

You shall live to see the creature you love best, and who alone loves you ay, a human creature, but as innocent and fond as my poor, dead darling you shall see this creature, for whom death would be too happy, become a terror and a loathing to all, for this blood's sake. Hear me, O holy Saints, who never fail them that have no other help! (*ibid*, 46)

Bridget spurts Mignon's blood all over him which is suggestive of witchcraft used in magical and religious rites. When she comes back home, she begins to pray for the curse to succeed while performing some more rituals. It is significant that she does that in front of the portrait of Madonna, which symbolizes the Christian faith that condemns witchcraft. That particular atmosphere makes her think twice before deciding on revenge. From that moment, Bridget Fitzgerald can be considered as an angry, vindictive witch.

Alongside the curse and the witch element of this Gothic tale, it is necessary to involve the issue of *doubleness* or the manifestation of the double. The double is the most horrifying element of the tale and is being introduced with suspense, therefore making it

even more frightful. Botting writes about the notion of doubleness, alter egos, mirrors and animated representations as stock devices

signifying the alienation of the human subject from the culture and language in which s/he was located, these devices increasingly destabilised the boundaries between psyche and reality, opening up an indeterminate zone in which the differences between fantasy and actuality were no longer secure (Botting, 12).

In the first stage, Lucy whose malicious, evil and wicked double shows up every now and then, is unaware of the reason why her ghostly replica exists. The narrator chillingly describes this confrontation with the double in a typical Gothic manner when he exclaims:

Just at that instant, standing as I was opposite to her in the full and perfect morning light, I saw behind her another figure a ghastly resemblance, complete in likeness, so far as form and feature and minutest touch of dress could go, but with a loathsome demon soul looking out of the grey eyes, that were in turns mocking and voluptuous. My heart stood still within me; every hair rose up erect; my flesh crept with horror (*Poor Clare*, 62).

This scene of fear and the description of horror reveal the overwhelming sensation that the abnormality of the double's nature can cause. The appearance of the double brings shivers even to the reader and most definitely occupies his mind. After Lucy had heard about the source of the curse, she visits Bridget, where Lucy's double manifests maliciously mimicking her every action. Bridget stands up, "her gaze fixed on the creature beyond: drawing her breath with a hissing sound, never moving her terrible eyes, that were steady as stone," and makes "a dart at the phantom;" but catches "a mere handful of empty air" (69). The old lady remains horrified at what she has seen, moreover, the other day Lucy's double looks at her through the window and she is, once again, left aghast. The actual confrontation with a supernatural being is very uncomfortable even to someone who is considered a witch. The mere feeling of its presence chokes the words in Bridget's throat, leaving her incapable to pray. The fact that the double is so unpredictable, uncontrollable and mischievous can cause such a sensation to be petrified because of fear.

The issue of doubleness or duality is quite common for Victorian Gothic fiction. *Doppelgänger* narratives have traditionally been interpreted in Freudian terms as a manifestation of the struggle for domination between the ego and the id, but on the other hand it is seen as a repressed emotion and a forbidden desire of the main character (Gilbert and Gubar, 360). The *doppelgänger* is an uncanny motif which comprises of two different types, the first being “the alter ego or identical double of a protagonist who seems to be either a victim of an identity theft perpetrated by a mimicking supernatural presence or subject to a paranoid hallucination” and the second being “the split personality or dark half of the protagonist, an unleashed monster that acts as a physical manifestation of a dissociated part of the self” (Faurholt,1).

Based on Anne Williams's theorisation on male and female Gothic tradition, this short story belongs to the male sphere. One of the reasons for this is the inconclusive ending which does not offer closure to the reader. Even though *Poor Clare* ends with Bridget saying that Lucy is liberated from the curse, there is no proof that it is true because that is where the plot ends. Another trait of male Gothic is the fact that Gaskell uses the supernatural as part of real life, without offering any explanation for the supernatural elements. Moreover, fear-evoking devices that she uses evoke horror and not terror which is the case in female Gothic tradition. This tale does not have a happy plot typical for the female Gothic, since all female characters lead tragic lives. Bridget is left in a dreary state after a failed marriage and the same happens to Mary who commits suicide when she finds out that she is not actually married to Gisborne. Lucy, on the other hand, suffers because of the sins of others and is cursed by the malicious double which results in her being expelled from society until she is saved by the London lawyer.

In order to make the supernatural elements as plausible as possible, Gaskell chooses an elderly man to be a trustworthy narrator, moreover, he is a lawyer who witnessed the

supernatural incidents. Another method of refamiliarisation is that she sets the plot in a recognizable location and period, bringing it closer to the reader.

The Old Nurse's Story

A ghost is one of the most prominent and popular supernatural phenomena of Gothic literature. There are many types of ghosts appearing in literature. Some of them are malicious, materializing for no reason, just to cause confusion and others are wandering souls of guilty or blameworthy people. Not all ghosts have to be malevolent, for example, there are ghosts who are unable to rest peacefully because they have to inform their loved ones or someone else about the possible trouble. Ghosts in literature can be portrayed through visual and audible methods to make things even scarier.

In *The Old Nurse's Story*, the supernatural element of a ghost is an everyday presence. Lord Furnivall's ghost haunts Furnivall Manor by playing music on the dead man's music organ. First time when Hester, the narrator and Miss Rosamond's nurse, heard the noise she didn't consider it strange, until she asked the servants about the identity of the musician performing in the house and they all started ignoring her question and acting weirdly. Soon she finds out that the strange noise she hears at night, especially before a storm, is: "the old lord playing on the great organ in the hall, just as he used to do when he was alive" (*The Old Nurse's Story*, 14). Lord Furnivall's ghost is prevented from the eternal rest because of his evil deeds in life, especially towards his daughter Maude who was pregnant with a foreigner and therefore banished from the household, which ended tragically both for her and her newborn daughter. Such a plot leads us to Briggs' theory that

ghost stories often deal with the most primitive, punitive, and sadistic of impulses, revenge being one of the commonest motifs present in the form. The instinct to inflict upon others

the pain we have received is too readily tolerated as literary theme, as well as a human reaction (182).

Another supernatural element in *The Old Nurse's Story* is the ghost appearance of Maude and her child, materialising on a gloomy Sunday in November, just as it started to snow. Their ghosts are seen at the same spot where their bodies were discovered when they were expelled from the manor. They invite Rosamond to come to them. These two ghosts seem to be of wicked nature because they want to revenge Miss Grace, Maude's sister, by harming Rosamond, just because of the love that Miss Grace shows to the child. They try to lure Rosamond once more, but Hester sees it through the window, startled by the magnetic power of ghosts that make Rosamond move towards them. At the same time, after hearing Lord Furnivall's organ playing she runs to save Rosamond and prevents the phantom child from entering the manor. Following the incident, the Furnivall manor is completely locked and window-shutters closed completely. Rosamond is never left alone, but the phantom child starts wailing and crying, luring Rosamond to come out, once again. These days, the Manor household hears the ghost playing on his organ with more strength. The last appearance of the revengeful ghosts happens on the anniversary of their death and Gaskell introduces this horror scene with a chilling description of the event.

What happened that night is an enactment of the events that had led to the horror connected to this manor. On that night, Miss Grace was the first to hear the voices, terrible screams which were becoming louder and louder. Rosamond was the second to hear the noise telling them that "My little girl is crying, oh, how she is crying!" (*The Old Nurse's Story*, 15). They all decide to move towards the East wing of the manor where they notice the chandelier alight and the fire in the fireplace. The East doors suddenly open revealing the ghost of Lord Furnivall and Maude with her child re-enacting the tragic incident of the night when they were cast out from the manor. Rosamond is drawn towards them, wanting

to break free from Hester's hands, but she passes out the moment she sees the old man wanting to hurt the child. Miss Grace cries out to her father to spare the innocent child, this time aware of her role in the miserable events that occurred in her family. Suddenly, the ghosts disappear and Miss Grace remains death-stricken on the floor.

The Old Nurse's Story conforms to male Gothic tradition because of the use of supernatural elements as an integral part of reality. These elements are not explained, they are witnessed by all the characters which means that they are not part of one character's imagination.

This tragic story deals with consequences of jealousy and revenge, resulting in death and depicting the supernatural power dominant over human beings. In an account on *The Old Nurse's Story*, Galef writes that it is “the portrait of sibling rivalry and tortured love against a backdrop of maternal absence and monstrous fatherhood” (53). The absence of mother is another strong element which makes this story a Gothic one. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong suggests that “the mother’s surveillance within the family exerts a form of social control, to reframe this in Foucauldian terms, the mother plays the role of panopticon within the family” (Bienstock Anolik, 27). Through ghost appearances of revengeful Maude, her child and Lord Furnivall's ghost playing his chilling organ, Gaskell introduces horror both into the protagonists and the reader. The author offers her readers a detailed description of the setting of the tale while evoking a sensation of desolation, fear, anxiety and darkness. As Galef noted,

Domestic space is usually a safe realm in women's fiction, yet Gaskell locates the menace both in the manor and outside. Gaskell combines male and female dynamics- penetration; escape- just as she fuses the private and the social. As an additional dimension: for unwanted ghosts, one may also read 'marginalized groups': Gaskell's phantoms, representing scandalous love and its consequences, imply women's psychological needs struggling against social censure. (58)

By describing the exterior and the interior of the Furnivall Manor she establishes a strong relationship between the setting and the effect it causes. Furnivall Manor is surrounded by “a large wild park” with “gnarled thorn-trees, and old oaks all white and peeled with age” (*The Old Nurse's Story*, 13). The carriage way is largely covered with moss, and the fells which rose behind it were “bare enough” for “there were very few flowers that would live there” (*ibid*, 14). The images of the overgrown moss and the bareness of the fells create a feeling of negligence and desolation. The notion that very few flowers “would” live there is additionally foreboding (*ibid*, 14). There are many trees around the house, so close that they would, on windy days, seem to want to enter the house through the windows. They closed the view from the house and prevented the sunshine go through. The house interior was also frightening because the manor was dark and gloomy, with old-fashioned massive furniture and chandeliers. Gaskell's skill in describing the setting of the tale is characteristic for the Gothic literature.

In the plot of *The Old Nurse's Story* Gaskell uses the technique of refamiliarisation in order to suspend the reader's disbelief in the supernatural elements that occur in the narrative. She does it by specifically locating the plot into a familiar surrounding from Westmoreland at the beginning to Northumberland where Hester and Rosamond live at the Furnivall Manor. In this story, she introduces a female narrator, something that was unconventional at the time because women were considered more emotional, unreliable and imaginative. Hester's narration is very detailed and retrospective. She introduces detailed descriptions of the interior, exterior and physical appearance of people involved in the events making it more realistic and trustworthy. The fact that all the characters accept the supernatural phenomena as part of their normal life is another point which helps the reader familiarise with the plot. Galef purports this fact by stating that “the tale weds the supernatural to realism, being concerned less with the exotic than with the

domestic sphere and obsessed with dispossession as much as possession” (52). The whole plot evolves around ghost apparitions which rule the lives of characters who are present and alive.

Lois the Witch

Lois the Witch is another Elizabeth Gaskell's short story whose narrative encloses supernatural elements. These are manifested through curses, witchcraft and prophetic visions. This time, Gaskell sets her story in the New World. Since New England was part of a new continent at the time, the place setting did not offer her haunted castles and Gothic cathedrals which would already develop the frightening atmosphere, but she had to build it on her own, with the little knowledge of America that she had. The protagonist sets foot on the New Continent, immediately comparing it to her home in Warwickshire. The darkness of the nights, the strange sounds or the white drizzle are elements which Gaskell uses to create a completely Gothic atmosphere.

Salem was, as it were, snowed up, and left to prey upon itself. The long, dark evenings; the dimly lighted rooms; the creaking passages, where heterogeneous articles were piled away, out of the reach of the keen-piercing frost, and where occasionally, in the dead of night, a sound was heard, as of some heavy falling body, when, next morning, everything appeared to be in its right place (...) the white mist, coming nearer and nearer to the windows every evening in strange shapes, like phantoms (...) the distant fall of mighty trees in the mysterious forests girdling them round; the faint whoop and cry of some Indian seeking his camp (...) the hungry yells of the wild beasts approaching the cattle-pens - these were the things which made that winter life in Salem (...) strange, and haunted, and terrific to many (*Lois the Witch*, 95).

Lois the Witch is a novella which set grounds on the seventeenth-century Salem witch-hunts. It is a story about an Anglican girl called Lois Barclay who came to America to

live with her uncle and aunt after experiencing a forbidden romance and death of her parents. There she lives with the Hickson family, her cousins Manasseh, Faith and Prudence who are not quite fond of her staying in their house. She behaves in good manners and helps with the household. Manasseh is desperate to marry Lois and he insists that “If I wed not Lois, both she and I die within the year. I care not for life: before this, as you know, I have sought for death” (*ibid*, 37). As a child, Lois attended a witch trial where she witnessed ordeal by water, at that times it was a common way of punishing witches. There was a drowning old woman who cursed Lois with the following words: “Parson’s wench, parson’s wench, yonder, in thy nurse’s arms, thy dad hath never tried for to save me, and none shall save thee when thou art brought up for a witch” (*ibid*, 150). That curse was the first supernatural element in the story and it signified an unknown, but forthcoming danger for Lois. From the curse, it is obvious that Lois would eventually become a witch and that she might not be saved by anyone. After two girls suffered strange convulsions and an Indian woman gets accused of witchcraft, Prudence accuses Lois of having used a spell on her. After the accusation, she says: “I am not a witch. I know not hardly what you mean, when you say I am” (*ibid*, 218). Even though she is innocent, no one from her family helps her and she is sentenced to death.

Another Gothic element in the story is Nattee's knowledge in making love potions which helped Faith gain the affection of Pastor Nolan. Moreover, she has the ability to influence the actions of another person and she also enjoys telling terrifying tales to the young women in the house.

Lois Barclay has control of her own narrative, as a storyteller she has gained a voice, but her life circumstances left her voiceless. Gaskell introduces the notion of a witch as a narrator, building the process of interpretation and representation exclusively by Lois. Gaskell's narrative is a correspondence between the seventeenth-century factual history

from the nineteenth-century point of view, as well as a transatlantic conversation between America and England. *Lois the Witch* uses “a double distance of time and of space to launch an investigation into the pain of being estranged from the local by a sudden transition into an incomprehensible global world” (Pettitt, 600).

Salem is described as a typical Gothic setting, haunted by politics and unstable state, where witch trials are just one manifestation of evil. At the same time, she pinpoints the existence of silence and repression by emphasizing the existence of corruption. The whole Hickson family serves as a metonymy for the Salem community due to their suffering in silence and repressing the emotions. Each of the children shows it in its own way; Manasseh by communicating only through biblical language, Faith by her immense love for Pastor Nolan manifesting through physical convulsions since her desire is unspoken and Prudence by harassing members of the household and who is, in the end, guilty for Lois' tragic ending.

In the story, Gaskell introduces the persecution of the Puritan community which serves as a plausible proof for the existence of witchcraft trial in such an unhealthy environment. By condemning the witches, local authorities affirm their position in banishing the foreigners as well.

There are in fact two kinds of strangeness playing against one another in Gaskell's story: the strangeness of the remote place, an America that Gaskell describes as all swampy and boggy with deep forest, tangled into heavy darkness and the strangeness of the remote past, with the Puritan customs and beliefs in those days (*ibid*, 600).

The atmosphere is such that the community believes in witches being persecuted just because the authorities made them believe so. Both Nattee, the Indian maid, and Lois have the same fate because they are foreigners, enemies for Americans, despite their different origins. In the end, Lois loses the strings of her story, unable to understand or to utter a

denial. As her death sentence is pronounced she takes it with “dim understanding” (*Lois the Witch*, 214).

Lois the Witch belongs to the category of male Gothic tradition because it introduces both the supernatural elements without rational explanation and the source of fear through horrific elements such as witchcraft, prophetic visions and curses. The tale plot and its ending differ from the female Gothic because the female protagonist is not saved by a male lover closing the narrative with their marriage, but it ends tragically with Hugh Lucy, her love, arriving too late from England. He unfortunately comes “to the grassy grave where she lay at rest, done to death by mistaken men” (*ibid*, 223). Lois is at first chained to her foot with an iron ball closed in a jail until she is hanged and stoned to death. In the process of waiting for her death penalty, she loses her mind. The plot of *Lois the Witch* develops through many misunderstandings, false accusations and condemnation of outsiders increasing hysteria among the enclosed community of Salem. The horror of the story lies in the relationships of a highly dysfunctional family.

In Gaskell's Salem, then, the witch mania functions as a backdrop to events in the Hickson family, with the dysfunctions in the family paralleled by the moral and intellectual disorders of Salem as a society. The ensuing chaos, in a community already highly superstitious and insecure, leads to the witch hysteria itself, initiated and propelled by the Victorian archetype of irrational behaviour, a group of young girls (Henson, 260).

In Gaskell's short stories we witness a reinterpretation of the Gothic paradigm starting from the Unitarian conviction that “evil is no mystery at all”, that “it had no supernatural or abstract existence” but that it laid in the “irrational social structures and ignorant attitudes” (Styler, 34) that could be explained and understood. Elizabeth Gaskell's religious background is often referred to in her works of fiction. Throughout her life, Gaskell nourished an optimistic belief in human virtue which she implemented in her

literary works. The supernatural elements, ghost apparitions and Gothic imagery that she used throughout her writing stand as a critique and a condemnation of the Victorian society.

IV. Unitarianism

As religious outsiders, because of their opposition to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Unitarians were notably charitable and forgiving towards outcasts, believing in a merciful God who did not damn sinners to everlasting punishment (Davis, 150).

Unitarianism emerged as a faith after Dissenting ministers were ejected from the Church in 1662 and was afterwards developed as a strain of English Presbyterianism (Ugnow, 5). It was illegal to be a Unitarian until the passing of the Trinity Act in 1813. To

be born and educated as a Unitarian like Gaskell, meant that she faced controversies, difficulties and exclusion (Davis,150). The same as Gaskell uses Gothic literature to talk about the Other or the outcast, so did she feel in some points of her life due to her faith. Such prejudice, particularly the general belief that Unitarians were not Christians, illustrate how excluded Gaskell and others often felt, and how sensitive and reluctant she was to discuss her beliefs outside the safe circle of other Unitarians. Moreover, they were even identified with revolution “because they believed that men and women should speak openly against the things they felt were wrong, in personal and social life as well as on issues of faith” (Uglow, 7). Gaskell finds her outlet in writing, she buttresses the importance of female writers in all her works, speaking through her characters. “If Self is to be the end of exertions”, wrote Gaskell to her friend Tottie Fox,

those exertions are unholy, there is no doubt of that-and that is part of the danger in cultivating the Individual Life; but I do believe we all have some appointed work to do; which no one else can do so well... and that first we must find out what we are sent into the world to do, and define it, and make it clear to ourselves, (that's the hard part) and then forget ourselves in our work” (Gaskell, Letters, 107) (quoted in Showalter, 54).

Gaskell, as a Unitarian, rejected Original Sin, believing that the human mind and soul were not innately sinful, but had immense potential for growth. Consequently, Unitarians considered the environment as fundamentally responsible for shaping and determining an individual’s character and fate (Webster, 1). Unitarians did not determine the nature of Jesus, he could be a man with divine authority or a human being, divinely chosen, but morally fallible and vulnerable, therefore, he served them both as a teacher and as an example (Uglow, 5).

Gaskell's characters show features of generosity, goodness and strong moral values, their actions are full of compassion, sympathy and fondness to others. Their ability to

forgive the mistakes and wrongdoings that others may impose on them or to ask for forgiveness are just some of the main traits of Unitarianism. Coral Lansbury wrote a book about Elizabeth Gaskell and paid special attention to the religious aspect of her life, presenting a lengthy account on nineteenth-century Unitarianism. According to Lansbury, Unitarianism was a “collectivist movement in praise of the individual” (13). Gaskell's characters, as Unitarians, had a strong belief in human morality and virtue. She herself believed that each individual is one of a kind and has its own personal needs, but as Unitarian religion proposes, has a certain tolerance for others. Moreover, she possessed a strong faith in forgiveness and that was what led her through life. In her works, Gaskell highlights the need for redemption and forgiveness for every human being. Her characters often asked for forgiveness from their family, friends or God, but more often offered it to those who need it. Those characters were mostly structured and depicted in such a way that the reader could relate to them. The moments of seeking for redemption and forgiveness were not highlighted, but were in function of educating the readers to follow their own moral compass.

4.1. From disciplinary gaze to redemption

As a construct of moral consciousness, religion carries a strong meaning for the individual. Faith, as an individual responsibility, is constructed around certain values which should be obeyed, otherwise followers of a certain religious group can be punished or exiled. It is in the core of Christianity that people believe in an omnipresent, but invisible observer who might see their acts. Moreover, there are priests, nuns, and other members of the clergy that could be watching them at any moment in time. The awareness of the

possibility that someone could be observing them reduces the likelihood of committing a sin. The same pattern of the internalized control is seen in Foucault's theorization of Bentham's Panopticon and can be applied to fallen women as well.

The conceptual lenses of Foucauldian gaze can be used to illuminate the position of a 19th century fallen women in the society. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, theorises the gaze as a vehicle of power by putting it into a context of the Bentham's Panopticon. The first drawings of Panopticon were issued in 1791 to serve as a perfect system to regulate prisoners, or people in insane asylums, schools, hospitals or factories. Such structure allowed guards to continually see inside each cell from the high central power, invisible to prisoners. Constant observation, or thought that the possibility of constant surveillance is present at all times, ultimately disciplined the observed, therefore Foucault's term *the disciplinary gaze* functions as a form of power that is constant, unnoticeable and internalized. Seeing and judging is what the emergence of the Panopticon brought, so it can easily be translated onto Victorian society, especially onto women who were constantly observed and judged based on their behaviour.

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault, 202).

Being aware of the panoptic surveillance makes one more prone to accept rules and regulations, conforming to the socially accepted norms. The observer gains its power while accumulating knowledge by observing, as Foucault says "by being combined and generalized, they attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase in power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process" (*ibid*). The same as in religion, those who are observed, self-discipline themselves as a result of the internalized control. Foucault's disciplinary gaze and such system can be applied to the society as a whole, not only inside the

closed space of an institution. Women in the 19th century were under constant observance, repressed by (the) male gaze, their words were analysed and their actions condemned. Through Unitarianism, Gaskell preaches about the individual who has the right to commit a sin, repent and reintegrate into a society and then continue to grow. In one of his sermons, Gaskell's husband William Gaskell reveals a positive and embracing attitude towards suffering, stating that "he who has never suffered, has not attained to anything like true moral elevation and maturity of character. We must be purified in the fires of affliction" (qtd in Webster, 23). This identification with another human sufferer directly engages with the Unitarian understanding of Christ's role in the world. He is the perfect embodiment of humanity and leaves an exemplified life of self-redemption for all men to follow.

Gaskell implemented a new meaning into the traditional fallen women trope in order to emphasize the social influence and position of women in the Victorian age.

Though assuredly not a feminist writer, no Victorian writer of major stature was more aggressively *feminine* than Gaskell. Active and even strenuous as her life as a writer and minister's wife was, it seems to have convinced her that the feminine sphere of interest was not only different from that of men-it required a different literary perspective, an act of feminine fiction-making to give reality and shape to it (Weiss, 278).

It was very important to write about women from another woman's perspective because "historical research reveals the typical Victorian woman as a mental and moral cripple, incapable of informed and independent judgement, timid, deferential..vacuous..a slave to conventional opinion, to class prejudice, and to a narrow and bigoted morality" (Stoneman, 21).

There are two types of women who sought redemption in Gaskell's works. This thesis analyses both sexually and spiritually fallen women as portrayed in Gaskell's short stories.

4.2. Sexually Fallen Women

Occupying a position of duality, the woman of the 19th century carried a role of either a saint or a sinner, moreover, departure from the ideal Victorian woman was defined by being deviant and unnatural, in contrast to a chaste, innocent and self-sacrificing woman. Whether by sexual misconduct or by criminal act, unnatural behaviour was condemned and analysed in depth. There was no excuse for woman's violence, but it was opposite to the essence of ideal womanhood and motherhood. Female writers have created characters such as insane doubles or ghosts which were surpassing the constraints of the patriarchal society. In the Victorian period the dualities were associated with madness on the one hand, or the division between good and evil on the other hand. In her book *The Female Malady*, Showalter states that:

The dual images of female insanity – madness as one of the wrongs of women; madness as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality-suggest the two ways that the relationship between the woman and madness has been perceived. In the most obvious sense, madness is a female malady because it is experienced by more women than men (3).

This leads us to the binary opposition of women and men which was highly distinguished in the Victorian period. *The other* is always juxtaposed to *the normal* as the feminist theory puts a man and a woman in opposition. Toril Moi suggests that the male-female opposition always carries an inevitable positive-negative evaluation creating a hierarchy where feminine is the negative, the powerless and male is the positive, powerful. Under patriarchy, male is always the victor and therefore sets the value system where male is the 'normal', and female is the 'other' (65). As Foucault notes, the unnatural behaviour fell into a category of what he calls "other Victorians".

If it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere. The brothel and the mental hospital would be

those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and the pimp, together with the psychiatrist and his hysteric – those ‘other Victorians’ (Foucault, 4).

Victorian society created a discourse on sexuality outside of Victorian chaste morals: the world of perversion, or the world of the mentally ill, the criminal, the homosexual. Foucault proposes the term the ‘other Victorians’ for those people who liberated their sexuality outside of the marital bond where “on the subject of sex, silence became the rule” (Foucault, 3). Sexuality, indeed, cannot be repressed; it can only be displaced, so the Victorians placed sexuality with the mad people, the devious and the corrupt.

At that time, a woman commonly belonged to the domestic sphere, defined by her role as a wife and a mother. Moreover, the ideal woman was always associated with chastity because of the importance of pure blood significant for the 18th century patriarchal society and the rise of the middle class (Gilbert and Gubar, 48). It was exactly in the 18th century that the perception of fallen women began to rise and to be discussed. As Gilbert and Gubar explain, women writers “struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness” (51). Because of their writing, they were seen as if they were denying their own gender, departing from male domination, rejecting their feminine duties, moreover, moving into a wrong direction, the monstrous and the mad one. The story that Milton, “the first of the masculinists,” most notably tells about women is of course “the story of woman’s secondness, her otherness, and how that otherness leads inexorably to her demonic anger, her sin, her fall, and her exclusion from that garden of the gods which is also, for her, the garden of poetry” (Gilbert and Gubar, 191). Gilbert and Gubar also argue that Victorian woman authors created works that appeared to be one thing on the outside, while having a second meaning below the surface, bubbled and churned, subconsciously voicing the anger and desires of the female author. In order to accomplish this goal, the authors created characters that appeared simple, but were in reality operating in more than one capacity. In this way, the madwoman or

murderess is not simply a villain but is instead “the author’s double, an image of her own anxiety and rage” (Gilbert and Gubar,78).

Male authors who used the fallen women trope usually perceived it as Eve’s displacement from Eden and as a punishment for her sins against her husband and Father, sending her off into a new society. On the other hand, female authors saw the Miltonic tradition of a fallen woman saving herself by finding recovery in all female society within her homeland as is the case in Haywood’s *The British Recluse* and Gaskell’s *Ruth* and *Lizzie Leigh*. In a single line from *Paradise Lost* (“He for God only, she for God in him.” 4:299) Milton “managed to enshrine the concept of male superiority and to posit husband-worship as appropriate feminine religion. In 1850, however, Milton’s argument was completely inverted in the unlikely hands of Elizabeth Gaskell, devout Christian and wife of Unitarian minister” (Thompson, 22).

Dickens established reform home Urania Cottage in 1847, where fallen women would

be taught all household work that would be useful to them in home of their own and enable them to make it comfortable and happy... each may have a little flower-garden if she pleases.. they will be treated with the greatest kindness and will lead an active, cheerful, healthy life: will learn many things it is profitable and good to know, and being entirely removed from all who have any knowledge of their career will being life afresh and be able to win a good name and character (*An appeal to fallen women*, 2).

In one of his letters to Gaskell, Dickens communicates his goals more plainly, as “the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition” (Letter to Mrs. Gaskell. 31 Jan. 1850).

Any unnatural behaviour or associations with sexuality outside of marriage were viewed as socially deviant, sick and evil. It was not until 1850 that the reclamation movement

started perceiving women who were off their path as fallen angels who needed help reintegrating into society.

In 1854, Coventry Patmore in his poem *Angel in the House* conveyed a model of the domestic goddess, wife and a mother with all her purities which soon became a juxtaposed term for fallen woman. The private sphere of home, which was assigned to women, served as a sanctuary which regulated its moral stability, opposing the chaotic and exchangeable masculine public sphere of business and politics. As in Patmore's poem, a woman was a self-sacrificing figure who did not have ambition outside of her household. Such figure, metaphorically speaking, was killed by Virginia Woolf because she "would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex" (Woolf, 2). This thought was part of the speech that Woolf held before a branch of the National Society for Women's Service in 1931 and was posthumously published with the title "Professions for Women". Woolf states that "killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (*ibid*, 3).

There were people who wanted to help women who were ostracized by the society, pushed into madhouses, cast off or punished because of their deviation from a typical *angel in the house*. An important thing happened with the rise of reform houses that did not want to see those women die, but helped them regain socially acceptable status. Soon sex became a legitimate subject for investigation and discussion, as Foucault, in his *The History of Sexuality*, uses Victorian period as an example of bringing forward the taboo subject of sex, thus inaugurating the subject into many discourses, such as legal, medical, even religious, so paradoxically, refraining from sex resulted in the flourishing of discourses on sexuality.

Lizzie Leigh

A short story with the least Gothic elements, but with solid grounds for the analysis of fallen women, especially sexually fallen women is Gaskell's *Lizzie Leigh*.

Emily Jane Morris argues that

In 'Lizzie Leigh,' Gaskell juxtaposes feminine agency with masculine social paralysis and shows that tragedy can be rectified, if not avoided, by the act of doing instead of judging. In doing this, she overthrows the traditional depiction of the fallen woman and challenges her status as irretrievably lost (41).

Joanne Thompson also focuses upon the feminine agency by overthrowing the traditional fallen woman story and writes that

In the typical version of the story, the young woman is seduced and abandoned by an upper-class villain, suffers the curses of her father, and dies begging the mercy of her male savior. In Gaskell's story, by contrast, the male figures are absent. Lizzie's father is dead. We never learn anything about the seducer or the seduction itself (24).

Thompson, like Morris, sees women as being the main figures in the text, and she sees this as feminizing of the fallen woman story which is empowering because the focus is on the woman's experiences.

Susan was not allowed to be seen in an interaction with a fallen woman, even Will reacted negatively after finding out that Susan is taking care of one fallen woman's child. Women were not even supposed to talk about other woman's fallenness, any knowledge about transgression was considered improper. Emily Jane Morris pinpoints the fact that Gaskell challenged the traditional portrait of fallen women by creating proactive female characters who can redeem the status of the fallen women through their active roles. In *Lizzie Leigh*, Gaskell uses the character of Susan to portray the angel in the house, traditional Victorian trope, associating many conventional ideals to her personality. Moreover, Susan is a self-sacrificing character who selflessly takes care of her abusive

father and is completely dedicated to Nanny's upbringing. While building Lizzie's character, Gaskell not only uses a literary trope of a fallen woman, but the patriarchal treatment towards a fallen woman, therefore putting it into another perspective. The patriarchs of the story see Lizzie as a monster who only deserves to be banished from their pure household. Gaskell blurs the lines between Susan and Lizzie by giving them both the agency of motherhood. Moreover, Susan accepts Lizzie no matter what her history is, helping her from the very beginning, acting as a patriarchal figure in the family, which shows that even a financial provider for the household can help one fallen woman. Both Lizzie and Susan defied the patriarchal norms. Lizzie by finding someone to take care of her children and not letting her suffer as a bastard child, and Susan, on the other hand, by rejecting her father's plea not to take Nanny into her care.

4.3. Spiritually Fallen Women

The Old Nurse's Story

In *The Old Nurse's Story*, Grace Furnivall is an obvious example of a spiritually fallen woman. She is haunted by guilt because of her actions towards her sister Maude. Her crime lies in the fact that she did not help her sister and her child after they had been left on the street by the man both sisters were in love with at first, but who picked Maude until she bore him a child and then left her. "In a sense, the two Furnivall daughters remain too long in the domestic womb, but with Gothic grotesquerie: they are stillborn, the mother dead. They have no opportunity to individuate themselves until their first, perilous romance. Fear of the largely absent, musical father ironically emerges in love for a foreign musician" (Galef, 58).

Even though she hides Maude's portrait in the dusty drawing room, she cannot hide from her ghost appearance. Occasionally she begs for forgiveness, but she does not commit an act of repentance and that is the reason why her ending is tragic. Maude obviously insists on her sister's repentance which would be a public confession of her crime, but Grace does not find a spiritual peace with herself. Unfortunately, the story concludes with the disintegration of the Furnivall family and the breakdown of class structures.

The reason for Grace's idleness may lie in the fact that she is traumatized by the events in the past.

Grace in old age has learned to keep depressive anxiety at bay with her knitting and the company of Stark. Even her deafness may be read as a form of psychosomatic denial. Significantly, she never marries. In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud suggests an economic view of this self-enforced quietude long after the brutal incident: 'the pleasure principle follows from the principle of constancy', or keeping excitation to a minimum, with the compulsion to repeat such behavior over and over as part of neurosis. The point is that 'protection against stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than reception stimuli' (Galef, 60).

The relationship between Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark is similar to the one of Hester and Rosamond. Moreover, Rosamond and the dead child occupy the same place in

the life of Miss Furnivall and it is through love and affection towards Rosamond that she wants to substitute the lack of understanding and love for her sister's child. "If one analyzes the story from the perspective of sibling rivalry, however, one can't help noticing that Gaskell has provided a half spectral after-image of the original sisters, pairing an orphaned girl and a long-dead cousin" (Galef, 62).

Poor Clare

The most obvious example of a spiritually fallen woman is Bridget Fitzgerald from *Poor Clare*. Her world falls apart when her daughter Mary leaves England and she uses her witchcraft the moment her only companion, dog Mignon, is killed by Gisborne. She becomes notorious for her curses and the society avoids her. That is a common trait of Gaskell's tales which "show women of strong will and individual action, but they also delineate the ways in which women's power can be frustrated, turned even to a destructiveness which rebounds on the women themselves" (Martin, 33).

When she finds out that she has accidentally cursed her granddaughter Lucy with her own malicious double, her life becomes even more miserable. On the other hand, Lucy has suffered a lot through her life because of Bridget's curse but she does not feel the urge to revenge or to complain, and she is ready to forgive Bridget, having in mind all the trouble she has caused her loved ones because of the wicked double. There is no other method of removing the curse from Lucy than for Bridget to join the Poor Clares, where she would earn forgiveness and repent. She moves to Antwerp to join the order of nuns who live in perpetual poverty and service to others, where she gives more in service than all the nuns together and considers herself as the meanest of them all. However, she is ready to do anything just to save her granddaughter. When she accidentally encounters Gisborne, who

was injured in a rebellious attack against the Austrian occupiers, Bridget gives him shelter and food in the convent, leaving the nuns without any food. Citizens of Antwerp, knowing that the Poor Clares are starving to death, provide them every little bite of food they have got, saying: “A Poor Clare is dying! A Poor Clare is dead for hunger! God forgive us and our city!” (*Poor Clare*, 83) They ask forgiveness for their sins, symbolising Bridget's repentance. With Bridget's death, the curse for Lucy finally finishes. It is interesting that the narrator notices a certain proverb written on the wall of Bridget's room which says: “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink” (*ibid*, 83).

Her ending is a happy one, knowing that the curse has ended, she peacefully dies, forgiven by God, herself and everyone she had harmed. This ending suggests that this story is exclusively about forgiveness and repentance, while it would be a love story if it had ended with the marriage of Lucy and the lawyer. Gaskell's Unitarian soul believed in a perpetual search for goodness in every human being, the urge to find a way to redemption for the sinful period of life. Bridget's construction as a witch is presented as a failure of reason, but also as a failure of compassion through which Gaskell condemned society of the Victorian period. It was contrary to the core of Unitarianism Gaskell practised by “rejecting the idea of a divine Christ who suffered to redeem humanity from sins incurred by Adam”, and by “adopting a more rational and optimistic position based on the belief that God created human beings with the capacity to govern themselves with both justice and compassion” (Stoneman, 134).

Lois the Witch

Lois' life story is weaved through with a number of incredible misfortunes which shaped her character. There were two ways in which she could have been shaped and she chose the path which is based on forgiveness and understanding, not the one of revenge and hatred. Her parents died, she was forced to leave the man she loved to move to a foreign country with family that does not quite accept her. The most terrifying thing that happened to her was the conviction for being a witch. Her aunt Grace and cousins Prudence and Faith are all spiritually fallen women, mostly because of their repressed sexual passion, or the communal superstition which blurred their minds. Their jealousy, superstition and evil nature come out when they do not want to help Lois after she had been convicted to death. Interesting note is found in an essay *The Gothic as Mass Hysteria and the Threat of the Foreign Other in *Lois the Witch** by Irina Ciobanu stating:

This is traceable from one tale to another, from one short-story to another, to reach one of its most accomplished versions in *Lois the Witch* (1859), with its analysis of the liberating but also devastating effects of repressed sexual desire and the religious fanaticism deriving from mere superstition or the hysteria associated to it, which reveals a much more subversive author, a perceptive observer of mass psychology and popular behaviour (Ciobanu, 3).

Despite that, Lois finds the strength to forgive them and to forgive the community of Salem for sending her to death. Even when Grace Hickson pays her a visit, she raises her hand and curses Lois by saying “for ever, for her deadly sin” and demanding that she meet her at God’s judgement-seat to face her upon her death, and answer for this “deadly injury” (*Lois the Witch* 203). Until now, Lois was polite to Grace, not wanting to cause any further harm. In this moment, she decided to leave a powerful remembrance that would haunt her aunt for everything that she has done to her. “She, too, lifted up her right hand, as if solemnly pledging herself by that action, and replied - ‘Aunt! I will meet you there. And there you will know my innocence of this deadly thing. God have mercy on you and yours!’”

(*ibid*, 203). Since the reader first thinks that Lois has decided to return the curse, it is quite unexpected to hear the blessing that she utters. There is no place for hate in her words, only for forgiveness, as part of the Unitarian values. In fact, her genuine innocence and sane mind was the thing that frightened the members of such a closed community. Maybe it is from her that Grace and Prudence learnt to ask for repentance. Most of the Hickson family names are symbolical, they are allegorically religious and carry strong meaning. Their names are in opposition to their characters, as Ciobanu states:

Grace, Faith and Prudence, standing for abstract spiritual virtues apparently identifiable in their contained and pious stance, contrast sharply with their darker selves. Grace is a harsh and stern woman, Faith an agnostic and Prudence oscillates between emotional moods that already introduce the notion of hysteria (143).

Lois the Witch exploits the reader's interest in the supernatural, but ultimately sees “hysteria and sexual disturbance, not witchcraft, as the dominating forces in the community of Salem” (Martin, 28) in general. Hysteria refers to emotional excess, but the term itself derives from the Greek noun *hysterikos*, meaning the womb. It was widely accepted that hysteria was the psychological manifestation of a disease of the womb. Hippocrates and later Plato were pioneers of the idea that women are more prone to irrationality and hysterical conditions which later influenced Sigmund Freud’s popular theories (King, 3). Elaine Showalter writes about the common Victorian misconception of insanity being exclusively “a female malady”. Any inconsistency with social norms of the time was perceived as moral insanity, moreover, for women it was manifested through promiscuous behaviour and extroversion. This misbelief was even more encouraged due to male domination in the Victorian era.

The Salem community from Gaskell’s *Lois the Witch* is an example of a society falling into a terrible atmosphere of violence, fear and superstition. By the end of the story we witness Salem as it slowly awakens, seeking for forgiveness and redemption.

Symbolically, the ship Lois travels to America on is named *Redemption*. Lois starts her voyage to America without having a clue what to expect and “Her heart sank a little as she stood alone, waiting for the captain of the good ship *Redemption*, the kind rough old sailor, who was her only known friend in this unknown continent.” (*Lois the Witch*, 85) In the end, redemption did remain the only motif left in Salem. At the end of the narrative, people of Salem ask for forgiveness for their delusional evil acts, acting as if they were a fallen woman, pleading for redemption. The ministers write a decree to apologise to everyone they have done harm, to admit that the victims of the trial were innocent, but did not survive because of their fanatical superstition. Judge Sewall, responsible for all the wrong judgement, Prudence aware of her role in false accusations which led to death sentences of innocent people and Grace Hickson all fall into a world of repentance, sorrow and grief. Hugh Lucy, Lois's lover from England, is another character who demonstrates sorrow and grief, because he was not able to save Lois, saying: “All their repentance will avail nothing to my Lois, nor will it bring back her life” (*Lois the Witch*, 207). In the end, he gathers the strength to forgive, the same as Lois would because of her Christian values.

This short story provides an example of how the homogenous group can turn into a hysterical mass in the name of religious faith and salvation. The evidence is not only in a destructive power of mass hysteria triggered by repressed feelings, but in the rejection of Otherness. The narrative Gaskell develops in *Lois the Witch* mirrors Charles Mackay's observation how “We find whole communities fix their attention upon one object, and go mad in its pursuit: that millions of people become simultaneously impressed with one delusion, and run after it, till their attention is caught by some new folly more captivating than the first” (qtd in Henson, 252).

V. Conclusion

The aim of this comparative analysis was to emphasise the importance of Elizabeth Gaskell's short stories in the context of the Victorian period. Gaskell was one of many women writers who used their literature as a medium to talk about the state of consciousness of the Victorian mind, its instabilities and social problems. The emergence of periodicals and magazines offered an experience which differed from reading a novel. Periodicals brought along the new wave by enticing the readership with more affordable, quicker to read and therefore more interesting works of fiction which dealt with common themes of society. Gaskell's Gothic short stories *Lois the Witch*, *Poor Clare* and *The Old Nurse's Story* share traits with her short story *Lizzie Leigh*, inasmuch as they all contain the trope of a fallen woman. They were all published in periodicals as well. By using Gothic imagery and simultaneously constructing stories around both female and male Gothic plots, Gaskell offers an educational note on morality, proving her undeniable skill as a writer and storyteller. Introducing doubleness or *doppelgängers* as Gothic motifs, she corresponds with the duality of women in the 19th century, with the sinner-saint dichotomy. Her religious construct around Unitarianism is present in most of her works and manifests through her characters. The importance of redemption is highly visible in her Gothic stories which deal with sexually or spiritually fallen women. Gothic genre helps her articulate an opinion on the issue of women who were mostly oppressed and under constant observation of a disciplinary gaze. Through Unitarianism, Gaskell preaches about the capacity of human beings to govern themselves with both justice and compassion and she showed that social and moral evils could be overpowered by reconciliation and redemption arising from human suffering.

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