

THE SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF ELIZABETH  
GASKELL : GOTHIC TRADITION, FORGIVENESS AND  
REDEMPTION, AND FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS IN MRS  
GASKELL'S SHORT FICTION

Tracy Marie Nectoux

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy  
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by

Tracy Marie Nectoux

SEPTEMBER 2001



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## Abstract

This thesis discusses selected short stories by Elizabeth Gaskell. It focuses on three main ideas: the use of pagan traditions and the importance of names in her gothic tales (Chapter One); the incorporation of her Unitarian beliefs in stories depicting spiritually and sexually “Fallen Women” (Chapter Two); and the various types of female friendships found in her short fiction (Chapter Three).

Chapter One explores the way Mrs. Gaskell draws on pagan myth and traditions in her gothic stories, and the significance of particular names. It draws attention to a less familiar aspect of her work, the description of extreme states of mind in a Gothic framework.

Chapter Two explores Mrs. Gaskell’s Unitarian background in relation to her many short stories about forgiveness and redemption. It also discusses her analysis of the limits of forgiveness, and the emotional and spiritual dangers of unconditional forgiveness, particularly with reference to “Morton Hall” and “The Crooked Branch.”

Chapter Three focuses on female friendships in Gaskell’s short stories, written at a time when such critics as Eliza Lynn Linton had dismissed women’s capacity for friendship. I argue that Mrs. Gaskell proves these critics wrong, but also that she does imagine frightening, dangerous friendships, such as that between Victorine and Theresa (“Crowley Castle”). These unhealthy friendships never appear in her stories set in real, domestic settings, but only in her gothic tales of mystery and horror.

In all three chapters, the analysis reveals dichotomies that reflect Mrs. Gaskell’s own life, for example as a member of the “rational” Unitarians, who nonetheless believed in the supernatural. The nature of this dichotomy, and the ways in which it reveals itself, forms a link between the chapters, and is a recurrent concern of the thesis.

I, Tracy Marie Nectoux, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 46,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

date 12-27-01 signature of candidate \_\_\_\_\_

I was admitted as a research student in September, 1999 and as a candidate for the degree of M.Phil. in September, 2000; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1999 and 2001.

date 12-27-01 signature of candidate \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of M.Phil. in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

date 8 Feb 2002 signature of supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

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**Abbreviations**

<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell</i>
<i>Further Letters</i>	<i>Further Letters of Mrs. Gaskell</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life of Charlotte Brontë</i>
<i>CD Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of Charles Dickens</i>
<i>GE Letters</i>	<i>The George Eliot Letters</i>
<i>SHB</i>	<i>The Shakespeare Head Brontë</i>

## INTRODUCTION

It is my contention that Elizabeth Gaskell's short fiction, as a rule, has long been neglected among literary scholars. On the occasion that she is mentioned in academic essays and literary criticism, more often than not the attention is devoted to her novels rather than her short stories or novellas. For instance, Elaine Showalter's *Literature of Their Own* discusses Gaskell at length, but her book concerns the longer works of female novelists only, not their short fiction; consequently, there is no mention of Mrs. Gaskell's short fiction anywhere in Showalter's text. Mary Lenard's *Preaching Pity* follows Showalter in making no mention of Gaskell's short stories at all.<sup>1</sup> If the critics do mention Mrs. Gaskell's short stories, much of their discussion is devoted only to how the stories relate back to the longer novels. For example, though "Lizzie Leigh" preceded *Ruth*, only the controversial novel inevitably captures the primary focus of Mrs. Gaskell's biographers and critics. Consequently, "Lizzie Leigh" is casually alluded to as Gaskell's "first" story of unwed pregnancy, and then quickly set aside. Patsy Stoneman's *Elizabeth Gaskell* discusses some of Gaskell's short stories, but the stories are either crowded together in one chapter titled, "Two Nations and Separate Spheres: Class and Gender in Elizabeth Gaskell's Work" (a chapter that is only twenty-three pages long), or they are briefly mentioned in her other chapters—all of which are devoted to Gaskell's novels, with one exception, *Cousin Phillis*. Jane Spencer's *Elizabeth Gaskell* only mentions two of Gaskell's short stories in the entire book: "Curious if True" and "Lois the Witch" (about which there is only one sentence). Ironically, Spencer discusses five poems by William Wordsworth, yet mentions only two short stories by the author to whom the book is dedicated. Spencer provides an extensive critique of "Curious if True," but the story is in a chapter titled "Household Goodness: 'Cousin Phillis', *Wives and Daughters*."

Hence, though she discusses the story at length, her main purpose is to tie it to the longer novel:

The real, but enchanting world Whittingham returns to can be compared with the world Gaskell creates in late works such as "Cousin Phillis" and *Wives and Daughters* . . . (123).

Texts that are devoted to the themes or the history of the Victorian short story or Victorian gothic fiction, either do not mention Mrs. Gaskell at all, or merely mention her in passing as a "contributor" to Charles Dickens' journals. David Punter's *The Literature of Terror*, Valerie Shaw's *The Short Story*, and Harold Orel's *The Victorian Short Story* are perfect examples of my point. Mrs. Gaskell wrote 30 works of short fiction; nine of these stories are gothic in nature, or contain gothic elements. Yet, Punter mentions Gaskell only once as a contributor to Dickens' *All the Year Round* (189), and neglects to discuss even one of her works. Valerie Shaw grants one sentence each to *Cranford* and *Cousin Phillis*, but only as these novellas relate to Mary Russell Mitford's fiction (166, 167). Both "The Half-Brothers" and "The Old Nurse's Story" get a passing comment, and these stories must share the one sentence devoted to them (196). Orel mentions Mrs. Gaskell but once, and his comment has nothing to do with either her or her works:

Dickens's skill in subdividing Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South* into suitable lengths for serialized installments in *Household Words* was a significant element in the instantaneous success of that novel. (64)<sup>2</sup>

This sentence is in a chapter devoted to Dickens. In fact, despite its title, Orel's book is concerned only with male authors of the Victorian Age. Texts on female writers, however, are almost as dismissive. Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*, an extensive 650 page book on nineteenth century female authors, mentions Mrs. Gaskell only five times: once with a group of other literary women who were "plagued by

headaches" (151); twice as a friend of the Brontë family (206, 70-71), once in regards to her letter to George Eliot (484); and once more in a parenthetical referencing her "factory novel," *Mary Barton* (205). In the introduction to Jessica Amanda Salmonson's feminist anthology of supernatural fiction, *What Did Miss Darrington See?*, Rosemary Jackson states that Gaskell's "novels and short macabre tales exemplify a certain type of women's subversive use of the supernatural" and lists "Lois the Witch" and "The Grey Woman" as examples (Introduction, xx). Yet, not one of Mrs. Gaskell's gothic or supernatural stories is made available in the anthology.<sup>3</sup>

There are, of course, critical texts that do discuss Gaskell's short fiction at length, and recognise her important contributions to the genre. In 1978, Michael Ashley published an anthology of what he considered to be Mrs. Gaskell's suspenseful gothic tales. And Laura Kranzler has recently done the same (*Gothic Tales: Elizabeth Gaskell*, Penguin, 2001). In Glennis Stephenson's *Nineteenth-Century Stories by Women*, Gaskell is the only author who has more than one story in the anthology ("Lizzie Leigh" and "The Old Nurse's Story").<sup>4</sup> Jenny Uglow, Felicia Bonaparte, and Terence Wright are three authors who devote much of their discussions to Gaskell's shorter fiction, and their work has been most valuable to my thesis. In his Preface to *Elizabeth Gaskell: 'We are not angels'*, Wright "felt there was no point in registering her [Gaskell's] 'points score' against her contemporaries, nor in tackling specifically the negatives felt by other critics" (xii), and I have adopted the same approach. My intent is not to "prove" the value of Gaskell's short fiction, but rather to celebrate it by bringing it to the forefront. Mrs. Gaskell's short fiction shall speak for itself.

In this thesis, I will discuss a few of Mrs. Gaskell's novels or essays, but only in regards to how they relate to her short fiction. For example, in Chapter Two, I will

discuss *Ruth* at length; however, my intent is to show that the characters, as well as the message, in "Lizzie Leigh" were a precedent to the novel. My thesis will focus on three main ideas that I have gleaned from Mrs. Gaskell's short fiction: Pagan tradition and the importance of names in her gothic tales (Chapter One); how Mrs. Gaskell incorporated her Unitarian beliefs in her stories which depict spiritually and sexually "Fallen Women" (Chapter Two); and the various types of female friendships found in her short fiction (Chapter Three). As will be shown, these three lines of inquiry lead us to conclude that Gaskell's short stories contain themes that intertwine, giving an organic wholeness.

In *Mrs Gaskell's Tales of Mystery and Horror*, Michael Ashley says that the "place held by Mrs Gaskell in the development of the horror short story is undeniably a focal point" (11). And certainly, Mrs. Gaskell's gothic fiction incorporates all of the elements previously established in the genre of horror fiction since Horace Walpole's 1764 publication of *The Castle of Otranto*. David Punter lists the elements of the Gothic genre most clearly and succinctly:

When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant. Used in this sense, '*Gothic*' fiction is the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves. (italics mine 1)

From her short gothic fiction, it is clear that Mrs. Gaskell knew the "rules" and made use of them in abundance. "The Grey Woman," a tale that Ashley enthusiastically calls a "Gothic extravaganza" (14), is a perfect example, with its gloomy castle and

suspenseful stalking of its terrified heroines. In this tale, Gaskell needs no supernatural monster, for in *Monsieur de la Tourelle*, she has introduced a villain who is himself a monster capable of horrific cruelty.

But Gaskell's unexpected use of gothic imagery in her non-gothic tales is also very interesting. She often wrote a short scene of "unspeakable terror," or she depicted a benevolent character committing an uncharacteristically "villainous" act. The prophesying dream of *Madame de Crequy* is an example of Gaskell's tendency to include the genre she enjoyed in a story as far removed from the gothic tradition as can be:

[S]he had seen the figure of Virginie, as the only light object amid much surrounding darkness as of night, smiling and beckoning Clement on—on—till at length the bright phantom stopped, motionless, and Madame de Crequy's eyes began to penetrate the murky darkness, and to see closing around her the gloomy dripping walls . . . the walls of the vault of the chapel of the De Crequys . . .

(*My Lady Ludlow*. V. 125)<sup>5</sup>

*My Lady Ludlow* was published in 1858, and the following year Gaskell incorporated the supernatural element of prophecy again, to a much greater extent, in the gothic tale "Lois the Witch."

In "Morton Hall" (*Household Words*, 1853), Gaskell tells the long history of a great house, beginning during England's civil war and ending after the restoration. Like Libbie Marsh, the Hall has three eras, and Gaskell makes one of them a dark, gothic tale. Morton Hall is a house long cursed by the first dwellers there. In the days of England's civil war, a great injury is inflicted upon Lady Alice Carr (a Puritan) by her husband, Sir John Morton (a Cavalier). Falsely accused of insanity, bound to her horse's pillion, and forced from her home, Lady Carr's last words are a foul curse

upon the Hall and all its future inhabitants: "Sir John! it shall be called a Devil's House, and you shall be his steward" (II. 176). And the curse seizes upon Morton Hall; it permeates the passageways, accumulates in the great dining room (where Lady Alice often served dinner to her Puritan guests) and settles there. Years of deep grief ensue. Whether it be poverty, loneliness, jealousy, or death, some form of evil or grief strikes each generation of Morton Hall. The dwellers of the Hall find no true happiness, until, at last, the family comes full circle: descendants of Alice Carr and John Morton marry. Marmaduke Carr marries Cordelia Morton and restores dignity to the family name.

In "The Well of Pen-Morfa" (*Household Words*, 1850), the otherwise kind and patient Eleanor Gwynn brings a curse upon the house of her daughter's betrothed to "avenge her cruel wrongs" committed by him. The small scene, only a few paragraphs long, is replete with gothic imagery: "wrath burst[ing]" forth; Eleanor's voice constricted through parted lips; hysteria; arms thrown toward heaven; lightning striking the "grey old house;" and, of course, the curse itself (II. 253). In both this scene and that in "Morton Hall," Gaskell draws on her talent for writing chilling, frightening scenes, and the dark side of human nature. As I will show, curses are an important tool that Gaskell uses in much of her gothic fiction.

Mrs. Gaskell delighted in ghost stories and frightening, even violent, supernatural tales. She began telling them as a young girl in school, and she was still telling them in the year before her death, entertaining a group of her women friends with tales of "Scotch ghosts, historical ghosts, spirited ghosts with faded uniforms and nice old powdered queues."<sup>6</sup> As will be shown in Chapter One, Mrs. Gaskell had no fear of ghosts, nor did she think it foolish to believe in them, or to respect that intangible side of the supernatural that is still so much a mystery to us. In one of the most witty and engaging scenes in *Cranford*,<sup>7</sup> Gaskell plays with the dignity of Miss

Pole, sarcastically poking fun at those who would mock a belief in the supernatural elements in a God-created world. In the chapter, "The Panic," Mrs. Forrester confesses to her friends that what "would frighten her more than anything" are ghosts, and states that her servant has seen a headless lady "all in white . . . who sat by the roadside wringing her hands in deep grief" (II. 119-120). This sighting occurred on Darkness Lane, the very lane on which the ladies will walk home this night. The rational Miss Pole disdainfully lectures Mrs. Forrester (along with all the ladies) that science and reason can explain away fears and "sightings," stating with "withering scorn" that believing in ghosts is silly superstition (II. 119-120). Still, while walking home later that night, Miss Pole's trusted rationality abruptly abandons her, and fear takes over: "She had breath for nothing beyond an imploring 'Don't leave me!' uttered as she clutched my arm so tightly that I could not have quitted her, ghost or no ghost" (II. 121). The women are accompanied by two men who are carrying Miss Matty in a cab, and Miss Pole is so terrified of walking down Darkness Lane, she pays them an extra shilling to take a longer route along another road. Nevertheless, the next morning, Miss Pole regains her dubious scepticism, and, with a "half-kindly and half-contemptuous" smile, gossips to Lady Glenmire of her "poor friend Mrs. Forrester, and her terror of ghosts" (II. 122). This gentle chiding of Miss Pole by Gaskell is brilliant in its satire; she does not have to be heavy-handed to get her message across—even the most hardened sceptics have within themselves, a small belief in things magical, and to pretend otherwise is dishonest. Mrs. Gaskell, herself, claims to have seen a ghost (*Letters* 81), and I doubt she would have suffered Miss Pole's scorn gladly.

Even more fascinating than her respect for the supernatural is Mrs. Gaskell's vast knowledge of pagan tradition. In Chapter One, I intend to show how Mrs. Gaskell uses this knowledge to bring richness and depth to many of her gothic tales.

For instance, it is Lois' telling of the pagan games she played during Samhain that brings forth Prudence's first accusation of "Witch!" ("Lois the Witch." VII). Bridget is not only an Irish Catholic witch ("The Poor Clare." V), but a witch with aspects of the Celtic goddess, Brigid—a goddess which the Catholic Church has canonised as a saint of their own (Squire 228).<sup>8</sup> The haunting of Furnivall Manor can be seen as Karmic retribution for the long-ago sin of its mistress, Grace Furnivall ("The Old Nurse's Story." II). And "The Poor Clare," "Lois the Witch," "Morton Hall," "The Doom of the Griffiths," and "The Well of Pen-Morfa" all make use of the ancient practice of cursing, and all the curses—save that in "The Well of Pen-Morfa"—are fulfilled. Thus, in many of her gothic stories, there is no need for Gaskell to adhere to that element of gothic genre—"a common insistence on archaic settings"—named specifically by Punter (1). Unlike other writers of gothic tradition, Gaskell very seldom wrote stories that took place in the Dark Ages or even the seventeenth century. For there is already an archaic element in her stories—the traditions of the ancient pagans.

An interesting aspect of Mrs. Gaskell's gothic tales is her prolific use of symbolic names. For example, Lois, meaning "good and desirable," is an apt name for the title character of "Lois the Witch," for she is a truly benevolent character, and Manasseh most certainly finds her desirable. Also, the title of the story offers the reader an immediate paradox, with "good" and "witch" conjoined. Another example of Mrs. Gaskell's attention to detail regarding names is the aptly named Amante in "The Grey Woman." In Italian, "amante" means "lover," and, as we will see in Chapter Three, Amante is the epitome of this word. Mrs. Gaskell often turned to satire, symbolism, and paradox when choosing names for her characters; and she also did this for herself. Like both Mary Ann Evans and Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth used a male pseudonym during her early publications for *Howitt's Journal* (Uglow 172).

She chose a name that embodied a mixture of the real and the gothic, the domestic and the macabre—Cotton Mather Mills. This name at once recalls both the cotton mills of Gaskell's Manchester home and the infamous Puritan minister of the late seventeenth century, who was influential in the Salem witchcraft trials. In discussing the names given to the major female characters in Mrs. Gaskell's novels, Wright states that the "Christian names of these women seem rather carefully chosen to suggest their natures" (19), and my contention is that Gaskell treats the characters in her gothic short stories the same. In the names that Gaskell gives to the troubled, broken characters of her gothic tales can be found hints and hidden meanings into their psyches, or messages that Gaskell herself desires to send. Throughout Chapter One, I will periodically pause (most especially with "Lois the Witch") in order to devote some time to Gaskell's symbolic use of names in each of her gothic tales.

Though Mrs. Gaskell poked much satirical fun at Miss Pole's scepticism regarding ghosts and the macabre, there was a place in her own life for science and reason, and that was her religion. In Chapter Two, I will show how her strong Unitarian background influenced her fiction. To do this I must first give a short account of the era in which Gaskell lived and wrote, a time of great religious anxiety and scepticism. Doing this will perhaps give an unevenness to the introduction of my chapters, but will, I think, help put in context the importance of Gaskell's particular beliefs and influences in regards to her stories which highlight forgiveness and redemption.

In *God's Funeral*, A. N. Wilson says the nineteenth century "began to confront the human consciousness, not simply with new *ideas*, but with demonstrable new facts which challenged religious belief" (Preface, x). The havoc that geology, astronomy, and biology wreaked on the staunch belief in a six-day creation and a 6000-year-old earth was dismaying to those who, until then, had held their Bible as

the source of truth. Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and *Elements of Geology* (both published in the 1830's) destroyed the common theory of a "young earth," and replaced it with a new theory of a gradual development of the universe. Lyell was only the beginning. Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (pub. anonymously in 1844) and Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (pub. 1859) are just two of many publications that, for some, chimed the death-knell for belief in a created universe (Houghton 68). Consequently, feelings of confusion, doubt, even despair affected many learned Victorians who "found themselves honourably at war with theology" (Wilson xi).<sup>9</sup> A quote from John Ruskin illustrates these feelings of anguished desolation regarding loss of faith: "If only the Geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses."<sup>10</sup> By the time Darwin (a distant cousin of Elizabeth) had published *Origin of Species*, he had lost his faith in Christianity and began his own evolutionary process toward agnosticism (Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* 109). Thus, the impact of scientific discoveries were, for some, enormously damaging to their established faiths.

One sect of Christianity was not much affected by the new and startling findings of science, however; indeed, such ideas "meshed with their optimistic notion of material laws set in motion by God" (Uglow 136). Unitarians were a sect devoted to a rational understanding of the Bible and God's laws. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke characterises their approach in the search for the mysteries of the universe. In Book 1, Locke implores all men to approach knowledge rationally, to use all the higher faculties of our minds and forego innate principles:

Whilst some (and those the most) taking things upon trust, misemploy their power of assent, by lazily enslaving their minds to the dictates and dominion of others, in doctrines which it is their duty carefully to

examine, and not blindly, with an implicit faith, to swallow; others employing their thoughts only about some few things, grow acquainted sufficiently with them, attain great degrees of knowledge in them, and are ignorant of all other, having never let their thoughts loose in the search of other inquiries. (113)

Locke's attack on *a priori* ideas of God was an enormous influence on Unitarians, and his works were used as textbooks in the Dissenting academies; indeed, Joseph Priestley (while being tutored by a "Dissenting minister") cites this particular essay as one of the materials he studied while preparing to enter the Daventry Academy (*Memoirs* 8).<sup>11</sup> A fascinating combination of scientist and dissenting minister, Priestley argued that both God's universal laws and "genuine Christianity" can be saved and understood "by all who [wish] to study and understand them," only if we remain "sagacious and unprejudiced." He wrote that understanding Christianity must be conducted like the investigation of natural science: "Divine Providence conducting the whole, but without any miracle" ("A General History of the Christian Church" 329).

For Unitarians, each scientific advance brought us closer to a deeper understanding of God's Divine Plan: "The more we come to know of His working," William Gaskell said, "the more clearly shall we see how marvellous it is, and the more profoundly be led to adore."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, even as Darwin was losing his faith, he could not help but adopt William's peaceful idealism: "And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (Darwin 459). Hence, the famous "optimism" of the Unitarians.

Because the Unitarians' belief system was anything but the norm, most Christians did not even consider them one of their own. Unitarians believed neither in

the divinity of Christ nor in salvation through his sacrifice. Theophilus Lindsey, friend of both William Turner and Joseph Priestley, and founder of the first Unitarian church in Essex Street, London, stated implicitly that he believed it “idolatrous to worship, or pray to, any but the Father” (24). In a letter to William Tayleur, Lindsey paraphrases a recent Christmas sermon he gave in 1779:

I took the occasion to say that if any asked why we commemorated the days of the birth and death of Christ, that in the present state of the Christian world, we hold it our duty to bear our testimony to what we believed to be the truth concerning our Saviour Christ, that he was not God, or the object of divine worship—for God cannot be born or die, can have no beginning or end of existence dependent on the will of another. (35)

Surprisingly, however, though Lindsey was adamant as to Christ’s humanity, he still believed in the virgin birth. In a letter concerning the Apostles’ Creed, he states: “I shall not be satisfied till we have expunged it, though my sentiments are not altered with respect to the miraculous conception” (36). In this, Lindsey and Joseph Priestley disagreed. In “An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ,” Priestley discusses his questions and doubts concerning the virgin birth of Christ: “It may be imagined to be more honorable to Christ to have come into the world without the help of a man than with it; but this is an affair of imagination only” (306). And though Thomas Starr King makes no mention of the virgin birth in his essay “The Doctrine of Endless Punishment,” he too makes clear his denial that Jesus is God: “Brethren, I do not believe in the Supreme Deity of Christ, or that it is taught in any portion of the New Testament” (60). Mrs. Gaskell agreed. In a letter to her daughter (who was toying with the idea of converting to Catholicism), she wrote:

[Jesus] so expressly tells us to pray to God alone. . . . Then the one thing I *am* clear and sure about is that Jesus Christ was not equal to His father; that, however a being he was *not* God; and that worship as God addressed to Him is therefore wrong in me. (*The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* 860)

Thus, though the nature of Jesus' birth continued to be a subject of debate, Unitarians did unanimously agree on one issue—Jesus was honoured as both a teacher and inspiration, nothing more. This denial of Jesus' divinity invalidated all three doctrines of original sin, atonement, and predestination. There are no "chosen," no elected few; all contain a spark of the divine.

Like Unitarians, many Anglican churches did not hold with the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. They believed the atonement of Christ works for all believers (an important distinction). On the idea of an eternal Hell, however, most Anglican churches did agree with the Calvinists. Non-believers and wayward sinners will be punished there forever; once they are condemned to Hell, no repentance is possible. According to the Anglicans and Calvinists, God's ability to forgive has its limits. The Unitarians, however, adopted a Universalist approach to Hell and God's infinite ability to forgive sinners and non-believers. All would eventually be forgiven their sins and admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, the Unitarians differed with all the established churches at the time, and, as stated earlier, because of these differences, most did not even consider them Christians at all. Consequently, Unitarians suffered sarcastic criticism, discrimination, and even violence. In her *Autobiography*, Harriet Martineau devotes almost an entire chapter expounding on what she believed to be the inherent shallowness of Unitarianism:

[My] descendants passed by degrees, with the congregations to which they belonged, out of Calvinism into the pseudo-Christianity of

Arianism first, and then of Unitarianism, under the guidance of pastors whose natural sense revolted from the essential points of the Christian doctrine, while they had not learning enough, biblical, ecclesiastical, historical or philosophical, to discover that what they gave up was truly essential, and that the name of Christianity was a mere sham when applied to what they retained. (36-37)

Martineau's opinion does have merit. She sympathised with the Unitarian religion, but she also lost patience with their cut and paste treatment of Biblical passages. Martineau is never contemptuous toward Unitarians, however; on this she differs from other antagonists of the religion. Indeed, as this Methodist hymn shows, Unitarians were often subject to mean-spirited ridicule and even violent bigotry:

Stretch out thy arm, thou *Triune God!*

*The Unitarian fiend* expel,

And chase his doctrines back to Hell.<sup>14</sup>

The discrimination and lack of assistance from the courts that Unitarians suffered in England was long-occurring and is well documented. The Act relieving those who opposed the Holy Trinity from discrimination was not passed until 1813, and Unitarians were excluded altogether from the Toleration Act of 1689 (McLachlan 27). The new Toleration Act of 1797 was "somewhat ambiguous" with regard to their rights, and the Corporation and Test Acts of 1661 and 1673 "excluded Nonconformists from office in any municipal body and from all employment under Government." These Acts were fought ceaselessly by Lindsey, Priestley, and other leading Unitarians for years, yet they were not repealed until 1828 (62-67). In 1793, Theophilus Lindsey wrote that "the letters of Dissenters, particularly Unitarians, were very commonly inspected at the Post Office" (10-11). And when F. D. Maurice (Professor of Theology at King's College, London) published his *Theological Essays*

in 1853, which “took note of the positive aspects of Unitarianism,” King’s College summarily dismissed him from his chaired position (Young 143-144). In his *Memoirs*, Priestley recounts that his main reason for emigrating to America was the “bigotry” in England toward Dissenters (74). He provides succinct, yet harrowing accounts of rioters in Birmingham, who on 14 July 1791,

first burned the meetinghouse in which I preached, then another meetinghouse in the town, and then my dwelling house, demolishing my library, apparatus, and, as far as they could, everything belonging to me. They also burned, or much damaged, the houses of many Dissenters, chiefly my friends. (70)

Elizabeth Gaskell was born in 1810, at a time that was almost at the centre of these movements. She was raised in a Unitarian household (her maternal grandfather was a lay-preacher) and was the wife of William Gaskell, a leading Unitarian educator and Minister of Cross Street Chapel in Manchester for fifty years. William was a co-founder of the Working Men’s College in Manchester, and a professor of history, literature, and logic at Manchester New College. He was a member of the Manchester Literature and Philosophical Society, chairman of Manchester’s Portico Library, and co-editor (with John Rely Beard) of the *Unitarian Herald*. Through both her upbringing and married life, Elizabeth was immersed in the beliefs and history of the Unitarian church and the “far-flung Unitarian web” (Uglow 23). Rev. William Turner was a relation to Elizabeth three times over, and she corresponded often with him, as well as Christian Socialists John Ludlow and Charles Kingsley. James Martineau, the new Professor of mental and moral philosophy at Manchester New College, was a colleague of her husband, and was an enormous influence on Elizabeth (Uglow 130). F. D. Maurice (along with Kingsley, Ludlow, and Beard) admired Elizabeth’s literary talent, calling her a “noble-hearted and pure-minded writer,” and exalting her

“courage” in writing the Unitarian-influenced *Ruth*: “which on this point and on all others is, I think, as true to human experience as it is to the divinest morality.”<sup>15</sup>

It is from these friends, scholars, and her Unitarian background that Gaskell formed her own moral compass. The two highest standards of moral living that Gaskell gleaned from her Unitarian background were the ideals of tolerance and forgiveness. To her, the two always went hand in hand. Gaskell undoubtedly knew the history of her church; she knew of the bigotry that Unitarians had experienced, indeed were still experiencing. When Charlotte Brontë became engaged to Arthur Nicholls, Gaskell worried that the Anglican minister would attempt to thwart their friendship, for she was well aware that many churches of the establishment viewed her particular sect as heretical. She wrote to John Forster that she understood Nicholls to be “*very stern & bigoted*” and that he may “shut us out” of Charlotte’s life (*Letters* 280). Elizabeth stated that both she and Charlotte were “terribly afraid” that Nicholls “won’t let her [Charlotte] go on being as intimate” with her after the wedding (280):

I don’t believe Miss Brontë will *ever* become bigoted, or *ever* lose her true love for me,—but I do fear a *little* for her \happiness/ just because he is narrow, and she is not. (282)

Gaskell was not being an alarmist, for Nicholls had an active dislike for non-conformists, and, according to Charlotte, sometimes developed a “rather refractory mood about some Dissenters” (*The Shakespeare Head Brontë*. XV. 154).

When F. D. Maurice was dismissed from King’s College, Gaskell became his champion, offering help where she thought she could do some good:

Mr Dickens is in Italy, . . . as soon as he [returns] I will take care he is made aware of every circumstance relating to Mr Maurice’s dismissal, & I am sure he will feel hearty interest in it all. And I do talk & lend

my pamphlets to every body I meet with; because it is one of the subjects uppermost in my mind. (*Letters* 256)

And then there is her attitude toward George Eliot—the Fallen Woman of Gaskell’s literary circle. Gaskell had long recognised the value and talent of the anonymous author of *Adam Bede* and *Scenes from Clerical Life*, even recommending them to Dante Rossetti, saying that the author was a “noble creature, whoever he or she be” (*Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell* 200). But when Gaskell discovered that the writer of these inspiring books might possibly be the mistress of George Henry Lewes, she said quite candidly that she did not respect the kind of life Eliot had chosen to live:

It is a noble grand book, whoever wrote it,—but Miss Evans’ life taken at the best construction, does so jar against the beautiful book that one cannot help hoping against hope. (*Letters* 566)

Realising the truth about George Eliot was hard for Gaskell. But her eventual kindness toward Eliot shows clearly that she had the courage of her convictions. Gaskell was offended by Eliot’s lifestyle and did not approve, but the author of “Lizzie Leigh” and *Ruth* was no hypocrite. It would have been easy for the wife of a minister to defend the “fallen woman” in her works, yet behave self-righteously in her own life. But when life imitated art, Gaskell practised what she preached. She wrote to Harriet Martineau:

I would rather they had not been written by Miss Evans, it is true; but justice should be done to all; & after all the writing such a book should raise her in every one’s opinion, because no dramatic power would, I think enable her to think & say *noble* things, unless her own character—perhaps/ somewhere hidden away from our sight at present,—has such possibilities of greatness & goodness in it. (903)

Soon after writing to Martineau, Gaskell finally took it upon herself to put an end to her own gossiping and wrote directly to the author who was causing her such confusion. In this letter, Gaskell is honest to the point of bluntness, but her deep-rooted belief in tolerance is quite evident:

I should not be quite true in my ending, if I did not say before I concluded that I wish you *were* Mrs Lewes. However, that can't be helped, as far as I can see, and *one must not judge others*.

(latter italics mine 592)

Her letter to Eliot was written 10 November 1859, and by the thirtieth of that month, Gaskell took further steps in her stance of tolerance and non-judgement toward others. In a letter to George Smith, she tossed aside the sticking point of Eliot's name and addressed her as "Mrs Lewes," enthusiastically stating that she could not help but like the author:

I *have* tried to be moral, & dislike her & dislike her books—but it won't do. There is not a wrong word, or a wrong thought in them, I do believe, . . . yet I think the author must be a noble creature; and I shut my eyes to the awkward blot in her life.

(594)

Hence, Gaskell lived the religion that her husband preached and in which she so deeply believed. Elizabeth's religious beliefs were her touchstone, so it is not surprising that people and events—those that were entwined with her beliefs—would appear in her fictional works. Perhaps because of the intolerance that Unitarians suffered, the deep conviction that tolerance must always occur when dealing with others was an important theme to Gaskell. As I will show in Chapter Two, her short fiction is replete with lessons of tolerance through the recurring theme of forgiveness and redemption. For through tolerance of other's mistakes, shortcomings, and even

their sins, we can learn to forgive. And by showing tolerance and granting forgiveness, we teach others to do the same.

Mrs. Gaskell's belief in the virtue of forgiveness did not stop her from recognising the pain that unconditional forgiveness can inflict on those who freely give it the unrepentant, however. Thus, Chapter Two will also discuss Gaskell's stories that explore the emotional and spiritual dangers of unconditional forgiveness, particularly with reference to "Morton Hall" and "The Crooked Branch."

As will be seen, Mrs. Gaskell's honest, yet respectful, treatment of George Eliot was not the exception, but rather the rule when dealing with other women whom she admired or loved. Gaskell's friendships were healthy, loving, important parts of her life. She had friends from both her literary and domestic life, and they blurred class boundaries; she was close to her large extended family and she valued her daughters immensely. Thus, it is not surprising that her fiction is filled with friendships among women young and old, and from all aspects of life. As I stated earlier, Mrs. Gaskell had very few men friends, and this too is reflected in her short stories. Only one story—"Six Weeks at Heppenheim"—contains a platonic male/female friendship. In all her other stories, Mrs. Gaskell's male/female relationships are romantic in nature. Even the friendship between Paul and Phillis (*Cousin Phillis*) begins with sexual tension. Only after Phillis, and especially Paul, come to realise that they are not meant to be husband and wife, do they settle into a trusted, platonic friendship. Thus, Mrs. Gaskell's art imitated her life. For this reason, I have chosen to explore her female friendships and her tendency to group them into categories, such as Mother/Daughter and Mistress/Servant. Even more interesting is Gaskell's inclination to save her destructive, even deadly female friendships, such as those between Victorine and Theresa ("Crowley Castle") and Nattee and Faith ("Lois the Witch"), for her gothic tales. These unhealthy friendships

never appear in Gaskell's stories set in realistic, domestic settings, but only in her gothic tales of mystery and horror.

## CHAPTER I

PAGAN TRADITION AND NAME SYMBOLISM IN MRS. GASKELL'S  
GOTHIC SHORT FICTION

. . . we all told the most frightening & wild stories we had ever heard,—some such fearful ones—all true . . . (Elizabeth Gaskell to Elizabeth Holland, Late 1841)<sup>16</sup>

Elizabeth Gaskell's familiarity with and interest in ancient customs is well documented. Her belief in the supernatural is slight (and most definitely playful), but it does exist. Gaskell was at all times spiritual, and she definitely considered herself a "true Christian" (*Letters* 108), but she never let her beliefs stop her from enjoying a good ghost story, or getting into the spirit of gothic games (her thrill at the chilling scenes at Clopton Hall attest to this). As seen in a letter written to her publisher George Smith, she seemed to feel that a little superstition now and then couldn't hurt: "Being half-Scotch I have a right to be very superstitious" (*Letters* 576).<sup>17</sup> In *The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester*, Felicia Bonaparte asserts that because of the teasing tone of this letter, Mrs. Gaskell never meant to be taken seriously (49), but read in context with Gaskell's other letters, whose subjects discuss pagan customs and supernatural events, I must disagree. In one such letter (to Eliza Fox in 1849) Gaskell tells of having her fortune told by a gypsy and, with no shyness at all, admits to seeing a ghost:

[A]nd we had brilliantly fine days when we went on long drives; in one of which . . . I SAW a ghost! Yes I did; though in such a matter of fact place as Charlotte St I should not wonder if you are sceptical; and had my fortune told by a gypsy; curiously true as to the past. (*Letters* 81)

It is Gaskell's letter to Mary Howitt (dated 1838) that gives us a rich and detailed account of her knowledge and belief in the many ancient customs of her homes in Knutsford, Cheshire, and Lancashire. She relates the practice of drawing a "pattern of flowers" in white sand upon a bed of red sand during "any occasion of rejoicing" for the town. During her own wedding, Gaskell says that "all the houses in the town" had these decorations. She claims that the laying of the sand "is always done for a wedding, and often accompanied by some verse of rural composition" that invoked happiness and "progeny." The verse that Gaskell gives to Howitt is clearly not a prayer, but rather a blessing:

Long may they live,  
Happy may they be,  
Blest with content,  
And from misfortune free.

Long may they live  
Happy may they be,  
And blest with a numerous  
Pro-ge-ny. (28-29)

The people participating in this custom are clearly engaging in the act of "enchanted." Enchanting is "the act of empowering an herb, stone, or other magickal object with one's own energies directed towards a magickal goal" (McCoy 277).<sup>18</sup> In her letter, Gaskell claims that this custom is most "[v]arious and grand" (*Letters* 29). Considering her wealth of knowledge concerning these types of traditions, it is not unreasonable to assume that she was aware of its pagan origins.

Gaskell continues with tales of a man "who has seen the Fairies and tells the story in the prettiest possible way" (32). It is important to note that Gaskell does not sceptically say, "This man claims to see fairies." Instead she speaks admiringly of him and says that he has "seen the Fairies," as if such beings exist. She talks of "servant-maids [who] wear a bag containing a druggist's powder called Dragon's Blood upon their heart, which will make them beloved by the person they love" (31).

These girls carried a “gris-gris,”<sup>19</sup> a small bag whose contents “depend upon the desired outcome of [its] magick” (McCoy 280). In *Drawing Down the Moon*, Margot Adler<sup>20</sup> describes a celebration at which amulets are given in honour of the New Moon:

[Billie] has made ten small bags with drawstrings, each from a different material. Each has a black bead attached to the drawstrings, signifying the dark moon. She gives them to us to keep. . . . We find seeds in the bags. Seed, the small beginning, the New Moon. (201)

During the Sabbat, Samhain (October 31), pagans often carry an amulet in order to help them project or focus their energy when attempting to contact a spirit or deceased relative (McCoy 45). During Midsummer (the summer solstice), some witches bury their amulets and make new ones (150). During the Sabbat, Lughnasadh (August 1), an amulet is sometimes used by pagans as a ritual fertility centrepiece on an altar (176). Though these are all modern pagan traditions, the amulet is an ancient, natural tool of magic, and is prevalent not just in Celtic tradition, but also in those of Voodoo and Native Americans. Gaskell does not use the word “amulet” in her letter, but it is obvious that this is to what she is referring.

Gaskell continues that the servants “make a curtsy to the new moon when first they see it, and turn the money in their pockets, which *ought* to be doubled before the moon is out” (*Letters* 31). Associating women with the moon, and acknowledging their connection with it, is a well-known and strongly held ancient tradition. In *Drawing Down the Moon*, Adler describes an age-old pagan ritual:

One day the coven in Essex sent me a tape recording of some rituals. The first one on the tape was called “The Drawing Down of the Moon.” I did not know it then, but in this ritual, one of the most serious and beautiful in the modern Craft, the priest *invokes* into the

priestess (or depending on your point of view, she *evokes* from within herself) the Goddess or Triple Goddess, symbolized by the phases of the moon. (19)

“Drawing Down the Moon” is an ancient custom, practised even in the days of Plato. In “Gorgias,” Socrates mentions the “Thessalian witches” who “charm the moon down from the sky” (Plato 90). Gaskell tells a similar story regarding the moon in “Modern Greek Songs” (*Household Words*, 1854), where she discusses the “infamous” Thessaly witches and wizards, who can “draw the moon out of the heavens to do their bidding” (III. 488). The Triple Goddess that Adler mentions is the “one Goddess in all three of her aspects: Maiden, Mother, and Crone” (McCoy 290). Thus, the ancient custom of associating women and the moon was taught to Gaskell by the servant girls. Gaskell calls their practices “superstitious,” but what is important is not that she believed all of the tales; what is important is that she was familiar with them.

But then, there are some traditions in which Gaskell did believe quite strongly:

A shooting star is unlucky to see. I have so far a belief in this that I always have a chill in my heart when I see one, for I have often noticed them when watching over a sick-bed and very, very anxious. The dog-rose, that pretty libertine of the hedges with the floating sprays wooing the summer air, its delicate hue and its faint perfume is unlucky.

Never form any plan while sitting near one, for it will never answer.

I was once saying to an old, blind countrywoman how much I admired the foxglove. She looked mysteriously solemn as she told me they were not like other flowers; they had ‘knowledge’ in them! Of course I inquired more particularly, and then she told me that the foxglove knows when a spirit passes by and always bows the head. Is

not this poetical! . . . I have respected the flower ever since. (*Letters*  
31-32)<sup>21</sup>

Thus, though Unitarian belief, on the whole, denied the existence of the supernatural, Gaskell's knowledge of and interest in ancient, pagan magic remained strong, and in her gothic fiction she draws upon this strength to enhance her stories. She explores what can happen when the supernatural is used for harm, and when fear and misunderstanding go unchecked. And, though the foundation of her religious belief called for a rational approach to the supernatural, she persistently explores the possibility that there is more in heaven and earth than what is dreamt of in Unitarianism.

Elizabeth Gaskell's talent for writing "frightening & wild" tales appears early in her literary career in her short essay, "Clopton House." In this essay, Gaskell recalls an experience from her school days in Stratford-upon-Avon. Sometime in the years 1825-1827, Gaskell and her classmates went on a field trip to Clopton Hall, and it is this visit that inspired her, in 1838, to write "Clopton House" for William Howitt's travel journal, *Visits to Remarkable Places* (Ward. I. 502). Jenny Uglow and others<sup>22</sup> suggest that Gaskell wrote "Clopton House" as a class assignment (37), for it is certainly anecdotal and formally composed in its depiction of Elizabeth and her Miss Byrley's School classmates setting off "one beautiful autumn day, full of delight and wonder respecting the place [they] were going to see" ("Clopton House." I. 505). Gaskell's carefree humour quickly changes, however, and she shifts the mood from frivolity to cheerless gloom. Desolate half-cultivated fields, "grim monsters" (gargoyles?), broken down walls, flowers tangled with nettles, wild grass—all are seen and described before the great house is even entered by the young girls (I. 505). Soon we learn the outward appearance of the house reflects its tragic and gruesome history.

Gaskell begins her tale of the haunted Hall by relating the unhappy legend of Charlotte Clopton, a violet-eyed, golden-haired girl who had contracted a deadly and contagious illness during the frightful days of the black plague. Charlotte had been “buried with fearful haste” in the chapel vaults inside the Hall (I. 506). The hurried burial had not contained the disease, however, and another of the family died of the sickness a few days later. While bearing him to the ancestral tomb, the family made a horrific discovery—Charlotte Clopton had been buried while still alive. She had struggled up the stairs of the vault, attempting to save herself, but tragically succumbed and died wretchedly alone, “but not before, in the agonies of despair and hunger she had bitten a piece from her white round shoulder! Of course, she had *walked ever since*” (I. 506).<sup>23</sup> Gaskell’s shuddering delight and obvious glee at this ghost story is even more highlighted in the reactions of both herself and a schoolgirl companion upon their discovery of a “curious carved old chest” in one of the dark and winding passages:

. . . when it was opened, what do you think we saw?—BONES!—but whether human, whether the remains of the lost bride, we did not stay to see, but ran off in partly feigned, and partly real terror. (I. 507)

Gaskell’s short essay, quite possibly her earliest attempt at the gothic genre, gives us our first glimpse of her enjoyment of macabre tales of dark, haunted castles and tragic, haunted women. And by the time Gaskell penned “The Old Nurse’s Story,” her skills at writing these ghastly, yet entertaining, supernatural tales had been honed to perfection.

Gaskell wrote “The Old Nurse’s Story” in 1852 for the Extra Christmas Number of Charles Dickens’ *Household Words*. At this time, Gaskell was struggling with her second novel, *Ruth*, a story whose title character is a fifteen-year-old farmer’s daughter who is seduced and impregnated by a young aristocrat, and she was

quite nervous about what she knew was going to be—at best—a controversial tale.

“[F]rightened off [her] nest” from *Ruth* (*Letters* 205), Gaskell had become almost frozen in her trepidation while writing it:

Ruth ‘has yet to be finished’, which is an expression I used only this morning to Wm before your letter came. I mean it is far from completion and I feel uncertain if it will ever be done. . . . I am so far from satisfied with it myself, that I don’t know how much to rewrite, or what to do about it. (*Further Letters* 74)

And in a letter to her daughter Marianne, dated October 1852, she laments:

About my book. I will certainly give a copy of it, dear, where you wish it. Only I dislike its being published so much, I shd not wonder if I put it off another year. (*Letters* 204)

Clearly, *Ruth* was in the back of Gaskell’s mind while she wrote “The Old Nurse’s Story.” Indeed, Uglow calls this story a “treatment of the same themes—unmarried sex and illegitimacy—that [Gaskell] was currently dealing with so cautiously in *Ruth*” (307). I do not think that Uglow is altogether correct in this assessment, since the young woman in the story is married (though secretly) when she gives birth to her child (II. 440). But I do agree with Uglow that certain events in the story—the shame and humiliation that falling in love with the wrong man can bring—were most definitely influenced by *Ruth*.

Through the simple and sympathetic words of an old nursemaid, we are introduced to Grace Furnivall, mistress of a great manor on Northumberland Fells, the last heir and namesake of the deceased Lord Furnivall. Grace suffers from painful memories, intense guilt, and is haunted, both literally and emotionally, by the past. Many years earlier, when Grace was a young and beautiful woman, she and her sister Maude loved and competed for the same man—a dark, foreign musician who was a

friend and music teacher of their father's. Because of this, sisterly love and family loyalty were forgotten: "[Miss Maude] and Miss Grace grew colder and bitterer to each other every day," and, eventually, it was Maude who "won the day and carried off the prize," dubious prize though he was (II. 439-440). Maude's was a clandestine marriage, and her child was a secret too. Yet, when this "gentleman's" continuing romantic attentions toward Grace increasingly enraged Maude, he began to have second thoughts on his choice of brides and subsequently deserted her. At his leaving, "both Miss Maude and Miss Grace grew gloomy and sad; they had a haggard look about them" (II. 440). And then, tragically, Grace discovered Maude's disgraceful secret; jealousy consumed her and she told all to Lord Furnivall. The enraged Lord, in true Gothic form, turned against Maude and her child. He raised his cane, struck his grandchild, and banished both mother and child out into the stormy winter night. The next morning, the child was found frozen to death in the dark woods, in the arms of her mother, whose grief had given way to insanity.

Grace, now an old woman, has lived with the results of her actions all these many years. She has never married; she stays in the mansion alone, tended to only by servants; and each winter, as the storms howl, Grace is tortured by both her memories and the sound of her deceased father playing song after song on an old and tuneless organ. These hauntings emotionally imprison Grace. Her "sad, heavy" eyes stare into the fireplace. She virtually radiates a quiet, gloomy aura. And, of course, she dreads the oncoming "terrible winter" (II. 431). Grace devotes her very existence to a mysterious, sorrowful mourning. It is here that the symbolism of Grace's name becomes clear. In Christian theology, the concept of "grace" means unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification. The word encompasses the ideas of divine mercy and pardon. Clearly, Grace has not received this. Clearly, she still dwells in a state of anguished guilt and deep regret. Hence,

Grace's name is a parody of its meaning, for she is continually haunted by the past, and lives in a type of limbo, apart from grace. In Chapter Two, I will delve further into Grace's inability to achieve forgiveness or redemption.

This particular winter, Grace has a ward, a small girl named Rosamond, who claims that she sees a young child, "a poor little girl out in the snow" (II. 437). Rosamond is drawn to this phantom child and puts her own life in danger in order to be with her. The servants in the household are extremely concerned, and do all they can to stop Rosamond from obeying the "evil child" (II. 436) and being lured to a certain death, for they know the reason behind the haunting that plagues Furnivall Hall. Finally, one particularly violent, stormy night, Grace's past (and her guilt concerning it) manifests in front of her and her servants:

All at once the east door gave way with a thundering crash as if torn open in a violent passion, and there came into that broad and mysterious light, the figure of a tall old man, with grey hair and gleaming eyes. He drove before him, with many a relentless gesture of abhorrence, a stern and beautiful woman with a little child clinging to her dress. (II. 444)

As Grace cries and begs the ghost of her father to have pity on the "innocent child," a new spectral figure emerges in the midst of the horrific scene:

But just then I saw—we all saw—another phantom shape itself, and grow clear out of the blue and misty light that filled the hall; we had not seen her till now, for it was another lady who stood by the old man, with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn. . . . I had seen that figure before. It was the likeness of Miss Furnivall in her youth; and the terrible phantoms moved on, regardless of old Miss Furnivall's wild entreaty—and the up-lifted crutch fell on the right shoulder of the

little child, and the younger sister looked on, stony and deadly serene. (II. 445)

Thus, Grace is forced to relive the actions and consequences of her past. It is too much for her. The guilt she has carried with her all these years and the forced viewing of her deeds overwhelm her:

She was carried to her bed that night never to rise again. She lay with her face to the wall muttering low but muttering always: 'Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!' (II. 445)

Pagan tradition in "The Old Nurse's Story" appears in the form of Karmic retribution. "Karma" is a Hindustani word for "the ancient belief that good and evil done will return to be visited on a person either in this life or in the succeeding one" (McCoy 281). A belief in some form of cosmic retribution is found among many ancient and modern religions. The ancient Greeks believed in Nemesis, the Goddess of Retribution. Christianity's belief in Heaven and Hell implies a form of Karmic retribution, with Heaven being our "reward" and Hell being our "punishment." Pagans call this doctrine "three-fold law" (Adler 112), and it is this form in which Grace's particular retribution takes. Grace is cursed by her own past. Long ago she embarked upon a course of action that haunts her to this day, and will continue to do so the rest of her wretched life. In her youth, Grace had a choice to make: gracious assistance to Maude in her time of need, or revenge. She chose revenge, and her Karma is that this revenge is turned back onto her. Because of Grace, Maude loses her child; Grace never marries and remains childless her entire life. Just as Lord Furnivall railed against Maude, chasing her out of his home, he now rails against Grace, haunting the Manor, playing his organ, and chasing away her peace of mind. Clearly, the final, violent ghostly manifestation is the climax of years of Karmic

retribution, and having literally to witness her own hateful actions (instead of just symbolically experiencing them) is Grace's final Karmic punishment.

Gaskell uses this theme of Karmic retribution again in "The Poor Clare," a story in which the elements of pagan tradition are quite prominent, and the three-fold law clearly highlighted. Gaskell wrote "The Poor Clare" for *Household Words*' Extra Christmas Issue in 1856, during the time she was researching and writing her biography of Charlotte Brontë, published the following year. Uglow remarks on the obvious similarity of Lucy's haunting by her wicked sexual Double and the sad, mournful, and wretched Charlotte that Gaskell's research had revealed (398-399). While on a research trip to Brussels, Gaskell met with Monsieur Constantin Heger, a former instructor of the Brontë sisters. Heger and his wife were the proprietors of the school in Brussels at which both Charlotte and Emily had attended in February 1842 (*The Life of Charlotte Brontë* 166). At their meeting, Heger read to Gaskell the extremely passionate and pleading letters that Charlotte had written to him:

Day and night I find neither rest nor peace. If I sleep I am disturbed by tormenting dreams in which I see you, always severe, always grave, always incensed against me. . . . If my master withdraws his friendship from me entirely I shall be altogether without hope; if he gives me a little—just a little—I shall be satisfied—happy; I shall have a reason for living on, for working. . . . But you showed me of yore a *little* interest, when I was your pupil in Brussels, and I hold on to the maintenance of that *little* interest—I hold on to it as I wold hold on to life. (SHB. XIII. 23-24)

This discovery of Charlotte's impassioned, torrid infatuation with her married instructor dismayed Gaskell, and she determined to keep it from the public. She even went so far as to tell George Smith (her publisher) that the letters should be censored:

“I can not tell you how I should deprecate anything leading to the publication of those letters of M. Hegers” (*Letters* 400-401). Still, so much of Charlotte’s secret feelings, her secret self, are symbolically manifested in both Lucy and Bridget. They are Irish, as are Charlotte’s ancestors (*Life* 32); Lucy (like Charlotte) is extremely pious and gentle, yet her Double shows her darker, secret side; and, most telling, Bridget is a witch who dies a penitent nun in Belgium, the very place that Charlotte experienced her shameful, unrequited love. The character of Bridget was Elizabeth’s own invention, however (Uglow 399); and for the purposes of this chapter, it is Bridget in whom most of my interest lies.

Bridget Fitzgerald is confusing and fascinating, and I am quite certain this woman is unique among Gaskell’s female characters. Much is written of the dual nature of Lucy,<sup>24</sup> but Bridget also possesses this same intricate duality. She is both pious and wicked; she is, at different times in her tragic life, a witch and a nun; and Gaskell presents her as both a simple maidservant and a Celtic Goddess.

Much of “The Poor Clare” centres on Bridget Fitzgerald—a maidservant to Madame Starkey, the wife of Squire Patrick Starkey. The Squire, owner of Starkey Manor-house, is a zealous Catholic, and a follower of James the Second. He had met his wife in Ireland, and had brought her, Bridget, and Bridget’s daughter Mary to his home in Lancashire at the completion of his exile. This is how the Irish Catholic Bridget came to be in England in the beginning of the eighteenth century (V. 331).

Our first glimpse of Bridget is of a woman “past middle age” walking with a “firm and strong step” by a procession of carts which carry the property of her master and mistress (V. 332). And then, Bridget does something incredible. Upon arriving at the Manor-house, and descending from her cart, Madame Starkey is lifted not by her husband, but rather by Bridget. Moreover, this act is not offensive to the Squire. Indeed, he “smiles gravely” as Bridget sets his wife down in their new home (V. 332).

Bridget has overstepped the normal limits of her gender and status in the family; she has usurped her master's position and withdrawn his pleasure of welcoming his bride to her new home. Why Squire Starkey is not angered or offended by Bridget's boldness is most puzzling, and his actions immediately following are even more so. As Bridget is setting her mistress down, she delivers "a passionate and outlandish blessing" (V. 332). It has already been stated that the Squire is a strict Roman Catholic. Indeed, he has suffered exile and poverty for his beliefs, and has married a Catholic woman "as zealous for her religion" as himself. Moreover, he and his family "[esteem] it even a sin to marry any one of Protestant descent, however willing he or she might [be] to embrace the Romish religion" (V. 331). Bridget is neither a nun nor a priest, yet it is she who offers a "blessing," not a prayer, for their home. And yet, the Squire's action while his servant is taking such a liberty is to remove "his fine feathered hat and [bend] his head" (V. 332). There is no umbrage, no indignation from either Master or Mistress at Bridget's actions. It seems that they accept as the norm Bridget's authority in such matters. And they often treat her with more generosity and respect than they treat themselves:

As soon as Bridget had arrived there, the Squire gave her a cottage of her own, and took more pains in furnishing it for her than he did in anything else out of his own house. It was only nominally her residence. She was constantly up at the great house. . . . Her daughter Mary, in like manner, moved from one house to the other at her own will. Madam loved both mother and child dearly. They had great influence over her and, through her, over her husband. (V. 333-334)

Certainly, Bridget (and to an extent, Mary) is more than a servant to the Starkey's. Even more certain, she is not their equal; she is *above* them somehow. This elevation of Bridget's place is never stated directly, but it is there nonetheless.

Shortly, the other servants and the “country-folk” begin to sense Bridget’s unique attributes. The servants do not dislike Bridget, exactly, but they are uncomfortable in her presence and use words like “ruling spirits” and “magic of a superior mind” when describing Bridget, and even her daughter, Mary (V. 334). But it is the country-folk who intuitively sense Bridget’s special gifts, and they are awed by her. After Bridget has left her home to go in search of Mary, who has moved to the continent and ceased all communication, the country-folk discuss entering Bridget’s home in order to protect her property from dust, moths, and rust, but they are fearful of offending so “fierce a creature” as she:

There was some low talk, from time to time, among the hinds and country people, whether it would not be as well to break into old Bridget’s cottage, and save such of her goods. . . . But this idea was always quenched by the recollection of her strong character and passionate anger; and tales of her masterful spirit, and vehement force of will, were whispered about, till the very thought of offending her, by touching any article of hers, became invested with a kind of horror: and it was believed that, dead or alive, she would not fail to avenge it.

(V. 338)

This kind of awe-struck fear points us to the Old Testament story of the Ark of the Covenant, and God’s mortal punishment of Uzzah for being so “irreverent” as to touch it (2 Samuel 6: 1-7).<sup>25</sup> Like the Ark, Bridget’s belongings are considered so precious, so powerful, the people believe them to be untouchable, and that doing so will bring forth terrible consequences. Bridget is that powerful in their eyes. Thus, there is something special, otherworldly, about Bridget. Her employers sense it, and so do the townspeople. And all acknowledge it.

Before I begin narrating examples of Bridget's witchcraft and her use of her powers, I think it necessary to study Gaskell's treatment of Bridget the witch, her descriptions of Bridget, and the pagan aspects that Gaskell gives to her. These are important because Gaskell chooses to portray Bridget as not just a witch, but as a witch whose nature is that of the Irish Goddess, Brigid.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, Gaskell chose Bridget's name with this Goddess in mind. In Irish mythology, Brigid is the Goddess of fire, poetry, and the hearth (Squire 56). She is a Triple Goddess of poetry, smithcraft, and healing (Starhawk 186)<sup>27</sup> whose three aspects (in more detail) are:

- (1) Fire of Inspiration, as patroness of poetry, (2) Fire of the Hearth, as patroness of healing and fertility, and (3) Fire of the Forge, as patroness of smithcraft and martial arts.<sup>28</sup>

Two of the three aspects (those of Inspiration and Hearth) and the importance of fire apply to Bridget Fitzgerald. It is when Bridget returns from her fruitless trip in search of her beloved daughter that the first accusations of "witch" begin to surface. Bridget is in utter despair. She is a literal crone, looking "as if she had been scorched in the flames of hell" ("The Poor Clare." V. 338). She is fearful to look upon, and has taken up a strange habit of talking to herself, and, even more bizarre, answering herself (V. 339). The people begin to watch her, to listen, and to condemn:

It was no wonder that those who dared to listen outside her door at night believed that she held converse with some spirit; in short, she was unconsciously earning for herself the dreadful reputation of a witch. (V. 339)

Soon, more whispers of suspicion surface. The Squire and his wife, attempting to soothe Bridget's grief over her daughter, had given her a dog named Mignon (French for "darling") for a companion. The name of this little dog is quite symbolic. "Mignon" is an etymological ancestral form of the middle French

“minion,” a servile dependent, follower, or underling. Taking this further, a “familiar” is a spirit or demon, often embodied in an animal, believed to attend, serve, and guard a person. Thus, Bridget’s “darling” is her minion, or familiar. History describes familiars as servants in constant attention to witches for the purpose of carrying out spells and bewitchments. Most often, familiars were believed to assume animal forms, cats being the favoured forms, especially black ones. The Witch Inquisitor’s handbook, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (published in 1486), describes a witch “summon[ing] her familiar who always works with her in everything,” and instructing it to steal milk from the neighbouring cattle (Part II. Question I. Chapter XIV). The narrator’s uncle alludes to this handbook when speaking of the “low and dreadful” ways of “compelling” Bridget to revoke her curse (V. 368). As will be seen in “Lois the Witch,” Gaskell was very familiar with the witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts. Thus, she was certainly acquainted with this notorious manual. Like that of his owner’s, Mignon’s name was carefully chosen.

Bridget fiercely loves Mignon, channelling all her devotion for the missing Mary onto him. One day, the dog becomes ill and Bridget carries him more than three miles to a veterinarian well known for his skills in curing diseased animals (V. 339). This vet cures Bridget’s pet, and to reward him, Bridget once again utters a blessing; and her blessing is fulfilled:

Whatever this man did, the dog recovered; and they who heard her thanks, intermingled with blessings (that were rather promises of good fortune than prayers), looked grave at his good luck when, next year, his ewes twinned, and his meadow-grass was heavy and thick. (V. 339)

The Sabbat, Imbolg (or Candlemas—a Christianised name for Imbolg), is a special feast day in “Irish pagan folklore” set-aside by Brigid’s fire-cult to honour her (Farmer 72). This festival can fall on either the first or second of February, a time of

year when the ancient pagan ancestors believed the goddess Brigid was “slowly turning the Wheel of the Year back to spring” (McCoy 87). A popular custom on this day is the giving of alms to Brigid in hopes that in return they could receive “good fortune in the harvest to come” (87). Honouring the gods at Imbolg was not native to ancient Ireland alone. In Scotland, too, Brigid was invoked to assure a healthy crop and prosperous year:

Upon the night before Candlemas it is usual to make a bed with corn and hay, over which some blankets are laid, in a part of the house near the door. When it is ready, a person goes out and repeats three times, . . . ‘Bridget, Bridget, come in; thy bed is ready.’ One or more candles are left burning near it all night. (Frazer 97-98)<sup>29</sup>

In *The Sabbats*, Edain McCoy offers another belief regarding Imbolg that came from Europe, and is most telling when considering the specific blessing that Bridget gives to Mignon’s healer:

Two other names commonly used for this Sabbat are Imbolc and Oimeic, both meaning ‘ewe’s milk.’ In Europe, this was the time when pregnant ewes began lactating, and the event was celebrated as another sign that winter was ending. (88)

Because he is a veterinarian, this gentleman is most likely not a conventional farmer and would not have a traditional crop to “harvest.” Thus, Bridget rewards him with the next best thing—she gifts his ewes with a healthy crop, which, in turn, benefits the doctor. Did the vet save Bridget’s dog during (or close to) the Sabbat of Imbolg? This cannot be known, but what is known is that the very next year, this vet’s ewes had twins and the field in which they ate was abundant and flourishing. Thus, in the aspect of the Fire Goddess of the Hearth, Bridget, like the patroness of healing and fertility, uses her powers to pay in kind those who honour her.

When next we see Bridget using her powers, her reasons and intentions are not so benevolent. Again, the scene is centred on Bridget's dog, Mignon. It is the year 1711. The young Squire (Bridget's old Master and Mistress have both died—bequeathing Bridget's cottage to her) has allowed his guardians to hunt on his land. A certain Mr. Gisborne has had no luck this day, and in a "black humour," seeing Mignon, "[p]artly for wantonness, partly to vent his spleen upon some living creature," shoots and kills the innocent animal (V. 340). When Bridget arrives and sees what Gisborne has done, she, in her anger and grief, loses all sense of balance and virtue. Thinking only of her sad loss, thinking only that this "bad, cruel man . . . has killed the only creature that loved [her]," the only creature left that she loves, Bridget, in vengeful retaliation, smites the loved one of Gisborne with a most dark and terrible curse:

'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!'

(V. 340-341)

Thus, Gisborne's loved one will bear the Mark of Cain.<sup>30</sup> Bridget then secures her curse by baptising Gisborne with the blood of his own victim (V. 341), but she is not yet finished. She returns to her cottage:

. . . by the flickering wood-flame, he [a young boy] saw Bridget kneeling before the picture of Our Lady of the Holy Heart, with dead Mignon lying between her and the Madonna. She was praying wildly, as her outstretched arms betokened. (V. 341)

Before the fire, with her murdered familiar before her, Bridget, arms outstretched, overcome by her own pain, calls down grievous retribution upon another innocent. In this most frightening and ominous scene, Gaskell shows Bridget in yet another aspect of the goddess Brigid. Yet, she does this with a clever and almost blasphemous twist. Bridget, in the aspect of the Fire Goddess of Inspiration, represents the patroness of poetry. Her poetry is a violent curse, however; her prayers are obscene sacrilege. Though Bridget's behaviour may seem unconventional, in the tradition of the ancient Celts, she is acting in true bardic form. In *The White Goddess*, Robert Graves discusses these "cursing poems," and claims the ancient Irish poets wrote their satiric verses at the "least indignity," causing all manner of illnesses and grief (18). These poetic curses of the past were most effective, as is Bridget's curse centuries later. Gaskell's imagery of Bridget, kneeling by her fire with her dead dog, is our last glimpse of Bridget as Irish Goddess. Very quickly, we learn what Bridget comes to know: Gisborne had been husband to Mary, now deceased. The only person he cares for in the world is his daughter, Lucy. Bridget has unwittingly cursed her own granddaughter. From here, Gaskell removes the cloak of mysterious magic surrounding Bridget and unveils a bitter, lonely witch.

As discussed earlier, there is an old pagan belief in a concept called the "threefold law": that whatever [we] do returns to [us] threefold" (Adler 112). This is Karmic Law, and it definitely manifests in Bridget's world. After bringing down "heavy sorrow" (V. 340) on Mr. Gisborne, and cursing that whom he loves, Bridget learns a harsh lesson from Karmic Fate. The curse returns upon her threefold: (1) Bridget's grandchild is the one cursed; (2) Bridget finds, in Lucy, her beloved family again, only to be forced to deny herself the pleasure of being with her; (3) Bridget dies a slow and painful death by starvation. In closing a letter to Constantin Heger, Charlotte Brontë tells him: "One suffers in silence so long as one has the strength so

to do, and when that strength gives out one speaks without too carefully measuring one's words" (SHB. XIII. 24). Read in context, these words could apply to the paragraph preceding them, where Brontë explains that she is sending the letter without re-reading it or editing out the tormented angst. But read on their own (and they do stand alone in a single, one-sentence paragraph), they almost sound like a veiled threat. Gaskell might have been thinking about Charlotte's cryptic words when creating the character of Bridget, for the "heavy sorrow" brought down on Gisborne, the hasty, unmeasured curse Bridget casts upon him, serves, in turn, to haunt Bridget all the days of her life.

Gaskell incorporated her knowledge of pagan traditions into many of her Gothic stories; perhaps not to the extent that she did in "The Poor Clare," but often the elements can be found. In "Lois the Witch" (*All the Year Round*, 1859), Lois tries to calm her cousin, Faith (grieving over her unrequited love for Pastor Nolan), by telling stories of England, of the "old ways" and customs, and soon begins talking of Halloween:

. . . she told of tricks she had often played, of the apple eaten facing a mirror, of the dripping sheet, of the basins of water, of the nuts burning side by side, and many other such innocent ways of divination, by which laughing, trembling English maidens sought to see the form of their future husbands, if husbands they were to have. . . . Lois went on speaking, telling [Faith] of all the stories that would confirm the truth of the second sight vouchsafed to all seekers in the accustomed methods . . . (VII. 139)

Lois' decision to share her experiences with the ancient traditions is the catalyst that sets her fate in motion, for little Prudence exclaims that Lois must be a witch. Yet,

this is not the first time that Lois is accused of being a “wicked English witch” (VII. 140).

We first meet Lois Barclay as she is travelling from England to America. It is 1691, and Lois has lost both of her parents. She is leaving England (and her betrothed, Hugh Lucy<sup>31</sup>) for America to live with her aunt, her uncle (her mother’s brother), and her three cousins who live in Salem, Massachusetts. Gaskell gives every member of the Hickson family (except Uncle Ralph, who dies early in the story) symbolic names with Biblical significance; Manasseh is named after actual Biblical characters, and the female Hicksons are named after Christian virtues: Grace, Faith, and Prudence. The names of the women in the Hickson household are parodies, however, for these women make a mockery of their meanings. As stated earlier, “grace” is unmerited divine assistance given to us for our regeneration or sanctification. Grace Hickson shows none of these attributes; it is clear that she does not live in a “state of grace.” No matter how kind, obedient, or virtuous Lois is, she receives no sympathy or understanding from her aunt. From our first introduction to Grace, it is clear that she does not exude what her name implies. She is coldly unwelcoming to Lois, insulting her dead father, and behaving so rudely that her son has to remind her of the manners required of a gracious hostess (VII. 126-127). Seeing Grace behave quite ungraciously is a satirical, and most telling, foreshadowing of her behaviour to come.

Faith is an extremely compelling character who has no “faith” in Christian dogma. “Lois, I believe in [Satan] no more than I believe in heaven,” she cries, “Both may exist, but they are so far away that I defy them” (VII. 165). She does not appeal to the Christian God for Pastor Nolan’s love, but rather to the occult spirits. She does not place her fate in God’s hands, as Lois did long before she reached Salem (VII. 113), but rather in witchcraft and the powers of Nattee. It would seem at first that

Faith's name is a paradox, that she has no faith at all, or that it is misplaced. But I see her rather as a troubled young woman who is searching beyond the pages of her Bible and the four walls of her church for meaning to her life. Faith is a freethinker, a hedonist, who dreams of "giv[ing] up all that future life . . . which seems so vague and so distant" for something "vivid," something tangible (VII. 165). She is not afraid to try new avenues (even witchcraft) when other, more acceptable means fail to get her what she wants, though they may be more harmful or dangerous. In Faith, we find a woman whose faith is in herself, rather than Christianity.

And then there is Prudence—a troubled, even manic young girl who is quite cruel and destructive for no apparent reason. Prudence's behaviour is anything but prudent; she is vindictive, sneaky, and violent. And she never thinks about the consequences of her actions. Etymologically, the word "prudence" is derived from the Latin, "providence," meaning divine guidance, or care. Clearly, Prudence is the antithesis of this virtue. She is a symbolic representation of everything imprudent.

During Lois' journey to Salem, we learn something both intriguing and disturbing about her past: Lois' father was a minister, and when she was a child, Lois witnessed the murder of a witch. She tells the story of an old woman in town accused of witchcraft, and as Lois was being carried through town that day, her nurse stopped by a "still and breathless" crowd:

. . . [T]here was a crowd of folk all still. . . . They were all gazing towards the water, and the maid held me up in her arms to see the sight above the shoulders of the people; and I saw old Hannah in the water, her grey hair streaming down her shoulders, and her face bloody and black with the stones and the mud they had been throwing at her, and her cat tied round her neck. (VII. 122)

Hannah's name is extremely significant. In the Bible, the only character named Hannah is a woman in the First Book of Samuel. Hannah is the mother of Samuel, one of God's most esteemed prophets. It is Samuel who anoints David King of Israel (1 Samuel 16: 13). When Hannah's story begins, she is barren, and because of this she suffers cruel mocking and provoking by her rival until she cries bitter tears and refuses to eat (1 Samuel 1: 7). Though her husband loves her even more than his other wife (who is not barren), Hannah cannot be comforted because the Lord has closed (or cursed) her womb (5-6). She goes to the temple and vehemently prays to God for a son. While she is praying, one of the temple priests, Eli, accuses her of being intoxicated. But Hannah answers:

Not so, my lord, . . . I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief. (15-16)

Eli, then, instead of cursing her, blesses her: "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him" (17). And God remembers Hannah, blessing her with a son (20). So Hannah is "cursed" with barrenness and "accused" of drunkenness, yet, she is treated with special fairness by her husband, is blessed by Eli, and is found to be in God's favour. What would have become of Hannah (and Israel) if her husband had banished her or the Priest had not listened? Thus, Gaskell gives the accused witch the name of Hannah for a reason. What kind of woman did they stone to death? What possible blessings did they blindly surrender by destroying a woman they feared, simply because they did not understand her? These questions are not asked by Lois, however, as she continues telling this chilling tale of fear and death.

As Lois looks on in fright and dread the old woman turns to her and cries out: "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" (VII. 122). This story is told before Lois has even reached Salem. We are left to wonder if old Hannah is an actual witch who curses Lois, or if she is a prophet shouting events to come. Considering how this story ends, the former seems true. I do not think Hannah is prophesying as much as casting Lois' fate. The character of Hannah is most thought-provoking, and too similar to Bridget, to be interpreted as a prophet. She is accused of being a witch; her cat (like Bridget's familiar, Mignon) has been killed; from her words, we know that she feels utterly betrayed by Lois' father; thus, she curses the one he loves. Like Bridget, Hannah curses the loved one of the man who has done her the most harm, and the curse sticks. Thus, the accusations against Hannah are most likely true; she is not a prophet, but rather a powerful witch, whose cruel death Bridget likewise almost suffered: "[A]n old servant of the Starkeys . . . said, 'It will be the old witch, that his worship means. She needs a ducking, if ever a woman did, does that Bridget Fitzgerald'" ("The Poor Clare." V. 341).

"Lois the Witch" does, however, have a much more prominent character who possesses the gift of prophecy—Manasseh Hickson. Manasseh is the oldest and only male of Lois' cousins. He is a typically gothic character: tall and gaunt, possessing a "stern, dark face" with "deep-set," furtive eyes under "dark, shaggy eyebrows" (VII. 125-126), and "lank, black hair [with] grey, coarse skin" (VII. 142). When angered, he storms about the room, muttering to himself, and chastising Lois' differing beliefs in "passionate" tones (133). His "word [is] law" in the Hickson's Puritan household (VII. 127). Yet, at the same time, Manasseh is pale, lank, grave—a virtual walking death. Manasseh is also severely depressed, fanatically religious, obsessed with Lois

(who is repulsed by him), and troubled by visions. He is suicidal and quite frightening in his lust and religious zeal.<sup>32</sup>

Manasseh is a prophet; he “dreams dreams and sees visions” (Uglow 477). And these visions and dreams most definitely contain shades of the occult. Manasseh fancies himself in love with Lois. Indeed, his visions have revealed her to be of the elect, and he believes that she is his spiritual soul mate sent from God. Upon first seeing Lois, he cannot stop himself from “furtively examining” her (VII. 126), and his attention over the next few months only becomes more smothering. Manasseh wants Lois for his bride and insists that she must accept his demands or invite disaster. He tells Lois that, as he was reading scripture one day, he saw a vision in which “gold and ruddy type of some unknown language” (VII. 145) appeared on the page. And in his ear was whispered the meaning of the words: “Marry Lois! marry Lois!” (VII. 145). Lois, who does not love Manasseh, and is already betrothed to Hugh Lucy, rebuffs her cousin’s advances, which only causes him to have more frequent and more disturbing visions:

‘I saw in my soul, between sleeping and waking, the spirit come and offer thee two [capes], and the colour of the one was white, like a bride’s, and the other was black and red, which is, being interpreted, a violent death. And when thou didst choose the latter the spirit said unto me, “Come!” and I came, and did as I was bidden. I put it on thee with mine own hands, as it is preordained, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice and be my wife. And when the black and red dress fell to the ground, thou wert even as a corpse three days old’ (VII. 154-155).

As a fictional character, Manasseh is fascinating because it would be easy to write him off as a lunatic, except for the fact that his visions concerning Lois all come true. Indeed, Manasseh sees what the others do not: Hannah’s curse will come to pass. Of

course, how he goes about trying to save Lois does nothing but alienate her further. His clumsy, morbid wooing is for naught; Lois does not love him and has no qualms telling him so. She does not believe that Manasseh's visions are prophetic, and brushes them off as the mere ramblings of a disturbed religious fanatic. But when the mob cries, "Witch!" we learn the truth: Manasseh saw Lois' fate. And, interestingly, though Lois refuses to listen to him, declining his offer of salvation, only Manasseh tries to help her at her trial. Ironically, his attempts to save her result in fulfilling both his own prophetic vision and the curse of old Hannah. His incoherent and confused ramblings cause further upset in the crowd and they accuse Lois of "master[ing] the soul of Manasseh Hickson" (VII. 190). Lois is hanged, and Manasseh runs into the "dark dense forest," never to be seen again (VII. 205).

Manasseh is a strong, intriguing character, and extremely important to the story's plot. He is, at alternate times, as puritanical as Grace and as troubled and desolate as Faith. He oftentimes plays the role of Chorus, and he is both Lois' oracle and would-be protector. Manasseh is tormented by his strong belief in the Puritan doctrine of predestination. He desperately wants to be one of the elect, and he is frightened almost beyond sanity that he is not among God's chosen. He confides this to his mother, stating his frustration that knowledge of God's Divine Plan is impossible to understand, as well as being kept a mystery by Satan: "[W]hen I try to know whether I am one of the elect, all is dark" (VII. 157). Manasseh is extremely troubled by his inability to foresee the fate of his soul. He has been both spiritually and emotionally distraught for years, believing that he will die soon, without having achieved spiritual salvation. He prays aloud "with every mark of abject terror on his face and in his manner," hoping for "deliverance from the Evil One" (VII. 161). Even the stoic and private Grace confides to Lois of her son's "disturbed" mind (VII. 157), and works hard to hide his afflictions from her neighbours, even going so far as to tie

him to his bed (VII. 201). Manasseh's religious angst is not unique among Calvinists and Puritans, however.

Calvinism was a religion that Unitarians considered anathema to their own beliefs. Indeed, Elizabeth stated that she had "only one antipathy—and that was to the Calvinistic or Low Church creed" (*Letters* 648). Calvinism teaches the doctrine of atonement more harshly than any other Christian sect, for it is the religion of the elect. Simply put, because of Adam and Eve's sin, God has condemned us all to death. Some of us, God has "elected" or predestined to be saved due to Christ's death and resurrection, but most of us he has predestined to remain unsaved. The saved will enter Heaven; the others will suffer in Hell forever. Those unfortunate souls cannot be saved, no matter how hard they pray, no matter how sincerely they repent, for it has been ordained that only a limited number are members of the elect. Hence, with Calvinism, the doctrine of atonement only works for the few elect—those predestined for Heaven.<sup>33</sup> Priestley, who was raised Calvinist (*Memoirs* 6), spoke often of the extreme anxiety resulting from belief in a religion that foretells eternal torment for those not chosen:

I felt occasionally such distress of mind as it is not in my power to describe, and which I still look back upon with horror.

Notwithstanding I had nothing very material to reproach myself with, I often concluded that God had forsaken me, . . . repentance and salvation were denied. (7)

Rev. Albert Barnes wrote that his "whole soul pants for light and relief" on the questions of Election and Eternal Torment:

But I confess, that when I look on a world of sinners and sufferers; . . . when I see my friends, my parents, my family, my people, my fellow citizens,—when I look upon a whole race, . . . and when I feel

that God only can save them, and yet he does not do it,—I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark, dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it.

(Quoted in King 47)

These same fears and issues result in Manasseh's degeneration in both body and mind. Our first introduction to Manasseh is certainly not positive. Gaskell's depiction of him as dark, grave, heavy, and indifferent (VII. 149) clearly shows the impression she wishes to convey of this troubled soul. And his blessings at mealtime show that Manasseh is pitifully searching for redemption, and finding none:

Manasseh lifted his right hand, and 'asked a blessing,' as it was termed; but the grace became a long prayer for abstract spiritual blessings, for strength to combat Satan, and to quench his fiery darts, and at length assumed—so Lois thought—a purely personal character, as if the young man had forgotten the occasion, and even the people present, but was searching into the nature of the diseases that beset his own sick soul, and spreading them out before the Lord. (VII. 130)

How long has Manasseh sought a cure for this mysterious "disease"? His gaunt appearance, his quiet personality, and his grasping to Lois for help all show that this desperation has long tormented him.

Manasseh's name explains much behind the mysteries of his behaviour, for there is a symbolic explanation behind his severe depression. "Manasseh" is the name of two prominent characters in the Old Testament, one the grandson of Jacob (Joseph's son) and the other, a Hebrew king. Genesis tells the story of Joseph taking both his sons to be blessed by Jacob (Israel); during the blessing, something very significant happens:

And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and

brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. (Genesis 48: 13-14)

Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one [Manasseh] is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused. . . .

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. (Genesis 48: 18-20)

Thus, Manasseh is not the chosen one for the primary blessing. Jacob does not "elect" Manasseh for greatness over his younger brother, for he is not "predestined" for special greatness. But there is another Manasseh, with an even more interesting history, for his deeds are steeped in Witchcraft. In the Second Book of Kings, there is a king named Manasseh:

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. . . . He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. . . . He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. . . . In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. (2 Kings 21: 1-6)

Why did the Hicksons give their son the same name as so cursed and "evil" a man? Did they purposely name their son after these Biblical men, one of whom is clearly not of the "chosen," and the other a sorcerer? This does not seem likely. What seems possible (and marvellously ironic) is that Grace Hickson, this "godly" (VII. 136), Puritan woman, supposedly beyond reproach, has such little knowledge of her Bible

that she unknowingly gave her own son these devastating Biblical namesakes. And from this accidental cursing of her own son, emerges a truly tragic young man, caught up in a fate from which he cannot escape. Manasseh's name explains his pain and anguish; it also explains his gift of prophecy. And this "gift" induces him to dwell precariously between sanity and madness.

In modern criticism of "Lois the Witch," Manasseh has not been given much credence or esteem. Uglow describes Manasseh as stalking Lois "like Death itself," and asserts that "desire distorts his [theological] texts" (477). In *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Novel in Social Crises*, Coral Lansbury describes Manasseh as "mentally disturbed," having "escaped from reality to live in dreams and prophecy" (157). Bonaparte admits that Manasseh defends Lois, but at the same time, she describes him as the "worst of the lot" in regards to his family as a result of his becoming "completely perverted by the Puritan religion" (115-116). It is certainly true that Manasseh's pursuit of Lois frightens her; the scene in the storeroom, where Manasseh waits for Lois in the dark in order to whisper urgent overtures in her ear is morbidly insidious (VII. 148-149). And Manasseh does admit to finding Lois "pleasant in [his] sight" (VII. 144). But it must not be discounted that what Manasseh claims to see, what he knows will happen to Lois, does indeed happen. The fact that the prevention of Lois' death can only be thwarted by her marriage to Manasseh should not automatically negate his intent. What he says will happen, does in fact come about. Terence Wright states that, though Manasseh is "deranged," he is "possessed of the most mysterious power in the book, since he would appear to dream the truth, albeit by default" (68). I concur. Manasseh, morose though he may be, has a benevolent heart and honourable intentions. Lois' scepticism regarding his prophecy is understandable, but it does, in fact, result in her death.

“Lois the Witch” contains another fulfilled curse—that of Nance Hickson.

At the story’s beginning, while Lois is travelling to Salem, she is told a frightening tale of a pirate raid at Marblehead. The pirates came ashore dragging their prisoners with them, taking them “by force to the inland marsh” (VII. 119). The pirates had among their prisoners a woman, and the people of Marblehead heard her woeful cries that night, begging Jesus to be merciful and save her from the “power of man” (VII. 119). But no one helped. The men stayed in their homes, guns loaded, safe from the pirates. Their blood ran cold at the sound of the woman’s pleas for help, but they were too afraid, or too cowardly, to do anything about it. There was a sickly woman named Nance Hickson, however, who cursed the people of Marblehead:

. . . old Nance Hickson, who had been stone-deaf and bedridden for years, stood up in the midst of the folk all gathered together in her grandson’s house, and said, that as they, the dwellers in Marblehead, had not had brave hearts or faith enough to go and succour the helpless, that cry of a dying woman should be in their ears, and in their children’s ears, till the end of the world. And Nance dropped down dead as soon as she had made an end of speaking, and the pirates set sail from Marblehead at morning dawn; but the folk there hear the cry still, shrill and pitiful, from the waste marshes, ‘Lord Jesu! Have mercy on me! Save me from the power of man, O Lord Jesu!’ (VII. 119)

Thus, the people of Marblehead live with the same curse as Grace Furnivall; they are made to repeatedly witness their own sins, and live with their guilt, constantly being reminded that they left a “helpless woman unaided in her sore distress” (VII. 120).

And the woman who curses them possesses the same surname as Grace Hickson.

Nance Hickson defends the innocent against the cowardly mob; Grace Hickson does

not. In choosing to give Nance the same surname as Grace, Mrs. Gaskell ingeniously highlights Grace's deplorable abandonment of Lois during her own "sore distress."

Just as in "The Poor Clare," the curses and prophesies in "Lois the Witch" all come to pass. Bridget and Nance speak curses to avenge the innocent; Hannah curses Lois to avenge herself; Manasseh sees Lois' fate and futilely tries to prevent it. In "The Old Nurse's Story," Grace Furnivall unwittingly curses herself through her own sin. And in "The Doom of the Griffiths" (*Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 1858) a curse comes to pass yet again.

Mrs. Gaskell called "The Doom of the Griffiths" an "old rubbishy one, . . . [the] only merit whereof is that it is founded on fact" (*Letters* 488). She had vacationed in Wales in the summer of 1827. Plas Penrhyn, "a large white house on the hillside at Minffordd, near Penrhyndeudraeth" (Uglow 50), was deeply loved by Elizabeth, and when she married William in 1832, they honeymooned there (80). Gaskell gained much literary inspiration from Wales' rich beauty and romantic landscape. The Alpine country of North Wales serves as one of the settings for Gaskell's novel, *Ruth*, and the breathtaking beauty of the mountains has an almost overwhelming impact on the novel's troubled heroine (III. 64). The night before Ruth is forced to leave her beloved Wales and return to England, she wanders "from window to window, learning off each rock and tree by heart" (III. 130). Gaskell's short story, "The Well of Pen-Morfa" is set in the Lleyn peninsula and the country round Tremadoc, near Plas Penrhyn, and "The Doom of the Griffiths" takes place there too. Gaskell's claim that this story is based on fact is explained in Uglow's biography; the plot is most likely based on a "local scandal" heard while Gaskell was vacationing at Plas Penrhyn (122). Throughout the story, Gaskell makes many

authentic references to setting, topography, food and drink, and the general language and local colour. Set in all of this realism, however, is a dark, gothic story.

Gaskell opens her story with a legend from the past. Many centuries ago, during the middle ages, a member of the Gryfydd family betrayed the powerful Welsh leader, Owain Glendwr. Glendwr took especially great offence to the betrayal of Gryfydd because he had loved him as he would his own family; he had considered him “more than brother” (V. 238). Consequently, instead of killing Gryfydd, Glendwr chose a harsher punishment. He let Gryfydd live in disgrace among his people, suffering the “loathing and scorn of his compatriots”:

I doom thee to live, because I know thou wilt pray for death. Thou shalt live on beyond the natural term of the life of man, the scorn of all good men. . . . Thy race shall be accursed. . . . yea, their wealth shall vanish. . . . And when nine generations have passed from the face of the earth, thy blood shall no longer flow in the veins of any human being. In those days the last male of thy race shall avenge me. The son shall slay the father. (V. 238)

The early generations that followed Gryfydd’s decline did suffer poverty, and “their worldly stock diminished without any visible cause” (V. 238). But in the many years that followed, the fear and awe of the curse dwindled as the family—now called Griffiths<sup>34</sup>—once again began to prosper. It was only when the Griffiths suffered tragedy that the ancient curse was again whispered of and given credence. Indeed, in the eighth generation, many lost faith in the power of the curse when Owen Griffiths married Miss Owen, an heiress of some wealth. The family moved into her estate (Bodowen), and all seemed well (V. 239). The Griffiths bore a son whom they named Robert. He inherited Bodowen, married, and had first a daughter, and then a young

son, whom he named Owen. It is this gentleman, Owen Griffiths, around which the story is centred.

Owen is a lonely, sensitive man. Though his father loves him dearly, all of his life Owen has been held at arm's length. Squire Griffiths fears the onslaught of the curse—" [h]is strong imagination rendered him peculiarly impressionable on such subjects" (V. 242)—and is completely honest with Owen that he expects it to come about:

. . . Squire Griffiths told the legend, in a half-jesting manner, to his little son, when they were roaming over the wild heaths in the autumn days. . . . The legend was wrought into the boy's mind, and he would crave, yet tremble, to hear it told over and over again, while the words were intermingled with caresses and questions as to his love.

Occasionally his loving words and actions were cut short by his father's light yet bitter speech—"Get thee away, my lad; thou knowest not what is to come of all this love." (V. 243)

By the time Owen grows into a man, he is completely alone. His mother died while giving birth to him; his sister has married and left the family home; and Owen has been replaced in his father's affections by a new stepmother.<sup>35</sup> But when he finally finds happiness with Nest, a local peasant girl, life again seems perfect. Owen and Nest marry secretly (due to her low social status) and have a son, whom they name Owen. But as Gaskell says, this bliss is to be short-lived: "But the curse was at work! The fulfilment of the prophecy was nigh at hand" (V. 258)! We do not need the narrator to tell us this, however, for the names of the characters have already made this clear.

All we know of Rhys ap Gryfydd is that he betrayed Owain Glendwr, and was cursed for it. It is understandable that his future generations would be hesitant to

name their children after such a notorious ancestor. To give one of their own the name of "Owen," however, seems not only daring, but also utterly foolish. It is not certain in which generation this happened, but someone in the Griffiths family made a fatal error when naming his child. We first learn that this has occurred when we are introduced to the seventh generation's heir, Owen Griffiths—the two men involved in the ancient curse have been symbolically conjoined. The originator of the curse has been "married" to the one cursed. And to seal the fate of the family, Owen Griffiths marries Mrs. Owen (V. 239), further strengthening the power of Owain Glendwr's virulent curse. The eighth generation of the Griffiths family is fooled, however, into a false sense of security by Mrs. Owen's fortune. They have become so complacent that they do not even notice the foreboding name of the home in which they abide—Bodowen. Owain Glendwr's name is everywhere, encircling the Griffiths like a shroud. Robert, the son of Owen Griffiths and Mrs. Owen, repeats the same error and names his son Owen, who in turn repeats the same hazardous error. It is through this lack of forethought that the curse is kept alive.

Squire Griffiths eventually discovers Owen's secret marriage; he is also told by his wife that Nest's reputation leaves something to be desired. He goes to their cottage and is enraged by the domestic situation in which he finds his son. Then, in a scene reminiscent of Lord Furnivall striking his granddaughter and throwing her out in the storm ("The Old Nurse's Story"), the Squire violently argues with Owen and, throwing his grandson across the room toward the baby's mother, storms out of the cottage. Nest "open[s] her arms to receive and cherish her precious babe" (V. 261), but her efforts are futile. The Squire had not put care in his aim; the baby hits against a dresser, falls to the floor, and dies almost instantly in his father's arms.

Owen mistakenly believes that his father purposely killed little Owen. He does not notice—in the heat of the horrible moment—that his father has left before

realising what he has done. Still, even in his grief and desire for revenge, Owen tries to prove the curse false:

. . . he planned to go to the Squire and tell him of the anguish of heart he had wrought, and awe him, as it were, by the dignity of grief. But then again he durst not—he distrusted his self-control—the old prophecy rose up in its horror—he dreaded his doom. (V. 263)

Owen decides to leave Bodowen forever, and regretfully makes one last trip there to gather money that he and Nest will need to start their new life. While there, he has an altercation with his younger stepbrother, Robert, which results in Owen slapping the boy across the face. The Squire walks in on the scene and rains down “bitter and deep” words on his older son, unaware that he has done far worse to Owen’s only child (V. 266). And Owen says nothing—no words of defence, no words of explanation; he is by now too “stubborn from injustice, and hardened by suffering” (V. 267). Owen leaves the house with the Squire in pursuit. When his father attacks him from behind, Owen fights back, pushes the Squire onto a stone, and further into the black waters below. Immediately sensing “the awful doom” of his fate (V. 269), Owen tries desperately to save his father, and when he sees that this is impossible, cries all of his regrets to heaven. Our last sight of the Griffiths is of Owen smuggling his family away—Nest still holding her dead child in her arms—in a small boat, “never more seen of men” (V. 277). The curse is finally concluded; Glendwr is avenged.

Against these two men’s wills, the curse takes control of their lives. There are so many misunderstandings, so many preventable confrontations, and so many situations that are inescapable. Owen does not want to return home, but must in order to get money, making confrontation unavoidable. Because the Squire does not know he killed his own grandson, he is never able to make amends. Thinking the worst,

Owen is not able even to try to reason with his father. Little Robert—bringing to mind the destructive and hateful Prudence in “Lois the Witch”—emotionally tortures Owen with cruel insults about his wife and dead child. And behind it all, Mrs. Griffiths continues to fan the flames of resentment between father and son. The House of Griffiths seems plagued by the same furies as the House of Pelops.<sup>36</sup>

The validity of this curse by Glendwr (unlike the curses by Bridget, Hannah, and Nance) is sometimes not treated as a serious, literal curse, possibly because it reads too much like wishful thinking on Glendwr’s part, and possibly because of Gaskell’s clear rejection of the biblical concept of sins of the father being visited upon the sons (Uglow 122). Uglow argues that the curse of the Griffiths “is not divinely but socially constructed, carried through generations of patriarchal pride” (123). In his preface to the story, Michael Ashley offers an identical interpretation to Uglow’s: “The supernatural element of the story rests solely on the acceptance of the inevitability of destiny” (62). In other words, the Griffiths believed in the curse, accepted their “fate,” and in doing so brought about that which they feared the most. I must argue against these explanations, however. Why should we break away from the established motif that is generally found in Mrs. Gaskell’s supernatural fiction? It is clear from the first page of the first chapter of this story that Gaskell intends Owain Glendwr’s words to be a literal curse that plagues the Gryfydd family all of its days:

Perhaps some may not be aware that this redoubted chieftain is, even in the present days of enlightenment, as famous among his illiterate countrymen for his *magical powers* as for his patriotism. (italics mine. V. 237)

Gaskell quotes from William Shakespeare’s “1 Henry IV” to prove Glendwr’s renowned powers:

He [Glendwr] says himself—or Shakespeare says it for him, which is much the same thing:

‘At my nativity

The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes

Of burning cressets . . .

. . . I can call spirits from the vasty deep.’

And few among the lower orders in the principality would think of asking Hotspur’s irreverent question in reply. (V. 237)

Gaskell does not quote all of the words Shakespeare uses to describe Glendwr’s magical gifts with the occult, but she quotes directly from this play to highlight Glendwr’s legendary powers, thus, directing us toward the play to learn more. Gaskell herself has established that she is well grounded in folklore and pagan traditions, and she is not frightened by them. If we accept that the women in Furnivall Hall see literal phantoms, if we accept that Bridget’s curse conjures a daemonic Other, if we accept all of the curses that take place in “Lois the Witch” and acknowledge that Manasseh’s visions come to pass, why would we now say that what occurs in “The Doom of the Griffiths” is a self-fulfilling prophecy? I think that the solid motif of Gaskell’s supernatural fiction makes it clear that when she says a supernatural incident has occurred, then we can trust that she expects us to suspend disbelief and follow the magic.

But the question should be asked: why would a woman whose belief system is so rational, who belongs to a religion that embraces science and reason, believe in the supernatural, have a fascination for pagan tradition, and delve into the gothic genre so deeply? Would not Mrs. Gaskell be diametrically opposed to such things? I think that, rather than nullifying the possible existence of the supernatural, the Unitarian religion quite literally enhanced Gaskell’s acceptance of the mysteries of the universe.

By teaching tolerance and acceptance of those different from themselves, Unitarians did not irrationally fear the unknown. They educated themselves in many different religions and cultures without suspicion, fear, or judgment.<sup>37</sup> In general, Unitarians, including women, were exceptionally well educated. Uglow states that Elizabeth was well read from an early age and “learnt poetry by heart” (27). Harriet Martineau’s education began early too. She writes in her *Autobiography* that at the age of seven she memorised hymns from *Hymns and Prose for Children*, “shiver[ing] with awe” from some of them (34). In a letter to his daughter Mary, Rev. William Turner encourages her to read the “well-founded strictures of Mary Wollstonecraft,” if she has not already (115). Turner’s choice of author is significant, for though he might have found Wollstonecraft’s scandalous lifestyle disconcerting and her writings sometimes “coarse,” he was open-minded and tolerant enough to see how valuable they would be for his daughter. Turner’s letter is a perfect example of the Unitarian proverb of not throwing out the baby with the bath water. Though sometimes their search for truth might make them uncomfortable, the end result held such value for them, that they continued the search. Elizabeth had a fascination with magic, fairy tales, myths, and folklore that began with her childhood education (Uglow 27). She was taught early in life to open her mind to new, exciting viewpoints and cultures. Her Unitarian belief served to enhance her interest and knowledge in a variety of ideas and philosophies, pagan tradition only being one of these. And, as will be seen in Chapter Two, gothic fiction was not the only result of Unitarianism’s influence upon her.

Thus, Mrs. Gaskell believed in the Unitarian way, but she did not hold to the simple confidence that it had an answer for everything. Her stories reflect her conviction that there are strange things (and people) in the world, things that may be beyond our control or understanding. In her gothic fiction, she imagined worlds

outside the domestic and social realm in which she normally lived, thus allowing the abrupt appearance of the supernatural in the most ordinary of settings. In these stories she peered into the distorted, violent, perverse, desperate, haunted, etc. She found that outside the realm in which she believed, there was still another world that she could make almost believable. And she explored the havoc that can occur when these two worlds are conjoined.

## CHAPTER II

### TOLERANCE, FORGIVENESS, AND REDEMPTION

*There is great need for forgiveness in this world.* (Ellinor in "A Dark Night's Work." VII. 512)

Mrs. Gaskell's belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature is obvious. Many of her characters display attributes of virtue, decency, and generosity, which are manifested in their ability to forgive the mistakes and injuries that others inflict upon them, or that they inflict upon those around them. Very few characters are honestly in no need of redemption, such as M. de Chalabre ("My French Master") or Gilbert Dawson ("The Sexton's Hero"). But most characters are depicted as needing redemption either through their ability to forgive, or to accept the forgiveness of others. And it is these stories that reveal much about Mrs. Gaskell and her staunch trust in humankind. To understand Gaskell's optimistic outlook, one need only comprehend an essential element of her Unitarian beliefs.

Coral Lansbury presents a detailed account of nineteenth century Unitarianism, and especially Mrs. Gaskell's particular beliefs. Unitarianism, says Lansbury, was a "[c]ollectivist movement in praise of the individual." Unitarians believed in the "power of reason to effect change," and maintained a strong faith in the "natural goodness of man" (13). Gaskell held strong belief in the "unique nature of every human being" (212), and trusted that each individual, through self-understanding and contemplative study, could achieve his or her self-awareness and religious insight. Her tolerance of every person's own private "emotional needs" and "appropriate objects of worship" shows an open-mindedness and magnanimity that Lansbury claims is missing in both moralists and psychologists even today (212).

Certainly, tolerance was “the measure of Unitarian life” (19) and Gaskell was no exception. Gaskell’s open-minded respect for different belief systems is quite obvious in her stories (notably, “The Poor Clare” and “Lois the Witch”) and even more so in her friendships. The importance of tolerance and understanding in the Unitarian religion is discussed by Joseph Priestley, who admiringly speaks of his Calvinist aunt opening her home to “all the Dissenting ministers in the neighbourhood,” no matter how troublesome she might have found their beliefs (*Memoirs* 6). With tolerance came the ability to forgive those who may be in need of help or assistance in returning to the correct path. Tolerance did not mean “loving the sin,” but rather “loving the sinner.” And this philosophy led Unitarians like Mrs. Gaskell to possess an extraordinary capacity for forgiveness of others’ shortcomings. Moreover, because Unitarians did not teach the doctrine of atonement or an eternal Hell, theirs was a religion whose entire nature embodied forgiveness; indeed, Unitarianism is a Religion of Forgiveness. For, if God is so forgiving of His creation, should not the creation be any less forgiving of each other?

The theme of forgiveness and redemption in Mrs. Gaskell’s short fiction, the trials and struggles of her characters, the need for forgiveness from both God and those harmed, arise again and again. It is rare to find a “perfect” man, woman, or child among Gaskell’s characters. Even (what I consider to be) her two most sweet and adorable children, Tom from “Hand and Heart” and Mary of “Bessy’s Troubles at Home” are not naturally gifted children, and must be patiently led by mother and teacher, respectively. How forgiveness is granted, and how it manifests itself, is repeatedly highlighted in the many complex characters of Mrs. Gaskell’s fiction. Time and again, her characters freely offer forgiveness to those they love, those to which they feel loyalty, or even those who are mere acquaintances. They also humbly ask for forgiveness from family, friends, or even God. Sometimes, Gaskell has

simple, one-dimensional characters (Lord Furnivall and Roger Bellingham immediately come to mind), but these are few, and they are used to highlight the good and blessed spiritual nature of the stories' main characters. Gaskell's major characters (whether benevolent or sinful), the ones she holds up as examples, are at once flawed and sympathetic. They are complex characters in which we can see ourselves, characters to which we can relate. From the hard-hearted Grace Hickson to the fallen Lizzie Leigh, we learn that all deserve forgiveness; all are redeemable; all possess a benevolent and forgiving nature. Mrs. Gaskell does not preach to us; she never points her finger at us or tells us what kind of people we should be. Rather, in her stories we learn what kind of people we could be.

Ellinor Wilkins ("A Dark Night's Work." *All the Year Round*, 1863) quickly forgives her father, an accidental murderer, thinking only of him:

'No, [Ellinor], you must never kiss me again; I am a murderer.'

'But I will, my own darling papa,' said she, throwing her arms passionately round his neck, and covering his face with kisses. 'I love you, and I don't care what you are—if you were twenty times a murderer, which you are not. (VII. 465)

Ellinor continues to plead her father's case, even after he has died. Hoping that Ralph Corbet might "think as kindly as [he] can" for the man who has sunk so low, she presents a letter her father wrote in which he begs Corbet to forgive him his sins (VII. 585). Though she suffers for years from her father's rash actions, Ellinor never complains, never condemns. She has lost her youth, her health, her property, her fiancé, and her peace of mind. Yet, after risking discovery of her family's dark secret to save the innocent Dixon from false imprisonment for her father's crime (reminiscent of a similar scene in *Mary Barton*, and just as suspenseful), she asks only for Dixon's forgiveness for the shame and anguish he has suffered: "Forgive me all

the shame and misery, Dixon! Say you forgive me; and give me your blessing” (VII. 588)! And Dixon grants her request, though he knows (as do we) that Ellinor has done nothing for him to forgive.

In Gaskell’s Dickensian Christmas tale, “Christmas Storms and Sunshine” (*Howitt’s Journal*, 1848), we are introduced to Mary Hodgson and Mrs. Jenkins—two women who are “wanting to finish the completeness of the quarrel” that exists between their husbands, who are business rivals (II. 194). Mrs. Jenkins flaunts her wealth; Mary flaunts her child. The quarrel between these two neighbours finally climaxes on Christmas Eve, when Mary harshly disciplines Mrs. Jenkins’ cat for breaking into her cupboard. In a wickedly humorous scene, Mrs. Jenkins’ stately, self-righteous chastising of Mary’s deplorable treatment of a “poor dumb animal” (II. 196) shames Mary into self-doubt. But later, when Mary is in dire need of Mrs. Jenkins’ help—for the life of her child is at stake—she is coldly turned away:

‘I’m sorry I can’t oblige you, ma’am; my kettle is wanted for my husband’s tea. . . . You’d better send for the doctor, ma’am, instead of wasting your time in wringing your hands, ma’am—my kettle is engaged’ (II. 201).

Both women behave abominably; both are mortified by their behaviour. And both ask for, and are granted, forgiveness. Mrs. Jenkins asks it of God (II. 201), and saves the child’s life; and Mary asks it of Mrs. Jenkins, not in words, but in action: “Mary seized [Mrs. Jenkins’] hand and kissed it” (II. 202). And with this unspoken forgiveness, a lifetime of friendship is formed, and jealousy is forgotten.

The motif of forgiveness and redemption can be quite subtle. In “The Well of Pen-Morfa,” an embittered daughter does not appreciate her mother’s love and strength until the old woman passes away. She devotes the rest of her life in servitude

to the less fortunate, in hopes of gaining the spiritual forgiveness of both her mother and her God, and perhaps in hopes of eventually forgiving herself (II. 242-266).

A common character in Gaskell's fiction (be it novel, novella, or short story) who often requires forgiveness is the careless, feckless, irresponsible man. And most often, this wayward man is loved, protected, and indulged by almost everyone associated with him. Indeed, a suffering parent, lover, or sister of this type of character is a familiar sight in Gaskell's fiction, and their forgiveness of the corrupt, yet beloved man is just as familiar. Most times, the forgiveness remains unspoken, for to speak it might appear to be a condemnation of an adored son or father. Yet the forgiveness is manifested in the actions of the other family members or friends, and also in their grief. But is the wayward man always deserving of such unconditional forgiveness? Mrs. Gaskell would answer yes. How many times should we forgive someone who has no intention of repenting, no interest in reforming? Mrs. Gaskell would answer, seventy times seven (Matthew 18: 22). Gaskell believed in unconditional forgiveness, but at what cost to the one forgiving? This is an important question that Mrs. Gaskell repeatedly explores in her short stories that address this type of character.

In "Morton Hall" (*Household Words*, 1853), Miss Phillis, due to the "lazy, careless" (II. 462) nature of her nephew, John Marmaduke Morton, slowly dies of starvation—her fortune squandered, the family estate in ruins. Phillis remains faithful to her cherished nephew until her dying day. She eschews marriage, children, comfort, and, finally, she dies, all for her love of the wayward boy:

Miss Phillis said he [John] was going abroad; but in what part he was then, she herself hardly knew; only she had a feeling that, sooner or later, he would come back to the old place; where she should strive to

keep a home for him whenever he was tired of wandering about, and trying to make his fortune. (II. 463)

When John finally returns and there is hardly enough food for them both, she goes without, giving all there is to him, so he will not suffer (II. 467). Phillis never speaks ill of her nephew, and, interestingly, neither does the narrator of the tale. All has been forgiven, it seems, before the offence has been committed, and before the offender offers apology or repentance.

In Gaskell's novella, *The Moorland Cottage* (Published 1850), Maggie Browne's spoiled brother Edward proves supercilious and tiresome from the story's beginning:

You see, Maggie, a man must be educated to be a gentleman. Now, if a woman knows how to keep a house, that's all that is wanted from her. So my time is of more consequence than yours. (II. 270)

Edward, his mother's obvious favourite, grows up privileged and pampered. Mrs. Browne remains oblivious to his faults, and blind to the charitable daughter she does have, defending him to "this day," prizing "her dead son more than a thousand living daughters" (II. 382). Edward is sent to good schools and is first in all of his mother's thoughts, while Maggie is neglected and often even treated with disdain by her mother. However, when Edward loses his moral compass and commits forgery against Mr. Buxton—the very gentleman who helped him in his career—it is Maggie who risks her engagement and even her life to help her brother return to a moral and ethical path. For she grants forgiveness to her loved ones over and over again.

Like *The Moorland Cottage*, "The Crooked Branch"<sup>38</sup> is a story of parents who unwisely ignore what they know to be the truth about their son, quietly forgiving, and never speaking ill of him to anyone. Hester and Nathan (along with their niece, Bessy) sacrifice their savings and well being for their irresponsible son, only to be

most cruelly betrayed by him in return. Still, no one in the family desires revenge or punishment for Benjamin. They protect him from the law as much as they can, and it is only under duress that they finally testify at his trial. Hester is forced to admit that her son robbed his own parents. But when the lawyer tries to push her further to admit that Benjamin encouraged one of his gang to choke her into silence, this proves too much for Hester. She collapses and dies soon after (VII. 209-258).

It is difficult to understand the passivity of the main characters in these three stories, and the extent to which they repeatedly forgive their selfish, even criminal, loved ones. What is Gaskell's intent behind these stories? Are there boundaries to our ability to forgive? And if not, should not there be? What can happen when we continue to forgive those who repeatedly do us harm? Must we all "forgive to death" like Phillis and Hester? As mentioned earlier, Mrs. Gaskell obviously believed that all sinners deserve our forgiveness, whether they repent of their sins or not. Thus, unconditional forgiveness is the necessary and correct way to respond to the transgressions of others. In these stories, Mrs. Gaskell tests the Unitarian doctrine of forgiveness. She explores the fact that there are oftentimes costs to turning the other cheek and forgiving our enemies. In some of Gaskell's stories, however, she shows what can be gained by forgiving those who have done us harm. These stories describe how characters who are willing and capable of forgiving are changed for the better, how they improve those around them, and how they find peace.

In "The Doom of the Griffiths" a son and daughter-in-law struggle to forgive an obdurate father. Nest, still holding her dead child, asks God to forgive her father-in-law, the murderer of the baby (V. 273). And Owen fancies his dead child guiding his father "safe over the paths of the sky to the gates of heaven" (V. 275). And though Owen's later despair causes him to imagine that there will never be forgiveness, that his father "revolted even in death" against a reconciliation (V. 276),

it is clear that Owen and Nest's eventual peace is secured by their mutual forgiving hearts.

In "The Sexton's Hero" (*Howitt's Journal*, 1847), forgiveness is shown in the Christ-like figure of Gilbert Dawson, a pacifist who outshines even the message of the Gospel of John: "Greater love hath no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (15: 13), for Dawson does not lay down his life for a friend, but rather an enemy. The story's narrator, a sexton from the town of Lindal, abuses Dawson both verbally and emotionally. Because of pettiness and jealousy, he threatens Dawson with violence, humiliates him in front of the entire town, steals the woman he loves (Letty), and revels in all of it. Yet, Dawson forgives both the Sexton and Letty's betrayal, and, just as Phillis does for John, he dies saving their lives. The result of his sacrifice is a namesake: "We had a boy, and we named it Gilbert Dawson Knipe; he that's stoker on the London railway" (I. 110). More importantly, the Sexton—like Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*<sup>39</sup>—now tells Dawson's story of pacifism as a lesson to young boys of what a genuine hero truly is: "Of a surety, sir, there's call enough for bravery in the service of God, and to show love to man, without quarrelling and fighting" (I. 109). Because of Dawson's willingness to forgive, the Sexton is fundamentally changed.

In "My French Master" (*Household Words*, 1852), the theme of forgiveness is again quite subtle, displayed in the character of an extraordinary patriot of France. Though both his country and his king disregard, even betray, M. de Chalabre, this gentleman remains steadfast and loyal, "faithful both to [his] God and [his] king," to the end of his days (II. 531). Chalabre is a man of such intrinsic goodness that his presence affects all those around him. Indeed, the story's narrator, one of his pupils, is a better person (both intellectually and emotionally) from having known him.

“The Heart of John Middleton” (*Household Words*, 1850)—an inversion of “The Sexton’s Hero”—tells the story of a man’s struggle to forgive the mocking humiliations of a fierce adversary. Middleton suffers near insanity from his fantasies of blessed vengeance. It is only his profound love for his daughter and the forgiving heart of his beloved, dying wife, Nelly, that finally bring him to a state of difficult, but easeful forgiveness. As Middleton confronts Richard Jackson, his “life’s enemy” (II. 404), prepared to seek righteous vengeance, Jackson falls to Nelly’s side, begging forgiveness. And Nelly answers, “It was a moment of passion; I never bore you malice for it. I forgive you; and so does John, I trust.” Middleton is immediately contrite:

Could I keep my purpose [vengeance] there? It faded into nothing.  
But, above my choking tears, I strove to speak clear and distinct, for  
her dying ear to hear, and her sinking heart to be gladdened.

‘I forgive you, Richard; I will befriend you in your trouble.’ (II. 408)

With the embracing of forgiveness come both peace and a sense of purpose. Middleton, like the Sexton, devotes the rest of his life preaching of Christ’s redemption and “faith of love” (II. 409).

In “The Manchester Marriage” (*Household Words*, Extra Christmas Number, 1858), Gaskell presents us with a dilemma fit for today’s daytime drama: a woman, thinking she is a widow, remarries and bears a child with another man. Inevitably, the first husband (Captain Wilson) returns to reclaim his old life, which includes his wife and their daughter. Gaskell does not torture us with pages and pages of melodrama, however. Instead, she removes Wilson from the story rather quickly, and we are left with the poignant final scene of Mr. Openshaw’s redemption. He now becomes “[m]ore thoughtful, . . . with new and different rules for the guidance of that conduct” (V. 523), spending the rest of his life ensuring that his wife and children want for

nothing, and trying to forgive himself for his unwitting injury upon a man he had never met. And in the story's last paragraph, we see that Openshaw has indeed forgiven himself. For he is finally capable of bringing his stepdaughter to Captain Wilson's grave, and, free of shame, telling her of the father whom she had never known.

Thus, Mrs. Gaskell's stories show that a strong belief in unconditional forgiveness can sometimes be quite burdensome and complicated. When we adopt a doctrine, sometimes we do not expect that we might be forced to follow it through adverse and even dangerous situations. Hester is able to forgive her thieving son, Benjamin, but dies because she can not bear to admit that he is unworthy of (or even interested in) her forgiveness. Gilbert Dawson proves that it may sometimes be necessary to appear weak in order to teach what true strength is. But "Morton Hall" asks questions that are more difficult. If forgiveness is given too freely or too easily, it can be dangerous. Rationality must accompany the action. Forgiveness should be unconditional, but if it is given with no discussion, or without actions being taken to change behaviour, then oftentimes the one making the mistakes will not change. When this happens, forgiveness ceases being a strength, and begins to perpetuate the problem. Something so noble and positive can then turn destructive. Gaskell never stops testing and exploring these difficult and intricate issues regarding the nature of forgiveness. But on one issue she remained steadfast: we are all capable of it, and if we desire it, we are all worthy of it.

Gaskell's unflinching trust in the innate goodness of human nature permeates her novels and short fiction. She believed "strongly that moral judgements should [and could] come from within, and should be learnt from example not from dictation" (Uglow 111). Unitarians assumed a "gradual progress to perfection, both in individuals and societies," and emphasised personal action and responsibility (6), and

this concept repeatedly appears in Gaskell's fiction, but no more so than in her stories of the Fallen Woman.

### **Spiritually Fallen Women**

In Gaskell's fiction are found two types of Fallen Women—the Spiritually Fallen and the Sexually Fallen. For both types, redemption can be gained by offering penance and seeking forgiveness. Both must occur for the woman to gain genuine peace and to be redeemed. In this sense, the Fallen Woman is taken from the lowliest of places (whether spiritual or literal) and is lifted to a higher state of being.

Beginning with the Spiritually Fallen Woman, my discussion will return to three of the Gothic stories discussed in Chapter One, the first being “The Old Nurse’s Story.”

“The Old Nurse’s Story” shows how fear and guilt can surface when forgiveness and redemption are not obtained. Terence Wright opines that it is Grace’s new affection for little Rosamond that triggers the ghastly transpiration, that “the real affection blossoming again in the present carries with it the demand for pity from the little ghost of the past” (189). Thus, Miss Grace is not just haunted by her niece; she is also haunted with guilt and revulsion of her own past. She would like to hide from it (as she hides from Maude’s portrait), but Maude will not allow her to. Redemption for Miss Grace never comes, and she can find no peace. But why is there no redemption? Why can she not be forgiven and find peace? I am reminded of Gaskell’s short story “The Half Brothers,” which shows a meaningful public act of contrition by William Preston, who literally demeans himself before the step-son whom he has offended (V. 391-404). In contrast, though Grace’s last words at the end of “The Old Nurse’s Story” do suggest “plain responsibility for one’s own fate” (Wright 188), it remains questionable whether she has publicly owned up to that responsibility. Certainly, she begs for forgiveness, but does she ever commit a true

act of repentance? Or does she just privately confess what she did and ask forgiveness for it? We do see her make excuses that her participation in the murder was ever so long ago (II. 436). Perhaps these feeble excuses only serve to inflame Maude. Additionally, Maude's portrait is banished to the dusty floor of the drawing room, her likeness facing the wall (II. 429). Why does Grace do this? It seems that she is too ashamed to look upon Maude's likeness. Clearly, Maude interprets this act as Grace symbolically disowning her, thus adding further insult to injury. At the time that the story takes place, Grace is certainly a sorrowful woman; no longer is she the proud, bitter woman who stood next to her father, triumphantly supporting Maude's banishment. However, Maude only remembers the young, scornful, spiteful Grace. And, Maude is no Gilbert Dawson, and will not forgive until repentance is certain. It seems she is waiting for an act of penance from Grace, such as the sexton's naming of his first-born after Dawson instead of himself ("The Sexton's Hero." I. 110). Such an act of repentance has not yet occurred with Grace. Obviously, her cries for forgiveness fall far short. And since Grace is too ashamed, or too afraid, to look upon Maude's likeness herself, Maude will force her to do so. Grace must make an act of repentance. It does no good for her to hide in her mansion and moan that she is sorry. Maude desires a symbolic, public acknowledgement of her crime from Grace; nothing less will suffice.

"The Old Nurse's Story" contains no religious dogma. There is no confession here, no salvation or redemption through Christ, but instead a begging of forgiveness from those harmed. Grace Furnivall is not inherently evil. Her anguished, futile pleas for mercy for her ghostly niece are proof of this (II. 445). Indeed, Grace devotes her very existence to sorrowful mourning, begging forgiveness from her long-dead relatives: "Have mercy! . . . Oh have mercy! Wilt thou never forgive! It is many a long year ago!" (II. 436). Reflected in "The Old Nurse's Story" is Gaskell's strong

belief in the goodness of human nature and our own power to repent and save, or spiritually elevate, ourselves. The tragic element of "The Old Nurse's Story" is that Grace never finds this spiritual elevation for herself, does not commit an act of repentance, and thus, is refused forgiveness. Clearly, until Grace can see her own goodness and forgive herself, until Maude is convinced that Grace feels genuine contrition, or until Grace commits a genuine act of contrition, redemption will continue to elude her. And she (and all of those close to her) will continue to be haunted by the past. Hence, continued haunting, continued dread, continued despair for all the inhabitants of Furnivall Manor.

In "Lois the Witch," Gaskell's Unitarian beliefs in a gradual process to perfection and the positive effect of conscience are most evident. We witness Salem become caught up in an ugly, violent grip of fear and superstition. And we watch as it slowly awakens and, horrified at its own behaviour, seeks forgiveness and redemption.

Redemption and forgiveness are especially strong elements in "Lois the Witch." Indeed, the very ship on which Lois travels to America is named *Redemption*, a most telling foreshadowing. The last pages of the tragic tale describe the people of Salem humbly beseeching their God and their country to forgive them their "frightful delusion" (VII. 206). The spiritually fallen characters of "Lois the Witch," indeed the self-destructive city of Salem itself, are perfect examples of the Unitarian ideal of our infinite advancement "from one degree of knowledge, perfection, and happiness to another."<sup>40</sup> When Salem finally awakens from its fanatical superstition, the ministers of the city write a decree in apology to those they killed (VII. 206-207). In this decree (of which Grace Hickson is one of the signers), they admit their error, profess the innocence of the victims of the trials, and consecrate the grounds in which they are buried. And Judge Sewall sets apart his own

day for “humiliation and prayer” in remembrance of his tragic errors in judgement and to show his sorrow, shame, and repentance (VII. 208). Prudence also reforms from a troubled, vindictive child to a repentant, honest woman:

Prudence Hickson—now woman grown—had made a most touching and pungent declaration of sorrow and repentance before the whole church for the false and mistaken testimony she had given in several instances, among which she particularly mentioned that of her cousin Lois Barclay. (VII. 206)

And then of course there is Hugh Lucy—Lois’ betrothed. Upon arriving in Salem and hearing of Lois’ violent murder, Lucy “shook the dust off his feet in quitting Salem” (VII. 206), and lives for years in torment and anger toward those who have stolen both his and Lois’ future. Long years later, however, when Lucy hears of Salem’s repentance, he lets go of his anger and eventually forgives the ministers and citizens of Salem. Trembling with grief, he vows that each year, on the same day of Judge Sewall’s penance, he will join his prayers with those of Sewall “so that his sin may be blotted out and no more had in remembrance. She would have willed it so” (VII. 208). Understandably, this act of forgiveness does not come easy for Hugh Lucy. Just as Peter denied Jesus, three times Lucy withholds forgiveness (denying Lois’ innate forgiving nature), saying, “All their repentance will avail nothing to my Lois, nor will it bring back her life” (VII. 207). But, in the end, just as a penitent Salem learns humility, Hugh Lucy learns to forgive. Indeed, if Lucy is to be a “true lover” to Lois, if he is to honour her memory and become “most true to her, and to the spirit in which she suffered” (Ward. VII. xix), he must forgive, for it is Lois Barclay whom Gaskell sets up as the epitome of Christian forgiveness.

If ever a woman deserved to fight and behave as ruthlessly as possible, it is Lois. In less than one year, the young woman loses both of her parents, is forced to

leave the man she loves, moves to a strange country, lives with a family that shows her no love, endures the affections of an unwanted suitor, and, most horrible of all, is tried and convicted for being a witch. Yet through all of this incredible misfortune, Lois never wavers in her convictions, nor does she give in to anger or bitterness. When Faith angrily and unexpectedly pushes Lois, hurting her in the process, we see that Lois has spirit, and a sense of self-worth, but is also capable of forgiveness and understanding:

Tears came into her eyes; not so much because her cheek was bruised, as because of the surprised pain she felt at this repulse from the cousin towards whom she was feeling so warmly and kindly. Just for the moment, Lois was as angry as any child could have been; but some of the words of Pastor Nolan's prayer yet rang in her ears, and she thought it would be a shame if she did not let them sink into her heart. She dared not, however, stoop again to caress Faith, but stood quietly by her. (VII. 154)

Lois is no doormat, but she is capable of true forgiveness. When she is accused of witchcraft by young, insane Prudence, instead of cursing her, or even feeling justifiable anger toward her, Lois tries to reason with her. She gives Prudence the benefit of the doubt and offers a kind, bittersweet olive branch:

‘Prudence,’ she said, in such a sweet, touching voice, that, long afterwards, those who heard it that day spoke of it to their children, ‘have I ever said an unkind word to you, much less done you an ill turn? Speak, dear child! You did not know what you said just now, did you?’ (VII. 186)

It is all for naught. Lois' cousins and aunt—all Spiritually Fallen Women—turn their backs to her and she is imprisoned. Jealousy, pride, and superstition take over; Grace

will not help Lois; Faith will not help Lois; Prudence will not help Lois. She is accused of being a witch. In prison, she is bid to say the Lord's Prayer, and while saying the prayer, Lois "made a little pause" before the forgiveness clause (VII. 195). The night before, Lois had also paused before this particular clause in order that "she might be sure that in her heart of hearts she did forgive" (VII. 194). Clearly, Lois is struggling, but she completes the prayer only because she does, indeed, forgive her family.

And then comes Lois' shining moment. Grace Hickson arrives to pour more salt on Lois' wounds. She raises her hand and curses Lois, dooming her "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" (VII. 203). Until now, Lois had meekly withstood Mrs. Hickson's verbal abuse, not wanting to cause further hurt, and even thanking the woman for her dreary hospitality, for any attempt at defence would be futile. But with this last insult, Lois finds her inner strength. Now is the time to defend herself against her abusive aunt:

[S]he, 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!'  
(VII. 203)

When Lois first raises her hand, the imagery leads us to believe that she may possibly return curse for curse. We expect recompense from Lois against Grace's cruel words. But instead, along with Lois' declaration of innocence, comes an unexpected—if heated—blessing. Thus, we last see Lois, in prison and awaiting certain death, with no hate in her words, but only self-assured and steadfast forgiveness. In *Lois Barclay*, Gaskell has written a strong, true heroine indeed, and a beautiful example of Unitarian

values. And though the conclusion of "Lois the Witch" is by no means a typically "happy" ending, it is surely an uplifting one. Grace and Prudence have grown and improved. Though Faith is not mentioned, we assume that she has joined the "people of Salem" in signing the declaration of sorrow and repentance. Salem has left the horrendous path it was travelling upon, and sought forgiveness from God and man; the story's Spiritually Fallen Women have joined them. And from Hugh Lucy, spokesman for Lois, they have received it.

To me, there is no more sympathetic woman in Gaskell's short fiction than the Spiritually Fallen Bridget Fitzgerald of "The Poor Clare." Bridget's world begins to crumble when her daughter, Mary, "wearied of home," leaves England for the continent to become a waiting-maid (V. 334). Bridget is crushed by Mary's departure, and virtually incapacitated by her eventual disappearance, but as discussed earlier, it is the brutal killing of her dog that causes Bridget to use her abilities in the Craft for evil. After Bridget curses Gisborne, she continues to do occasional harm to those around her:

The country-folk did her imperious bidding, because they feared to disobey. If they pleased her, they prospered; if, on the contrary, they neglected or traversed her behests, misfortune, small or great, fell on them and theirs. (V. 369)

Clearly, it is not Bridget's status as a witch that Gaskell portrays as sinful, but rather her decision to use her powers to do harm to others.

The harm that Bridget inadvertently inflicts upon her granddaughter is to curse Lucy with a projection of her dark side—her own "wicked, fearful self" (V. 361). Lucy, and those around her, are haunted by her Double. The demon roams free, committing "evil doings" (V. 361), whispering "wicked thoughts" to Lucy, and tempting her to "wicked actions" (V. 368). Gaskell wrote this concept of our innate

dual natures thirty years before Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde."<sup>41</sup> Stevenson's "tale of the divided self" contains no supernatural element at all, but rather treats its extraordinary events as a scientific experiment gone awry, using terms and concepts that were familiar in 1886 (Bonaparte 49-50). Gaskell, however, writing in 1856, had no direct knowledge of these concepts; thus she employs not science, but rather the supernatural to illustrate her ideas. Her use of metaphor is astounding, and her understanding of human nature is remarkably insightful.

It would be easy to focus solely on the symbolism of Lucy's and Bridget's spiritually fallen natures. After all, Lucy's mocking, wickedly sexy double is deliciously fascinating, and Bridget the witch calling upon Christian deities to perform evil is gloriously thrilling. But both of these women are complete human beings. They are whole, both physically and spiritually. Hence, Lucy can easily forgive Bridget's vengeful deed, forget her own suffering, and think only of the trouble that she is causing for those few in her life who still love her, despite the ghastly "demon-soul" (V. 374). Lucy has lost her home, her reputation, and her father because of Bridget, yet she is gentle, pious, and unquestioning. Indeed, the story's narrator describes Lucy as "over-passive, . . . too patient—too resigned" in her quiet acceptance of Bridget's curse (V. 375). Additionally, Patsy Stoneman describes Lucy as "only half human, the product of an ideology which denies female autonomy" (66). But, like Lois Barclay, Lucy is not completely meek. She has grown up wealthy, but motherless. Her entire life she has endured an "angry" and "reckless" father who alternately gives and takes away his love ("The Poor Clare." V. 360). Yet still, she has the copious strength to accept the disgrace of her curse and neither complains of, nor curses in return, the woman who is the cause of it all. Lucy has suffered so much in her life (besides the curse), and she handles it all with patience and kindness, much

more so than her two companions, who—though enduring far less—are sadly prone to complaints and accusations (V. 375).

Lucy's quiet forgiveness of Bridget does not end the curse, however, for Bridget is now continually haunted by Lucy's double. She has no peace, and cannot even pray:

‘But she—that creature—has been looking in upon me through the window all day long. I closed it up with my shawl; and then I saw her feet below the door, as long as it was light, and I knew she heard my very breathing—nay, worse, my very prayers; and I could not pray, for her listening choked the words ere they rose to my lips.’ (V. 373)

Because of the curse that came from Bridget's lips that long ago day in the forest, no prayer can now be spoken. She knows what she must do. Only Bridget can conquer the creature that she herself has conjured. And—like Grace Furnivall—she will not be able to accomplish this task until she has earned forgiveness from those she has harmed, completed true penance, and finally, forgiven herself.

The penance Bridget undergoes is to join the Poor Clares—an order of nuns that lives in perpetual poverty and service to others—in the war-torn city of Antwerp. Bridget, now called Sister Magdalen, lives there, giving more in service than “all the other nuns put together” and begging to be always placed below the others and considered “the meanest servant of all” (V. 383-384). Finally, during an uprising in the city, as the citizens revolt against their Austrian occupiers, Bridget once again encounters Squire Gisborne, lying injured on the ground. She recognises her long-time enemy and carries him to the safety of the convent. The convent has hardly any food, and Bridget gives all she has to Gisborne. Eventually, the people of Antwerp discover that the Poor Clares are starving to death. The story's final, incredibly poignant scenes describe the citizens of the town leaving the violence of the streets,

carrying in their hands their “little pittance of food,” as the bells of the convent toll on and on. “Haste, haste!” said they. “A Poor Clare is dying! A Poor Clare is dead for hunger! God forgive us and our city!” (V. 388-389). Like the citizens of Salem, the people of Antwerp (friends and enemies alike) atone for their sins and ask forgiveness. They are, in fact, a mirror of Bridget, giving what they can ill afford, and “rushing to undo evil” (Wright 197). And as the narrator enters Bridget’s room, he sees written on the wall the proverb by which she has lived and now died: “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink” (Proverbs 25:21). With Bridget’s final act of repentance, her bitter curse at last ends.

Just as with “Lois the Witch,” “The Poor Clare” does not end with romantic love; there is no certain “happily ever after.” The narrator has pined for Lucy throughout the story, and we can only assume that they do eventually marry, since the curse has been lifted. The story’s ending focuses upon Bridget’s penitence as a Poor Clare, however, rather than on a wedding. In *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell’s Work*, Hughes and Lund claim that the story’s closing is written in a way that “buries the traditional romantic conclusion—the union of the narrator with Lucy—and highlights instead Bridget’s release from her suffering” (102). This ending is only proper, for it would be regrettable if Gaskell’s higher message of forgiveness and humility was lost in the typical “marriage and children” resolution. Moreover, the story does not need a romance for its ending to be a happy one. Though Bridget dies, she dies with the knowledge that she has ended the curse. Like Ruth, Gaskell’s quintessential Sexually Fallen Woman, Bridget has overcome her fallen state; her sins have been forgiven by herself, her God, and those whom she has harmed.

Terence Wright calls “The Poor Clare” a “supernatural counterpart to *Sylvia’s Lovers*, the former taking the latter’s simple refusal of forgiveness and turning it into

the more intense and transcendent form of a curse” (196). And certainly *Sylvia’s Lovers* has a definite Unitarian influence; Uglow includes this novel (along with *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*) in her list of Gaskell’s fiction containing strong emphasis on “atonement and regeneration” (131). But I see “The Poor Clare” more as an example of Gaskell’s trust in humanity’s power and ability to improve continually. Because Gaskell did not believe in the doctrine of original sin, she could not accept that humans are born in a fallen spiritual state. Therefore, there would be no need for atonement from God. If we are living in a sinful state, then we ourselves have caused this, and it is our responsibility to find our way clear of it and onto a higher spiritual plane. And we do this through the power of our own reason, not metaphysics or doctrine (Lansbury 13). Nineteenth century Unitarian theology taught that man is a “rational being who [can] ultimately attain a perfect state in this world without recourse to marvels and miracles” (11). Gaskell’s Spiritually Fallen Women reflect this belief. Admittedly, they pray—even Grace Furnivall prays to her tormentors—but it is enlightened reason that leads Salem’s citizens (and Lois’ relatives) to penitent sorrow. It is her selfless act of penance, along with her ablutions, that elevate Bridget to a higher spiritual state. And until Grace Furnivall stops crying to the heavens and offers true penance she will remain in her lowly, fallen state. Gaskell’s stories speak for themselves; they are a rich and complex account of what faith, forgiveness, tolerance, and true penance can do for those—be they wayward men or fallen women—who are spiritually lost.

### **Sexually Fallen Women**

In 1850, three years before Mrs. Gaskell wrote *Ruth*—her very moving (and incredibly brave) novel of a Sexually Fallen young woman—she published a short story titled “Lizzie Leigh” for Charles Dickens’ *Household Words*. Whether Gaskell

was “frightened off her nest” from writing this particular story about a fallen woman, we do not know. The scarce letters (the ones we are aware of) in which she mentions “Lizzie Leigh” discuss the royalties she received from selling the story (*Letters* 113, 407, 484, 534, 712; *Further Letters* 213), though in a letter to Parisian publisher, Louis Hachette, Gaskell does list “Lizzie Leigh” as one of the “best of all [her] smaller tales” (*Further Letters* 134). But the events surrounding the publication of this story, and Gaskell’s own convictions concerning the Sexually Fallen Woman, tell much about her feelings concerning this unforgivable societal sin.

“Lizzie Leigh” was the first story that Gaskell contributed to *Household Words*. After reading *Mary Barton*, Dickens actively pursued Gaskell, writing to her that he had been “most profoundly affected and impressed” by her first novel, and desired any contributions to his new weekly journal that she might have to offer: “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*” (*The Letters of Charles Dickens*. VI. 21-22). His new journal, Dickens promised, would be dedicated to “the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition” (VI. 22). This appeal from Dickens to her conscience was extremely persuasive to Gaskell, for it touched upon her Unitarian belief in the “moral function of art and in the duty to state the truth and expose social evils” (Uglow 236). In a letter to Mary Green, Gaskell discusses her reasons for writing such a shocking story as *Ruth*: “I did feel as if I had some thing to say about it that I *must* say, and you know I can tell stories better than any other way of expressing myself” (*Further Letters* 79). This belief was not fleeting; two years later, Gaskell would write to Eliza Fox her purpose for writing: “I really do mean to do something good and virtuous” (*Letters* 216-217). Thus, writing was to some extent a philanthropic endeavour for Mrs. Gaskell. Hence, by “using her art as the vehicle for her belief” (Uglow 134), Gaskell shows her

readers—both past and present—the sometimes harsh realities of everyday life, and she holds a mirror up to society’s often floundering morality. However, her desire to help those women who had fallen on desperate times began before *Ruth*; it began even before “Lizzie Leigh.”

It seems unlikely that Gaskell worried much that Dickens might balk at the subject matter of “Lizzie Leigh” for his family magazine.<sup>42</sup> Only a few months earlier, she and Dickens had been in contact about another young prostitute—this one very real—who is known to us only as Miss Pasley. Miss Pasley had been apprenticed to a dressmaker at the age of fourteen, and while there, had been seduced “by a surgeon in the neighbourhood.” When the seduction was discovered, she was dismissed, became a prostitute, and was eventually incarcerated in New Bayley prison for theft (*Letters* 98-99). Gaskell already knew of Dickens’ considerable involvement in helping fallen women seek refuge through emigration to Australia.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, when she became involved in helping this “wild wistful” young girl, it was Dickens to whom she turned:

Please, will you help me? . . . I can manage all except the voyage. She is a good reader[,] writer, and a beautiful needlewoman; and we can pay all her expenses &c.

Pray don’t say you can’t help me for I don’t know any one else to ask, and you see the message you sent about emigration some years ago has been the mother of all this mischief. (99)

Dickens did help Gaskell’s “poor girl,” and Pasley safely left England (*Letters* 100, CD *Letters*. VI. 7-9). What happened to Pasley after her emigration to Australia is not known, but her story is told in at least two of Gaskell’s tales: both *Ruth* and *Lizzie*, like Pasley, are dress shop apprentices; all are seduced by men above their station; all fall on desperate times; and all are saved by kind-hearted philanthropists. Gaskell’s

stories tell of the necessity, indeed the Christian duty, for society to begin helping women who have committed a sexual sin, instead of ostracising them. Gaskell, however, had taken on a difficult task.

Mid-nineteenth century England did not suffer the Sexually Fallen Woman gladly. In *Mary Barton*, the dying prostitute Esther refuses to contact any of her family or old friends for help, for she knows that “[h]ers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof dreading to be counted unclean” (I. 182). The fallen woman was an outcast, not to be even looked upon, not to be acknowledged. Indeed, Lizzie Leigh’s father strips her of her very identity, decreeing that, “henceforth they would have no daughter; that she should be as one dead, and her name never more be named at market or at meal time, in blessing or in prayer” (II. 212). With her father’s words, Lizzie becomes a non-person to all but her mother. Her actual character does not appear in the thirty-five-page story (whose title ironically bears her name) until the twenty-fifth page, and then it is only as a shadow, creeping along the ground and crouching in the dark (II. 231). In *Family and Society in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell*, E. Holly Pike says that “Lizzie Leigh” is the story, not of Lizzie, but of “the young woman with whom Lizzie’s brother falls in love and who is, coincidentally, raising Lizzie’s child as her ‘niece’” (49). But “Lizzie Leigh” is also the story of Anne, a mother who for three long years, has inwardly raged and “rebelled against her husband as against a tyrant” for banishing her only daughter (II. 207). And the story is also about Lizzie’s brother, Will, who—like John Middleton—learns to forgive by witnessing the forgiving nature of the woman he loves. Moreover, when her child dies and we are finally introduced to Lizzie, when she leaves the darkness and removes her “shadow-cloak,” she remains in what Arthur Pollard calls a life “clothed in the obscurity of retirement and mourning for the child of her sin” (*Mrs. Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer* 87). Thus, “Lizzie Leigh” is not Lizzie’s story; it is rather the story of those related to her, those

affected by her fall. Perhaps due to the way Gaskell approached the subject of the Sexually Fallen Woman in "Lizzie Leigh," she suffered no societal or critical repercussions as she did for *Ruth*. After all, Lizzie loses her illegitimate child; she lives with her mother in a cottage "so secluded that, until you drop into the very hollow where it is placed, you do not see it"; Lizzie's child is buried away from the family, away from the churchyard; and Lizzie continues to pray for forgiveness and salvation (II. 240-241). Also, Lizzie has become a woman of mercy, helping those less fortunate, helping those who suffer shadows of their own, and, like Ruth, Lizzie mourns her past, never forgetting her sins. We last see Lizzie sitting beside a "little grave," shedding bitter tears (II. 241). Gaskell does not end *Ruth* in such a mournful, contrite way. Ruth does not lose her child; indeed, Leonard is so proud of his mother that he cannot help but repeatedly tell the crowds that he is her son (III. 426). And though Ruth does die, it is made clear that she is forgiven and received by the Heavenly Father: "'I see the Light coming,' said she. 'The Light is coming,' she said" (III. 444).

In her memoirs, Josephine Butler discusses the impact of Gaskell's novel *Ruth*, and how the sensitive subject of the book was generally denigrated, even by the scholars of Oxford, where her husband was a geography don:

A pure woman . . . should be absolutely ignorant of a certain class of evils in the world, albeit those evils bore with murderous cruelty on other women. One young man seriously declared that he would not allow his own mother to read such a book as that under discussion. . . .

Silence was thought to be the great duty of all on such subjects. (23)

Butler, herself a philanthropist, whose work with prostitutes helped bring about the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in 1886, goes on to say that Gaskell's novel contains a "very wholesome tendency" toward its "painful subject" (23).

Nevertheless, the shocking subject matter of the novel (and the sympathetic treatment of the title character) alienated much of Victorian society. Gaskell was not the only Victorian author writing stories of seduction of working-class girls by upper-class men.<sup>44</sup> Yet, because of the blatant double standard regarding women and sexuality, young girls like Lizzie, Esther, and Ruth had no hope beyond the pitiful and disease-ridden existence that prostitution could bring. In 1857, Dr. William Acton called the seduction of rural girls “a sport and a habit with vast numbers of men, married . . . and single, placed above the ranks of labour.”<sup>45</sup> What Francis Wilson Newman had to say about the issue is even more disturbing. Elizabeth had known Newman since the early 1840’s and greatly admired him as both a scholar and Christian (*Letters* 87-89). He was Professor of Classics at Manchester New College, and a colleague of William. His 1869 study of Oxford undergraduates shows that, though they did not approve of seduction, fornication was acceptable, since the woman was already ruined, and thus, a lost cause:

Adultery and Seduction, they avowed, were utter scoundrelism. . . . *At least* (said one), if a gentleman *did* seduce a poor girl, at any rate he ought not to abandon her, . . . he must honourably take the consequences of his own act.

. . . But as to Fornication, that was quite another thing. A man found a woman already spoiled; he did not do her any harm, poor creature!<sup>46</sup>

What these boys did not take into account is that, for every Jude Fawley totally committed to his Sue Bridehead,<sup>47</sup> there were many more Henry Bellinghams. Hence, in 1851 alone, 42,000 illegitimate children were born in England and Wales,<sup>48</sup> and these children were being born to women like Esther, Lizzie, and Ruth—the outcasts, the “spoiled.” Fallen women were inevitably cast out of both their homes and their jobs. The “Victorian code of purity” (Houghton 366) could never allow an unwed,

pregnant female to continue to work or dwell among the virtuous. These self-righteous banishments are starkly highlighted in Gaskell's stories. All three of her Sexually Fallen Women—Lizzie, Esther, and Ruth—are fired from their jobs; Lizzie's father and brothers consider her dead; Ruth is treated with extreme callousness by both Mrs. Bellingham and Mr. Bradshaw. It is no wonder that, with little else to turn to for help or guidance, prostitution so often seemed the only answer for these women. Indeed, this is the future Ruth sees for herself after Mr. Bellingham abandons her; consequently, suicide becomes a serious option for her. If not for the assistance of Thurstan Benson, Ruth might have killed both herself and her unborn child.

Thurstan and Faith Benson, Sally, Jemima Bradshaw, Susan Palmer, Anne Leigh, Jem Wilson, Mary Barton—for every one of Mrs. Gaskell's "Sexually Fallen Women," she gives us many more characters who are willing to forgive them. Mary Barton, upon hearing of her aunt's wretched situation, immediately begins planning to find her and save her. Mary tells Jem to "trust to the good that must be in" Esther, and claims that if they could only appeal to her innate goodness, they could "love her so [and] make her good" (I. 454). Mary's peculiar use of the term "good" shows her ability and willingness to separate "spirit" from "doctrine." True, Esther has fallen, but her spiritual goodness remains. Her regrettable choices and subsequent lifestyle are sinful; yet, her nature remains virtuous, worthy of repentance and salvation. Jem needs no persuasion and immediately sets out to search for Esther, promising to bring her to America with them and to "help her to get rid of her sins" (I. 454). Thus, Esther is a spiritually "good" woman who can be helped out of a despairing situation that is hindering her from living up to this spiritual goodness. Familiarity with Gaskell's Unitarian beliefs removes any wonder at Mary's words and her double usage of "good." Because Gaskell did not hold to the doctrine of original sin,

“warped though human actions might become in response to material, emotional or spiritual deprivation,” conscience could be awakened, behaviour modified (Uglow 73). And though it is too late for Mary and Jem to save Esther’s physical life, Gaskell makes it clear that her spiritual life is secured. For Esther’s last act before she dies is to help Mary and Jem find safety and love with each other. All we know of Esther is that she is morbidly worried that Mary will follow in her tragic example. Her only desire is to express regret and save Mary. Yet, the “voice” surrounding Esther is profound in its message: “To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale? Who will give her help in the day of need?” (I. 182). When next Gaskell writes of the Sexually Fallen Woman, she answers this question.

In “Lizzie Leigh,” Gaskell takes the plight of the Sexually Fallen Woman even further by employing Christian values to strengthen her case. From our first introduction to Lizzie and her situation, we are meant to think of her as the female counterpart to the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32): “Oh, speak not to me of stopping here, when she may be perishing for hunger, like the poor lad in the parable” (II. 211). In her first novel, *Mary Barton*, Mrs. Gaskell had used this term for Esther in the chapter “Return of the Prodigal” (128-143), but in “Lizzie Leigh” she takes the metaphor further by adding an element of trust and sympathy in Anne’s character. Lizzie does not have to return home contrite in demeanour and begging for forgiveness for Anne instinctively to understand her daughter’s regret and repentance. As with Mary’s confidence in Esther, Anne believes and trusts in Lizzie’s innate goodness, and—her shameful behaviour aside—Lizzie is not lost to Anne. A year earlier, Dickens’ *David Copperfield* had portrayed a character who has a similar reaction to his own adopted daughter’s disgrace. Upon learning that Emily has run away with James Steerforth, Mr. Peggotty quickly leaves, promising to find his “little Em’ly,” saying,

'I'm a-going to seek her, fur and wide. If any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left for her was, 'My unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!' (457)

Clearly, parental love does not make forgiving this type of disgraceful act easy, but it does make it possible.

References to the New Testament are prevalent in "Lizzie Leigh." Jesus' message of forgiveness for the wayward sinner is repeatedly communicated: Anne refers to Lizzie as a "prodigal" child more than once (II. 211, 230), and, without hesitation, labels all those who would judge her daughter harshly as "Pharisees" (II. 220, 225). Susan Palmer, the epitome of Christian forgiveness, refers to Mary Magdalen<sup>49</sup> in hopes that Lizzie too will "turn right at last" (II. 225). Susan is "too deep read in her New Testament" to "judge and scorn the sinner" (II. 228), and when Lizzie's brother Will, in moral indignation, shows no mercy for Lizzie's sufferings, Susan speaks to him in verse, the poetic, elevated style of her words highlighting her morally elevated spirit:

He made answer, low and stern, 'She deserved them all; every jot.'

'In the eye of God, perhaps she does. He is the Judge; we are not.'

(II. 237)

Like his father, James Leigh, Will is unable (at first) to peer past the sin and see the fallible human behind the disgrace. And even when Will is told that James forgave Lizzie in a deathbed pardon, he still has a difficult time getting past Lizzie's fall. His eventual forgiveness of Lizzie is touching in its poignancy, and, to me, most admirable of all the others because it is a result of brutal, honest reason and quiet meditation rather than emotion:

'Thou [Susan] shouldst give me time. I would do right in time. I never think it o'er in quiet. But I will do what is right and fitting,

never fear. . . . If I did hang back a bit from making sudden promises, it was because not even for love of thee, would I say what I was not feeling; and at first I could not feel all at once as thou wouldst have me. But I'm not cruel and hard; for if I had been I should not have grieved as I have done.' (II. 238)

Will is the most realistic of the characters in "Lizzie Leigh." For most, forgiveness of a terrible harm is never easy and it hardly ever comes quickly. Will needs "quiet" and "time" in order to let go of the past and forgive Lizzie the pain she has caused both him and his family. Only then will he be ready to embrace the concept of "hate the sin, love the sinner."

Thus, Lizzie is forgiven by those she has harmed; she is forgiven by God: "I'll tell thee God's promises to them that are penitent" (II. 239); and she slowly begins to forgive herself, to "strive very hard," and reach heaven in order to see her daughter again (II. 240). Like Bridget and Ruth, Lizzie's inward penance is manifested in her good works, demonstrating Susan Palmer's axiom that "[g]oodness is not goodness unless there is mercy and tenderness with it" (II. 238).

For every main character in *Ruth*, a similar personality can be found in the novel's precedent—"Lizzie Leigh." As mentioned earlier, Lizzie and Ruth have strikingly similar falls and subsequent redemptions. Even their first steps toward penance are analogous: both suffer fitful fevers when they begin to come to terms with their sins ("Lizzie Leigh." II. 233; *Ruth*. III. 101), and both stories make reference to Mary Magdalen and the Prodigal Son ("Lizzie Leigh." II. 211, 230, 225; *Ruth*. III. 153, 118). And, of course, both women devote the rest of their lives to the service of others. The Benson household emulates Susan Palmer's benevolent assistance for the fallen. Though Faith is slower to withdraw her judgement, she is the one who concocts the infamous lie concerning Ruth's past, which helps both her

and her son live a mostly normal life. Just as Susan raises Lizzie's daughter as her own, Thurstan, Faith, and Sally all give their help (both emotional and financial) and hearts to Ruth's son.

Jemima Bradshaw mirrors Anne Leigh's stalwart demeanour when she bravely stands up to her father in defence of Ruth: "Father! I will speak. I will not keep silence. I will bear witness to Ruth" (III. 335). How similar to Anne's speech to her son—now the patriarchal head of the family—that he will hold his tongue concerning Lizzie's sins, and he will provide for her if ever she is found:

'Will, my lad, I'm not afeard of you now; and I must speak, and you must listen. I am your mother, and I dare command you, because I know I am in the right, and that God is on my side.' (II. 229)

Jemima is not the only character in *Ruth* to possess Anne Leigh's inner strength of will. We see shades of Anne in Mrs. Bradshaw's angry protests regarding Mr. Bradshaw's banishment of their son, Richard. Until their children's troubles begin, Mrs. Bradshaw and Anne Leigh's marriages are almost indistinguishable from each other:

"Lizzie Leigh": Milton's famous line might have been framed and hung up as the rule of their married life, for he was truly the interpreter, who stood between God and her; she would have considered herself wicked if she had ever dared even to think him austere, though as certainly as he was an upright man, so surely was he hard, stern, and inflexible. (II. 206)

*Ruth*: He [Mr. Bradshaw] was a tall, large-boned, iron man; stern, powerful, and authoritative in appearance; dressed in clothes of the finest broadcloth, . . . His wife was sweet and gentle-looking, but as if she was thoroughly broken into

submission. (III. 152)

And though their outward behaviour may be different, both mothers feel the same anger toward their husbands during the crises with their children. When Mr. Bradshaw discovers that Richard has been forging deeds from the family business and stealing money from Thurstan Benson, he promises to prosecute, refuses to hear any argument in the matter (even from Thurstan), and claims “that boy . . . is no longer a child of mine” (III. 402). Mr. Bradshaw’s obdurate stance infuriates his wife, and she fights back:

‘Oh! is not he cruel? I don’t care. I have been a good wife till now. I know I have. I have done all he bid me, ever since we were married. But now I will speak my mind, and say to everybody how cruel he is—how hard to his own flesh and blood!’ (III. 404)

Mrs. Bradshaw voices what Anne dares not say. However, both women’s actions are virtually the same. Mrs. Bradshaw vows to accompany her son to prison if need be, and, according to Jemima, resorts to passive aggression regarding her husband:

‘Mamma would not go near him. He has said something which she seems as if she could not forgive. Because he came to meals, she would not. She has almost lived in the nursery . . .’ (III. 409)

When we first meet Anne and James Leigh, we find that the anger she has felt for three years, has corroded the “old landmarks of wifely duty and affection,” causing “bitter estrangement” where there had once been love (II. 207). Obviously, the husbands’ banishment of their own children has destroyed the love their wives held for them, and the marriage bed is quite cold. When James dies, Anne undertakes what Mrs. Bradshaw only imagines: she enters Lizzie’s “prison,” wandering the streets, “pale and weary,” searching for her daughter among the lost souls (II. 214).

Both Will and his father are seen again in the “stern, . . . authoritative” Mr. Bradshaw. Like his literary predecessors, Mr. Bradshaw believes Ruth to be too unfit, “depraved,” and “disgusting” (*Ruth*. III. 334) for his household: “If ever you, or your bastard, darken this door again, I will have you both turned out by the police” (III. 337)! Clearly, Mr. Bradshaw holds Will’s attitude toward illegitimate children as well. His words regarding Ruth’s Leonard bring to mind Will’s disgust at the thought of his beloved and pure Susan “having to do with such a child” as Lizzie’s (“Lizzie Leigh.” II. 229):

Do you suppose that he is ever to rank with other boys, who are not stained and marked with sin from their birth? Every creature in Eccleston may know what he is; do you think they will spare him their scorn? (*Ruth*. III. 336-337)

Like Will and James Leigh, however, Mr. Bradshaw softens toward Ruth, slowly forgives her past mistakes, and attempts to make amends:

Mr. Bradshaw had been anxious to do something to testify his respect for the woman who, if all had entertained his opinions, would have been driven into hopeless sin. Accordingly, he ordered the first stonemason of the town to meet him in the chapel-yard on Monday morning, to take measurement and receive directions for a tombstone. (III. 453)

Indeed, the novel ends with Mr. Bradshaw comforting Leonard, and seeing to it that he is being looked after and protected:

‘My mother is dead, sir.’

His eyes sought those of Mr. Bradshaw with a wild look of agony, as if to find comfort for that great loss in human sympathy; and at the first

word—the first touch of Mr. Bradshaw’s hand on his shoulder—he burst out afresh.

‘Come, come! my boy! . . . Let me take you home, my poor fellow. Come, my lad, come!’

The first time, for years, that he had entered Mr. Benson’s house, he came leading and comforting her son—and, for a moment, he could not speak to his old friend for the sympathy which choked up his voice, and filled his eyes with tears. (III. 454)

Like Ruth, Mr. Bradshaw has much to repent. He comes to this recognition slowly. Uglow asserts that while Ruth is elevated to the status of “public heroine,” Bradshaw degenerates into an “object of shame and pity” (336). This is too harsh an interpretation, however. Bradshaw is a man of his time, adhering to the teachings of his own society, whose habit it was to condemn “outright all lapses from feminine purity and violations of the sanctity of the family” (Pike 46). It is no exaggeration to say that Gaskell meant Bradshaw to be the literary representation of this stringently ruled society. But even so, he is capable of forgiveness and sympathy. It could even be said that because Bradshaw represents Victorian society, Gaskell purposely sees to it that he willingly changes. For if he does not, then what use would the moral of *Ruth* be? Clearly, Gaskell meant her readers to see themselves in Bradshaw. Thus, he could not be stubbornly immovable; he must be open to change, for Gaskell’s intent was for society to follow Bradshaw’s example. Thus, she has Bradshaw change due to his potential for deep love. Bradshaw is no hypocrite; he treats his son’s sins as harshly as he does those of Ruth: “If there has been any fraud, . . . I will not fail to aid the ends of justice, even though the culprit should be my own son” (III. 397). But Richard’s act of fraud and subsequent redemption are Bradshaw’s salvation. He learns that a sinner can be redeemed through charity and mercy. He realises his

mistake in embracing a philosophy that supports the idea that “violence against the failings of others is equivalent to virtue in [our]selves.”<sup>50</sup> In his critical essay on *Ruth* for the *Leader*, George Lewes quotes two examples that highlight Mr. Bradshaw’s paradoxical character and strongly display both his unfortunate pride and sympathetic appeal: 1) Bradshaw’s assumption that Ruth’s taciturn nature is due to her awe of him; 2) Bradshaw’s unusually loud singing of hymns relating to immortality and Heavenly afterlife in order to comfort the “widowed” Ruth (217-218). And though, as George Eliot noted, Gaskell sometimes treats Bradshaw with “sly satire” (*The George Eliot Letters*. II. 86)—namely, Chapter twenty-six cleverly titled, “Mr. Bradshaw’s Virtuous Indignation”—her purpose for this intricate character remains clear: “unsparing moral judges” can be awakened “to a sense of their personal weakness and frailty,”<sup>51</sup> and consequently redeemed through this self-awareness. Thus, Bradshaw becomes (like Will Leigh) the story’s most admirable character. Gaskell makes it clear that Ruth is already spiritually virtuous. Indeed, one of the major issues both her professional reviewers and friends alike had with *Ruth* was Gaskell’s portrayal of her heroine as “peculiarly innocent and pure” (Pike 46) and “a little too faultless” (Lewes, *Leader* 218). Consequently, Ruth’s penance and benevolent, giving nature—though admirable—are not extraordinary. On the contrary, Bradshaw’s change is indeed extraordinary. He goes from a self-righteous, condemning tyrant to a quiet penitent, returning to his family’s church pew, and bowing his head “down low in prayer” (III. 418). This scene is clearly reminiscent of Ruth’s first Sunday Service when Thurstan’s preaching moves her “broken and contrite spirit” literally to sink her “down, and down till she was kneeling on the floor of the pew” (III. 153). Bradshaw’s head “down low” in prayer, Ruth kneeling “down, and down”—Gaskell’s message is obvious: Bradshaw and Ruth are equal penitents who need (and are worthy of) forgiveness. And since Bradshaw represents the

harshness of Victorian society, he must have been as uncomfortable to stomach as *Mary Barton* was for the upper class. Gaskell's treatment of Bradshaw is brilliant, and it is obvious that his improvement is an extension of Will's. While in "Lizzie Leigh" (possibly due to space restrictions), Will has to make do with only a heart-felt speech, *Ruth* closes with Mr. Bradshaw; our last thoughts are of him gently comforting Ruth's child. By bringing not only Ruth, but also Mr. Bradshaw from a low status to an elevated state of spiritual redemption, Gaskell teaches Victorian society how they can raise themselves to be true examples of Christian benevolence and forgiveness.

How did Gaskell escape criticism when "Lizzie Leigh" was published? Would not her obviously sympathetic portrayal of a fallen girl who becomes a prostitute and gives birth to an illegitimate child bring about the same outrage that *Ruth* was to cause? After all, Ruth only commits two of Lizzie's three transgressions, preferring suicide to prostitution. Why then, did *Ruth* so offend the delicate sensibilities of the reading public, but not "Lizzie Leigh"? The answer is clear when we consider Victorian society's unspoken rule of how authors should portray their heroines. Pike explains that most Victorian fiction portraying fallen women detailed their "downward path"; women like Esther succumbed to their addictions, took up prostitution, and disappeared wretched and close to death (48). For this reason, says Pike, it was unheard of for the fallen woman to be a novel's protagonist: "for such a woman can not be the innocent childlike woman preferred as a heroine by most popular writers" (48). Thus, with "Lizzie Leigh," Gaskell was safe—her title character was not the story's heroine. And though Gaskell does give her readers small lessons regarding mercy and judgement of others in the speeches of Anne, Susan, and Will, it seems they did not take offence. How different from their reactions to *Ruth*!

Elizabeth knew that she was writing a disconcerting and controversial novel in *Ruth*. Indeed, she admitted to Mary Green that a novel of this subject would have “repelled” her (*Further Letters* 79), and warned her friend that it most likely would not be a book that she would like to keep around her family (74). But still, Gaskell insisted the topic, when written by her hand, would be a worthy one:

I felt *almost* sure that if people would only read what I had to say they would not be disgusted,—but I feared & still think it probable that many may refuse to read any book of that kind. (79)

Initial reaction to *Ruth* was as bad as Gaskell had feared. Strangers and friends alike had something to say about this “unfit subject for fiction”: “‘Deep regret’ is what my friends here (such as Miss [Rosa] Mitchell) feel and express” (*Letters* 220). *Ruth* was banned from Bell’s Library in London on the basis that it was “unfit for family reading”; husbands forbade their wives to read it; and at least two known members of William’s own congregation burned their copies of the book (223). Gaskell lists for Eliza Fox a catalogue of indignant publications that abused *Ruth* “as roundly as may be”—*Spectator*,<sup>52</sup> *Literary Gazette*,<sup>53</sup> *Sharpe’s London Magazine*,<sup>54</sup> *New Monthly Magazine*.<sup>55</sup> The *Literary Gazette* went so far as to sound Gaskell’s artistic death knell, expressing the “deep regret that we and all admirers of *Mary Barton* must feel at the author’s loss of reputation” (*Letters* 223), all because Gaskell had dared to write a story portraying a heroine who “has offended against those laws of God and man which bind a woman to purity of life and conversation.” Further cause for outrage was Gaskell’s supposed suggestion that “all persons are to be condemned, who refuse a plenary indulgence to such an offender [as Ruth] and who do not deal with her, . . . as though she had not transgressed.” These comments from the *Christian Observer* should be taken with a grain of salt, considering the reviewer boldly admits: “We do not pretend to have read through these volumes . . .”<sup>56</sup> Hence, the unfounded (and

incorrect) accusation that Mrs. Gaskell has ever suggested that anyone should be “condemned” of anything means very little. To be sure, even Gaskell confessed that the book was not “for young people, unless read with someone older,” as she planned to do with her own daughter Marianne. But for all her “quiver[s] of pain” and her “*Ruth* fever[s],” Mrs. Gaskell did not waver in her belief that she had written her “best” and that the book “*must* do some good” (*Letters* 221-222). Mrs. Gaskell was right.

For every negative review, letter, or comment that Gaskell received regarding *Ruth*, it seems that she received three positive ones. In *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage*, Angus Easson notes the positive reception of *Ruth*, stating,

If some held that *Ruth* was ‘an unfit subject for fiction’ because a novel could not discuss ethical questions seriously, others claimed for fiction that though it could not present an argument it could make an impression more powerfully and therefore more effectively than a sermon. (29)

Henry Chorley was the first to compliment Gaskell as “one who writes with such feeling, such earnestness and such beauty,” though he labelled Thurstan’s lie a “luckless expedient: well intentioned, but ill imagined” (206). Soon, however, the reviews became less tentative, and much more felicitous. John Forster stated that he had been “charmed and affected” by *Ruth*, and—most importantly—remarked that *Ruth* is “for ever a real person,” and that Gaskell’s story teaches “gentle truths of mercy and compassion” (219). It is precisely this observation that makes both *Ruth* (and its predecessor “Lizzie Leigh”) so profoundly important for their time.

Certainly, many critics lauded Gaskell’s “exquisite passages” (Forster 221) and the “dramatic power” (Ludlow 275) of her talent and writing ability, but the message of *Ruth*—the moral plea of forgiveness and charity for the fallen woman—was not lost

on the story's readers, and the reviews reflect this. Indeed, social reformers and politicians alike took pen in hand and used *Ruth* as the springboard for their agendas. George Lewes was moved to review *Ruth* twice, claiming that the subject of seduction is one of which "a rational word" is rarely spoken (*Westminster Review* 265). Lewes states:

As the world goes, a woman's fault is always painted irretrievable; and she is, in consequence, nailed up as a scare-crow on the barn-door of society, to protect the interests of female virtue! That ancient punishment of burying alive was surely less terrible than the pitiless finality which thus pronounces judgement. (266)

In the *Leader*, Lewes tackles the issue of Thurstan Benson's lie (which some critics were labelling the novel's fundamental artistic error), first saying that the novel presents the timeless struggle between "Truth and Truth-seeming, virtue and convention," and then asking society the harsh rhetorical question that was to return again and again: "Is not the world notoriously and maliciously unjust in its harshness towards mothers who are not wives? . . . The untruth is forced by the untruth of convention" (216). The *Morning Post* echoes Lewes' opinion, citing the "pitiless judgment of society."<sup>57</sup> And another expounds that Victorian society should be held responsible for these women (like Esther and Lizzie Leigh) sinking into crime and prostitution:

If the sad histories of all those poor outcasts who people by nights the streets of our large towns were known to the world, how large a proportion of the great evil would be written down to the account, not of the wilful depravity of the wretched creatures themselves, but the hardness and uncharitableness of those who might have redeemed them!<sup>58</sup>

The *Sun*, praising the book as a “Christian lesson most eloquently enforced,” spoke even more strongly for those who, “by the tacit consent of society, [were] prohibited from emancipating themselves from [the] cruel bondage” of their past mistakes:

There is one sin especially which is universally visited with most severe punishment, but a punishment which, so far from amending the offender and protecting others, is itself the *cause* for an untold amount of sin. It says to the offender, you have sinned, you have committed one fault, you may repent, God may forgive you; but you shall *not* turn from the evil of your ways. You have chosen sin, and in it you *must* abide. . . . On their own heads, be the guilt of their first sin; but you [society] who forbid them to rise—you who hold out no hand to save them—you how, like the Pharisee, would keep them from the feet of Jesus—on you is the responsibility of those years of crime which, by a stern necessity, seem to be their inevitable fate.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, the times were slowly changing. The general consensus among the reviews of *Ruth* markedly came down on the side of charity and mercy for the fallen.

*Bentley's Miscellany* lauded the novel for being a noble “exhortation to charity” that “suggests that it is want of charity among men” that drives the mere sinner to become a “habitual” sinner.<sup>60</sup> And the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, in reference to the “bitter gibes” and “stern law” as a way of dealing with fallen women, postulated, “most assuredly such a system is not in accordance with the Christianity about which some of us talk so loudly.”<sup>61</sup>

Inevitably, allegations of a double standard, based on “superstitious and exaggerated estimate of physical [female] virginity” (Beard 255), began to rise. John Relly Beard, Unitarian clergyman, educator, and colleague of William Gaskell,

asserted that the “monstrous disproportion of the punishment, as visited on the sexes, has no reasonable ground”:

Puritanism, with servile adherence to the killing letter of the Jewish law, rejecting the merciful amendments of the new Divine authority, has made this public injustice more intolerable in Protestant countries; but has omitted redressing the balance by condemning equally the male offender. (261)

The *Observer* asked, along with Gaskell, why the “innocent should suffer all through life, and the guilty escape.”<sup>62</sup> Some offered solutions. The *Nonconformist*, expressing a “wish for the moral elevation of society,” claimed that “[s]ociety is its own physician,” and if it refused to acknowledge “its own corruptions,” there would be no hope for a cure.<sup>63</sup>

Some were more gender-specific, claiming that some of the blame for this blatant double standard must lie with women themselves. *Manchester Examiner and Times* scolded that “woman has much to answer for in reference to the position she assumes towards an ‘offending’ sister—striking down the already ‘stricken deer,’—whilst tolerating the spoiler.”<sup>64</sup> It is very clear whom John Beard thought most harmed women. Quoting from a now unknown source, he makes a very valid point that the Englishwomen were largely responsible for the harm done to their fallen sisters:

‘Many a female, who talks in the language of abhorrence of an offending sister, and averts the eye in contumely when meeting her in the street, is perfectly willing to be the friend of the equally offending man.’ (261).

Lewes maintains that if the fallen woman is to be rehabilitated, "it must be through the means of women," meaning there should be no more judging, no more setting the "seal of despair and reprobation" upon their fellow sisters (*Westminster Review* 269).

Comments and discussions of these types were taking place everywhere, from drawing-rooms to chapels to universities (Uglow 341), and they were exactly what Mrs. Gaskell had been hoping for when she began writing *Ruth*. She was extremely gratified: "I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk & discuss the subject a little more than they did" (*Letters* 226). *Ruth* elevated Gaskell's status as an author "to new heights" (Uglow 342). Certainly, the controversy over the novel remained a painful memory to her for quite some time, but her "small wedge" was secure, and was something in which she took justifiable pride.

Elizabeth Gaskell's religion, being one of tolerance, forgiveness, and good works, was a belief system whose touchstone was the spirit of the New Testament, focusing upon "light and love," as opposed to "gloom and terror."<sup>65</sup> Though her beliefs were founded on the Bible, Mrs. Gaskell refused to become engulfed in doctrine, preferring, rather, spiritual intuition, and trusting that a person's virtue can always be found in his or her actions and words:

—oh! for some really spiritual devotional preaching instead of controversy about doctrines,—about [which] I am more & more certain *we can never be certain* in this world. (*Letters* 537)

Gaskell never preached in her stories, but through her characters' actions and words the moral lessons are illuminated. And these lessons' foundations are most often portrayed in the forgiving natures of Gaskell's characters. Whether it is Miss Matty silently forgiving her deceased sister for mismanaging their funds, and even expressing gratitude that "poor Deborah is spared" the strain and embarrassment of

their lost fortune and social status (*Cranford*. II. 152), or whether it is Bessy crying out for God's forgiveness upon seeing the terrible outcome of her misguided actions, ("Bessy's Troubles at Home." III. 531), Gaskell's message is clear. We learn that peace comes from forgiving those who do us physical harm, as with Madame de Gange, forgiving her cruel husband and even teaching her son that avenging her death would go against "the Christian duty of forgiveness" ("French Life." VII. 674). Peace comes from forgiving those who do us emotional harm, as with Miss Galindo and Miss Bessy, allowing Lady Ludlow's cold prejudice against Bessy's illegitimacy to be "over and forgiven" immediately upon Lady Ludlow's acquiescence and acknowledgement of Bessy's "very existence" (*My Lady Ludlow*. V. 206-207). And finally, peace comes from asking forgiveness from God or from those whom we have harmed. In Gaskell's stories, however, asking for forgiveness is never quite that easy. People must show true regret for their past transgressions in their words *and* their deeds. Hence, William Preston, after years of harsh physical and emotional abuse toward his step-son Gregory, to mark the "depth of his feeling of repentance," not only asks for God's forgiveness, but also requests that Gregory be laid with his mother, while William is buried at the foot of the grave ("The Half-Brothers." V. 404). For when actions do not ally with words, we have forlorn characters such as Grace Furnivall, tortured, crippled in both mind and body, forever wondering why forgiveness eludes her ("The Old Nurse's Story." II. 435).

CHAPTER III  
FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS

*Still let me open my heart sometimes to you dear Anne, with reliance on your sympathy and secrecy.* (Elizabeth Gaskell to Anne Robson, 23 December 1841)<sup>66</sup>

Mrs. Gaskell's letters present a clear sense of the importance her numerous friendships had for her. Each aspect of her life was blessed with strong, close friendships. She had many dear friends both within her large family—the Greens, the Hollands, Anne Robson—and without, like Charlotte Brontë, Eliza Fox, the Wedgwoods, the Winkworths, Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, and Mary Clarke Mohl. She had a literary mentor in Mary Howitt and cultivated friendships among many of the social and religious activists of her day: Harriet Martineau, Anna Jamison, Bessie Parkes, Barbara Bodichon (*née* Leigh Smith), Parthenope and Florence Nightingale, and Adelaide Procter.<sup>67</sup> And, of course, her closest friendships were with her daughters. Though she did have positive male influences in her life which she cared for (notably, Rev. William Turner and William Howitt), Gaskell's male acquaintances (with the marked exception of Charles Eliot Norton) stayed precisely that—acquaintances as opposed to friends. More often than not, she had friendly and fruitful associations with her various publishers, but her letters do not seem to indicate that these business relationships flowered into anything more than marked respect. It was her female friendships that she cultivated and treated as most precious, and it was these friendships that influenced her work. For two years, however, Gaskell's work and her friendship with Charlotte Brontë became tragically inter-linked.

## Charlotte Brontë

*[S]he is so true, she wins respect, deep respect, from the very first,—and then comes hearty liking,—and last of all comes love. I thoroughly loved her before she left . . . (Elizabeth Gaskell to John Forster, Late April 1853)<sup>68</sup>*

In 1850, Mrs. Gaskell was invited to vacation with Lady Kay-Shuttleworth at her vacation house called Briery Close. It was during this visit that she was introduced to Charlotte Brontë (*Letters* 123). Gaskell was aghast at Charlotte's harsh, isolated upbringing, claiming,

Such a life as Miss B's I never heard of before Lady K S described her home to me (124). . . . Indeed I never heard of so hard, and dreary a life (128). . . . The wonder to me is how she can have kept heart and power alive in her life of desolation. (130)

Thus, Gaskell instinctively sympathised with and understood Charlotte's reasons for being so "frightfully shy," and why she "almost crie[d] at the thought of going amongst strangers" (127). Yet, Charlotte's nervousness at meeting new people did not impede her from befriending Mrs. Gaskell. They quickly relaxed with each other, and by the end of the three-day visit, they had discussed similar acquaintances, literature, politics, academics, and the Brontë family's home in Haworth:

She and I quarrelled & differed about almost every thing,—she calls me a democrat, & can not bear Tennyson—but we like each other heartily I think & I hope we shall ripen into friends. (124-127)

Her hope was realised. Charlotte visited Gaskell in Manchester in 1851, 1853, and again in 1854, the year before she died (Uglow 272). In September 1853, Gaskell visited Charlotte in Haworth, and often leaned on her for literary advice, seeking

opinions from the woman whom she considered a scholarly genius. And Charlotte was always happy to offer her any help she could. She assured Gaskell that she found *Cranford* a “graphic, pithy, penetrating, shrewd, yet kind and indulgent” reading (SHB. XV. 76). She sent long letters commenting on *Ruth*, recognising its “goodness” and “philanthropic purpose” (XV. 34), and offered encouragement against the negative criticism they both anticipated Gaskell would receive (XV. 48-49). And, in a letter to Catherine Winkworth, Charlotte took time from her honeymoon to defend her friend against Dickens, saying, “I can’t see that Mrs Gaskell is one whit in error. Mr Dickens, I think, may have been somewhat too exacting” (XV. 138).<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, when Charlotte disapproved of Gaskell’s work, she honestly told her so. In the case of *North and South*, she had serious reservations concerning Mr. Hale and the despair that his religious doubts cause for both him and his family. She wrote to Gaskell that she had “groaned over it,” warning Gaskell that she considered her story “good ground, but still rugged for the step of Fiction” (XV. 153). Gaskell, in turn, reassured Charlotte when she had doubts or concerns regarding her writing, especially when fearing accusations of artistic dishonesty. In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Gaskell relates that during her visit to Haworth in September 1853, Charlotte confided that she “dreaded a charge of plagiarism” (413), for she had recently read two stories which contained—she imagined—characters and events extremely similar to her own *Jane Eyre*.<sup>70</sup> Gaskell states, “For my own part, I cannot see the slightest resemblance between the two characters, and so I told her” (413). And though, as both Uglow (272) and Pauline Nestor (32) point out, Charlotte rarely needed Gaskell’s advice concerning her work, she gratefully accepted Gaskell’s invitations to Manchester as a way to escape, even if briefly, her desolate existence in Haworth. In a letter to Ellen Nussey she grieves:

The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart—lie in position—not that I am a *single* woman and likely to remain a *single* woman—but because I am a *lonely* woman and likely to be *lonely*.

(SHB. XV. 6)

Charlotte thoroughly delighted in her visits to Manchester. She was sometimes even able to overcome her crippling shyness and enjoy herself in the presence of strangers. In *Life*, Mrs. Gaskell describes some events during Charlotte's 1853 visit to Manchester. This quote is quite long, but it is important to show the positive influence that Mrs. Gaskell's company had on Charlotte:

One evening we had, among other guests, two sisters<sup>71</sup> who sang Scottish ballads exquisitely. Miss Brontë had been sitting quiet and constrained till they began 'The Bonnie House of Airlie,' but the effect of that and 'Carlisle Yetts,' which followed, was as irresistible as the playing of the Piper of Hamelin. The beautiful clear light came into her eyes; her lips quivered with emotion; she forgot herself, rose, and crossed the room to the piano, where she asked eagerly for song after song. . . . One day we asked two gentlemen to meet her at dinner, expecting that she and they would have a mutual pleasure in making each other's acquaintance. To our disappointment, she drew back with timid reserve from all their advances, replying to their questions and remarks in the briefest manner possible; till at last they gave up their efforts to draw her into conversation in despair, and talked to each other and my husband on subjects of recent local interest. Among these Thackeray's Lectures . . . were spoken of. . . . This roused Miss Brontë, who threw herself warmly into the discussion; the ice of her reserve broken, and from that time she showed her interest in all that

was said, and contributed her share to any conversation that was going on in the course of the evening. (405-407)

True, Charlotte's ventures into society were not always so congenial, but these small successes certainly meant the world to her: "My Dear Mrs Gaskell,—The week I spent in Manchester has impressed me as the very brightest and healthiest I have known for these five years past" (SHB. XV. 64). By the time Gaskell's following visit to Haworth had ended, their friendship had blossomed into a loving, sisterly closeness:

After you left, the house felt very much as if the shutters had been suddenly closed and the blinds let down. One was sensible during the remainder of the day of a depressing silence, shadow, loss, and want.  
(XV. 96)

May 1854 was the last time Elizabeth and Charlotte saw each other before Charlotte's death on 31 March 1855. Personal friendship and literary endeavour were soon to be conjoined for Mrs. Gaskell.

### *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*

*I don't think there ever was such an apple of discord as that unlucky book. (Elizabeth Gaskell to George Smith, 26 November 1857)<sup>72</sup>*

On 16 July 1855, Patrick Brontë wrote to Mrs. Gaskell, acknowledging her as the person "best qualified" to write an account of Charlotte's life and works, and asking if she would agree to the task (SHB. XV. 190-191). Within a week, Gaskell arrived at Haworth Parsonage to discuss the biography. From the beginning, she intended to do much more than the "brief account of [Charlotte's] life and . . . some

remarks on her works” for which Patrick had asked (XV. 190). She wrote to Ellen Nussey:

I told Mr Brontë how much I felt the difficulty of the task I had undertaken, yet how much I wished to do it well, and make his daughter’s most unusual character (as taken separately from her genius,) known to those who from their deep interest and admiration of her writings would naturally, if her life was to be written, expect to be informed as to the circumstances which made her what she was.

*(Letters 361)*

Gaskell’s biography was to be a tribute to both the woman and the writer; she also intended it to be an expression of their treasured friendship, as she said in her letters both before and after the book’s publication. Indeed, before she had even been approached by Patrick Brontë, she had written to Charlotte’s publisher, George Smith, that she longed to “publish what I know of her, and make the world . . . honour the woman as much as they have admired the writer” (345). And when the “unlucky book” was published, and Gaskell was “in the *Hornet*’s nest with a vengeance” (453) from those unhappy with their particular portrayals, she stood true to her friend’s memory, asking Charles Kingsley to “[r]espect & value the memory of Charlotte Brontë as she deserves” (452), and telling Ellen Nussey:

I weighed every line with all my whole power & heart, so that every line should go to it’s [sic] great purpose of making *her* known & valued, as one who had gone through such a terrible life with a brave & faithful heart. (454)

Gaskell had mourned Charlotte’s passing; indeed, she most likely still mourned her, or at least she expected to:

My dear dear friend that I shall never see again on earth! . . . I

loved her dearly, more than I think she knew. I shall never cease to be thankful that I knew her; or to mourn her loss. (335-336)

Thus, as Pollard says, Mrs. Gaskell wrote with a “tender concern” that highlighted the “profound attachment” she had for Charlotte Brontë (*Mrs Gaskell* 142-143), a woman she considered “truth itself” (*Letters* 128). If, indeed, her purpose was to exalt Charlotte’s goodness (Pollard 146), it was also certainly sincere. Gaskell’s purpose was to write an account of Charlotte just short of hagiography, and she never claimed otherwise:

I appeal to that larger and more solemn public, who know how to look with tender humility at faults and errors; how to admire generously extraordinary genius, and how to reverence with warm, full hearts all noble virtue. To that Public I commit the memory of Charlotte Brontë. (*Life* 429)

Wise and Symington state that, though the friendship between Gaskell and Brontë was brief, “[n]ever, anywhere, do we find a single jarring note” (SHB. XV. 61). It is appropriate that the friendship between these two extraordinary women be emphasised, for in the nineteenth century, a friendship like theirs was considered most rare.

### **Victorian Concept of Female Friendships**

*She had never before ventured into the world, and did not know how common and universal is the custom of picking to pieces those with whom we have just been associating. (Maggie in *The Moorland Cottage*. II. 288)*

Mrs. Gaskell lived during a time of increasing scepticism concerning women's abilities to cultivate healthy friendships. In *Female Friendships and Communities*, Pauline Nestor recounts two articles published in the *Saturday Review*<sup>73</sup> that discussed what was then the "common view of women's relationships":

The first ["Friendship"] claimed that female friendships were notoriously shallow, most often a 'rehearsal' for the 'serious business' of relationships with men. . . . The second article ["The Exclusiveness of Women"] depicted women as possessive, competitive, and untrusting, . . . and it concluded, 'you seldom see any sense of the community of sex.' (12)

Attitudes of this nature were nothing new. Women's jealousy, fickleness, and tendency toward acts of betrayal had long been fodder for the male author. But during the first half of the nineteenth century, female authorship had grown so significantly that Anne Elliot's lament in *Persuasion*—that the pen was solely in the hands of men—seemed an issue of the past (Nestor 7). However, this new power cut both ways. Just as the *Victoria Magazine* could respond with outrage toward the *Saturday Review* by encouraging women authors to rally together and "defend their sex" against such insulting articles,<sup>74</sup> so could influential female authors join in the antagonism toward women, lending it legitimacy in the process. Eliza Lynn Linton, for example, was an extremely scathing critic of women, and her misogynistic essays (*Saturday Review*, 1868 onwards) were notorious and tellingly popular. In her essay, "The Girl of the Period,"<sup>75</sup> Linton begins her attack on the female sex by lamenting the loss of the "innate purity and dignity" of women's nature:

Time was when the phrase, 'a fair young English girl,' meant the ideal of womanhood; . . . This was in the old time, and when English girls were content to be what God and nature had made them. The Girl of

the Period and the fair young English girl of the past, have nothing in common save ancestry and their mother-tongue. (1-2)

In "Bored Husbands," Linton attacks married women's jealousies, saying that the reason most married men slip off their "bonds" of "domestic stagnation" is because the smothering exclusiveness that their wives insist upon has driven them to it (343). When men marry, says Linton, they immediately become a "house prisoner," whose bachelor friends (they smoke! they drink! they gamble!) are banished from therein (338). Moreover, the wife does not limit this exclusiveness to just her husband's male friends:

If bachelor friends are shouldered out of the house, all female friends are forbidden anything like an intimate footing, save those few whom the wife thinks specially devoted to herself and of whom she is not jealous. And these are very few. There are perhaps no women in the world so exclusive in their dealings with their husbands as are Englishwomen. (338)

Linton assumes that the English wife will not entertain the idea that her husband's new female friend might, in turn, become hers also. This is because, according to Linton, "[f]riendship is a hard saying to [women], and one they cannot receive" (343). Linton sincerely believed her words regarding women's incapacity for healthy friendships, and devotes an entire essay (satirically titled "Feminine Amenities") to their talent for ripping each other to shreds:

[T]he keenest enemies of women are women themselves. No one can inflict such humiliation on a woman as can a woman when she chooses. . . . Women are always more or less antagonistic to each other. . . . They never support their weak sisters; they shrink from those who are stronger than the average; and if they would speak the truth

boldly, they would confess to a radical contempt for each other's intellect. (184)

Linton carefully words her essays so that her prejudice against the "girl of the period" does not appear to be universal. For example, when discussing women, Linton will sometimes phrase her statements thusly: "If she gets over this pinch," or "if she can understand this," giving the impression that she considers some women capable of such things ("Bored Husbands" 336). However, most often, Linton makes extremely spurious generalisations, or deliberately trenchant statements that starkly highlight her intellectual dishonesty: "If they are jealous, or shy, or unsocial, *as so many women are*" . . . (italics mine 337). Nestor argues that Linton's "detailed accounts of women's facility for viciousness" only served to "[exemplify] the venomousness she was allegedly diagnosing" (14). Indeed, Linton's essays are so rooted in stereotype, so set on placing women in gender roles, that she sets herself up as unfortunate verification of women's sometimes cruel betrayal of their own sex.<sup>76</sup> Linton was lauded by some and derided by others, and in the middle were the women authors. Often, their letters and their attitudes toward each other do indeed prove the statements of Linton and the *Spectator Review* at least partially valid, if not completely correct.

Jealousy among the "less successful" female authors was common, almost impossible to resist, and completely understandable when one considers the position in which women writers were placed by their critics and publishers. In *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter explains that "any woman who published a book" knew she would suffer the inevitable comparison with Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot (104). The self-esteem of the secondary authors was "precariously maintained," and they "often wondered whether they must forever be content to follow haltingly on Brontë's peculiar path, or build a cottage on the Eliot estate" (106). Eliza Linton, though

pleading to the publishers that her new novel be spared a comparison to *Jane Eyre* and *Adam Bede*, was still rejected (105). And Margaret Oliphant spent twenty years negotiating subjects with her publishers at *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* "in terms of what Eliot was writing" (105). For example, Oliphant had to abandon a biography of Savonarola because it would have followed too closely to Eliot's publication of *Romola*, and the comparison of *Salem Chapel* to *Adam Bede* further annoyed her (105). It is episodes like this that make Barbara Bodichon's letter to George Eliot, stating that "Almost all women are jealous of [her]" (*GE Letters*. III. 103), believable, and even expected.

In her biography of Oliphant, Elisabeth Jay reports that the author felt the "identifying marks of genius" she found in George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë were an "[a]bsolute self-absorption and an unremitting sense of one's individual value," and she pitied and envied them because of it (*Mrs Oliphant* 7). Oliphant could not help comparing herself to the two dominant authors, and, even in her own mind, she considered herself a lesser writer. This low self-worth troubled and hurt Oliphant her entire career:

I was reading Charlotte Brontë the other day, and could not help comparing myself with the picture more or less as I read. I don't suppose my powers are equal to hers—my work to myself looks perfectly pale and colourless besides hers—but yet I have had far more experience and, I think, a fuller conception of life. (Oliphant 10)

In her autobiography, Oliphant laments that her critics refused to "mention [her] in the same breath with George Eliot" (16-17), and she disdainfully writes of her struggles as a secondary author, while her contemporary enjoyed a greater and easier success:

. . . George Eliot's life has . . . stirred me up to an involuntary confession. How I have been handicapped in life! Should I have done

better if I had been kept, like her, in a mental greenhouse, and taken care of? (15)

In other words, Oliphant did not write as well as Brontë because, unlike Brontë, she had a more worldly view of things; she was not as successful as Eliot because, unlike Eliot, she did not enjoy a pampered lifestyle.<sup>77</sup> Oliphant does, indeed, sound bitter in regards to Eliot—a woman she called “dull” and “ponderous,” and whom she enviously considered “much better off” both financially and emotionally (17), but when this bitterness is juxtaposed against her battles with her publishers and critics, it does not seem unjustified, merely misplaced.<sup>78</sup>

But what of the two “dominant” authors of the period? What of their place in this swirling cauldron of jealousy and resentment? Nestor writes that both Brontë and Eliot “jealously guarded their work in composition,” not allowing, nor asking for, assistance or opinions of any kind (29), though it should be noted that Eliot greatly depended on George Lewes both intellectually and emotionally. However, these two women did not seem bothered by their competition, nor did they suffer from jealousy when they came across works of great talent by their female contemporaries. During the early years of her literary career, Eliot began voraciously reading stories that were predominantly the works of women authors (*GE Letters*. II. 358). While she did not, as a rule, meet the authors of the works she admired, Eliot often reviewed them in critical essays that she then published in the literary journals of the period. And Eliot’s letters show even more of her appreciation and delight in the works of her sister authors. She spoke admiringly of Brontë’s “passion” and “fire” (II. 91); she wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe on a regular basis until her death, and had high regard for her talents (Nestor 155); and her admiration of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* is extravagant almost to hyperbole. In a letter to Sara Hennell, Eliot longingly writes, “You must read *Aurora Leigh*. I wish I had seen Mrs. Browning, as

you have, for I love to have a distinct human being in my mind, as the medium of great and beautiful things" (GE *Letters*. II. 278).<sup>79</sup> In a letter to Mrs. Gaskell, Eliot's genuine admiration for her as both an author and a woman is unreservedly expressed:

Only yesterday I was wondering that artists, knowing each other's pains so well, did not help each other more, and, as usual, when I have been talking complainingly or suspiciously, something has come which serves me as a reproof.

That 'something' is your letter. . . . I shall always love to think that one woman wrote to another such sweet encouraging words—still more to think that you were the writer and I the receiver.

I had indulged the idea that if my books turned out to be worth much, you would be among my willing readers; for I was conscious, while the question of my power was still undecided for me, that my feeling towards Life and Art had some affinity with the feeling which had inspired "Cranford" and the earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." . . . I like to tell you these slight details because they will prove to you that your letter must have a peculiar value for me . . . (III. 198-199)

Eliot did not write these words to Gaskell for mere flattery's sake. When discussing *Ruth's* refreshing "finish and fullness," she lamented that writers like Gaskell were the exception rather than the rule:

How women have the courage to write and publishers the spirit to buy at a high price the false and feeble representations of life and character that most feminine novels give, is a constant marvel to me. (GE *Letters* 86)

It seems that the effect that Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth* had on Eliot stayed with her, for three years later when writing "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," she expresses the same

sentiments found in the above letter. Reviewers and publishers tend to coddle “silly lady novelists,” she says, while treating talented and worthwhile female writers as they would men, and she lists Elizabeth Gaskell (along with Brontë and Martineau) as an example (322). Clearly, though Eliot “deeply resented comparisons with her sister authors” (Nestor 30), she felt no competition toward those whom she thought possessed great literary talent. On the contrary, she seemed both delighted in them and inspired by them. And Charlotte Brontë was no different.

While it can be assumed that family loyalty and love are part of what fostered Charlotte’s desire to be “agent, editor, advocate, and critic” for her sisters, Emily and Anne (Nestor 83), it was love and respect that moved Brontë to assist Mrs. Gaskell as much as she did. As stated earlier, Brontë was a superb source of help and support to Gaskell, but one instance of extraordinary generosity stands high above the rest. After Gaskell wrote to Brontë concerning *Ruth*, admitting her distress that a simultaneous publication of *Villette* would overshadow her own, Brontë wrote back, putting Gaskell at ease by reassuring her that she would request a delay of the publication, and suggesting that they ignore the critics and reviews, and cleave to each other in friendship:

I dare say, arrange as we may, we shall not be able wholly to prevent comparisons; it is the nature of some critics to be invidious; but we need not care: we can set them at defiance; they *shall* not make us foes, they *shall* not mingle with our mutual feelings one taint of jealousy: there is my hand on that: I know you will give clasp for clasp. (SHB. XV. 34)

Nestor speculates that Brontë’s gesture was in response to an earlier request by Gaskell to delay publication (31). And Brontë did, in fact, write to Ellen Nussey that she could not help but “defer publication a week or two,” since “Mrs Gaskell wrote so

pitifully to beg that [*Villette*] should not clash with her ‘Ruth’” (SHB. XV. 36). In *Life*, Gaskell records, “with proud pleasure,” Brontë’s “words of friendship,” and makes no mention of a precursory request (397-398). In all likelihood, Gaskell was the initiator in writing to Brontë and requesting the favour, but it should be noted that Brontë assured Gaskell that she had already considered the problem, and, without being asked, had taken steps to correct it:

*Before receiving yours* I had felt, and expressed to Mr Smith [her publisher], reluctance to come in the way of ‘Ruth’; . . . I have ever held comparisons to be odious, and would fain that neither I nor my friends should be made subjects of the same. . . . ‘Villette’ has indeed no right to push itself before ‘Ruth.’ (italics mine. SHB. XV. 34)

However it came about, this act of friendship by Brontë is important on two levels: it highlights what the authors of the period had to withstand regarding the tendency of the critics to pit them against each other; and it undermines those who would belittle women’s ability to form healthy, enduring, non-competitive friendships.

If theorists were to attempt to use Mrs. Gaskell’s life to support the statements of either the *Saturday Review*, Linton, or even Showalter, they would fail miserably. For Gaskell, perhaps even beyond Eliot and Brontë, loved her women friends and openly (and without jealousy) admired and assisted her sister authors. Her correspondence shows neither competition nor resentment of other contemporary female authors. On the contrary, Gaskell’s modesty and humility allowed her to write frank, open letters of admiration. One especially lively example is her keen interest in George Eliot. Gaskell greatly esteemed Eliot’s writing and this admiration made her hunger to know the writer behind the works. In a letter to George Smith, Gaskell teasingly admonishes her publisher, stating that “curiosity comes before friendship”:

How could you find in yr heart to be so curt about Madam Adam? .  
 . . send us PLEASE a long account of what she is like &c &c &c &c  
 &c,—eyes nose mouth, *dress &c for facts*, and then—if you  
 would—your impression of her, . . . (*Letters* 586-587)

And in a letter to Charles Norton, Mrs. Gaskell openly acknowledges her secondary status to dominant authors like George Eliot:

N. B. Smith & Elder have offered me 1000£ for a three vol. novel, including the American rights &c, . . . Not a line of the book is written yet,—I think I have a feeling that it is not worth while trying to write, while there are such books as Adam Bede & Scenes from Clerical Life—I set ‘Janet’s Repentance’ above all, still. (581).

Though Gaskell is indeed comparing herself to Eliot, there is no bitterness, complaint, or even excuses, only open admiration and her assessment of Eliot as a superior talent.

Gaskell was not just an enthusiastic admirer of other established and successful female authors; she was also a mentor to those who asked for advice and those she felt could use her help. She recommended both Camilla Jenkins’ *Cousin Stella* and Mary Mohl’s essay on Mme de Sévigné to George Smith for possible publications in *Cornhill Magazine* (Uglow 461). And a long letter to an unknown aspiring author survives in which Gaskell gives a plethora of advice touching on everything from sewing to writing: she offers the ailing young mother health tips, asking, “Did you ever try a tea-cup full of *hop-tea* the first thing in the morning?”; she recommends *The Finchley Manual of Needlework* to help the woman “conquer [her] ‘clumsiness’ in sewing”; and she warns that a “desire to earn money” may cause her to neglect giving “tender sympathy to [her] little ones in their small joys and sorrows” (*Letters* 694-695). Gaskell assures the woman that she will be happy to read her manuscript, but also admits that only one author among several whom she has

recommended has ever been successful in getting her work published. Letters from Gaskell to Louis Hachette attest to the truth of her statement regarding her assistance to other writers. Hachette was the founder of a Parisian publishing firm, and between 1854 and 1868 all of Gaskell's major fiction was published in translation by his firm. In 1855, Gaskell took it upon herself to write out a list containing authors of whom she thought Hachette might like to be made aware. Gaskell named Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Anne Marsh Caldwell, Catherine Gore, and three other women "who come in well in the second rank of novelists": Geraldine Jewsbury, Dinah Mulock, and Margaret Oliphant (*Further Letters* 126-129).<sup>80</sup> In a following letter to Hachette, Gaskell agreed to "facilitate an arrangement" between Hachette and both Brontë and Jewsbury, and quickly recommends three more secondary authors to him: Charlotte Mary Yonge, Julia Kavanagh, and Elizabeth Sewell (130-132). Thus, in her personal life, Gaskell proved the detractors wrong. Indeed, the very way she conducted her own close friendships made a mockery of the supposed social experts of the day. Of course, Gaskell was certainly aware that not all relationships between women are healthy friendships, and her stories reflect this. However, her fiction shows a much more balanced, and even innovative, approach regarding female friendships.<sup>81</sup>

Gaskell's literary friendships build upon her own life and personal experiences, most prominently, her Mother/Daughter relationships. Friendships can be corrupt, however, and Gaskell closely explores these in her Gothic fiction, showing that something that may look positive can turn destructive when obsessive love goes unchecked. In her short stories and novellas, Mrs. Gaskell tended to use a formula with which she was clearly comfortable. She adhered to three types of female friendships: Mother/Daughter, Mistress/Servant, and, what I have labelled, "Friends in Need." This formula, of course, can vary. For instance, the Mother/Daughter

friendship is used with both biological and adoptive parents and children; the “Friends in Need” category can contain the other two types of friendships or neither of them; and, as we will see with “The Grey Woman,” what we might at first think is a Mistress/Servant friendship, is actually much more. In all three types, Mrs. Gaskell presents both healthy (which I will discuss first) and unhealthy friendships.

### **Biological Mother/Daughter Friendships**

The healthy friendships between biological mothers and daughters in Mrs. Gaskell’s short fiction are very few, and most often not essential to the story’s plot.<sup>82</sup> For example, if the mother is still living at the story’s opening, the relationship between her and her daughter—if it is healthy—ends before the actual story has even begun. *My Lady Ludlow*, *Cranford*, “Lois the Witch,” and “Half a Lifetime Ago” all have daughters who are close to their mothers, yet lose them to either death or distance quite early in the story.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, the Mother/Daughter relationships—when they are loving and healthy—are not usually friendships, but rather a bond between the mother and the daughter that is ruptured early in the story as a catalyst for the actual plot. Gaskell has one exception to this rule, however, in “Lizzie Leigh.” From this story’s beginning, it is clear that Anne and Lizzie were always close. Anne loses Lizzie due to the patriarchal tyranny of James Leigh; but, as stated in Chapter Two, resentment burns in her the rest of their married life. Anne remains a true friend to Lizzie in spirit when circumstances make it impossible for them to be friends in the physical realm. And the day James dies, Anne vows to search for Lizzie until she is found, and she keeps this promise. In her darkest days, Lizzie has a friend in her mother, though she is completely unaware of it. The same can be said for Anne, for Lizzie names her baby after her mother (II. 224). “Lizzie Leigh” ends with Anne and her daughter making a home for themselves near Upclose

Farm. Lizzie, of course, is prayerful and penitent, and Anne is “quiet and happy,” her precious “lost piece of silver—found once more” (II. 241).

### **Adoptive Mother/Daughter Friendships**

*My dearest Aunt Lumb, my more than mother. . . . May God reward her for all her kindness to me.* (Elizabeth Gaskell's *Diary, Private Voices* 63)

Coral Lansbury asserts that “the happy families” in the fiction of the Victorian writers are quite different from Gaskell's portrayals, and this is especially true as far as Mother/Daughter relationships go (8). For in her short fiction, it is the adoptive (rather than the biological) Mother/Daughter relationships that highlight loving, supportive, healthy friendships.<sup>84</sup> *My Lady Ludlow* (*Household Words*, 1858) centres around the growth and improvement of the novella's title character—a wealthy aristocrat who takes young gentlewomen “of condition” into her home, describing the poor young girls “as daughters” (V. 11), and, indeed, she is most kind and loving to her charges. It is not Lady Ludlow whom I consider the novella's true mother figure, however, but her friend, Miss Galindo, the story's other principle character. For, as Jenny Uglow states: “Lady Ludlow educates; . . . Miss Galindo adopts” (469). Miss Galindo takes charge of Bessy, the illegitimate daughter of Mark (a deceased friend whom she had once loved), after hearing that the child is destitute. She makes Bessy's clothes, pays for her keeping, and “labour[s] away more diligently than ever” when it is time for her to attend school (V. 194). The two gradually grow to love each other, and when it is finally time for Bessy (now a young woman) to leave school, Miss Galindo braves the severe displeasure of Lady Ludlow (her best friend) for her adopted daughter's sake. Lady Ludlow slowly learns that Miss Galindo will not put

their friendship before her child, and finally revokes Bessy's banishment from her home. And when Bessy arrives at Lady Ludlow's, the story's narrator notes that her affection and concern for her adopted mother is obvious: "One thing I did like—her watchful look at Miss Galindo from time to time: it showed that her thoughts and sympathy were ever at Miss Galindo's service" (V. 206). Uglow describes the roles of both Lady Ludlow and Miss Galindo as "maternal" (469), and, to an extent, this is true of both women. But I would add that Lady Ludlow's maternal role—though no less worthwhile—is merely symbolic, whereas Miss Galindo's is actual and, moreover, extremely brave for the time. Lady Ludlow is a woman tied to the old aristocratic days of the past; she is resistant to change, and raises her charges according to her own agenda, to preserve the ways of the old order that she holds so precious. Hence, though Lady Ludlow cares for her girls and treats them well, they are, in all actuality, the heiresses of her agenda. Miss Galindo, on the other hand, takes care of Bessy *in spite of* her beliefs. There is no agenda here, only maternal devotion.

As seen in *My Lady Ludlow*, though Gaskell's "adoptions" are not the legal procedures we authorize today, many of them are true adoptions in the familial sense of the word. In "The Crooked Branch," Hester and Nathan adopt their niece, Bessie Rose, after the death of Hester's brother. Hester and Nathan love Bessie so much that they hope for her eventual marriage to their own troubled son, Benjamin. Bessie, in turn, watches over both her adoptive parents, but most especially her aunt Hester. When Benjamin asks to leave the family farm and attend school in London, Hester and Bessie instinctively clasp each other's hands in sympathy (VII. 215). Additionally, when Benjamin is abrupt toward and thoughtless of Hester, Bessie hurts for her aunt and scolds her cousin, preferring to see some small act of kindness for Hester than hear empty, careless compliments toward herself: "I'd rayther by a deal

see thee helping thy mother, when she's dropped her knitting-needle and canna see i' the' dusk for to pick it up" (VII. 218). When Hester's failing eyesight causes her to make "large and false" stitches on her beloved son's shirts, Bessie secretly stays up late, sewing "in the dead of night" to re-stitch the fabric, saving both Benjamin's shirts and Hester's pride (VII. 219). No matter her love for Benjamin, Bessie always puts the feelings and safety of her adopted mother (and father) first when she knows he has done them harm. She protects her parents emotionally and physically from Benjamin, for she is more a daughter to them than he ever was son.

Perhaps the most significant adopted Mother/Daughter friendship in all of Mrs. Gaskell's short fiction is that between Maggie and Mrs. Buxton in *The Moorland Cottage*. Maggie, in response to her own mother's "sharp fault-finding" and emotional neglect (II. 293), naturally begins to look to Mrs. Buxton, a family friend, as a surrogate mother:

Something in herself was so much in harmony with Mrs. Buxton's sweet resigned gentleness, that it answered like an echo, and the two understood each other strangely well. They seemed like old friends.  
(II. 285)

Though Mrs. Buxton is quite sickly, she is—like Mrs. Hamley in *Wives and Daughters*—the "ruling spirit of the house" (VIII. 284), and Maggie finds a gentle cheerfulness in her room, even when she is simply holding the lady's hand. It is from Mrs. Buxton that Maggie derives "[a]ll the knowledge, and most of the strength of her character" (II. 294). Truly, if not for Mrs. Buxton, Maggie may not have had the inner strength and benevolence to save her brother, Edward, for from Mrs. Buxton come the stories of philanthropy and Christian sacrifice:

[S]aints and martyrs, and . . . those whose names will never be blazoned on earth—some poor maid-servant, or hard-worked artisan,

or weary governess—who have gone on through life quietly, with holy purposes in their hearts, to which they gave up pleasure and ease, in a soft, still, succession of resolute days. (II. 295-296)

When her brother's crisis comes to a head, Maggie remembers these tales of heroines who performed "striking glorious deed[s]," who possessed "beautiful strength," and committed "crowning sacrifice[s]" (II. 295-296), and she willingly offers to leave both her country and her fiancé in order to help her brother (II. 362). Mrs. Buxton's influence on Maggie is profound; she is, indeed, Maggie's guiding mentor and spiritual mother.

Lansbury relates that, to Gaskell, "it was love that defined the relationship between mother and child, not an act of birth" (16). Gaskell shows this repeatedly in her fiction—a home is where love exists; a mother is one who transcends the "narrowly biological definition of motherhood" (Nestor 48). In her stories, Gaskell champions those women who—like her own Aunt Lumb—choose the role of motherhood when they are needed (no matter the genitor of the child), and provide not only physical nourishment, but emotional nourishment as well.

### **Mistress/Servant Friendships**

*We have lost our servant Betsy, who was obliged to leave us, being wanted at home. . . . But we still keep her as a friend.*

(Elizabeth Gaskell's Diary, *Private Voices* 63)

Because Gaskell travelled so extensively, she needed a household full of servants of all kinds. By the mid-1850's, after the publication of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell had hired "a cook, two or three maids, a 'waiter' and a gardener" (Uglow 262). And, most especially, there was Ann Hearn, Gaskell's friend and servant, who

cared for the Gaskell family for over fifty years (150), and comforted Elizabeth through the terrible days after her son Willie's death (264). And Hearn's dedication to the Gaskell family was generously reciprocated. Mrs. Gaskell carefully looked after her friend when Hearn experienced times of stress, sorrow, or ill health. In a letter to Anne Robson, describing Hearn's illness and subsequent melancholy, Gaskell wrote that she had a "variety of plans" that she hoped would give her "some change of thought and scene" (*Letters* 760). She related, with no sign of stress or complaint, that she would be doing nothing for the next six weeks except taking over Hearn's housekeeping duties, nursing, and "cheering up" her "dear good valuable *friend*" (760-761). From her letters, it seems that Gaskell must have acted as a friend to all her servants, as Nestor states, "consistently demonstrat[ing] the deep and important bonds between mistress and servant" (40). When her maid's fiancé was gravely harmed in a milling accident, Mrs. Gaskell immediately took charge, "speed[ing] her off" (*Letters* 633) and allowing her to stay with her lover for fourteen weeks until he was well (638). And in a letter to Barbara Fergusson (herself a former governess with whom Gaskell remained friends), Gaskell discussed her servant, Anne, who had become pregnant by a man in town and been subsequently abandoned. Gaskell confided to Barbara that she had been told so many half-truths and outright lies by Anne that she angrily came close to giving up on her. With her typical compassion, however, she did not. She called the girl's mother, and when she proved sadly useless, Gaskell arranged for a position for Anne as a wet nurse "out of Manchester, & away from the man." Because of Anne's deceitfulness, Gaskell told Barbara that she decided that Anne "ought not to come back," but she never ceased in aiding Anne until she was safely employed and able to provide for her baby (*Further Letters* 37-38).

Gaskell's consideration and careful treatment of her own servants prove how valuable she thought them to be as both assistants and friends, and she openly shares her feelings concerning servants in her literary endeavours, such as the short story, "Morton Hall." This tale, like "The Old Nurse's Story," is told by a loyal servant. It is through Bidly, a retired servant of the once great Hall, that we learn of Morton Hall's sad history, of Miss Phillis' sacrifices for her nephew, John Marmaduke Morton, and her eventual starvation (as told earlier in Chapter Two). Bidly and her sister Ethelinda (two remarkable friends in their own right) know of Phillis' hardship and silently offer assistance:

I took some eggs from our own pheasant hen, . . . and I laid them softly after dusk on one of the little stone seats in the porch of Miss Phillis's cottage. But alas! . . . early the next morning, there were my eggs all shattered and splashed, making an ugly yellow pool in the road just in front of the cottage. (II. 466)

Phillis and John, though poorer and hungrier than even their retired servants, are insistent that everyone "must keep [their] place." Eventually, however, the formerly "high and distant" Miss Phillis returns to her servants' cottage looking "white and haggard." She is faint from hunger and cries to them that she and John are starving. Bidly and Ethelinda beg her to allow them the "honour" of helping her, and she accepts for John's sake (II. 466-467). Throughout this tragic scene, the "place" of the servants and the mistress wavers only once, when Miss Phillis kisses them in gratitude. Bidly and Ethelinda are "silent and aghast" at seeing their old mistress crying in pain and grief; they are "honour[ed]" to offer tea to her, and tell her they are "proud . . . to this day" that her father once dined with their own father; and they leave her with the "deepest courtesies [they] could make" (II. 467-468). Bidly and Ethelinda, though they care about Miss Phillis deeply, agree to stay in their "place."

Because of this stubborn adherence to caste and tradition, Miss Phillis slowly starves to death, and the servants (also adhering to rules of “place”) silently watch as this happens. It is all so pointlessly tragic, and, when contrasted with a similar situation in “A Dark Night’s Work,” Mrs. Gaskell’s message is unmistakable. After Ellinor’s father dies, leaving her penniless, her governess, Miss Monro, decides that they will live together and share expenses. Ellinor agrees, and because she and Miss Monro are willing to “blur class boundaries” (Stoneman 48), they both benefit and their lives are markedly improved from what they might have been had they not decided to lean on each other.

Mrs. Gaskell’s fictional treatment of servants illustrates her belief that they are as intelligent, brave, and loyal as any member of the higher caste system. As Stoneman points out, Mrs. Buxton includes servants in her tales of saints and heroines (*The Moorland Cottage* 296).<sup>85</sup> In her essay “French Life” (*Fraser’s Magazine*, 1864), for example, Gaskell commends the Parisians’ thoughtful treatment of their servants by complimenting their flats, stating that their particular architecture is conducive to easing the workload of the servants (VII. 609). She uses this observation to stress the “moral advantage of uniting mistresses and maids in a more complete family bond” (VII. 609). She then narrates the words of a French woman, who says that she would never bring her servants out of their “country homes,” only to banish them to the “depths of a London kitchen, . . . [preferring rather to] hear of their joys and sorrows and, by taking an interest in their interests, induce them to care for hers” (VII. 609). Thus, Mrs. Gaskell longed for a way of life similar to that which she found in Paris, where the idea of “family” included the domestic help. She desired a familiarity between employer and employee where neither would ever allow one of their own to suffer the fate of Miss Phillis, merely for the sake of antiquated traditions. She continues, stating, “French people appear to me to live in this pleasant

kind of familiarity with their servants—a familiarity which does not breed contempt, in spite of proverbs” (VII. 609). That Gaskell—long before her trip to France in 1862—approved of this “pleasant kind of familiarity” between mistress and servant is often shown in her fiction.

Miss Matty, because of her affection for her servant, Martha, breaks the tradition set by her beloved sister Deborah that no servant be allowed to have “followers” (*Cranford*. II. 30). It is important to understand that Miss Matty does not break from tradition because she disagrees with this arbitrary rule; indeed, Mary Smith (the story’s narrator) states that after Deborah’s death, the rules she had set in place “were religiously such as Miss Matilda thought her sister would approve” (II. 30). However, when Martha is hired, Miss Matty’s feelings regarding the insistence upon her servants’ celibacy change.

Martha and Miss Matty’s relationship is enhanced by its comparison with that of Miss Matty and Fanny, the servant whom Martha has replaced. Fanny had been sneaky, untruthful, and manipulative (II. 30). Certainly, she had never adhered to the “no followers” rule. Perhaps having seen how Miss Matty allowed Deborah to rule over her, Fanny believed she could take Deborah’s place after her death in relation to Miss Matty, and “make her feel more in the power of her clever servant” (II. 32). Nonetheless, Fanny leaves and Martha replaces her. It is obvious from Martha’s first introduction to us—“blunt . . . plain-spoken; . . . a brisk, well-meaning, but very ignorant girl”—that she is Fanny’s opposite (II. 32). Because of this, she is immediately likeable (as Mrs. Gaskell means her to be), and we are treated to humorous scenes of Martha’s training in the “art of waiting” (II. 33) and of a small tiff over Martha’s candid reference to Miss Matty’s age (II. 43). The issue of the “followers ban,” however, is what begins the progression of these two women toward

a real friendship. It is, understandably, Martha who first breaches the subject to Mary. In her lament to Mary, Martha proves her honesty and her respect for her Mistress:

‘Why, it seems so hard of missus not to let me have any followers; there’s such lots of young fellows in the town; and many a one has as much as offered to keep company with me; . . . Many a girl as I know would have ‘em unbeknownst to missus; . . . I had to shut the door in Jem Hearn’s face, and he’s a steady young man, fit for any girl; only I had given missus my word.’ (II. 45)

Martha tells Mary that Miss Matty’s kitchen would be perfect to hide beaux, for “there’s such good dark corners in it” (II. 45), but instead, she keeps her promise to her employer, difficult though this is for her. Martha’s respect for Miss Matty’s rule is ultimately rewarded, for when a gentleman whom Miss Matty had declined long ago suddenly dies, all of Miss Matty’s regrets overwhelm her, and she suddenly realises that she is forcing Martha to repeat her own life of loneliness. It has to have been difficult for Miss Matty to break a rule instigated by Deborah, but she puts Martha’s well-being over her own feelings:

‘I did say you were not to have followers; but if you meet with such a young man, and tell me, and I find he is respectable, I have no objection to his coming to see you once a week. God forbid,’ said she in a low voice, ‘that I should grieve any young hearts!’ (II. 48)

This is the catalyst of Miss Matty’s and Martha’s first steps toward a friendship. They continually prove themselves loyal to the other, and in the serial’s instalment, “Friends in Need,” which outlines Miss Matty’s financial ruin, Martha is the first of many “friends” to come to her rescue. Indeed, all the women of Cranford join together to help Miss Matty (which is itself a noteworthy statement of female

friendship by Mrs. Gaskell), but Martha is the first whom the author chooses to emphasise. Martha insists that she will stay with her mistress, insinuating that she is insulted by Miss Matty's assumption she will leave:

‘I’ll never leave her! No; I won’t. I telled her so, and said I could not think how she could find in her heart to give me warning. . . . I said I was not one to go and serve Mammon at that rate; that I knew when I’d got a good missus, if she didn’t know when she’d got a good servant. . . . I’m not going to leave Miss Matty. No, not if she gives me warning every hour in the day!’ (II. 155)

When Mary tells Martha that she realises she is “like a friend to dear Miss Matty,” Martha immediately reaches into her own store of money and provides part of that night’s evening meal.<sup>86</sup> And after the meal, Miss Matty discards the rules of her own caste system, and takes Martha’s hand in her own to express her gratitude. They have meliorated from mistress and servant to friends. That very evening, Martha does something extraordinary: she decides to rush into a marriage with her beau, Jem Hearn, with the sole purpose of offering her “dear Miss Matty” a place as lodger in their home (II. 160). Jem has long been “axing, and an-axing” Martha to set a date for their wedding, but she had, until that evening, told him she “could not think of it for years to come” (II. 161). But Miss Matty’s situation changes everything for Martha, including her own life’s plans. She forgets her own wants for those of her friend. Mrs. Gaskell continues this theme of self-sacrifice with Mrs. Clarke in “The Poor Clare.”

I discussed earlier the deep, almost awful, devotion the Starkey’s have for Madam’s nurse, Bridget Fitzgerald (Chapter One). One scene—when Bridget’s daughter Mary leaves to seek her fortune on the continent—demonstrates this loving care in a particularly poignant way. After Mary’s departure, Bridget can barely

function; indeed for over twenty hours she sits, “motionless, over the grey ashes of her extinguished fire,” ignoring even Madam Starkey’s requests to enter her cottage (V. 335). The continual self-banishment of Bridget causes Madam to become frightened for her friend. Finally, she has an idea, and carries Mary’s young spaniel to Bridget’s door, explaining that it has been crying for its owner and cannot be comforted. This little dog brings Bridget out of her anguished mourning, and she quietly allows Madam to kiss and comfort her, to light her fire, to coax her to eat, and to remain by her side “all that night” (V. 335).

Bridget is equally devoted to her mistress, following her “in all her fortunes,” from St. Germain to Antwerp to Lancashire (V. 333). Bridget remains “devoted and faithful” to both her mistress and master all their lives, and when Madam succumbs to a deadly fever,

Bridget let no other woman tend her [mistress] but herself; and in the very arms that had received her at her birth, that sweet young woman laid her head down, and gave up her breath. (V. 336)

Bridget and Madam Starkey are not the only women who enjoy a loyal Mistress/Servant friendship in “The Poor Clare,” however. Bridget’s granddaughter Lucy is also very close to her Governess, Mrs. Clarke. Lucy’s “faithful Clarke,” like Bridget, also stays with Lucy through all her misfortunes, travelling with her to another land when Lucy’s father sends her away (V. 361). Considering Lucy’s curse, Mrs. Clarke’s devotion to her should be considered as brave as is Miss Galindo’s to Bessy. Through fear, great distress, and even ostracism Mrs. Clarke stays with Lucy, remaining faithful to her even when (or perhaps because) her own father abandons her. She comforts and protects her, and even in times of great stress, when she does not think she can take much more of Lucy’s affliction, Mrs. Clarke still mourns for her “poor child’s” suffering, and remains by her side (V. 357). In fact, it seems that

Mrs. Clarke works hard at being a surrogate mother to Lucy, for at times she calls her charge, "my child" (V. 357), and attempts to pass Lucy off as her daughter (V. 352). However, the curse inhibits Mrs. Clarke from getting as close to Lucy as she wishes she could, for she lives in an almost constant state of apprehension, always fearful of the terrifying Double's return. After the story's narrator promises to help them, Mrs. Clarke begins to hope that their sufferings might end. Sadly, Bridget disappears, and Mrs. Clarke's disappointment causes her to become even more agitated, "complain[ing] more than ever," and even having "occasional temptations to leave Lucy" (V. 375). The fact that Mrs. Clarke does not leave Lucy (in spite of the enticement to do so), the fact that she agrees, instead, to settle with her in Coldholme speaks well of her love and devotion. Indeed, Mrs. Clarke's steadfast refusal to abandon Lucy, though she knows leaving would be easier, represents an even greater sacrifice than Martha's, for in doing so, she willingly (though perhaps not happily) surrenders her peace of mind.

To me, Gaskell's most extraordinary tale of female friendship, above all others, is told in the short story, "The Grey Woman" (*All the Year Round*, 1861), a frightening, gothic tale of deception, torture, and fearful grief. Anna Scherer, the story's young German heroine, has entered into a hasty and ill-advised engagement to an effeminate, yet "handsome" and "elegant" French gentleman, named Monsieur de la Tourelle (VII. 309). This particular story has another heroine, however, a Norman woman in her mid-forties named Amante. Anna's deceptively obsequious fiancé has turned out to be a stern, jealous, and, at times, frighteningly tyrannical husband, and has ordered her to remain always in her salon, literally shut in and completely separated—by sight or sound—from the rest of the chateau (VII. 315-316). Amante has been brought to Anna's remote chateau in the Vosges mountains to be her maid, and the two women become close confidantes. The "pleasure and comfort" (VII. 319)

that they take in each other's society is a great consolation to Anna, and though she still has reservations about her marriage, she slowly begins to reconcile herself to her life in France, even confiding in Amante that she is pregnant with Tourelle's child. Suddenly, everything changes with the arrival of a letter.

One night, while Tourelle is away, Amante informs Anna that a letter addressed to her has arrived at the Chateau and is in Tourelle's study. Anna is beside herself in her eagerness to hear news from home, so she and Amante—knowing that they are breaking all kinds of rules—decide to enter Tourelle's study and retrieve the letter. While Anna is searching for the letter, Amante leaves the room briefly, and while she is away Tourelle and his friends suddenly return through a window in the study. Anna, in a panic, hides beneath a table, and learns all. Her husband is a chief of the *Chauffeurs*, bandits renowned for their use of fire to torture their victims before killing them.<sup>87</sup> In a scene replete with tension and suspense, Anna waits under the table, frightened and mortified by her husband's deeds and reassurances to his friends that he would guarantee Anna "would not outlive the day" if he ever suspected her of knowing the true means to their wealth (VII. 329). Finally they leave, and Amante, hearing that the room is safe to enter, calls to her mistress and carries her safely to their rooms. While Anna was hiding in her husband's study, Amante had packed their belongings, and she now tells Anna that they are leaving immediately. Anna is practically catatonic, and Amante takes control of the situation: "She gave me directions—short, condensed directions, without reasons—just as you do a child; and, like a child, I obeyed her" (VII. 334). At first glance, it seems that the maid has become the mistress and vice versa. But there is much more happening here. What happens is a change of status for both women; they are no longer mistress and servant, but equals. The social hierarchy has been discarded, and what is left becomes much more—two close friends taking care of each other.<sup>88</sup>

Amante and Anna run from the chateau and hide from Tourelle's relentless pursuit, altering their appearances in the process. With clothes, shears, and cork, Amante transforms herself into a man; by breaking a front tooth (evidence of a stunning resilience) and dyeing her complexion and hair, Anna disguises herself as a working-class wife (VII. 341-342). As they travel to Germany, their disguises gradually become "in themselves a manifestation of the roles that have begun to evolve in the partnership" (Nestor 77). They decide that the safest thing to do is to live as man and wife. Amante works as a tailor outside the home; Anna takes care of the household duties, and safely gives birth to her daughter. They take care of each other, each showing courage and perseverance when the other is overcome with fear or exhaustion. Anna claims that she cannot put into words how deeply she "became attached to Amante" (VII. 343), and Amante's "delight and glory" in Anna's baby almost exceeds that of the mother's (VII. 355). They share a marriage bed, "holding each other tight" throughout the night when they sense that Tourelle is near (VII. 349), and slip into a "more natural" way of speaking to each other, dropping the "respectful formality" of the Mistress/Servant rule (VII. 354). Amante and Anna remain "husband and wife" until Amante's tragic murder at the hands of Tourelle (VII. 354).

In discussing "The Grey Woman," Coral Lansbury states that the love between Anna and Amante "could be defined as lesbian" in nature (211). Tess Cosslett goes to great lengths to counter Lansbury, stating that

we must beware of trying to read Victorian representations of female friendship in this way. They are not anticipatory images of modern feminist solidarity of lesbian consciousness. (3)<sup>89</sup>

Nestor, like Cosslett, states that it would be a "distortion of 'The Grey Woman' to see its significance in terms of its daring as a depiction of a homosexual relationship"

(78), and I agree. Like Cosslett and Nestor, I see the relationship between Anna and Amante as much more than the sexual union that a twenty-first century lesbian interpretation would imply. Their love is loyal and strong, almost Platonic (in the classical sense) in nature. To apply a label that can be construed so many different ways trivialises the relationship between these two heroines. True, Amante and Anna are affectionate, and they are definitely spiritually married to each other. The description of them lying in bed, "holding each other tight" is stirring and romantic, despite the danger and fear of discovery (VII. 349). Amante and Anna are romantic; they are even sexual; but are they making love? I do not think so. Sexuality is not a concept that must imply a sexual act. However, though their friendship is not lesbian in the sense that we speak of lesbianism today, it is unique among Gaskell's short stories. So unique, in fact, that A. W. Ward avoids the relationship completely and devotes his entire critical introduction to the history of the *Chauffeurs*. He pointedly ignores the friendship between Anna and Amante, not mentioning it even in passing (xxviii-xxxiii). His silence on the matter is deafening. In all of Mrs. Gaskell's many female friendships, the relationships between the women are obviously not lesbian; "The Grey Woman," however, is not so obvious. It is possible that Ward, like Lansbury, saw that the relationship has shades of lesbianism and shied away from examining it, which—taking into account the time in which he was writing—is understandable, if regrettable. If, in fact, this is Ward's reason for eschewing a discussion of Amante and Anna's friendship, he proves Nestor's statement true, for his introduction, though informative, limits what Gaskell's story represents—a friendship between two women that is as strong and abiding as any relationship can offer, marriage or otherwise.

### Friends in Need

*God bless you, and show you His mercy in your need as you have shown it to this little child.* (Anne Leigh in "Lizzie Leigh." II. 225)

Mrs. Gaskell's third category—those relationships that I have labelled "Friends in Need"—can be of all types, castes, and relations: mistresses, servants, sisters, rivals, and, in the case of "Lizzie Leigh," two women who (for most of the story) do not even know each other. "Friends in Need" friendships (a label I have flagrantly taken from Chapter 14 of *Cranford*) are subtly different from the others, in that they occur in stories about one woman's desperate need for the help of another, and from this assistance, a friendship is formed. The friendship between Lizzie Leigh and Susan Palmer is quite special, in that a "bond of nature transcends the more fickle links of shared interest" (Nestor 68). Their bond is formed not with each other, but through Lizzie's baby. Moreover, this friendship remains mostly one-sided. Lizzie needs a friend in Susan, not the other way around. And Susan grants this friendship, never asking anything in return. Because her life is so wretched, Lizzie knows that someone else must raise her illegitimate child. One evening, she thrusts the baby in Susan's arms and runs away, asking in a note that Susan raise her, and Susan unhesitatingly does so. Whenever she is able, Lizzie leaves little packets of money under Susan's door, trying to help in the raising of little Anne. Susan takes care of Lizzie's baby, saving the money for the child's care. And she protects Lizzie when Mr. Palmer tries to "set the policeman to watch" for her, arguing that, though Lizzie may be a sinner, her care for her child is "such a holy thing" (II. 225). Susan protects Lizzie and treats her with respect and kindness, even patiently forgiving her violent actions and cruel accusations of murder when the baby has a tragic, terminal accident:

‘You killed her—you slighted her—you let her fall down those stairs! you killed her!’

Susan cleared off the thick mist before her, and, gazing at the mother with her clear, sweet angel eyes, said, mournfully—

‘I would have laid down my own life for her.’ (II. 232)

Perhaps it is Susan’s example of pacifism and love, but immediately after her words, Lizzie backs away and lets her unfounded anger at Susan drain away, even asking forgiveness, admitting that she has spoken to Susan as she “never should have spoken,” and acknowledging her kindness (II. 233). Susan, in answer, returns the child she has loved as her own back to its mother,<sup>90</sup> and asks God to “have mercy on [Lizzie], and forgive and comfort her” (II. 231). Susan Palmer is an exceptional example of a woman’s capacity for profound friendship, giving without receiving, loving and forgiving with hardly a thought of self.

“Half a Lifetime Ago” (*Household Words*, 1855) is similar to “Lizzie Leigh,” in that it tells of two women who do not know each other, but who become connected through their love of another human being, the “strikingly handsome” but unworthy scoundrel, Michael Hurst (V. 284). The story opens with Susan Dixon and Michael having an “unspoken attachment” with each other, an attachment over which their parents “rejoiced” (V. 281). Susan has a younger brother named Willie, whose mind has a “delicacy running through” it that causes his body to be “feeble and weak” (V. 292). Willie is a special consideration to both Susan and her mother, and both love him very much, as opposed to Mr. Dixon and Michael, who consider Willie an annoyance. When Mrs. Dixon suddenly becomes terminally ill, she implores Susan to take care of Willie and protect him from the harsh treatment of the men: “Father’s often vexed with him because he’s not a quick strong lad. . . . He vexes Michael at times, and Michael has struck him before now” (V. 283). Susan quickly promises that

she will assume guardianship of Willie, vowing “within herself to be a mother to him” (V. 284). The next spring, Mr. Dixon, Susan, and Willie all become terribly ill from a fever. Mr. Dixon dies and both Susan and Willie recover, but Willie is changed:

His bodily strength returned; . . . but his eyes wandered continually; his regard could not be arrested; his speech became slow, impeded, and incoherent. People began to say that the fever had taken away the little wit Willie Dixon had ever possessed. (V. 297)

The degeneration of Willie’s reason worsens Michael’s treatment of him. In the past, a “harsh word and blow” (V. 294) from Michael was common enough, but now he admits to himself that he absolutely loathes Willie (V. 303). And when he gives Susan an ultimatum—“Choose between him and me, Susy, for I swear to thee, thou shan’t have both”—Susan chooses her “bairn,” keeping her promise to both herself and her mother, hoping that Michael will eventually understand and marry her as he has promised (V. 304). He breaks their engagement instead, and does not return.

Weeks later, Susan hears that Michael is “very thick” with Eleanor Hebthwaite, a woman with whom he had flirted, even while promised to Susan (V. 307). Soon after, he marries Eleanor, and commences to make her life as miserable as he undoubtedly would have made Susan’s. Michael had always been a heavy drinker, and this habit becomes worse (V. 319). His temper and penchant for abusing the helpless have also worsened, and one night Susan secretly watches as he harshly flogs his horse in a drunken rage (V. 314). Susan later learns that Michael’s fortune has been lost due to his heavy drinking, and his children are “poor, sickly things,” suffering from the penurious lifestyle he has given them (V. 319).

Late one bitterly cold night in November, Susan hears cries for help outside her home and finds that Michael has fallen in the snow, seriously injuring himself.

She drags him to her house and tries to save him, but he dies almost instantly. It is at this point in Susan's life that she meets Eleanor. Willie has long since died; the long, sometimes tortuous caring for him has thankfully ended, and Susan—now a woman of great wealth—is living alone when Michael dies in her arms. When she goes to Eleanor's "carelessly kept" and "slatternly tended" farmhouse, it is to tell her of her husband's death, not to seek out a friend. But this is what she finds there. As the two women grieve for Michael, each tells the other of their love for him, but, most telling (and most moving) is what they do not say; neither woman says that her love for Michael has ever been returned. It becomes clear that, though Eleanor has a family, she is almost destitute; and Susan, though wealthy and respected, is lonely. During the exchange, Susan has a small stroke, which temporarily paralyses her, and without hesitation, Eleanor cares for her former rival. Eleanor nurses Susan "like a sister," even selling "little trifle[s]" to buy "small comforts as Susan needed" (V. 327). And when Susan recovers, she takes Eleanor and her children to her home to live "and fill up the haunted hearth with living forms" (V. 327). Susan and Eleanor live out the rest of their days together, ensuring that their "latter days" are "better than the former" (V. 327).

Mrs. Gaskell uses what Cosslett calls a "woman-together" ending (185) in another story dedicated to the "Friends in Need" theme: "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras" (*Howitt's Journal*, 1847), her first published short story. Libbie, an orphan living with relatives, befriends a young crippled boy named Franky. At first, it seems that Franky is the one in need of a friend; indeed, the frail, lame boy is lonely and bed-ridden most of every day. But soon, the friendship that Libbie offers Franky brings her close to his mother, and we learn that she is neediest of all:

[T]he barrier of reserve once broken down, she had much to say, to thank her for days of amusement and happy employment for her lad, to

speak of his gratitude, to tell of her hopes and fears—the hopes and fears that made up the dates of her life. (I. 470)

Franky's widowed mother, Margaret Hall, is known among the small town as "the scold of the neighbourhood" (I. 470), and Libbie never intended to gain a friend in her. But Margaret's attitude toward Libbie is softened as she watches her kindness toward poor Franky. Slowly, Libbie and Margaret grow close due to their shared love for him, and when the child dies, Libbie volunteers to live with Margaret, and Margaret agrees. They live together in hopes of easing each other's hearts, each helping the other while mourning the beloved child they have lost. Margaret is like a mother to Libbie and she, in turn, "tenders the services of a daughter" to Margaret (I. 489). Both women, thinking that Franky alone was in need of a friend, discover they too need friendship, and spend the rest of their lives together, grateful for each other.

These "woman-together" stories share a common link—women's capacity to help each other when all other means have disappointed. Whether it is a shared love for a child, or a spiritual emptiness that wants nourishment, there is a need for a love and understanding that, oftentimes, only another woman can bring. Because she loves Lizzie's child, only Susan can truly understand the pain Lizzie felt at having to give it away, and the two women share a special bond when grieving for its death. Only Susan Dixon can truly understand Eleanor's grief at the death of Michael, for she had loved him too. Additionally, these two women share an unspoken bond, for both have been harmed by Michael's selfish neglect, and each knows this of the other. Libbie Marsh is motherless and Margaret Hall is childless; each gladly gives what the other needs, and each gratefully takes what the other offers. In discussing "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras," Uglow states that love "can exist between strangers and need not be confined to the family" (Uglow 177). I would add that the love that Gaskell shows her women friends sharing is often even more steadfast and trustworthy than what

occurs in her fictional families: both Susan Palmer and Libbie Marsh had alcoholic fathers; Lizzie's father disowns her; Susan Dixon is abandoned by her fiancé, and Eleanor is neglected by the same cruel and irresponsible man. And it is not always the men in Gaskell's stories who are disappointing in their familial responsibilities: Grace Hickson, Mrs. Browne, Mrs. Griffiths, and the Furnivall sisters all show an extraordinary lack of love and loyalty to the family members that societal mores dictate they should love and nurture. Thus, family can be disappointing, lonely, even harmful. When this occurs, Gaskell clearly believed that we can sometimes look outside the doors of our home and find another family, another friendship that is just as abiding and meaningful.

### **Unhealthy Friendships**

*She felt her powerlessness, after a struggle or two, but treasured up her vengeance. If she had lost power over the household, there was no diminution of her influence over her mistress. (Victorine in "Crowley Castle." VII. 705)*

Though much of Gaskell's short fiction highlights female friendships in a positive way, she also "gives full due to female rivalry, jealousy, cruelty and pettiness" (Uglow 165). Those women who embody the aspects of all that is wicked in the feminine psyche tend to appear in Gaskell's short stories and novellas rather than her novels. For example, Gaskell's jealous, spiteful females—those who let their desire for a man alter, harm, even destroy their friendships—all occur in her short stories: Maude and Faith Furnivall ("The Old Nurse's Story"); Faith Hickson ("Lois the Witch"); Theresa Crowley ("Crowley Castle"), while her female characters who refuse to allow jealousy to ruin their friendships occur in her novels: Molly Gibson

(*Wives and Daughters*); Jemima Bradshaw (*Ruth*); Hester Rose and Sylvia Robson (*Sylvia's Lovers*). Gaskell's short stories deal frequently with unhappy, wasted relationships between women, be they mothers and daughters, sisters, or former friends. Some relationships between the female characters are not friendships at all, but rather antipathetical struggles between two women of strong wills, or even between two enemies: Lois Barclay and Grace Hickson ("Lois the Witch"); Maude and Faith Furnivall ("The Old Nurse's Story"); Theresa Crowley and Bessy Hawtrey ("Crowley Castle"). In "The Well of Pen-Morfa," Nest Gwynn closes her heart to everything, including her mother Eleanor, when she is cast off by her betrothed: "Of late, . . . I have been cruel in my thoughts to every one. I have turned away from tenderness with bitter indifference" (II. 260). Eleanor suffers greatly from Nest's coldness, and their relationship is never resolved.

The pitiable relationship that Maggie has with her mother in *The Moorland Cottage* is already well documented in this chapter. But there is another novella written by Gaskell that depicts a mother and daughter who, though not as unhappy as Maggie and Mrs. Browne, are perhaps just as distant. *Cousin Phillis* (*Cornhill Magazine*, 1864), Mrs. Gaskell's beautifully written pastoral, portrays a mother/daughter relationship that is in perpetual danger of becoming hurtful and competitive. Phillis and her father are very close in regards to intellect and interests. Mrs. Holman, in contrast, is "completely unable even to understand . . . much less to care in the least" for their pursuits of knowledge (VII. 35). Paul, the story's narrator, notices their absorption in each other and consequential neglect of Mrs. Holman, and remarks that she is often "unavoidably thrown out of some of their interests" (VII. 35). The situation is causes resentment:

I was rather sorry for cousin Holman; . . . I had once or twice thought she was a little jealous of her own child, as a fitter companion for her husband than she was herself. (VII. 34-35)

And though Rev. Holman is aware of his wife's unease, and goes out of his way to make her feel "contented and peaceful again," Phillis never perceives her mother's "little shadows," for she is "too much engrossed with any matter in hand to think about other people's manners and looks" (VII. 35). Perhaps if Phillis had been closer to her mother, she might have confided her feelings for Mr. Holdsworth and her subsequent mortification at hearing of his wedding. But instead, Phillis bears all of this alone, eventually collapsing from the stress of it. Phillis and Mrs. Holman's relationship is not without closeness and love; indeed, Mrs. Holman is a silent heroine, the only one with the "presence of mind" to know what to do during Phillis' collapse, for Paul leaves to get the doctor and the Rev. Holman is helplessly "unmanned" by the crises (VII. 100-101). Yet, still, the troubling distance between mother and daughter is never completely rectified.

*Cranford's* sisters Deborah and Matty Jenkyns are a virtual antithesis to the sisters Biddy and Ethelinda of "Morton Hall." Biddy and Ethelinda are equals; their relationship is based upon respect and support. In contrast, Matty is ruled by the matriarchal Deborah, prevented even from marrying, for Deborah has adopted a celibate lifestyle and it is said that she expects Miss Matty to do the same (II. 35). Deborah is a kind, generous lady, and she and Miss Matty do love each other, but they are not equals. It must be stated that Deborah is not the only one to blame (if blame must be given) for this inequality; Miss Matty is as responsible as Deborah is for their comfortable pseudo-marriage. And it is only after Deborah's death that she stops comparing herself to her sister (II. 151) and comes into her own sense of self-worth (II. 192).

Each of these examples is indeed a relationship between two women who could be friends, but in some way misses the mark. The women in these relationships are neither enemies, such as Maude and Grace Furnivall, nor friends like Ethelinda and Biddy. They are women who are tied together by familial bonds, but who are neither able nor willing to achieve a healthy friendship. Their relationships are not unhealthy, however. By "unhealthy" I mean friendships that are truly harmful, friendships that cause hurt or even death, friendships that literally ruin lives. Mrs. Gaskell is brilliant in her portrayal of these types of unhealthy female relationships. Strikingly, these types of friendships always occur in her gothic tales. It is unclear what type of relationship Maude and Grace Furnivall had before the young musician came into their lives, sparking competition and jealousy between them, but it is reasonable to conjecture that they were friends. These two sisters remain joined together in a ghastly, vengeful relationship. Their past keeps them together in a senseless, destructive way; it is a macabre binding so strong that not even death can sever it.

In "Lois the Witch," Gaskell illustrates an intriguing closeness between Nattee and Faith, and on the surface, this friendship seems nurturing. But it is clearly unhealthy, however, in that it is centred upon black magic and the desired control of Pastor Nolan. Faith's mother resembles *The Moorland Cottage's* Mrs. Browne: "Grace made distinct favourites of Manasseh, her only son, and Prudence, her youngest child" (VII. 141). Similar to Mrs. Browne's neglect of her daughter is Grace Hickson's neglect of Faith, but unlike Maggie, Faith does not turn to a benevolent soul for motherly compensation; she, instead, befriends the old Indian housekeeper, Nattee, a spiritual diviner, who often chants and drones and toils over "some simmering pipkin, from which the smell [is], to say the least, unearthly" (VII. 150). Faith is in love with Pastor Nolan, and to win his heart, she and Nattee enter

into a partnership that “*seemed* more bound together by love and common interest” than any other in the household (italics mine. VII. 150). This common interest is a false love, however, for it is based on lies, tricks, and manipulation:

‘Old Indian woman great mystery. Old Indian woman sent hither and thither; go where she is told, where she hears with her ears. But old Indian woman’—and here she drew herself up, and the expression of her face quite changed—‘know how to call, and then white man [Pastor Nolan] must come; and old Indian woman have spoken never a word, and white man have heard nothing with his ears.’ So the old crone muttered. (VII. 152)

As Nattee admits, she and Faith have removed Pastor Nolan’s freewill. Using magic to gain power over others is dangerous and, in some covens, considered a form of black magic that will return upon the one casting the spell:

Spells that attempt to control another person should be avoided. This particularly applies to love spells focused on a specific person. More than any other form of spells, these work far more strongly on the person who casts them than they do on the intended object.

(Starhawk 129)

Thus, a relationship that initially seems a genuine, healthy friendship is, in truth, a dangerously unhealthy alliance between two women who do not understand the powerful magic in which they are engaging, and do not understand the harm that they are causing. And when the magic returns on Faith, she, Nattee, and Lois all suffer the consequences.

The spell that Faith has Nattee cast does, indeed, work far more strongly on her than on Pastor Nolan. Right after Pastor Nolan is “called” to the Hickson home, Faith immediately becomes overwhelmingly obsessed with him. Her fanatical

infatuation with him stunts her ability to speak coherently with him during the visit, and she actually breaks down in hysterical sobs because of it. It is at this moment also that Faith reacts violently toward Lois, pushing her away when Lois tries to comfort her. Very soon, Faith becomes fiercely jealous of Pastor Nolan's obvious admiration of Lois, and not only throws away what little friendship she and Lois have shared, but also betrays Nattee to the gallows:

‘Let the witch hang! What care I? She has done harm enough with her charms and her sorcery on Pastor Tappau’s girls. Let her die, and let all other witches look to themselves; for there be many kinds of witchcraft abroad. (VII. 178)

This veiled threat toward Lois (who herself had considered Faith a friend) is not mere embellishment for anger's sake. That very afternoon, Faith insinuates to Prudence that Lois is a witch (VII. 180-181). Indeed, it may be Prudence who accuses Lois, but it is Faith who gives her the idea. Thus, from Nattee and Faith's baleful friendship come two violent deaths.

In “Crowley Castle,”<sup>91</sup> Gaskell depicts a friendship that, like that between Faith and Nattee, becomes deadly. Though the story itself is not gothic, Victorine is indeed a gothic character surrounded by gothic imagery. She is a French nurse to young, motherless Theresa Crowley, Lady of Crowley Castle. She has become like a mother to her charge and adores her to distraction. Our first introduction to Victorine shows her fierce devotion to Theresa and her frightening power in the household. When Theresa comes down with small-pox, Victorine “shut herself up” nursing her “night and day.” Victorine herself “only succumbed to the dreadful illness, when all danger to the child was over. . . . [And] was disfigured for life” (VII. 683). But it is when Theresa's father, Sir Mark, attempts to interfere with Victorine's management

of Theresa that we first see signs of gothic imagery surrounding the mysterious woman:

He [the butler] had gone into the room unawares, and had found Sir Mark and Victorine at high words; and he said that Victorine was white with rage; that her eyes were blazing with passionate fire; that her voice was low and her words were few; but that, although she spoke in French and the butler only knew his native English, he persisted to his dying day in declaring that he would rather have been sworn at by a drunken grenadier with a sword in his hand, than have had those words of Victorine's addressed to him. (VII. 683)

This scene contains strong gothic imagery. Victorine's portrayal here is eerie and unnerving, bringing to mind not only Grace Furnivall's phantom image of "relentless hate and triumphant scorn" ("The Old Nurse's Story." II. 445), but also a fascinating and frightening character created by George Eliot named Bertha Grant. "The Lifted Veil" was written in 1859, and it is reasonable to assume that Gaskell was familiar with this gothic story, considering her admiration for Eliot. Bertha is a cold beauty and vindictive soul who manipulates all those around her, and uses their love merely as a means to her own end. Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions of Victorine are quite similar to Eliot's Bertha:

Bertha appeared at the door, with a candle in her hand, and advanced toward me. . . . Why did she stand before me with the candle in her hand, with her cruel contemptuous eyes fixed on me, and the glittering [jewel] serpent, like a familiar demon, on her breast? . . . 'Fool, idiot, why don't you kill yourself then?'—that was her thought.

(*Works*. VII. 35)

Bertha's "cruel, contemptuous" eyes match those of Victorine's with their "passionate fire." But this is not the only similarity between these two women. Bertha resorts to poison to rid herself of her hated husband; and, to rid her beloved Theresa of her own hated husband, Victorine does the same.

Like Anna in "The Grey Woman," Theresa enters into an "ill-starred marriage" with a French count who soon reveals himself to be a cheat and a scoundrel (VII. 700). Victorine is no benevolent, heroic Amante, however. She turns her watchful eye toward the count "as a tiger watches its prey," ominously remarking to Theresa that he "will not live forever" (VII. 699). One day, while Theresa and the Count are arguing, his "heavy closed hand fell on her white shoulder with a terrible blow" (VII. 701).<sup>92</sup> This is the final straw for Victorine. She turns to her private cupboard, and suddenly we discover that she keeps various medicines, tonics, and drugs "of which she alone knew the properties" (VII. 701-702). She mixes a concoction clearly meant to poison the Count. This does not take place, however, for there is no need. That night he is carried home, dead from a stab wound received at a card game. His death prompts no sympathy from Victorine, and, in a scene suffused with the macabre, she strikes his corpse, cursing it as she does so:

'Better so,' she muttered; 'better so! But, monseigneur, you shall take this with you, whithersoever your wicked soul is fleeing.' And she struck him a light stroke on his shoulder, just where Theresa's bruise was. (VII. 703)

Victorine is careful that her blow to the Count's shoulder is "as light a stroke as well could be" (VII. 703), for her intent is not to do physical harm, but rather mystical harm. Because of her curse, wherever Fate takes the Count in his afterlife, he will carry the memory that he once abused his helpless wife. And though she does not get the chance to murder the Count, Victorine does eventually put her knowledge of

poisons to use. She murders Bessy, the wife of Marmaduke, Theresa's first love, opening the door to reconciliation between the two. Years later, when Theresa discovers the awful truth, she becomes sickly and old before her time. Gaskell, calling to mind her descriptions of Ruth sinking "down, and down" (III. 153) in repentance of her sins, twice describes Theresa's "drooped and drooped" mood and appearance (VII. 715, 716). Victorine suffers the same fate as Grace Furnivall, haunted by the one whom she has harmed. She begins seeing the ghost of Bessy and finally confesses all (VII. 717).<sup>93</sup> Marmaduke inevitably learns of Victorine's deed, and, believing that Theresa instigated the murder of his first wife, leaves her forever. And Theresa, her life destroyed by the madness of her friend's love, dies of a broken heart.

Victorine is certainly a gothic character. Indeed, it would not be exaggeration to label her a witch, like Bridget Fitzgerald. The curse she inflicts upon the Count and her knowledge of medicinal herbs and tonics prove her to be what some pagans today consider a "classical witch." In his essay "Witchcraft: Classical, Gothic and Neopagan," Isaac Bonewits describes the classical witch as

a person (usually an older female) who is adept in the uses of herbs, roots, barks, etc., for the purposes of both healing and hurting (including midwifing, poisoning, producing aphrodisiacs, producing hallucinogens, etc.) and who is familiar with the basic principles of both passive and active magical talents, and can therefore use them for good or ill, as she chooses.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, Bridget and Victorine both fit the description of classical witches, though Gaskell only labels Bridget as such. Moreover, Bonewits states that for the classical witch, "*religion* was fairly irrelevant to *practice*. Some considered themselves Christians; some were Pagans" (Adler 68), which would explain both Bridget's

calling upon Catholic saints and deities when performing her magic and Victorine's deathbed confession.

The question that must be asked is: why did Mrs. Gaskell always write unhealthy friendships within gothic surroundings? Was an unhealthy friendship a typical recipe for her gothic tales? Or did this formula stem from innocence in Gaskell herself? It seems to me that Gaskell could not conceive of harmful, deadly female friendships occurring in "real" life. Thus, in her realistic tales, she most often portrayed the good in people; thus, her healthy friendships belonged in these tales. But the evil in people, the monstrous, belonged in the stories of the gothic realm. As a Unitarian, Mrs. Gaskell believed in the natural goodness of people, and her realistic characters, though flawed, were portrayed as such; Victorine is not good, however—therefore she is not portrayed as "natural." Surely Mrs. Gaskell knew of violence, had even perhaps witnessed it first-hand. But unhealthy friendships like those portrayed in her gothic stories must have seemed unnatural. Hence, she only wrote of them in supernatural settings.

## CONCLUSION

*I am perfectly confident of your power in regard to short tales.*

(Charles Dickens to Elizabeth Gaskell)<sup>95</sup>

To read the wealth of Mrs. Gaskell's short fiction is to get a glimpse into all aspects of her life, both domestic and spiritual. Her religion and friendships inspired characters and themes in her stories, and because of this we are able to know how Gaskell dealt with and felt about her friends (both personal and business), her religious beliefs, and the many different facets of Victorian society. As shown in all three of my chapters, her short fiction explores the positives and negatives of human nature and the world in which we live. This was not what I had expected to find. What had at first seemed to be slow-paced, domestic pastorals turned out to be startlingly intense tales that highlight the darker side of human nature, our shadow-side.

In her gothic fiction, Gaskell demonstrates her copious knowledge of the tradition of the ancients, while providing two opposing sides to the spiritual realm. One side can be seen as a warning that we should distrust the uncanny, the mysterious, and the different. The occult is not something that we should explore too closely or try to understand too deeply. For, if we give way to intense, fanatical belief in (or dependence upon) the occult, we become like Manasseh—a man who is harmless, but as frightening and lost as Bridget. Revelations like those of Manasseh's are to be treated with scepticism by rational persons (such as Unitarians), for a passionate belief in intangible things can lead to a certain kind of instability, "minds [enslaved] to the dictates and dominion of others," as Locke would say (113). This kind of blind faith should be "cured" rather than embraced. Gaskell shows that an unrestrained, heedless belief in the occult can lead to a dangerous and deadly gothic

world, where hauntings, curses, and even infanticide can befall the guilty and innocent alike. Thus, Bridget's belief in the Saints' abilities to perform miracles leads her to begin commanding them to do her vengeful bidding. Gaskell's gothic fiction can certainly be read this way; I would offer a second possible interpretation, however. As stated earlier, I see a clear influence of Unitarianism in Gaskell's gothic fiction. Unitarians, such as Priestley, required empirical evidence for proof of miracles, and applied a rational scepticism toward the divinity of Jesus, yet they still opened their minds to the existence of God. Though Theophilus Lindsey demanded an end to the Apostles' Creed, he still believed in the virgin birth of Jesus. Thus, for Unitarians, the rational and the magical often went hand-in-hand. Gaskell believed that knowledge of things unknown can be enjoyable and even healthy when treated with respect and moderation. We have both spiritual and physical natures, and so is the universe in which we live. And ignoring this can lead to fear and panic when we see or hear something strange that we do not understand. For if we determine only to approach the universe with sceptical eyes and closed minds, we set ourselves up to be the Miss Pole's of the world, suffering embarrassment and terror from imagined ghosts, rather than enjoying the excitement and delight that Mrs. Gaskell felt at actually seeing one. Thus, rather than being warnings, these stories may be reminders that sometimes worshipping at the altar of reason does not explain all the mysteries in our world, nor will it protect us from them.

This type of dichotomy appears again in Gaskell's stories that explore forgiveness and redemption. From characters like Gilbert Dawson and John Middleton, we see the peaceful happiness that forgiveness can bring to us when we forgive others and when forgiveness is granted to us. However, we also see what can happen when our ability to forgive overreaches itself, when these virtues that we have learned to trust serve to bring us despair rather than fulfilment. Hester, in "The

Crooked Branch,” and especially Phillis, in “Morton Hall,” show us that forgiveness, when not coupled with moderation, can turn from something noble and beautiful to something ugly and deadly. Phillis then becomes a holy, yet foolish young woman who has taken the honourable virtue of forgiveness and mutated it into a bastardised caricature of itself. She is a character worthy of our admiration, yet this admiration is coupled with pity, or even horror. Her conduct seems absurd, too terrifying to follow. She becomes like so many other martyrs and saints—a member of a long tradition that we look to and admire, but know that we could never emulate. Anne Leigh, however,—like *Ruth*’s Thurstan Benson—forgives Lizzie, while also encouraging her to change her ways, leave her sinful path, and cling to family and God. Mrs. Gaskell shows us that forgiveness is always necessary, but we should strive to work within the boundaries of rational actions. For to do otherwise perverts the benevolent quality of the virtue itself. Gaskell always made sure that her stories with a “forgiveness” theme are didactic in nature, but never bombastically preachy. True to her Unitarian beliefs, she holds up a mirror and asks us to look inside, to admit our own human frailties. This is not to condemn our faults, but rather to show us that we can be better; we too can grant forgiveness to those by whom we may be repulsed. For one day, like Mr. Bradshaw, we may need the same.

On the surface, Mrs. Gaskell’s stories of female friendships seem so “nice,” so “sweet.” Mrs. Gaskell’s women-together endings are beautiful; her stories of “Amazon” communities (“Mr. Harrison’s Confessions,” *Cranford*) are filled with laughter and gentle satire; her stories of women helping each other in their times of need are inspiring. But Gaskell also shows us the pain that friendships sometimes produce. In friendships, as with forgiveness, there is oftentimes destruction and despair. We see Phillis’ servants watching her slowly die as they wax poetic about her family’s noble heritage (“Mortan Hall”); we see Matty being dominated by

Deborah until she no longer trusts herself to do the simplest household tasks (*Cranford*). Sometimes families disappoint, or worse. Homes can be places from which we must escape if we want to live. When this happens, we can find other people, sometimes as lonely as ourselves, and form families with them. Mrs. Gaskell disregards exaggerated adherence to caste in many of her stories devoted to female friendship. Once again, Miss Phillis is held up as an example of what can occur when a respected virtue is taken to the extreme. Miss Phillis' servants allow her to die because they sympathise and do not want to intrude on her privacy. *Cousin Phillis's* Betty would have never allowed this to happen to her own mistress, who—interestingly—has the same name. Indeed, as Phillis is wasting away, bringing grief to both herself and those who love her, Betty finally takes charge, shaming her complacent attitude, and ordering her to “fight her way back to cheerfulness” (VII. 108). Mrs. Gaskell offers numerous other examples of what can be gained when servants are allowed to speak their minds and behave as equals in the homes in which they live and serve. Amante (“The Grey Woman”), Mrs. Clarke (“The Poor Clare”), Miss Monroe (“A Dark Night’s Work”), and Martha (*Cranford*) are all examples of servants who do not let their “place” stop them from taking responsibility of the household when it is necessary.

However, sometimes friendships go beyond the merely troubled into the dangerously unhealthy. It may be startling that the same Mrs. Gaskell who wrote *Cousin Phillis* and “Hand and Heart” also wrote stories of witchcraft, public executions, insanity, and spousal abuse. But she did. And oftentimes, it is not men performing these violent acts, but women—women who are caught up in dangerous friendships that serve to destroy them. In these stories, Gaskell eerily depicts the dark side of obsessive, morbid love, and the women who are determined to hold onto this love through any means necessary, even murder. It is these unhealthy friendships that

Gaskell designates for the Gothic realm. Why is this? It is almost as if Mrs.

Gaskell, who lived an almost charmed life among loving friends and family, could not conceive of portraying them any other way.

In my Introduction, I stated that Elizabeth Gaskell's short fiction shall speak for itself. That the quality and worth of Gaskell's short fiction is equal to her novels is, to me, self-evident. They possess all the depth and insight that can be found in the longer stories. For in them are found that which Mrs. Gaskell held so important and dear in her life: her intellect, her spiritual beliefs, and her friendships.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture*. Ed. Regina Hewitt. Studies in Nineteenth-Century British Literature Ser. Vol. 2. New York: Lang, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Gaskell would have vehemently disagreed with Orel's statement. See Endnote 69.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Gaskell is most often excluded from anthologies, even by those devoted to supernatural works. See Michael Cox's *Twelve Victorian Ghost Stories* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), Isak Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales* (New York: Vintage, 1934), and Dover Publication's *Classic Ghost Stories by Dickens and Others* (New York: Dover, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> *Nineteenth-Century Stories by Women: An Anthology*. Ed. Glennis Stephenson. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1993. In her Introduction, Stephenson asserts that "The Old Nurse's Story" is "generally considered one of the best ghost stories of the century" (16).

<sup>5</sup> Quotations from Gaskell's fiction are taken from the Knutsford edition. Volume and page numbers are given for quotations. For publication information of all of Gaskell's works and letters, see Works Cited.

<sup>6</sup> Lady Anne Thackeray Ritchie, "Mrs Gaskell," *Blackstick Papers* (London, 1908), 214-215. Qtd. in Uglow, pg. 605.

<sup>7</sup> *Cranford* was published serially in Dickens' *Household Words*. Gaskell's first story, "Our Society at Cranford," appeared 13 December 1851.

<sup>8</sup> As David Farmer states, assertion that the aspects of the pagan goddess, Brig, were acquired by and given to the Catholic Saint Bridget is still disputed among many scholars, though it is significant to note that Gaskell chose to name Bridget's daughter, "Mary," thus conjoining the two deities. For publication information, see Works Cited.

<sup>9</sup> Gaskell highlights this religious angst in the character of *North and South's* Rev. Hale (IV), whom she argued was not a "sceptic," but rather "has doubts" (*Letters* 353).

<sup>10</sup> Qtd. in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M. H. Abrams. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1986. 2 vols. 924.

<sup>11</sup> Quotations from Priestley's works are taken from the Brown edition. Page numbers are given for quotations.

<sup>12</sup> William Gaskell in the *Unitarian Herald*, 30 September 1864. Qtd. in Uglow, pg. 136.

<sup>13</sup> See Priestley's "A General History of the Christian Church," pg. 328. See also Thomas Starr King's "Two Discourses."

<sup>14</sup> Hymn 431 of (Methodist) Large Hymn Book (1808). Qtd. in Francis Edward Mineka. *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1944. Pg. 19.

<sup>15</sup> *The Unity of the New Testament*. (London, 1854), pg. xiv. Qtd. in Young, pg. 155.

<sup>16</sup> *Letters*, pg. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Gaskell incorporates this belief of the Scots' ability for a type of ethereal intuition in her novella *My Lady Ludlow*: "Something that she had said had touched a chord in my lord's nature which he inherited from his Scotch ancestors" (V. 78).

<sup>18</sup> Because the majority of my pagan scholars may be unknown among academic circles, I will provide their scholarship and academic background in endnotes. This thesis contains both academic and neopagan sources.

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<sup>19</sup> A potent amulet found in Voodoo tradition. (McCoy 280).

<sup>20</sup> Margot Adler, M.S. Columbia. Author of *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and other Pagans in America Today* (1995, Penguin) and *Heretic's Heart: A Journey through Spirit and Revolution* (1997, Beacon). Currently, a National Public Radio correspondent based in NPR's New York Bureau. She can be heard regularly on All Things Considered, Morning and Weekend Edition.

<sup>21</sup> Gaskell uses this charming legend of the foxglove in *Ruth*, while introducing us to Thurstan Benson (III. 68).

<sup>22</sup> See A. B. Hopkins in *Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work* (London, 1952), pgs. 38-39. See also W. Gérin in *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford, 1976), pg. 28. Qtd. in Uglow, pg. 627, note 19.

<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Lewis mentions a "disturbing parallel" between Charlotte Clopton and Anna Scherer of "The Grey Woman" (xvii). Both women, in fits of hysterical terror, bite a piece of flesh from their own bodies: Charlotte from her shoulder and Anna from her hand (VII. 327).

<sup>24</sup> In *The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester*, Felicia Bonaparte devotes an entire chapter to "The Poor Clare," in which she asserts that Lucy's "purpose in the narrative is to embody the ideal," . . . while her Other represents "those wicked thoughts and deeds that, since they have been disowned, have become her daemonic double" (49-50). In *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Patsy Stoneman states that since "all the characters" in "The Poor Clare" are Catholics or Puritans, "both groups which

practice repression of the flesh, . . . Lucy's double, which is seen by everyone, makes visible the repressed sexuality of a whole society" (65-66).

<sup>25</sup> All Biblical quotations and references are taken from the New International Version. Book, chapter, and verse numbers are given for quotations.

<sup>26</sup> This goddess' name has many variations: Brigit (Celtic/Scottish), Brid, Bride, Brigindo, Brigid, Brighid, St. Bridget, and Saint Brigit, the "Mary of the Gael." (Squire 387) (*The Encyclopedia Mythica*).

<sup>27</sup> Starhawk (Miriam Simos), M.A. in Psychology from Antioch West University. Author or co-author of eight books, including *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of The Ancient Religion Of The Great Goddess* (Harper & Row, 1979, 1989), *Dreaming The Dark: Magic, Sex, and Politics* (Beacon, 1982), *Round: Raising Children in the Goddess Tradition* (Bantam, 1998), *Walking to Mercury* (Bantam, 1997), and *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery* (Harper & Row, 1987), which won the Media Alliance Meritorious Achievement Award for non-fiction in 1988. Consultant on the films "Goddess Remembered" and "The Burning Times," and commentator for "Full Circle," a film in the Women's Spirituality series. Her first novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (Bantam Books, 1993), won the Lambda award for best Gay and Lesbian Science Fiction in 1994. She is a major contributor to *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying*, an anthology published by HarperSanFrancisco (1997). Currently producing documentary on the life of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/b/brigid.html>. See also, Farmer, pg. 72.

<sup>29</sup> Frazer quotes from *Scotland and Scotsman in the Eighteenth Century*, from the MSS. of John Ramsey of Ochertyre. Edited by Alex Allardyce (Edinburgh, 1888). ii. 447.

<sup>30</sup> Biblically, a mark of protection (Genesis 4: 15). The symbolism used here makes reference to a mark which shows that the bearer has committed a shameful act. Gaskell uses the term in this same sense in both "The Doom of the Griffiths" (pg. 238) and *Ruth* (pg. 121).

<sup>31</sup> In *Elizabeth Gaskell: We Are Not Angels*, Wright states that Gaskell's "carelessness with lesser characters' names is notorious" (19), and "Lois the Witch" is no exception. At our first introduction to Lois' betrothed, his name is Hugh Lucy (138); by the story's end, his name has been changed to Ralph (214). It is possible that Gaskell confused Lucy's character with Lois' father, who is also named Ralph.

<sup>32</sup> Gaskell had previously addressed the issue of religious fanaticism in "The Heart of John Middleton," published in 1850 for *Household Words*. (II. 384-409).

<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed account of Calvinism, see Priestley's "The Calvinistic Doctrine of Predestination Compared with the Philosophical Doctrine of Necessity" (274-277).

<sup>34</sup> In her biography of Gaskell, Uglow singularizes the name of "Griffith," and uses the plural form only when discussing the entire family. Mrs. Gaskell, however, uses the name "Griffiths" throughout the story.

<sup>35</sup> Squire Griffiths' second wife is called, at different times, "Mrs. Owen" and "Mrs. Griffiths." (pgs. 245 & 265, respectively). Possibly an error on Gaskell's part.

<sup>36</sup> My reference for this connection can be found in *Seneca: Four Tragedies and "Octavia."* Trans. E. F. Watling. London: Penguin, 1966. 43.

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Gaskell wrote essays about various cultures and religions that were remarkably different from her own. See "Traits and Stories of the Huguenots" (II. 490-505), "Modern Greek Songs" (III. 471-490), "An Accursed Race" (V. 218-236), "French Life" (VII. 604-680), and "The Shah's English Gardener" (VII. 591-603).

<sup>38</sup> Originally published in 1859 for *All the Year Round*, Extra Christmas Number as "The Ghost in the Garden Room," this story was re-titled "The Crooked Branch" when published in *Right at Last, and Other Tales*, 1860.

<sup>39</sup> My reference for Coleridge's poem can be found in *English Romantic Writers*. Ed. David Perkins. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995. 519-529.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Southwood Smith, *The Divine Government*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., London, 1826, pg. 109. Qtd. in Uglow, pg. 136.

<sup>41</sup> My reference for Stevenson's story can be found in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Weir of Hermiston*. 1886. Ed. Emma Letley. Oxford World's Classics Ser. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. 7-76.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Dickens wrote that he thought "Lizzie Leigh" "excellent," and that "it made [him] cry" (CD *Letters* VI. 29). Gaskell's story was given "pride of place in the magazine's first issue," second only to Dickens' "A Preliminary World." This was an obvious compliment that Gaskell would have recognised (Easson 5).

<sup>43</sup> See *Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*. Ed. David Paroissien. Boston: Twayne, 1985. 193-210.

<sup>44</sup> Houghton notes that Amy Cruse's *The Victorians and Their Reading*, pg. 356, cites other novels that deal with this subject (pg. 365). Novels that quickly come to my mind are: *Adam Bede's* Hetty, *Anna Karenina's* Anna, *Madame Bovary's* Emma, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles's* Tess, and *The Scarlet Letter's* Hester Prynne.

<sup>45</sup> Dr. William Acton. *Prostitution, Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects*, pg. 175. (1857). Qtd. in Houghton, pg. 365.

<sup>46</sup> F. W. Newman, "Remedies for the Great Social Evil" (1869), *Miscellanies*, 3, 275. Qtd. in Houghton, pg. 365-366.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Hardy. *Jude the Obscure*. 1895. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996.

<sup>48</sup> William Acton, pg. 18. op cit. Qtd. in Houghton, pg. 366.

<sup>49</sup> Biblical spelling of this name is varied: "Magdalene" (New International Version, King James Version, Young's Literal Translation, Bible in Worldwide

English, New American Standard Bible), "Magdala" (Darby), "Mag'dalene" (Revised Standard Version). I have found no translation that uses Gaskell's particular spelling.

<sup>50</sup> *Morning Post*. Unsigned review. 29 January 1853, 3. Rpt. in Easson, pg. 230.

<sup>51</sup> *New Monthly Magazine*. Unsigned Review. February 1853, xcvi, 193-200. Rpt. in Easson, pg. 232.

<sup>52</sup> *Spectator*. Unsigned Review. 15 January 1853, xxvi, 61-62.

<sup>53</sup> *Literary Gazette*. 22 January 1853. No other publishing info. is given by Easson.

<sup>54</sup> *Sharpe's London Magazine*. Unsigned Review. 15 January 1853, ns ii, 125-126.

<sup>55</sup> *New Monthly Magazine*. op cit. In her letter to Fox, Gaskell refers to this magazine by its publisher's name, Henry Colburn.

<sup>56</sup> *Christian Observer*. Unsigned notice. July 1853, liii, 498-500. Rpt. in Easson, pg. 314.

<sup>57</sup> *Morning Post*. op cit.

<sup>58</sup> *Bentley's Miscellany*. Unsigned Review. 3 February 1853, xxxiii, 233-240. Rpt. in Easson, pg. 242.

<sup>59</sup> *Sun*. Unsigned Review. 12 February 1853, 3. Rpt. in Easson, pgs. 247-248.

<sup>60</sup> *Bentley's Miscellany*. op cit.

<sup>61</sup> *Manchester Examiner and Times*. Unsigned Review. 2 February 1853, 3. Rpt. in Easson, pg. 237.

<sup>62</sup> *Observer*. Unsigned Review. 23 January 1853, 7. Rpt. in Easson, pg. 225.

<sup>63</sup> *Nonconformist*. Unsigned Review. 26 January 1853, 84-85. Rpt. in Easson, pg. 228.

<sup>64</sup> *Manchester Examiner and Times*. op cit.

<sup>65</sup> William Gaskell. Qtd. in Enid Duthie. *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell*. London: MacMillan, 1980. 153.

<sup>66</sup> *Letters*, pg. 46.

<sup>67</sup> In her biography's chapter, "Overlapping Circles," Jenny Uglow details much of the dynamics of Gaskell's circle of female friendships and colleagues. Pgs. 299-321.

<sup>68</sup> *Letters*, pg. 230.

<sup>69</sup> Brontë does not state to what she is referring; however, the date of this letter (27 July 1854) directly corresponds to the contest of wills in which Gaskell and Dickens were then engaged regarding *North and South* (Pub. serially Sept.-Jan., 1854-1855 for *Household Words*). See Uglow, pgs. 360-361. See also *Letters*, pgs. 323, 330-331, *Further Letters*, pg. 123, and Mrs. Gaskell's Preface to the original edition (Knutsford. IV. xxvii).

<sup>70</sup> Anna Marsh-Caldwell's "Deformed," a story from *Two Old Men's Tales* (1834) and Frederika Bremer's *Neighbours* (1842). See *Life*, pg. 492, notes 4 & 5.

<sup>71</sup> The two sisters are assumed to be Susanna and Catherine Winkworth. See note in *The Shakespeare Head Brontë*, XV, pg. 62.

<sup>72</sup> *Letters*, pg. 483.

<sup>73</sup> "Friendship," *Saturday Review*, 15 Jan. 1870, pgs. 77-78; "The Exclusiveness of Women," *Saturday Review*, 19 Feb. 1870, pgs. 242-243.

<sup>74</sup> "Friendship," *Victoria Magazine*, Oct. 1871, pg. 545. Qtd. in Nestor, pg. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Quotations from Linton's essays are taken from the Bentley edition. Page numbers are given for quotations.

<sup>76</sup> Some titles of Linton's essays that attest to her tendency toward stereotyping: "Little Women," "Ideal Women," "Nymphs," "Grim Females," "Mature Sirens," "Charming Women," "Sphinxes." Vol. I. Ironically, though Linton was a fierce opponent of Emancipation, she was herself an Emancipated woman, who separated from her Chartist husband and lived independently for the rest of her life as a professional journalist.

<sup>77</sup> Oliphant's husband died early in their marriage, leaving her in debt and with three children (one yet unborn). Oliphant never remarried, and was the sole caretaker for her entire family, including her brothers. See Jay's *Mrs Oliphant*, pg. 17. See also Jay's Introduction to Oliphant's *Autobiography*, pgs. vii-viii.

<sup>78</sup> According to Elisabeth Jay, Oliphant's resentment toward her fellow contemporaries was not gender-specific: "she constantly compared herself to the best-paid literary men of her generation" (*Mrs Oliphant* 249). See also Oliphant's *Autobiography*, pg. 91.

<sup>79</sup> See also Eliot's essay of what she calls Mrs. Browning's "greatest poem" in the *Westminster Review*, 67 (January 1857), 306-310, in which she praises Mrs. Browning for showing herself to be "all the greater poet because she is intensely a poetess" (*GE Letters* 278).

<sup>80</sup> Gaskell also listed three male authors for Hachette's appraisal: Charles Reade, Edward Hamley, and William Wilkie Collins.

<sup>81</sup> Showalter says that Mrs. Gaskell “became the heroine of a new school of ‘motherly fiction’” (71). Tess Cosslett compares Gaskell’s differences from Eliot when discussing the accepted standards of feminine mores (89), stating that, in regards to the literary “patterns of inter-female rivalry, betrayal and oppression” (11), Gaskell is “an important exception” to the rule (187). Uglow states that the “importance of servants [plays a] more central role” in Gaskell’s fiction than “any of her contemporaries” (264). And Patsy Stoneman calls Gaskell’s treatment of servants “revolutionary” (48).

<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth’s mother died when she was thirteen months old. She was raised by her aunt, Hannah Lumb. See Felicia Bonaparte (pg. 24) and Jenny Uglow (pgs. 24-25) for a detailed discussion of Mrs. Gaskell’s own life as an influence for her Mother/Daughter relationships.

<sup>83</sup> *My Lady Ludlow*: Margaret, due to financial difficulties, must leave her mother and board in Lady Ludlow’s home in Connington (V. 9-217). *Cranford*: Deborah and Matty are grown when the story takes place; however, we learn in Chapter Six that their mother died from grief when they were still young girls (III. 1-192). “Lois the Witch”: Lois’ journey to America is a consequence of her mother’s untimely death (VII. 110-208). “Half a Lifetime Ago”: Mrs. Dixon’s early death is what sparks Susan’s promise to care for Willie, which is central to the story’s plot (V. 278-328).

<sup>84</sup> In her novel *Wives and Daughters* (VIII), Gaskell reversed the formula she used in her short fiction. Mrs. Gibson’s feeble attempts at friendship toward her adopted daughter Molly are insulting at best, and contemptible at worst.

<sup>85</sup> Though my purpose is to discuss close, adult friendships between mistresses and servants, Patsy Stoneman provides a detailed account of the various ways Gaskell has treated the Mistress/Servant relationship (including adult servants of children). See pgs. 47-49.

<sup>86</sup> It is important to note the similar reactions of Martha and *Ruth*’s Sally regarding their employers’ financial difficulties. See Chapter 29 of *Ruth*, pgs. 373-386. *Ruth* and “Friends in Need” were both written January, 1853.

<sup>87</sup> Gaskell uses a similar theme in “The Squire’s Story” (II. 532-550), published in 1853 for *Household Words*’ Extra Christmas Number.

<sup>88</sup> Like Ellinor and Miss Monro’s friendship in “A Dark Night’s Work,” Anna and Amante’s relationship encompasses all three of Mrs. Gaskell’s types in one complete story, for Amante and Anna move from Mistress/Servant to Mother/Daughter to “Friends in Need.” Regarding Mother/Daughter: Amante is much older than Anna, and periodically refers to her as “my child” (VII. 354); Miss Monro considers Ellinor “almost like a child to her” (VII. 546).

<sup>89</sup> Unlike *Lansbury*, Cosslett is not discussing “The Grey Woman” in this particular instance, but rather all Victorian fiction that has a female friendship essential to the story’s plot.

<sup>90</sup> See E. Holly Pike’s interesting observation of Gaskell’s use of the term “mother” in regards to Susan and Lizzie, pgs. 52-53.

<sup>91</sup> First published in 1863 (titled “How the First Floor Went to Crowley Castle”) for the Extra Christmas Number of *All the Year Round* as an introduction to Dickens’ chain story *Mrs. Lirriper’s Lodgings*. The first three-quarters of the story exist in manuscript form, and were collated by A. W. Ward as “Crowley Castle” in 1906. See A. W. Ward’s Preface (VII. xi) and Critical Introduction (VII. xli-xlii).

<sup>92</sup> This description is quite similar to Lord Furnivall’s “uplifted crutch” falling on the “right shoulder of the little girl” (“The Old Nurse’s Story.” II. 445).

<sup>93</sup> It is important to note that, unlike Maude Furnivall, Bessy’s is not a literal haunting, but rather a reflection of Victorine’s guilt and insane obsession with Theresa. Hence, “Crowley Castle” is not a ghost story, like “The Old Nurse’s Story,” though Victorine is indeed a gothic figure.

<sup>94</sup> “Witchcraft: Classical, Gothic and Neopagan.” *Green Egg*. Pt. I, pgs. 17-18. Qtd. in Adler, pg. 68.

<sup>95</sup> *CD Letters*. VI. 29.

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