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**ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES**

**PROBLEMATIZATION AND FLUIDITY OF GENDER**  
**IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S SHORT FICTION**

**M.A. Thesis**

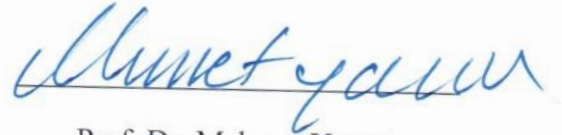
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## ABSTRACT

### PROBLEMATIZATION AND FLUIDITY OF GENDER IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S SHORT FICTION

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Elizabeth Gaskell's short fiction presents a complex portrayal of gender that not only demonstrates but also problematizes the traditional Victorian gender ideology that is based on a hierarchical relationship between men and women. This thesis aims to make a close reading of Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Doom of the Griffiths," "Lois the Witch," and "The Grey Woman," which share certain characteristics such as publication time, length, genre, and subject matter, in order to study the gender portrayal in these texts and explain how they challenged the gender ideology in the Victorian Era. These stories question Victorian values on gender through the representation of patriarchal views on women's status, the depiction of women's victimization in phallogentric societies with oppressors, such as family, society, and religion, and through the portrayal of gender fluidity in male and female characters who both embody and defy conventions. Portraying the victimization of women at different points in their lives: single, married, widowed, and spinster, in all of these stories, stereotypical representations of women are silenced and controversial female figures are assigned greater roles. Moreover, the portrayal of such concepts as motherhood, fatherhood, home, and the gaze further contribute to the unconventional portrayal of gender.

**Key words:** Elizabeth Gaskell, Victorian Era, short fiction, gender problematization, gender fluidity

## ÖZET

### ELIZABETH GASKELL'İN KISA ÖYKÜLERİNDE CİNSİYET KAVRAMININ SORUNSALLAŞTIRILMASI VE AKIŞKANLIĞI

GÜNEŞ, AYŞE

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Elizabeth Gaskell'in kısa öyküleri erkekler ve kadınlar arasında hiyerarşik bir ilişki anlayışına dayanan Viktorya Dönemi geleneksel cinsiyet ideolojisini yalnızca temsil etmez, aynı zamanda sorunsallaştırarak, cinsiyet kavramını muğlak biçimde ele alır. Bu çalışma yayınlanma tarihi, uzunluk, edebi tür ve konu açısından ortak özellikler sergileyen Elizabeth Gaskell'in "Griffith'lerin Laneti," "Cadı Lois" ve "Gri Kadın" metinlerini yakın okuma yöntemiyle inceleyerek, bu metinlerdeki cinsiyet tasvirini ve bu metinlerin Viktorya Dönemi cinsiyet ideolojisini hangi açılardan sorguladığını araştırmayı amaçlar. Bu kısa öyküler kadınların sosyal konumuna ilişkin ataerkil düşüncelerin temsil edilmesi, fallus merkezli toplumlarda aile, toplum ve din gibi baskı unsurlarıyla kadınların mağduriyetinin betimlenmesi ve geleneksel değerleri hem temsil eden hem de bunlara başkaldıran kadın ve erkek kahramanlardaki cinsiyet akışkanlığının tasvir edilmesi aracılığıyla cinsiyet kavramı hakkındaki Viktorya Dönemi değer yargılarını sorgular. Bekar, evli, dul ve hiç evlenmemiş kadınların betimlenmesi sayesinde, kadınların hayatlarının farklı dönemlerindeki mağduriyetlerini ele alan bu öykülerin tamamında basmakalıp kadın betimlemeleri susturulmuş ve kalıpların dışına çıkan kadın betimlemelerine daha önemli roller verilmiştir. Ayrıca, annelik, babalık, ev ve bakış gibi kavramların tasviri geleneklere aykırı cinsiyet betimlemesine katkıda bulunmuştur.

**Key words:** Elizabeth Gaskell, Viktorya Dönemi, kısa öykü, cinsiyet sorunsalı, cinsiyet akışkanlığı

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## INTRODUCTION

### Gender in the Early Victorian Era

The Victorian society was patriarchal, conventional, and sex conscious. On this issue, John Stuart Mill wrote “there remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house” to express women’s unprivileged situation in his “The Subjection of Women” (323). Mill criticizes the Victorian notion of family because of “the unlimited power” given to men and “repression” of women within the confines of family. As Mill explains, although family is assumed to be

a school of sympathy, tenderness, and loving forgetfulness of self, it is still oftener,[...] a school of wilfulness, overbearingness, unbounded self-indulgence, and a double-dyed and idealized selfishness, of which sacrifice itself is only a particular form: the care for the wife and children being only care for them as parts of the man's own interests and belongings, and their individual happiness being immolated in every shape to his smallest preferences. (288-89)

Within the constraints of Victorian family life, women were expected to play the role of “angel[s] in the house,” sacrificing themselves for their children and husbands (Gilbert and Gubar 20).

The role of women was a pressing issue in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Britain was ruled by a woman, separate spheres and the supremacy of men over women were accepted as norms. As explained by Kolmar and Bartkowski, the so-called natural differences between men and women are at the heart of the separate spheres ideology: In Western thought, the “mind” associated with men is privileged over the “body,” which is associated with women who are deemed valuable materials due to their exchange value among men (42-43). Because of their identification with the “body,” women are also associated with “nature;” and due to their presumed lack of the phallus, they are considered inferior to men, and owing to their reproductive capacities, they are regarded as “mysterious, taboo, or dangerous” (43). Moreover, the female body is to be gazed at and shaped by the society; its use is based on “virginity,” as well as “race, and class” (43). As a result of these, “societies assign[ed] them to the private sphere, denying them access to employment, education, and civic life,” and these associations “have grounded both historical and contemporary discussions of ‘men’



and ‘women’” (43). Women were excluded from the “processes of knowledge production” through exclusion from “sites of knowledge production” such as education and government and have been deprived of authority (45); thus, they were associated with the private sphere and were condemned to “public silence” (51).

In line with these associations, John Ruskin describes the Victorian ideology on gendered space: While “rough work in open world” was assigned to the man, “the sacred place” of the home was assigned to the woman who is to be guarded “within his house, as ruled by her” (44). The home, according to Ruskin, was thought to be “the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division” (44).

Nancy LaVerne Childress also comments on the hierarchical understanding of gender as she describes the portrayal of “womanly” judgement as opposed to “manly” judgement in Victorian fiction (ii). As she points out, one of the most important differences between men and women was judgement: “This hierarchical view of ‘womanly’ and ‘manly’ judgement, in which feminine compassion stems from an inability to grasp masculine principle, proved an extremely effective device for those arguing that women were unfitted for public roles” (3-9).

Traditionally, women have faced a “sexual double standard” as they have been associated with “chastity” unlike men who have been permitted and admired for sexual “promiscuity” (Kolmar and Bartkowski 57). The necessity of a childlike innocence in women and a denial of their sexuality was an indispensable part of the Victorian gender ideology; hence Ruskin describes “majestic childishness” as a quality of womanly beauty (47).

In the Early Victorian Era, women could not vote or own property; it was extremely difficult for them to get a divorce and impossible to get the custody of their children; when they did, they had limited employment and educational opportunities. While lower-class women could work in factories or as servants, an unmarried middle-class woman could only work as a governess or a writer. Due to the bad working conditions in factories, underemployment, and the high population of women causing an imbalance, prostitution increased greatly. However, it was also an age of great social change in all areas including women’s place in the society (Abrams et. al. 1055-1057). As a part of the first women’s movement in Britain in the 1850s and 1860s, women started to ask for reforms in property laws, expansion of employment opportunities, improvement of secondary education and availability of higher

education, and suffrage in addition to criticizing women's oppression in domestic life as daughters and wives (Caine 88-102).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, marriage was considered to be what mattered the most for women; thus, women who did not marry were stigmatized, and they were referred to as "redundant" women (Harrison 117). As Emma Liggins explains, the single women represented a transgression of norms:

The woman without heterosexual desire, or a domestic space shared with a husband and children, was stigmatised as 'abnormal, perverted, unnatural.' Yet, the outsider status of lesbians, spinsters, and widows could, and often did, allow them to transgress the norms of female behaviour and to stretch the rules governing sexuality which hemmed in conventional wives and mothers. (1)

Women were infantilized not only through social and cultural conventions but also through laws. Victorian women were disgruntled about their legal disempowerment; thus, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon explained her frustration with the centuries-old laws concerning the property rights of women as laws treated both single and married women unfairly. In 1854, four years prior to the first publication of "The Doom of the Griffiths," according to the property laws in England, the eldest brother was supposed to take "the real property ... land etc. ... as the heir at law" (123). Due to the laws of coverture, a married woman would lose all the legal rights she had as a single woman; all her personal property, land, and money before marriage would become her husband's as well as the money she earned as a married woman (125-26).

The status of married women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain was even worse than single women since a woman would lose her legal status as an individual due to coverture, "the legal doctrine whereby the married woman's identity was absorbed into that of her husband (d'Albertis "Insurgent" 120). As Bodichon points out, at the time, in Victorian England, there was a stark contrast between the legal status of a married woman and a single woman of twenty-one who,

becomes an independent human creature, capable of holding and administering property to any amount; or, if she can earn money, she may appropriate her earnings freely to any purpose she thinks good. Her father has no power over her or her property. But if she unites herself to a man, the law immediately steps in, and she finds herself legislated for, and her condition of life suddenly and entirely changed. Whatever age she may be of, she is again considered as an infant ... she loses her separate existence, and is merged in that of her husband. (129-30)

These laws would change in 1870 thanks to *Married Women's Property Act*, five years after Gaskell's passing.

Thus, Gaskell's contemporary, Margaret Oliphant criticizes coverture as she refers to "Man" as "the grand abstract tyrant," the status of women as "enslavement," and "marrying" as "dying—as distinct, as irrevocable, as complete" (379-80). As she points out, so many Victorian works are written about this pressing issue:

Woman's rights will never grow into a popular agitation, yet woman's wrongs are always picturesque and attractive. They are indeed so good to make novels and poems about, so telling as illustrations of patience and gentleness, that we fear any real redress of grievances would do more harm to the literary world than it would do good to the feminine. (379)

As a matter of fact, repercussions of the Woman Question in Victorian society is depicted vividly through the portrayal of powerlessness of women from all walks of life in all the texts to be analyzed in this thesis.

### **Gaskell Criticism**

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, née Stevenson (29 September 1810-12 November 1865), often referred to as Mrs. Gaskell, was a Victorian novelist, biographer, short story writer, and poet. Her major works are social problem novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, novels on rural life *Cranford* and *Wives and Daughters* and her biographical work *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Daughter of a Unitarian minister, following her mother's early death, Gaskell was raised by her aunt in Knutsford, Cheshire. After her marriage with William Gaskell, she lived in Manchester. A dutiful minister's wife and a mother of six, she was quite unlike other women authors of the Victorian period.

One of her contemporaries, Charles Dickens, spoke highly of Elizabeth Gaskell's power of storytelling by referring to her as his "dear Scheherezade" who could captivate an audience for a thousand and one nights (qtd. in Shor 3). Thus, she received a personal invitation to write for *Household Words* from its editor Charles Dickens and became one of the contributors of the publication (Lohrli 25). Dickens and Gaskell seem to have met in 1849, and had an amicable editorial relationship until the serialization of Gaskell's *North and South* which disrupted their pleasant relationship (Lohrli 277-81). As Alan Shelston pointed out in his 2004 lecture "The

Eagle and the Dove: Dickens, Mrs Gaskell, and the Publishing Culture of the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” this created an “irreparable” break<sup>1</sup> in their relationship and she “deliberately distance[d] herself from *All the Year Round*,” Dickens’ new periodical (19-27). Within this context, following their altercation with regard to *North and South*, Dickens complained about the serialization of one of Gaskell’s short pieces “Half a Life-Time Ago” in his letter to W. H. Wills in September 11, 1855, and expressed his exasperation with Gaskell in a misogynistic manner: “Oh, Mrs. Gaskell, fearful – fearful! If I were Mr. G. O Heaven how I would beat her!” (700). Even though Gerald G. Grubb refers to their relationship as a “friendly struggle,” (92) to borrow Hillary M. Schor’s term, theirs should actually be described as a “vexed” relationship (89). All in all, considering their turbulent professional relations, Dickens’s praise of Gaskell’s talent in storytelling was significant.

Gaskell was an eminent author in her lifetime, but her status as a writer has changed subsequently, and as Jill L. Matus pointed out in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, she fell out of favor after her death (2). Although she was “almost as well received in her day as Charles Dickens, she has not maintained the reputation that Dickens has” (Colby 1). Her loss of fame is closely related to the gender-biased criticism she received after her death as will become apparent later in this chapter.

The earliest study of importance on Elizabeth Gaskell was *Mrs. Gaskell’s Works* by Adolphus William Ward’s Knutsford edition in 8 volumes, printed in 1906. This edition was not a complete one of her texts since it excluded *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and some of her short stories, but it was the most comprehensive one until Joanne Shattock’s 2005 study. Another early study was Ellis H. Chadwick’s *Mrs. Gaskell: Haunts, Homes and Stories* (1913), a biographical study highlighting the connections between Gaskell’s life and her texts. Chadwick describes Gaskell as an exemplary Victorian wife who “never wrote anything without her husband’s approval and sanction,” and through such remarks, she becomes the earliest critic to condemn Gaskell to gender-biased criticism (143).

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<sup>1</sup> Dickens and Gaskell’s altercation was caused by “the unrelenting pressures of pre-advertised weekly installment writing” (Shelston “The Eagle” 19) and “the differing perspectives of writer and editor” (10). The novel *North and South* was longer than they thought it would be and Dickens did not allow Gaskell to write longer which caused an abrupt ending in the version of *Household Words* (23).

In 1934, Lord David Cecil allocated a chapter of his *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* to “Mrs. Gaskell” and his gender-focused analysis directed later criticism about the author. To him, Elizabeth Gaskell was “all a woman was expected to be; gentle, domestic, tactful, unintellectual, prone to tears, easily shocked” (152). Unlike Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot who were “ugly, dynamic, childless, independent, contemptuous of the notion that women should be confined to that small area of family and social interests which was commonly regarded as the only proper province of their sex; fiercely resentful of the conventions that kept them within it,” Gaskell “accepted them with serene satisfaction” and “looked up to man as her sex’s rightful and benevolent master,” so “Mrs. Gaskell was the typical Victorian woman.” (152-53). To Cecil, Gaskell’s femininity made her “a minor artist” with slight “talent” (155). However, it must be pointed out that Cecil’s arguments in relation to Gaskell’s portrayal as a conventional Victorian woman were not based on facts, and to this day, have been criticized heavily.

Cecil continued his gender-biased criticism with his analysis on Gaskell’s fiction arguing that “her work was wholly lacking virile qualities” as her genius and emotional capacity was “purely feminine” (153). He recited “style, poetry, humor, pathos, sensibility to nature, knowledge of character” as Mrs. Gaskell’s virtues and posited a question: “Why has she not got more reputation?” (179); to him, that is because Gaskell wrote “outside of her range” and had two faults resulting yet again from her femininity: first, her portrayal of male characters and dramatic incidents involving violence and brutality were problematic (179-82). Cecil specifically criticized the representation of anima in Gaskell’s male characters who were, as Cecil put it, “imperfectly disguised Victorian women, prudish, timid and demure;” second, the moral lessons she wanted to convey such as the Industrial Revolution and Victorian sexual morality were not subjects suitable for her sex (180-82). In a similar vein, in his 1948 book *The Great Tradition*, F. R. Leavis categorized Elizabeth Gaskell among the “minor novelists” of the Victorian Period (1). This gender-biased criticism had a negative impact on the reception of her novels on industrialization, and the author of social problem novels came to be known as the author of domestic fiction until the 1950s. Cecil’s disapproval of Gaskell’s representation of gender conforms with the separate spheres ideology of his time; however, it is quite ironic that her innovative gender representation has become the topic of many studies to come, including this one.

The 1950s marked a new era in Gaskell studies. Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novels acquired fame once again thanks to Marxist critics such as Raymond Williams, and this time, her non-industrial novels fell out of favor (Stoneman 3). Moreover, in her pioneering study *The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works* (1950), the earliest feminist study on Gaskell, Aina Rubenius aimed to revise the traditional view of "Mrs. Gaskell" as a domestic woman arguing that "it is evident from her books that she was well aware of the special problems of early Victorian woman" (vii). There, Rubenius criticized the status of Gaskellian studies as most studies on Gaskell "have either been of a chiefly biographical nature or have treated her works from a purely literary point of view or concentrated on her treatment of the social conditions of the poor in a large manufacturing town" (vii) although she lived at a time of great change for women. Thus, she combines the analysis of her life as a woman writer and the analysis of the female characters in her texts with the historical conditions of the time. Within this context, Rubenius wrote about women's legal status in the first half of the nineteenth century, Gaskell's marriage, her friends influential in the women's movement, problems of engaged women, factory work, domestic servants, needlewomen, fallen women as well as her attitude towards protective legislation.

The centenary of Gaskell's death (1965) signaled an increased critical interest in her works. Edgar Wright's *Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment* (1965) was a highly influential work in the history of Gaskell criticism as it opposed the well-accepted view of Gaskell as a minor lady novelist and argued that there is a need for the reassessment of her texts using new critical approaches. To contribute to the reassessment of Gaskell as a woman writer by shedding light on her personality and perspective on life, in 1966, editors John Chapple and Arthur Pollard published important resources for Gaskell scholars, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, which reflected her ideas on issues such as gender, class, and religion. As the editors referred to the justification of their publication, this book provided a "unique revelation" and an "intrinsic attractiveness of Mrs. Gaskell's own writings" and allowed Elizabeth Gaskell to speak for herself (Chapple and Pollard xi). The project of publishing Elizabeth Gaskell's letters continued in 2000, as correspondence discovered after 1966 was published in *The Further Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* by John Chapple and Arthur Pollard in 2003.

The 1970s and 1980s early feminist attention was marked by a heightened interest in the concept of domesticity in Gaskell's texts which has been a controversial

issue (Hamilton 185). While earlier critics like Cecil saw femininity and domesticity as Gaskell's greatest attribute and condemned her to obscurity as a minor novelist, later critics like Stoneman argued against this domestic portrayal. Yet, the feminist revival<sup>2</sup> of the texts of female writers in the 70s and 80s mostly ignored Gaskell compared to other writers. This was caused not only by the gender-biased reviews she received but also by the insidious form of feminism in her fiction compared to the other women writers of the time, such as George Eliot or the Brontës. As Stoneman pointed out, Gaskell had "a subtler kind of feminism ... where earlier readers saw only conformity" (ix-x). However, later studies were to reverse this conviction on Gaskell's conformity.

Published in 1974, Françoise Basch's *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67* is a remarkable book studying the status of women in Victorian society. Basch categorizes the female characters in Victorian fiction into three: "the model, the revalued and even sanctified image of the wife-mother," "the single woman, debased and largely caricatured," and "the impure woman, condemned and even damned" (xix). Basch points out how the Victorian woman "was far from the model woman" in reality and in literature (269). The study is important not only because it analyzes the portrayal of these three types of women in Gaskell's novels in detail, but also because it compares Gaskell's characters to those in the works of her contemporaries. Although I personally disagree with Basch's conviction that "Mrs. Gaskell was convinced that the place of mother and daughter was in the home" (185), I find Basch's praise on the portrayal of the impure woman in Gaskell worthy, as Gaskell "attacks the very foundations of the double standard by denouncing the excessive severity of the world's judgement on the guilty woman" (251).

In her seminal work *A Literature of Their Own: British Woman Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977), Elaine Showalter accused earlier critics of gender-biased criticism and the oversimplification of women's literary history in English literature saying, "The concept of greatness for women novelists often turns out to mean four or five writers —Jane Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf—" and she

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<sup>2</sup> In notable works of feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Woman Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman In the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) Gaskell is given a significantly small place compared to other Victorian women writers. For instance, in Gilbert and Gubar's study of 719 pages, Gaskell is mentioned on 6 pages only, while authors such as Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, and George Eliot have chapters dedicated to them.

went on to argue that all theories were derived from them, and this reduced the diversity of English women novelists (6-7). Similar criticism was brought forward by later feminist critics, as well. Following Showalter, critics like Patsy Stoneman reread Gaskell's work using gender theory, and thus, Gaskell finally started to take back her rightful place among major Victorian novelists.

In *Elizabeth Gaskell* (1987), Patsy Stoneman offered not only analyses on her texts, but also presented a historical survey of Gaskell studies, and a revised edition of the study was published in 2006. In her preface to the first edition, Stoneman highlighted that Gaskell was "seen either as a 'lady novelist', author of *Cranford*, or as a 'social problem novelist', author of *Mary Barton*" (xi), and the aim of her study was to argue that "Gaskell's novels are more 'about' women than has been acknowledged" (2). Using a feminist approach, Stoneman aimed to focus on the interaction of class and gender in Gaskell's fiction.

Although Gaskell had an unconventional notion of womanhood, some critics claimed that she was a conventional woman, and Stoneman allocates the second chapter of her study to the refutation of such claims. Gaskell was unconventional both as a woman and a woman writer; for instance, she wrote in her letters about "indelicate" matters (15), was friends with figures "active in the cause of women's rights" (17), was aware of the "tension between home duties and a longing for freedom" (18), travelled around Europe without her husband's company (18), had the power to buy and furnish a house without her husband's knowledge (20), did not see marriage as the only happy ending for women (21), believed that "men and women should both combine rational responsibility with loving care" (22), and expressed difficulty in reconciling her "opposing roles" of motherhood and authorship (22). Later in her study, Stoneman also points out that Gaskell felt "skepticism about the ability of the law to protect women in a society where patriarchal power is entrenched in the most personal relationships" (41).

One reason for the claim of Gaskell's conventionality was her seemingly conventional family life. Although she was famously referred to as a "dove" and "all a woman was expected to be" by Lord David Cecil in comparison to other women writers who are described as "eagles" (152), she actually expressed her opinion on this matter of womanliness clearly in her 1838 letter to Mary Howitt: "I feel a stirring instinct and long to be off ... just like a bird wakens up from its content at the change of the seasons. But ... I happen to be a woman instead of a bird, as I have ties at home



and duties to perform, and as, moreover I have no wings like a dove to fly away” (Gaskell “Letters” 14). Almost a century before Cecil’s description, her letter not only demonstrates that she did not feel like a dove but also criticizes the domestic status of women in the Victorian Period. Her words suggest that Gaskell was limited by the expectations of her society, trapped like a bird without wings who desperately desires to fly but cannot; thus, it becomes apparent that she can neither be resembled to an eagle nor a dove. These words also suggest that she was disturbed by the limitations of her society on women which is in contradiction to claims of her conventionality.

Likewise, Dale Spender focused on gender-biased criticism in her *Man Made Language* (1980) when she made a detailed analysis of Gaskell’s fall as a woman writer at the hands of male critics by pointing to her “success as measured by her popularity and sales” and the criticism she received before and after her gender was known to the public (206-210). To exemplify, before her gender was known, her first novel *Mary Barton* was praised for its realistic portrayal and “breaking new frontiers and exposing social evils,” but after her gender was revealed she was criticized for giving an “incorrect impression” (207). Spender stated that “surveying the reviews which Elizabeth Gaskell’s novels received and juxtaposing them alongside the novels themselves, it is possible to see a systematic pattern of misreading” caused by the inappropriateness of the subject matter in her fiction for her gender (208)<sup>3</sup>.

The foremost development of the 1990s was the immense upsurge in the number of studies on gender addressing the issue with different methodologies. John

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<sup>3</sup> Her social problem novels exposed realistically the terrible conditions in which the working class lived. For instance, in the 1848 review of Gaskell’s social problem novel *Mary Barton* in *The Athenaeum*, the gender of the author is unknown; thus, the review praises the book’s realistic portrayal: “But, we’ve met with few pictures of life among working classes at once so forcible and so fair as *Mary Barton*. The truth of it is terrible. The writer is superior to melodramatic seductions, and has described misery, temptation, distress and shame as they really exist. Only twice has he (?) had recourse to the worn-out machinery of the novelist, and then he has used it with a master’s hand” (Chorley 1050 question mark in the original). However, once the gender of the author was revealed, in the 1849 review of the novel in *The Manchester Guardian*, the author is criticized for her incorrect portrayal: “The only fault of the book is that the authoress has sinned gravely against truth, in matters of fact either above her comprehension, or beyond her sphere of knowledge.... Can the authoress believe this to convey a truthful impression of Manchester life? It is a libel on the workmen of Manchester; they never committed a murder under any such circumstances. It is a libel on the masters, merchants and gentlemen of this city, who have never been exceeded by those of any other part of the kingdom in acts of benevolence and charity, both public and private” (pars. 3-6). As this review clearly states, social ills of the society and class struggle were not issues suited for women; thus, Gaskell was criticized heavily about the subject matters of her fictions as they portrayed the public sphere which was assumed to be beyond her sphere of knowledge. Such criticism suggests that as a woman all she was supposed to write about was the private sphere of womanly matters.

Kucich's "Transgression in Gaskell's Novels" (1990) argued that in Gaskell's novels "women are rigidly masculinized, and men rigidly feminized;" and examples of these are often found in "affinities between fathers and daughters or mothers and sons" especially in their physical appearance and "the contrasts between paired siblings," such as a masculinized daughter in contrast to a feminized son in the family (188). However, this is not a subversive practice to Kucich, and it actually "fits quite comfortably with traditional notions about the separation of spheres," as such a transgression urges "women to be strong in their compassion, and men to be compassionate in their power" (189). However, transgressions are reversed and order is finally sustained in Gaskell's novels, which in Kucich's words should "limit our sense of Gaskell as a sexual reformer" (209).

In 1992, two intriguing books with a feminist perspective appeared: Felicia Bonaparte's *The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester: The Life of Mrs Gaskell's Demon* and Hilary M. Schor's *Scheherazade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel*. Bonaparte used a peculiar methodology which aimed to "examine Elizabeth Gaskell's life and fiction as one continuous metaphoric text ... to explore Elizabeth Gaskell's inner existence ... inaccessible by usual biographical means (1)." Pointing to her marriage and children as the reasons why Gaskell became a model of femininity, Bonaparte explains why she actually was an unconventional woman:

Gaskell did not surrender her income, like other Victorian women, for instance, to her husband to dispose of. She liked to travel, and she often, unlike most women of her day, did not take her husband along. And she appeared at the end of her life, to show an unusual independence for a nineteenth century woman when she purchased and furnished a house without consulting or telling her husband. (2)

She considered this incongruity of Gaskell's femininity to be a direct result of our lack of knowledge concerning her life as Gaskell was fond of her privacy, so she asked her correspondence to be burnt and her biography to never be published; however, according to Bonaparte, her secret self was revealed in her works (3-7). Thus, Bonaparte planned to "'deconstruct' the ideal Mrs. Gaskell ... to 'construct' the inner Gaskell" (11). Engaging a critical perspective distinct from Bonaparte, Schor aimed to highlight the problem that Victorian women writers encountered with respect to the forms of Victorian fiction: dealing with the inherited literary plots and the forces of the marketplace (4). The study aimed to present "a treatment of the career as a whole" instead of "the valuation of any one work over another" (7-8). Using a combination of

Marxist and feminist methodologies, Shor argued that “narrative is a social, and socially determined, act” (7). Therefore, she focused on analyzing “text as a cultural production” and studied Gaskell’s important novels within the framework of literary form, class, and gender (8). To Shor, Gaskell was “a Victorian Scheherazade, writing her own endings to a story she inherited,” for this reason, we should question which stories she was at liberty to tell (9).

Robin B. Colby’s *Some Appointed Work to Do: Women and Vocation in the Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell* (1995) argues that Gaskell’s texts challenge Victorian ideology on gender differences especially within the context of vocation in women’s lives (1). Colby describes Gaskell’s treatment of work as “revealing” and Gaskell herself as a “dissenting voice” opposing traditional Victorian ideology on gender because of her representation of the Woman Question with respect to women’s labor (1-2). The Victorian view of labor as a virtuous and divine activity affiliated with masculinity, regarded women’s labor in factories and households as a tainting and degenerative exercise which could only be “a last resort” making women “pathetic figures of oppression” (2-8). To Gaskell, the Victorian association of femininity with leisure and inactivity was wrong (12). Colby argues that “Gaskell presents the process of finding one’s vocation as central to a woman’s life” despite the presence of romantic plots in her texts (12). Within this context, Colby’s study is eminent as it presents a thorough analysis of vocation in Gaskell’s texts in comparison to her contemporaries and highlights her progressive views in contrast to the ideology of her time.

Studying an under-researched area, Vanessa D. Dickerson’s *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide* (1996) relates Gaskell’s supernatural stories to gender. Dickerson explores what motivated a woman writer in the Victorian Age to write supernatural stories even though this might have marginalized them as it was an age of intellect and materialism. She argues in the introduction to this book that Victorian woman was “the ghost in the noontide, an anomalous spirit on display at the center of Victorian materialism and progress” and supernatural fictions written by Victorian women writers were expressions of women’s “in-betweenness” (10-11). Through her analysis, Dickerson announces that these writers aimed to display the cultural and gendered paradox that led to women’s “ghosthood” as this was a time when “men pushed on to greater and greater heights in science, technology, and administration, women were expected to ground and center this progress, to be the fulcrums for the disequilibrium of change” (10-11).

That Elizabeth Gaskell is referred to as “Mrs. Gaskell” by some critics is a curious issue that requires attention as Gaskell is the only Victorian woman writer identified as “Mrs.” with a deliberate emphasis on her femininity and a highlight on her conventional status as a wife and mother. One might think that considering the Victorian values on gender, this issue can be explained as her preference to publish her fiction under that name; however, that was not the case. As Shirley Foster explains, like many Victorian women writers, Gaskell was “reluctant” to publish her works using her own name because she wanted to avoid gender-biased criticism; thus, she wrote her first three stories under the pseudonym “Cotton Mather Mills, Esq.” and her first novel, *Mary Barton*, anonymously even after her identity had become public, and Gaskell kept writing anonymously to protect her privacy throughout her career except for the publication of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (S.Foster “Introduction” 2-3). This clearly indicates that publishing her fiction under “Mrs. Gaskell” was not the author’s own preference.

The earliest Gaskellian critic to refer to Elizabeth Gaskell as “Mrs. Gaskell” was Adolphus William Ward. Although the author is referred to as “Elizabeth Gaskell” as early as 1929 by Gerald de Witt Sanders in his biographical study *Elizabeth Gaskell*, until the 1980s, she was commonly identified as “Mrs. Gaskell” and her idealized femininity was highlighted even by feminist figures such as Virginia Woolf. In her 1924 essay “Indiscretions” published in *Vogue* magazine, commenting on what our affection for a writer is based on, Woolf notes that “Mrs. Gaskell wields a maternal sway over readers of her own sex; wise, witty and very large-minded, her readers are devoted to her as to the most admirable of mothers” (par. 7). However, in the very same sentence, Woolf refers to her female contemporaries as “Emily Brontë,” and “George Eliot.”<sup>4</sup> After 1980, almost all critics started to refer to Gaskell as Elizabeth Gaskell. However, Gaskell is still referred to as “Mrs. Gaskell” from time to time. For instance, in *The Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (2003), John Chapple and Alan Shelston continue to refer to Gaskell as “Mrs. Gaskell” arguing that Gaskell generally signed her letters as “E. C. Gaskell” (xxii-xxiii). Similarly, the titles of *The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester: The Life of Mrs Gaskell’s Demon* (1992) by Felicia

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Aina Rubenius, names her book as *The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works* (1950). Even in the 1970s, in groundbreaking works of feminist criticism such as *A Literature of Their Own: British Woman Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) by Elaine Showalter (69-71) and *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the author is referred to as “Mrs. Gaskell” (151, 206, 454).

Bonaparte and *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell's Work* (1999) by Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund seem to be continuing the old tradition; however, they actually do this deliberately to challenge Gaskell's conventional portrayal.

Several critics like Lord David Cecil, Felicia Bonaparte, and Sandro Jung have commented specifically on Elizabeth Gaskell's identification as "Mrs. Gaskell" and how this identification is closely related to her conventional portrayal as the epitome of Victorian femininity. Cecil concludes that the great difference between Gaskell and other women writers of the time is indicated in the name under which she is known: "Charlotte Brontë's admirers do not think of her as Mrs. Nichols; George Eliot's admirers would wonder whom we meant if one referred to her as Mrs Cross. But Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson is known to the world as Mrs. Gaskell. This is just as it should be;" overlooking the fact that Gaskell actually wanted to write anonymously, Cecil goes on to say that "this difference is fitly symbolized in the different form of name under which she elected to write. The outstanding fact about Mrs. Gaskell is her femininity" (152). In contrast to Cecil, Felicia Bonaparte criticizes Gaskell's well-accepted femininity and argues that "Mrs Gaskell," the ideal Victorian woman, was a mask behind which the real Gaskell laid (3-11). Likewise, Sandro Jung objects to Elizabeth Gaskell's feminine portrayal and "the unsatisfactory title of 'Mrs. Gaskell'" (Jung iv). As we can understand from the observations of these critics with a widely different perspective on Gaskell, it is undeniable that identifying Elizabeth Gaskell as "Mrs. Gaskell" is nothing but a deliberate action to highlight her assumed femininity. The fact that some critics still continue to refer to her as Mrs. Gaskell is quite bizarre since there is no other writer that is referred to as a someone's wife.

Another interesting issue in Gaskell criticism is the amount of biographical criticism that still continues to be published. This form of literary criticism assumes that there is a close link between an author's life and texts. Thus, it aims to unearth this relationship and find the author's intention for writing the text and make a definitive interpretation of it.

Formalist theorists, Monroe Beardsley and William K. Wimsatt point out that biographical criticism creates an "intentional fallacy" because trying to find out what the author intended is irrelevant to its analysis (468), and they go on to say that once a literary text is published, the critic or the author cannot control the intention:

The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The

poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. (470)

Another formalist theorist, John M. Ellis, challenges biographical criticism on similar grounds explaining the relationship of intent to everyday language and literary texts in order to show what makes a text a piece of literature:

Literary texts are not treated as part of the normal flow of speech, which has a purpose in its original context and is then discarded after that purpose is achieved, and they are not judged according to such limited purposes. ... The one thing that is different about literary texts, then, is that they are not to be taken as part of the contexts of their origin; and to take them in this way is to annihilate the thing that makes them literary texts. (35)

Ellis then goes on to explain how biographical criticism affects a text's process of becoming a piece of literature:

The process of a text becoming a literary text involves three stages: its originating in the context of its creator, its then being offered for use as literature, and its finally being accepted as such. In the final step, society makes the text into literature. The biographical approach returns the text to its former status, and reverses the process of its becoming a literary text. (35)

As Ellis points out by using information that the author decided to exclude from the text, the critic also destroys the work of the author; thus he concludes that the "only reliable evidence of that intent is the poem" so "we should not prefer any other evidence to that of the poem in determining intent" (36-37).

Similarly, post-structuralist theorists, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault have opposed biographical criticism, but unlike formalist critics, they have argued for a multiplicity of meanings in a literary text. Within this context, in "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes refuses to assign "an ultimate meaning" to the text (147) and comments on the function of language and bases his arguments on the difference between literature and practical use of language: "As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality ... the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins" (142). He argues that using a writer's biography to understand a literary text causes the imposition of the meaning in biographical text to the literary text: "To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147). He argues that the author is a myth and the focus of literary criticism should not be the author, it should be the reader: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). Criticizing Barthes' arguments about the author, in "What is an

Author?” Michel Foucault analyzes the relationship between a text and its author and claims that killing the author is not easy to do since it has a function of categorization in the society that affects its circulation (138-142). However, he also points out that “the author-function is not universal or constant in all discourse;” for instance, in contrast to today, before the seventeenth and eighteenth century, literary texts could be published anonymously unlike scientific texts (143). Thus, Foucault both recognizes and problematizes the existence of the author. He then ends the essay with his predictions on the future disappearance of the author considering past historical transformations: “We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author” (148).

Biographical criticism on Elizabeth Gaskell can be used to exemplify how such criticism is unfair to the author as well as the literary text. The source of Gaskell’s domestic portrayal is this sort of biographical criticism. Actually, it is impossible to ignore the stark contrast between earlier gender-biased critiques of Gaskell’s fiction, which assumed that she was an angelic wife and mother, and the recent critiques on her fiction reversing these claims about her domesticity. Biographical criticisms on the author might have created an interpretation of Elizabeth Gaskell as a person and an author, but they have not created valid interpretations of her texts. As I have explained before, the biographical information on Gaskell is still limited since she aimed to protect her privacy by asking people to burn her letters and demanding that her biography would never be published. Thus, with each and every new correspondence of Gaskell, the earlier criticism about Gaskell has been losing its credibility. Actually, even if we knew every single detail of her life, this would still not mean she intended her texts to reflect her life. Due to the reasons mentioned hitherto, in this study, I do not have an aim to unearth the relationship between Gaskell’s texts and her life. Arguing that Elizabeth Gaskell’s short fiction presents a complex portrayal of gender that not only demonstrates but also challenges the traditional Victorian gender ideology based on a hierarchical relationship between men and women, this thesis aims to make a close reading of Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Doom of the Griffiths,” “Lois the Witch,” and “The Grey Woman,” to study the gender portrayal in these texts and explain how they challenged the gender ideology in the Victorian Era.

In 1975, W. A. Craik commented that Elizabeth Gaskell did not receive the attention she deserved in comparison to The Brontës, George Eliot and Hardy: “Though she is admired, it is for a few of her works, and for reasons not central to her

art. The general reader knows *Cranford*, the student of literature reads *Mary Barton* and *North and South* as novels of social concern, while *Wives and Daughters*, probably by general critical consensus felt to be her greatest novel, is seen as the rich nineteenth-century descendant for the art of Jane Austen” (x). Nearly half a century later, the critical and curricular interest in Gaskell in Turkey still seems to be low. As of May 2019, the only books to be studied in English Literature programs around Turkey are *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, and *Cranford*; there have been only ten theses written on Elizabeth Gaskell in Turkish universities and none of these are on her shorter fiction. Since the mid-sixties, the great increase in the number of books on Elizabeth Gaskell has been accompanied by a greater increase in the number of articles focusing on a single work. As Nancy S. Weyant notes in the 1991 and 2001 volumes of her *Elizabeth Gaskell: An Annotated Guide to English Language Sources*, there has been an increase in the critical attention towards Gaskell in recent years worldwide. More theses, books and articles have been written; more studies have been published on her unduly neglected short fiction; and there has been an increase in the critical interest in Gaskell from scholars abroad (qtd. in Shelston “Where Next” 2). Within this context, the under researched status of Elizabeth Gaskell and specifically her short fiction make this thesis an original and much needed study.

This thesis discusses the selected short fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell, which are gothic stories or sensational fiction written towards the end of Gaskell’s career in order to problematize the hierarchical understanding of gender. These stories mainly focus on family, society, and religion as sources of oppression in patriarchal societies, and question the construction of gender against the backdrop of Victorian social and cultural conventions in addition to the legal regulations that endorse the doctrines of “angels in the house” and “separation of spheres.”

All of these stories were published in the second half of Gaskell’s career, a time when she distanced herself from the realistic social problem novel, which brought her enviable fame as well as undue criticism. “The Doom of the Griffiths” was published in 1858, 10 years after her first novel *Mary Barton*; “Lois the Witch” was published in 1861; and “The Grey Woman” was published in 1865, the year she died writing her last work “Wives and Daughters,” leaving it incomplete. Despite the gothic characteristics, these novellas incorporate realistic elements. While the gothic genre creates a safer space for the author to criticize the gender ideology of her time, the verisimilitude facilitates the reader's willingness to suspend disbelief. Thanks to the



narrational distancing through time and space, the stories have a distant yet familiar setting: “The Doom of the Griffiths” is set in 15th or 16th century Scotland; “Lois the Witch” in 16th century America; and “The Grey Woman” is set in 17th century Germany and France. Portraying the prevalence of patriarchal values in different countries at different times, these texts propagate for a non-binary understanding of gender by their choice of subject matter.

Thus, Elizabeth Gaskell’s short fiction studied in the thesis presents a complex portrayal of gender that not only demonstrates but also challenges traditional Victorian gender ideology based on a hierarchical relationship between men and women. This thesis purports to analyse, in detail, Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Doom of the Griffiths,” “Lois the Witch,” and “The Grey Woman” to study the gender portrayal in these texts and explain how they confront the gender ideology in the Victorian Era.

Chapters One, Two, and Three discuss the questioning of traditional gender ideology in “The Doom of the Griffiths,” “Lois the Witch,” and “The Grey Woman” through the representation of patriarchal views on women’s status, the depiction of women’s victimization in phallogocentric societies due to oppressors such as family, society, and religion, and through the portrayal of gender fluidity in male and female characters who both embody and defy conventions. How ideal representations of women are silenced and what sort of greater roles controversial female figures are assigned are explored in these stories, all of which portray the victimization of women at different points in their lives: single, married, widowed, and spinster. Moreover, concepts such as motherhood, fatherhood, home, and the gaze contributing to the unconventional portrayal of gender are related to the arguments put forward in the thesis.

## CHAPTER I

### “THE DOOM OF THE GRIFFITHS”

One of Gaskell’s earliest stories with supernatural elements, “The Doom of the Griffiths” was written in the 1830s, but it was first published in 1858. It recounts the story of a Welsh family, the Griffiths, over nine generations. The first generation is Rhys ap Gryfydd (Griffith) who lived in Wales during the time of Henry IV who ruled the country from 1399 to 1413. However, the story mainly revolves around the eighth generation who most probably lived during the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century. The narrational distancing of the story through time and space serves two purposes: first, it creates a safe distance between the ghastly turn of events and the reader; second, it provides a safer space in which the author can transgress the gender boundaries of the time especially when combined with the supernatural quality of the events to come. The first notable quality of Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Doom of the Griffiths” is the title’s suggestion of suspense and mystery due to the use of the word “doom” and the ancient Celtic surname “Griffiths” which is related to Celtic myths regarding the rising of Owain Glendwr against British rule to which the narrator refers at the beginning of the text. The story refers to the historical Welsh character named Owain Glyndŵr who “led the last major rebellion of the Welsh” against the English King Henry IV, but was defeated (Henken 2-7). As Gaskell’s story recounts, this defeat was partly due to the betrayal of his friend, Rhys ap Gryfydd, the ancestor of the Griffiths family<sup>5</sup>. “Doom” is defined in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* as “fate, lot, irrevocable destiny (usually of adverse fate),” and it has negative connotations such as “final fate, destruction, ruin, death” and “the last or great Judgement, at the end of the world<sup>6</sup>.” In this respect, the title foreshadows the tragedy to fall upon the Griffiths with

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<sup>5</sup>Gaskell describes “The Doom of the Griffiths” as “a story founded on fact” which is to mean it was either related to her or read by her (qtd. in Rubenius 279). The fact-based part of the story is historically limited to the rising of Owain Glendwr; the betrayal of his friend Rhys ap Gryfydd is not supported by historical accounts related to the rising. However, Gaskell might have heard mythical stories about Owain Glendwr.

<sup>6</sup> I include this definition here not to acknowledge or negate the writer’s intention in writing this story but to focus attention on what meaning this word may create in the reader’s mind in order to open the text to different interpretations from a reader-oriented point of view.

a suggestion of predetermination and creates an initial negative expectation in the reader's mind. Dickerson relates the predetermination suggested by the curse to gender: "It is noteworthy that curses are not as common, nor characters quite as impotent, in the supernatural stories of Gaskell's and Elliot's male counterparts.... The curse in supernatural stories appears to be a distinctly feminine phenomenon" as it suggests loss of control and in this respect, it is symbolic of the powerlessness of women over their lives ("Woman Witched" 131).

The portrayal of gender in Gaskell's "The Doom of the Griffiths" is unconventional as it offers a critical perspective to traditional gender ideology in the Victorian Era and portrays gender in non-binary terms. Through elements of intertextuality and a self-conscious narrator, the relationship between reality and fiction is problematized. The gender ideology of the time is questioned by the representation of conventional views on women's status and the depiction of the victimization of women in a phallogentric society where women are infantilized through laws and hence exploited by men especially through the loss of inheritance rights. In this traditional society, women are also confined to the private sphere and a hierarchical relationship between men and women is created. As well as the criticism of such traditional values on gender, gender is questioned through the portrayal of gender fluidity in both male and female characters who embody and defy conventions. To exemplify, despite their association with feminine beauty, major female characters are portrayed as active, rational and powerful figures as opposed to major male characters who are depicted as passive, irrational and weak figures. Moreover, the complex portrayal of concepts such as motherhood, fatherhood, home and the gaze contribute to the unconventional portrayal of gender. Within this context, this chapter analyzes the representation of gender in Gaskell's "The Doom of the Griffiths" with reference to Friedrich Engels's analyses on the roots of women's oppression, Judith Butler's understanding of gender, Sigmund Freud's and Margaret Hallissy's views on women's sexuality, and John Berger's theories on the gaze.

In the novella, the narrator hovers over the story and has no relationship with the characters. The dramatic structure begins with its extradiegetic (the act of narration occurs outside the fiction) and heterodiegetic (the narrator is not a character in the story) narrator's comments on the reason why s/he chose to narrate a story about this Welsh family: "I have always been much interested by the traditions which are scattered up and down North Wales relating to Owen Glendower (Owain Glendwr is

the national spelling of the name), and I fully enter into the feeling which makes the Welsh peasant still look upon him as the hero of his country” (Gaskell “Doom” 103). Here, the use of “I” signifies the presence of an overt narrator that announces his/her presence, and the narrator uses “I” once more to refer to his/her writing process: “But the valley beyond, similar in character, had yet more of gloom at the time of which I write” (105). The narrator also violates the existing frame by addressing the reader as “you” at one point in the text: “If you go from Tramadoe to Criccaeth, you pass by the parochial church of Ynysynhanarn” (105). Thus, with this direct address, metalepsis (frame-breaking) is used “to affirm the fictionality of the text” (Warhol 35).

The story recounts a common theme of Gothic fiction: “the power of ancestral sins to curse and condemn future generations” (Kranzler xvii). In Gaskell’s novella, Owain Glendwr finds out about the betrayal of his friend Rhys ap Gryfydd and puts a terrible curse on his family which leads to the events that are about to be unravelled:

Thou shalt live on to see all of thy house, except the weakling in arms, perish by the sword. Thy race shall be accursed. Each generation shall see their lands melt away like snow; yea their wealth shall vanish, though they may labour night and day to heap up gold. 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. (Gaskell 104)<sup>7</sup>

As Laura Kranzler points out, Gaskell’s Gothic stories “problematize the distinction between history and literature, fact and fiction” (xiv). In this regard, in order to highlight the fictionality of his narrative, the narrator makes allusions to folktales as well as Shakespeare’s play *Henry IV* which also includes a historical figure named Owain Glendwr. The narrator says:

He 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. (Gaskell “Doom” 103)

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<sup>7</sup> Strangely, in his “Exploring the Boundaries in Gaskell’s Short Fiction” Alan Shelston interprets nine generations as “nine years,” and argues that the curse is used “to provide a framework for a story of family inbreeding,” an issue of which there is no overt suggestion throughout the story (20).

These references to folktales and Shakespeare's plays not only problematize the relationship between fiction and reality in general, but also expose the illusion of reality specifically in the story to be told about the Griffiths. The narrator's comment "or Shakespeare says it for him, which is much the same thing" also suggests an ironic stance. Furthermore, the narrator refers to Hotspur's reply to Glendwr's earlier remark about having magical power to call spirits as "irreverent" (103): "HOTSPUR. Why, so can I, or so can any man; But will they come when you do call for them?" (Shakespeare 3.1.532). This remark by the narrator is also an indication of Hotspur's disbelief in Glendwr's claim of possessing magical powers because Hotspur questions if these spirits called by Glendwr will come, and this suggests a questioning of his magical powers and exposes the illusion of reality, as well. Within this context, all of these elements of intertextuality and the self-consciousness of the narrator bring a metafictional quality to the story and cause a questioning of reality.

After the curse, the Griffiths lose their wealth, and the doom is assumed to be real; however, faith in the prophecy is lost as Robert Griffiths, the eighth generation, becomes entitled to an inheritance by right of his wife. Following her brother's death, Mrs. Owen Griffiths<sup>8</sup> could not own property due to the laws of coverture so all her personal property, land, and money would become her husband's. Considering that Victorian women were disgruntled about the centuries-old laws concerning the property rights of women, this section of the text presents a criticism towards the legal status of women, especially the infantilization of married women.

Friedrich Engels criticizes women's confinement to the private sphere, saying "the woman was degraded, enthralled" and became "the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children" in patriarchal societies (736). He goes on to argue that the desire to bequeath private property to the next generation led to a need to control women's fidelity in order to guarantee the paternity of children, and marriage

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<sup>8</sup> Naming is a point that requires analysis in "The Doom of the Griffiths." In Tracy Marie Nectoux's words "Owain Glendwr's name is everywhere, encircling the Griffiths like a shroud" (55). To begin with, the seventh generation's heir is named as Owen; then, Owen's son Robert names his son Owen who gives the same name to his son. The name of the family home, Bodowen, is also reminiscent of the curse. Robert is also a suggestive name as it means "fame" and "bright" which contradicts his role in the story as a notorious figure whose murder of his grandson Owen is instrumental in the realization of the doom. Similarly, Augharad resembles the Welsh name Angharad which means "love" in contrast to Augharad's unloved existence (*A Dictionary of First Names*). Lastly, the name "Nest" is also suggestive of a warm family environment because of its meaning which will be influential in Owen's attraction to her as will be explained later.

caused women's enslavement by men through the unpaid labor they were assigned in the private sphere (737-744).

Hélène Cixous comments on the separate spheres ideology as she observes that the gender representation in traditional societies is based on hierarchical binaries that portray women as secondary to men, and in such societies, "activity," "culture," "head," "intelligible," and "logos" which are concepts associated with men are privileged over "passivity," "nature," "heart," "palpable", and "pathos" associated with women (348).

The portrayal of women in "The Doom of the Griffiths" is a representation of these conventional views sustained by the laws disempowering women in a phallogocentric society. To exemplify, with her traditional gender portrayal, Mrs. Owen Griffiths is a representation of the conventional gender ideology. She has importance in the plotline in two respects: first, her husband becomes wealthy thanks to her inheritance; second, she bears two sons: when the elder dies, the younger son Robert becomes the squire as the ninth generation, ensuring the bloodline and the curse to continue.

Similar to Mrs. Owen Griffiths, Mrs. Robert Griffiths also has a traditional gender portrayal in terms of her association with a weakness of mind and body. She is described as "a gentle, yielding person, full of love toward her husband, of whom, nevertheless, she stood something in awe, partly arising from the difference in their ages, partly from his devoting much time to studies of which she could understand nothing" (Gaskell "Doom" 106-7). Complementing her traditional portrayal, she dies after her second child birth because, according to the narrator, she seems to "lack the buoyancy of body and mind" (107).

Robert Griffiths' offsprings' portrayal is another representation of the conventional gender ideology emphasizing women's inferior status in contrast to men<sup>9</sup>. First, his daughter Augharad, is born, and, years later, his son Owen (Gaskell "Doom" 107). Augharad is described in feminine terms ("blooming"), as unimportant news ("a little"); her birth means "several uneventful years in the household;" in contrast, Owen's birth is described in more favorable terms as he is the much desired one, "the son and heir" (107). Augharad's inferior status is also emphasized through Robert's favorable treatment towards Owen who was the "king of the house," unlike

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<sup>9</sup> Felicia Bonaparte identifies "a recurring pattern of the idolized son" in contrast to a daughter who is neglected in Gaskell's works including "The Doom of the Griffiths" (177-178).

Augharad who “was almost neglected” and “undervalued” (107-108). Furthermore, the text suggests no interaction between the father and the daughter in contrast to the son. To exemplify, Robert “unwillingly” sends Owen to a Grammar School as he does not want to part with him, but until Augharad’s marriage both men seem to ignore her existence completely; in contrast to this, after her marriage, they both realize that they “missed” Augharad (108-09). Despite this remark, following her marriage, she disappears from the father’s and the brother’s lives completely; she is not mentioned even once throughout the rest of the story. The narrator has a critical stance about the unfair treatment that Augharad receives from her father; “she was so accustomed to give way to him [Owen] that it was no longer a hardship;” thus she is described as the “poor, motherless girl” whose face is “often anything but bright” by the narrator who sympathizes with her situation (107).

Similar to her grandmother and mother, who were also “the angel[s] in the house” (Gilbert and Gubar 20) devoting themselves to their husbands and children, Augharad occupies a conventional and domestic place; she is described in feminine terms as “patient,” “quiet,” and “loving;” furthermore, she is important as the maternal figure who “peacefully” kept the domestic environment in order by performing “so many thoughtful, noiseless little offices, on which their [Robert’s and Owen’s] daily comfort depended” (Gaskell “Doom” 109). In fact, she is missed by her father and brother only within this context: “the servants roamed about in search of commands and directions, the rooms had no longer the unobtrusive ordering of taste to make them cheerful, the very fires burned dim, and were always sinking down into dull heaps of gray ashes” (109). However, considering how the close relationship between the father and the son was disrupted following her marriage, it becomes evident that she brought not only order to the domestic environment of the household, but also balance to the relationship between the father and the son as she had become the maternal figure in the house replacing her mother.

Her minor role in the story in contrast to her brother and her absence from the rest of the story is a representation of the conventional gender ideology which regards women as unimportant to the bloodline. She is deemed unimportant for the rest of the story because of her insignificance to the doom that is to fall on the Griffiths family as continuity of the bloodline is generally related to a son not a daughter.

Within this context, Glendwr curses Rhys ap Gryfydd saying “when nine generations have passed from the face of Earth, thy blood shall no longer flow in the

veins of any human being” (Gaskell “Doom” 104). By specifically indicating that after nine generations the Griffith lineage will not continue, Glendwr assumes that descent through the male line is the norm, and hence disregards the fact that women can actually continue the bloodline.

In her discussion of the gothic elements in Gaskell’s stories, Laura Kranzler observes that Gaskell’s gothic stories transgress boundaries on “gender, history and textuality” (xii). In fact, in “The Doom of the Griffiths” all of these issues are problematized: as I have explained before, gender through the portrayal of female as well as male characters, and history and textuality by combining fact and fiction. Kranzler also explains how “powerful men conflict with their disempowered daughters and, occasionally, their sons” (xxi), how these stories express “problems of domesticity” and speak for “the silenced women” (xxviii). Within this context, she considers Robert’s treatment towards Owen to be an example of parental violence; however, Robert’s maltreatment of his daughter should also be mentioned as her existence is absolutely ignored by her father.

There is an obvious “homosocial desire” between the father and the son, and their relationships with the women in their lives lead to an irreparable damage caused by their jealousy of these women’s place in one another’s life (Sedgwick 1). To begin with, Augharad’s marriage causes a rift between the son and the father because Robert is offended by Owen’s remarks regretting Augharad’s intended marriage as well as his happiness about returning to school following the ceremony. When Owen hears about Augharad’s future marriage, he feels “stunned,” has “bitter regrets” about the way he has treated her and “the Squire was thoroughly hurt and chagrined at the repeated exclamations of ‘What shall we do when Augharad is gone?’ ‘How dull we shall be when Augharad is married!’” (Gaskell “Doom” 109). Robert has always thought that he was the only valuable person in Owen’s life and is clearly jealous of Owen’s brotherly affection towards Augharad.

Another reason behind the deterioration of their relationship is Robert’s marriage following Augharad’s departure. Unlike the previous years, Robert does not visit his son’s school and does not send a letter for a long time. Finally, when he sends a letter, this is to inform Owen that he has married a widow with a son about which Owen feels “rage” and “anger:”



They had been so much to each other; and now a shapeless, but too real something had come between him and his father there for ever. He felt as if his permission should have been asked, as if he should have been consulted. Certainly he ought to have been told of the intended event. So the Squire felt, and hence his constrained letter which had so much increased the bitterness of Owen's feelings. (Gaskell "Doom" 110)

Until that day, he thought he was the most important person in his father's life, his "confidant" and "companion" (110). Then, however, he feels as if he is being replaced by his stepmother and her son<sup>10</sup>. When he returns home and meets the beautiful stepmother who seems to be charming, Owen feels less angry, but he cannot trust her fully. Slowly, Owen starts relating the changes in his father's character to "his stepmother's secret influence" (111). At this point in the text, the narrator uses Owen as the focalizer to suggest an unreliability in his interpretation of events. As Owen sees it, his stepmother's wishes are fulfilled, but Owen's wishes are thwarted and he becomes a "cipher" in the house whom Robert seems to avoid (111-12). The narrator implies that there is no obvious reason for Owen's distrust and this might just be Owen's imagination. However, later on, the narrator suggests that the disruption is neither completely Robert's fault nor Owen's and they are both unreliable in their observations. On the one hand, Robert actually seems "rather to avoid than to seek him [Owen] as a companion" and shows "indifference" to his feelings and wishes; on the other hand, Owen is "seldom unimpassioned enough to be perfectly observant" and has become "moody and soured" (112). Actually, as the narrator specifically points out, the stepmother is also to be blamed in this matter and is disturbed by Owen's return from college as the heir:

Some cause of difference occurred, where the woman subdued her hidden anger sufficiently to become convinced that Owen was not entirely the dupe she had believed him to be. Henceforward there was no peace between them. Not in vulgar altercations did this show itself; but in moody reserve on Owen's part, and in undisguised and contemptuous pursuance of her own plans by his stepmother. ... he was thwarted ... by his father's desire, apparently, while the wife sat by with a smile of triumph on her beautiful lips. (112)

As is obvious with the phrase, "a smile of triumph", the stepmother had some ulterior motives all along, and Owen's distrust was not completely unfounded. Under these circumstances, Owen believes that he is replaced by his stepmother and her son who

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10 Felicia Bonaparte identifies a connection between Gaskell's own life with a stepmother and half-siblings and the sense of neglect felt by Augharad and Owen (64).

would become his father's "little favourite" (128); thus he tries to stay away from the "gloomy negligence of home," and seemingly finds the love and attention he longs for at a hostel where he meets his future wife Nest (113).

Finally, Owen's marriage to Nest separates the father and the son further. The text distinctly makes a connection between Owen's troubled home environment and his desire to find peace outside which becomes evident thanks to the stark contrast between the description of home and the hostel where he meets Nest, whose name represents a warm family environment as explained earlier. Since home did not mean love, attention, peace, and care anymore, Owen starts leaving the house "at the early day dawn, sometimes roaming about on the shore or the upland, shooting or fishing," and daydreaming and sometimes spending his evenings at a public-house "where the welcome, hearty, though bought, seemed so strongly to contrast with the gloomy negligence of home—unsympathising home" (Gaskell "Doom" 112-13). Owen still regards Bodowen as "home" despite its hostile atmosphere. One evening, a small hostel lures him with its "light," "cheeriness" in contrast to his home; he relishes the "merry greetings," the constant "smile" of the hostess, "the rural wedding;" and just as he was about to leave he sees "a village belle," his future wife Nest, the daughter of Ellis Pritchard who is a farmer and fisherman (114-19). At the end of the night, the young couple is full of admiration for one another; thus, Owen starts going to her house every day. The hostile atmosphere of the Squire's gentry household is also portrayed in contrast to the welcoming atmosphere of Ellis Pritchard's farmer's household at Ty Glas:

his being welcome was enough to attract the poor young man ... He left a home ... where no tones of love ever fell on his ear ... where his presence or absence was a matter of utter indifference; and when he entered Ty Glas, all ... seemed to rejoice. His account of his day's employment found a willing listener in Ellis; and when he passed on to Nest ... the gradual yielding of herself up to his lover-like caress, had worlds of charms. (119-20)

Following "repeated days of happiness," he gets married to Nest secretly, and after some time, Nest gives birth to a baby boy (120-21). Thus, Owen finally feels blessed with the happiness he has been looking for, making him forget "all besides the present; all the cares and griefs he had known in the past, and all that might await him of woe and death in the future" (122). As this sentence foreshadows, their bliss is not to continue for long. When the squire hears about their secret marriage, he stands before them as a terrifying figure "white with restrained passion" with foam flowing from his

lips, and he calls Nest “yr buten” <sup>11</sup> i.e. “the fair harlot;” their marriage an “accursed wiving” that “disgraced” Owen; and their baby boy “the child of another” (123). When Owen fails to follow his order “to cast away that miserable, shameless woman’s offspring,” the squire is filled with “ungovernable rage,” snatches the baby, throws it at Nest, and leaves the house without any knowledge of the result of this action, causing the instantaneous death of the baby boy (122-24). At this point, Owen does not realize that his father is not aware of the baby’s death.

Leaving grief-stricken Nest with her father, Owen goes out and reaches a solitary spot where he used to go before he met Nest to get a piece of mind. The change of weather reveals his change of mood from a state of euphoria to utter misery which stirs up the dark thoughts that haunt him:

the little pool was no longer the reflection of a blue and sunny sky: it sent back the dark and slaty clouds above ... Presently the rain came on ... He sat on the dank ground, his face buried in his hands, and his whole strength, physical and mental, employed in quelling the rush of blood, which rose and boiled and gurgled in his brain as if it would madden him.

The phantom of his dead child rose ever before him, and seemed to cry aloud for vengeance. And when the poor young man thought upon the victim whom he required in his wild longing for revenge, he shuddered, for it was his father! (Gaskell “Doom” 126)

The relationship between the father and the son is shaped by a great fear and love foreshadowed earlier in the text by the father’s remarks to his son when he was a little boy: “Get thee away, my lad; thou knowest not what is to come of all this love” (108). Distrusting his self-control and dreading his doom, Owen decides not to face his father; however, he has to get the money locked in the Squire’s house, Bodowen, in order to leave the country with Nest.

The tragic ending of the story also suggests a strong male bonding between the father and the son. Even in this situation, Owen is filled with “regret” when he looks at Bodowen and thinks of his father:

Would he then awaken to regret for the conduct which had driven him from home, and bitterly think on the loving and caressing boy who haunted his footsteps in former days? Or, alas! would he only feel that an obstacle to his daily happiness—to his contentment with his wife, and his strange, doting affection for the child—was taken away? Would they make merry over the heir’s departure? (Gaskell “Doom” 127)

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<sup>11</sup> This probably means “y butain,” the whore (Gaskell 353).

Obviously, Owen is filled with jealousy towards his stepmother who has taken his place in his father's heart. As he is about to leave Bodowen unseen, his stepbrother who has also replaced him and became Robert's "little favourite" comes into his room and defames his wife by calling her "yr buten" (a whore), and as the stepbrother passes on, "daringly to mocking words relating to the poor dead child," Owen strikes the little boy whose age is unknown (127-128). When he runs into his father following this altercation, his father locks him into the room, but he manages to escape.

Following this, the past and the present are juxtaposed. As Owen escapes, he sees his father consoling his stepmother. This highlights Owen and Robert's current relationship as opposed to the past because in the past Owen was Robert's companion, but now the stepmother has obviously replaced him. Another juxtaposition between past and present is suggested by the boat that Robert previously gave Owen as a present, because Robert dies by hitting his head against the side of the boat when chasing Owen. Once more, Owen's close bond with his father is reiterated by his regret following his father's death:

"Father, father!" he cried, "come back! come back! You never knew how I loved you! how I could love you still—if—Oh God!"  
And the thought of his little child rose before him. "Yes, father," he cried afresh, "you never knew how he fell—how he died! Oh, if I had but had patience to tell you! If you would but have borne with me and listened! And now it is over! Oh father! father!" (Gaskell "Doom" 131)

Despite the fact that his father has killed his little son, Owen still loves him. Lying next to his father's corpse in the boat, he sails away reminiscing about his childhood "when Owen had shared his father's bed, and used to waken him in the morning to hear one of the old Welsh legends" (131). He cannot believe that he has killed his father; when he finally accepts that he has died, he says, "It was my doom, father! It would have been better if I had died at my birth!" kissing his father's brow (132). After he comes home to Ty Glas in a devastated state and tells his wife and his father-in-law Ellis what has happened, Ellis makes a plan for Owen and Nest to leave.

That the story is open-ended leaves the reader in suspense as the ending can suggest both the realization or the reversal of the doom. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as the realization of the doom as the son has killed the father and is sailing into "stormy waters" (Gaskell "Doom" 138). With a drastic need to put the blame on the fatalistic nature of the doom, Owen wants himself and his father to be redeemed of

their sins; thus, he feels his father's spirit near him and hopes that his baby boy guides his father to heaven. However, as the boat with his father's corpse has broken loose and is nowhere to be found, all hope for reconciliation with his father is lost for Owen, because "now it appeared to him as if there was to be no forgiveness; as if his father revolted even in death against any such peaceful union" (137). Hence, the story ends in a dark atmosphere, with all hope lost, with prophecy fulfilled: "... with Owen wild, despairing, helpless, fate-pursued, what could he do? They sailed into the tossing darkness, and were never more seen of men. The house of Bodowen has sunk into damp, dark ruins; and a Saxon stranger holds the lands of the Griffiths" (138). The dark imagery at the end of the story could suggest that Owen has died during his journey or that he has never had another child. On the other hand, the open ending can be interpreted as the reversal of the doom because, as the narrator comments, the disappearance of Robert's corpse is a "simple and natural" event that affects Owen "in an extraordinary manner" as he has an "excited and superstitious mind" (137). Despite the fact that the curse says there will be no one with the Griffiths blood left alive after the son kills the father, Owen is alive at the end of the story and has a spouse to whom he promised to help with the death of her child after they "all go together," and to whom he has promised to "never come home again," to this "accursed" place (136). This might be the reason why they "were never more seen of men" who knew them (138). Actually, Owen and Nest could have started a new life somewhere else, had more children, and broken the curse. Carol A. Martin refers to the presence of ambiguity about the realization of the doom "which forces the reader to decide whether supernatural or psychological explanations are called for" despite the depiction of a curse fulfilled in this story (28). Although both interpretations seem possible, the dark imagery related to nature suggests that something bad has happened to Owen and Nest and they got killed most probably at sea as they had to find their way "through those stormy waters" and "they sailed into the tossing darkness" (Gaskell "Doom" 138). Furthermore, the description of Owen's state of mind contributes to this negativity as he was "wild, despairing, helpless, fate-pursued" (138). Thus, that Owen and Nest died that night becomes a more likely interpretation. However, even if they died that night, this does not necessarily mean that supernatural forces were at work. Personally, I interpret the realization of the curse as a socially constructed, self-fulfilling prophecy

because the text focuses on Robert's and Owen's belief on the inevitability of the curse as explained before<sup>12</sup>.

The conventional gender portrayal of Mrs. Owen Griffiths, Mrs. Robert Griffiths, and Augharad is complicated by the portrayal of the second Mrs. Robert Griffiths (the stepmother) and Nest Pritchard/Griffiths who have fluid gender identities as they follow the traditional gender ideology in some respects while defying conventions in others. The stepmother represents a contrast between inner and outer beauty. She is introduced to the reader from the eyes of Owen who thought "he had never seen so beautiful a woman for her age" and "watched her with a sort of breathless admiration" because of "her measured grace, her faultless movements, her tones of voice;" as a conventional upper-class woman, her significant qualities were her beauty and manners (Gaskell "Doom" 110). As the narrator specifically points out, these feminine qualities of the stepmother "made Owen less angry at his father's marriage" because as an orphan "he had seen little of female grace" (110).

Unlike her feminine characteristics of beauty, the stepmother is portrayed as a powerful and cunning figure which is in contradiction to the widespread Victorian assumption that women are in need of rational guidance. As David Glover and Cora Kaplan explain, "emotion is a key element in every definition of femininity in this period" (15). Within this context, Robert and Owen are portrayed as the weaker, irrational, and emotional figures as they are outwitted by the stepmother. To begin with, Owen, who was angry due to his father's sudden marriage, is taken in by the stepmother's beauty; next, he is taken in by her manners. Over the years, Owen begins to relate the changes in his father's character to his stepmother, but he gives an emotional response with his "moody reserve" to the stepmother's rational "pursuance of her plans" (Gaskell "Doom" 112). As years pass, she stealthily takes control of the Squire and the household:

Squire Griffiths caught up his wife's humbly advanced opinions, and, unawares to himself, adopted them as his own, defying all argument and opposition. It was the same with her wishes; they met their fulfilment, from the extreme and delicate art with which she insinuated them into her husband's mind, as his own. She sacrificed the show of authority for the power. (111)

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<sup>12</sup> In line with this argument, Jenny Uglow interprets the realization of the curse as a "not divinely but socially constructed" phenomenon "carried through generations of patriarchal pride" (*Elizabeth Gaskell* 123).

Thus, the narrator explains how the stepmother also deceives her husband who ostensibly has the authority, but actually has no power. As Felicia Bonaparte argues, the stepmother in this story is an “extraordinary” female figure; although she “is a minor character, she plays no minor role” (60).

As Judith Butler explains, “power appeared to operate in the production of that very binary frame for thinking about gender” (“Preface” xxx). Power, mind, and speech are concepts that are traditionally associated with masculinity in contrast to weakness, body, and silence associated with femininity. In this respect, the stepmother has a complex gender portrayal. Although she is associated with feminine beauty, she possesses more mental power than Robert and Owen, so she controls Robert and is not portrayed as a silent figure since she actually has planted her “humbly advanced opinions” in Robert’s mind (Gaskell “Doom” 111). He might be the one voicing them, but actually this is only a “show of authority” not real “power” (112).

In this respect, the stepmother’s portrayal is in accordance with the fairytale motif of the evil stepmother who tries to hurt her stepchild because of jealousy although there is a twist about the gender of the stepchild in “the Doom of the Griffiths.” In the case of the famous fairytale character Snow White, for example, her evil stepmother desires to be the “fairest of all,” so she plots to kill her (Grimm 171). In a similar manner, in “The Doom of the Griffiths,” the stepmother desires to take control of the household and be the most powerful of all; thus, she is disturbed by Owen’s return as the heir to Bodowen, so she tries to sever the relationship between the father and the son as explained before. While commenting on the Victorian ideals on gender and the so-called innate differences between men and women, John Ruskin emphasizes that a woman “must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side” (45). Thus, the portrayal of the stepmother as an evil feminine figure stands in stark contrast to the Victorian notion of women as angelic figures.

Her use of the power of speech to control Robert’s mind can also be exemplified through the disclosure of Owen and Nest’s marriage. The narrator explains that the disclosure of the secret marriage and exaggeration of Nest’s flirtatious reputation was a part of the stepmother’s plan. That she describes Nest to Robert as a “‘woman of the grove and brake’—for centuries the Welsh term of opprobrium for the loosest female characters” is the reason why Robert is angry at Owen, not his secret

marriage, as he berates Owen solely about Nest's bad reputation (Gaskell "Doom" 128). Although everyone at Bodowen knew about Owen and Nest's marriage, it was the stepmother who told Robert about Owen's marriage to a loose woman "with many tears" (128). Hence, the stepmother's lack of inner beauty slowly causes the doom. Despite using tears as weapons, which is a stereotypical part of her portrayal, she transcends gender boundaries and creates a reversal of the traditional values on gender since she is not portrayed as a traditional passive female figure. Her portrayal as a mother complements her unconventional portrayal. Although she comes to Bodowen with her little son of three, except for her reaction following the altercation between her son and Owen, there is no description regarding her maternal qualities.

The stepmother's status as a widow differentiates her from the other women in the story who are limited by the social expectations about being a daughter or a wife. A widow is a woman available for marriage and does not have a guardian which makes her more powerful than the other women, but she is aware of her sexuality, so, to the Victorian mind, she is a figure that creates fear as Nadine Muller points out (100). Many rules limiting women in the Victorian Era did not apply to widows. Hence, Charles Dickens writes "Widders are 'ceptions to ev'ry rule" in *Pickwick Papers* (422). As explained earlier in this chapter, the stepmother in the story reflects the complicated status of Victorian widows as powerful and feared figures that can overstep gender boundaries.

Nest is another female figure who has a fluid gender identity defying conventions in some respects. She is also introduced to the reader through the eyes of Owen, but unlike the stepmother, Nest is not described as an utter beauty. Despite her "extreme prettiness," her face can "never be called handsome" and although she has "splendid" eyes, her nose is "the most defective feature" (Gaskell "Doom" 115). Like her outer beauty, she has internal flaws, as well. For instance, she is not solely impressed by Owen's character; his social position is also an attraction for her. She had "her father's worldliness," but she was attracted to "his expressive and occasionally handsome countenance" (117). However, following her marriage, Nest turns into a perfect wife and mother who is truly in love with her husband and son and does everything to make her husband happy as an angelic feminine figure. That the narrator considers Nest's change following her marriage to be a verification of "beautiful fable of Undine" is relevant to the portrayal of gender because the fable reflects the submissiveness that is expected of women (120). According to the



fairytale, Undine, a mischievous water spirit without a soul, goes through a massive transformation and becomes an obedient wife following her marriage thanks to which she gains a soul<sup>13</sup>. Like Undine, Nest is transformed and her transformation is represented in her feelings for her husband and her son. Her change following marriage is described as such:

How often do we see giddy, coquetting, restless girls become sobered by marriage? A great object in life is decided; one on which their thoughts have been running in all their vagaries, and they seem to verify the beautiful fable of Undine. A new soul beams out in the gentleness and repose of their future lives. An indescribable softness and tenderness takes place of the wearying vanity of their former endeavours to attract admiration. Something of this sort took place in Nest Pritchard. If at first she had been anxious to attract the young Squire of Bodowen, long before her marriage this feeling had merged into a truer love than she had ever felt before; and now that he was her own, her husband, her whole soul was bent toward making him amends. (120)

Nest's transformation is also emphasized through the portrayal of her maternal feelings which are described most apparently in her reaction following her son's death. First, she faints; then, she "is half stupefied with crying;" for instance, after "nursing her babe on her knee as if it was alive," she "softly la[ys] her baby in its cradle" although she is aware that it has died (133). This reaction of fainting might be interpreted as a sentimental act suggesting femininity; however, as Rubenius contends,

Mrs. Gaskell had no patience with the 'womanly', simpering creatures with a habit of fainting in all exciting and difficult situations, who usually figured as heroines in the novels of sentimentality. Mrs. Gaskell's heroines hardly ever faint to escape a difficulty. If they faint at all they generally do so after they have grappled with the situation and weathered the crisis. And they do not sink down in a graceful swoon to evoke the protective chivalry of the hero. (17-18)

In this respect, that Nest does not faint to avoid confrontation with Owen's father should be taken into consideration; when she faints, it is after Robert has left having murdered her little baby and because she cannot grapple with the death of her child. Furthermore, fainting is portrayed as a humane reaction as Owen also almost faints following his son's death. Later on, Owen and Nest are associated with parental tenderness as both look at their dead son's face "long and tenderly; [kiss] it, and [cover] it up reverently and softly" (135). In contrast to an elaborate account of her husband's

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<sup>13</sup> *Undine* is a fairy-tale that emphasizes the transformative power of marriage on women; Undine who is described as a "childish," "wayward" and "perverse" (De La Motte-Fouqué 50-51) water spirit in the shape of a woman is transformed into "a sweet wife" of "loveliness and grace" (57); she used to be "whimsical and petulant" but she became "mild and gentle as an angel" (58) following her marriage.

paternal qualities, there is not a detailed reference to Nest's maternal qualities throughout the story which is similar to the portrayal of the stepmother.

Nest has a complicated portrayal in terms of her sexuality, as well. On the one hand, she acts with "reserve and shyness" during Owen's first visit to their house; on the other hand, she puts every "worldly plan" and "womanly wile" into practice to win Owen's heart (Gaskell "Doom" 118-19). She has a bad reputation as she is flirtatious and has "a great love of admiration" (117). As the narrator implicitly insinuates, in the past, Nest "went to the extreme lengths of Welsh courtship," but "except some very slight flirtations at Oxford, Owen had never been touched" (117-18)<sup>14</sup>. Nest's experience in flirting in contrast to Owen's inexperience creates a reversal of traditional Victorian association of women with purity. That Nest breaks the rules of courtship is the only reason why she is rumored to be a loose woman. Within this context, Nest's relationship with sexuality is also significant because it is an expression of the double standard that women face with regard to sexual activities for which they are punished as they are not allowed to have desires.

At times, Nest's assertive portrayal is complicated with her timid behavior towards Owen. Although she is associated with feminine passivity with "the gradual yielding of herself up to his lover-like caress," she is also associated with assertive masculine activity when she murmurs into "his ear her acknowledgment of love" while she encircles his neck "by her clasp[ing] arms" (120). Historically, "female interest in or commitment to sexual pleasure was, and possibly still is, threatening to many men and women" (Simon and Gagnon 107). Women are taught to be sexually passive, and as Nest is an active figure, she is considered to be guilty of promiscuity. However, she was supposed to refrain from such manners as these caused rumors about her chastity.

Nest's awareness of her sexuality is a critique of the Victorian ideology arguing for the necessity of a childlike innocence in women and a denial of their sexuality. Deborah Gorham describes the results of such a loss of innocence as "an imminent danger of becoming unchaste" as "such girls could easily become sexually loose and fall prey to seduction or themselves seduce the men they hoped to ensnare in matrimony" (54), and this is actually what happens in the story as the rumors and unrealistic expectations from young women contribute to the realization of the doom. Traditionally, society associates "authority, leadership, and decisiveness" with

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14 Felicia Bonaparte identifies lack of maternal love as a cause for every sin and crime in Gaskell's fiction and considers Nest's flirtatious nature to be an example of that (20).

masculinity, and “accommodation, interpersonal sensitivity, subservience, and warmth” with femininity and judge women and men “differently for engaging in sexual activity” (Lips 48-53). Moreover, as Patricia Ingham points out, the Victorian society considered sexual deviance to be an “endemic among the working classes” (24), and Robert’s accusation of Nest reflects such a state-of-mind associating lower class women with immorality. As the narrator points out, these accusations are all false, which supports Ingham’s claim that Gaskell “perceive[s] and represent[s] domesticity and the Angel/House sign in a subversive way (30).

Within this context, the change in Nest’s relationship with shame is another issue to be analyzed that suggests a reversal of Victorian association of women with purity. As W. Ray Crozier argues, “shame involves taking an ‘other’ perspective on the self” and “it is experienced when the individual recognizes that his or her action gives rise to a particular kind of interpretation by others even if he or she does not believe that interpretation to be justified” (273-274). The first episode of Nest’s shame is initiated by her father’s advice, most probably related to acceptable forms of courtship, when Owen visits the Pritchard household:

Before Nest had shyly dared to enter, her father, who had been mending his nets down below, and seen Owen winding up to the house, came in and gave him a hearty yet respectful welcome; and then Nest, downcast and blushing, full of the consciousness which her father’s advice and conversation had not failed to inspire, ventured to join them. To Owen’s mind this reserve and shyness gave her new charms. (Gaskell “Doom” 118)

Thus, Nest is portrayed as an angelic feminine figure in the house in contrast to her flirtatious portrayal in the inn. The second episode of shamefulness is initiated by Owen’s own shame: “As Owen became more serious in his feelings, he grew timider in their expression, and at night, when they returned from their shooting-excursion, the caress he gave Nest was almost as bashfully offered as received” (119). The last episode of her shame is caused by her self-awareness about the initial reason of her attraction to Owen. As Nest falls in love with Owen, she grows ashamed of her initial worldliness regarding her attraction to Owen because he was of noble birth. Hence, the initial portrayal of Nest as an assertive female figure not ashamed of her sexuality and worldliness, expressed through her flirtations, conflicts with her later portrayal as her relationship with Owen moves forward because she takes an external view on her actions and her self-awareness results in shame.

Nest also has a complicated portrayal in terms of power; although she is not portrayed as a physically weak figure, following her baby's death, Nest faints. However, just as she "clasp[s]" Owen's neck to express her love (Gaskell "Doom" 120), she "clasp[s]" the bundle with her baby "softly and tightly" (136). Also, following Robert's death, Owen is so weak that Nest helps him to "take off the wet garments which he would never have had energy enough to remove of himself" (135). Nest represents a combination of moderate inner and outer beauty, morality, wit, power, and worldliness; and her complex and realistic portrayal causes a reversal of the gender boundaries.

Taking a closer look at the relation between femininity and evil in "The Doom of the Griffiths," one could easily see the virgin-whore dichotomy in the portrayal of the Griffiths women. Freud refers to this dichotomy that leads to some of his male patients' problematic relationships with sexuality caused by a rigid categorization of women either as Madonnas or whores: "The whole sphere of love in such persons remains divided in the two directions personified in art as sacred and profane (or animal) love. Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love" (251). Within this context, Margaret Hallissy points out, it is traditionally assumed that Eve brought sin and death into the world, and "underlying the image of every venomous woman is the image of her mother, Eve" who eats the fruit "to gain superiority over Adam, who in consequence suffers a loss;" in contrast, Mary is brought to undo Eve's wrongdoings (15-16). In this respect, while Mrs. Owen Griffiths (the grandmother), the first Mrs. Robert Griffiths, and Augharad Griffiths are portrayed as Mary-like angelic figures, the second Mrs. Robert Griffiths (the stepmother) is a representation of Eve as the serpent-like figure who first deceives Robert and Owen with her beauty, then poisons her husband with her opinions, and gains power over him. Thus, she brings sin and murder to the Griffiths household. These representations of femininity do not only demonstrate this dichotomy but also problematize the misogynistic concept of the venomous woman which is a reflection of feminine power causing masculine fear. The virgin-whore dichotomy is further complicated through the portrayal of Nest Pritchard/Griffiths who is neither Mary-like nor Eve-like; on the one hand, she is portrayed as the flirtatious woman with a bad reputation who plots to raise her social status by marrying Owen secretly; on the other hand, after their marriage, she is depicted as the angelic wife and mother. Thus, gender is portrayed as an unstable identity by the subversion of the virgin/whore dichotomy.

The depiction of motherhood in “The Doom of the Griffiths” is another transgressive issue. Maura Dunst posits the view that “Gaskell’s fictional mothers have in common suffering, silence, and lack of agency” (57). The representation of motherhood in female characters with lesser importance to the plotline in this story carry these qualities as all are silenced. Dunst also identifies isolation as the most common quality of motherhood in Gaskell’s texts manifested in a number of ways, such as physical separation from their societies or families, confinement to the house or parts of the house, distant relations with other family members, intellectual isolation, isolation through illness or death (57). The contrast between Mrs. Robert Griffiths and her husband suggests a physical and an intellectual isolation as “she stood something in awe, partly arising from the difference in their ages, partly from his devoting much time to studies of which she could understand nothing” (Gaskell “Doom” 107). She is also separated from her family after her marriage, and finally, she is separated from her children and husband through illness and death. Following her mother’s death, Augharad assumes a maternal role, so she can be analyzed in this respect. Similar to her mother, Augharad is physically separated from her negligent father and brother as she cannot spend time with them, is intellectually isolated through lack of education and confinement to the house through domestic duties, and finally is physically separated from them after her marriage. All of these characters reflect the silencing of women as mothers; however, the portrayal of the stepmother and Nest contradicts Dunst’s claims. Although the stepmother is physically separated from her family after her marriage to Robert and seems to be silent, this does not entail powerlessness. Moreover, she is not physically or intellectually isolated from Robert. Similarly, Nest is not isolated from her father and Owen before or after marriage. Dunst also comments on how Gaskell “presents motherhood as the savior of children” (68). The narrator relates Augharad’s isolation and misery to her motherlessness, which stands in line with Dunst’s argument. However, the stepmother is portrayed as the instigator of the little baby’s murder which complicates Dunst’s argument. As Dunst rightly concludes, the portrayal of motherhood in the story reflects a critique on the disempowerment of women, and it is a transgression of the Victorian notion of motherhood.

The absence of traditional female figures with maternal qualities from the plotline also serves the purpose of criticizing the oppressive Victorian values regarding gender. As Brandi Jo argues, Gaskell uses absence “to silence the Victorian version of

the ideal woman" (v). In line with her argument, in "The Doom of the Griffiths," the deceased mothers and Augharad represent unattainable Victorian ideal femininity, and their removal from the story allow the controversial female figures such as Nest and the stepmother to have more important roles.

Robert and Owen, who have not only masculine but also feminine characteristics, are alike in their ambivalent gender portrayal. Robert carries qualities that are traditionally associated with the passivity of women such as being "mild, indolent, and easily managed;" however, his anger is "vehement and fearful" and he "dread[s] losing his self-control" which is a trait traditionally associated with masculinity as it entails physical power (Gaskell "Doom" 106). Another significant characteristic with regard to his gender portrayal is that he is "habitually sober," and he is therefore "almost shunned as a churlish, unsociable being, and paused much of his time in solitude" which are not manly qualities as men are conventionally associated with the public sphere (106). That the narrator refers to Robert's character imbued with gender fluidity as "not an uncommon character" reflects the unconventional gender portrayals throughout the story (106).

Another contrast in Robert's character is expressed through his treatment towards Owen. Robert carries little Owen with "the tenderest care," and the boy is "cradled in his father's arms" (Gaskell "Doom" 107). Thus, Robert's treatment of his son is described in maternal terms as "tender, and almost feminine" (107). Robert loved his first wife "all the more from having few other claims on his affections," "deeply grieved" following her death, and "his only comforter was the sweet little boy whom she had left behind" (107). When Owen was little, they shared meals, kept the same hours, and even shared a bed. Despite having two children to take care of, Robert does not get married for at least 12 years until Augharad gets married, and he misses Augharad not because of any parental affection he has towards her, but because of her "noiseless little offices, on which their daily comfort depended" (109). Another reason for Robert's marriage seems to be the fact that he has replaced the affection he felt for his wife with the affection for Owen for years, and when he realized Owen's fondness of Augharad he felt "thoroughly hurt" as he was not the sole recipient of his affection; thus, as "a selfish parent," he might have started looking for affection elsewhere (109). Hence, he loses his father's grace and is replaced by the stepmother who becomes "all in all to the Squire" (110). Until his marriage, Robert's actions used to be motivated by his desire to please Owen, and after it, he "showed the most utter indifference to

the feelings and wishes” of Owen (112). Robert also starts to lose his “temperate habits,” and drinking affects his “temper” (111). In fact, Robert, the tender father figure to Owen, becomes such an angry masculine figure that he can throw Owen’s baby son away and cause his death. These imbalanced, irrational, and passionate acts not only contribute to a portrayal far removed from traditional masculinity but also point to a problematic masculinity that results in destructiveness.

Resembling his father, Owen’s character is imbued with contrasts, and he has masculine as well as feminine qualities. The narrator relates Owen’s unpopularity among his schoolmates to these contrasting traits and his temper: “he was wayward, though, to a certain degree, generous and unselfish; he was reserved but gentle, except when the tremendous bursts of passion (similar in character to those of his father) forced their way” (Gaskell “Doom” 109). Similarly, he is associated with the passivity of women in his reactions towards his father and stepmother, but he cannot control his violent reaction to his stepbrother. His transgression of gender norms can also be exemplified in his unusual reaction towards his sister’s marriage: “Boys seldom appreciate their sisters; but Owen thought of the many slights with which he had requited the patient Augharad, and he gave way to bitter regrets” (109). Another feminine quality is his desire to be the only subject of his father’s affection. When he loses his privileged status in Robert’s heart, he starts looking for affection elsewhere like his father.

Similar to Robert, he is described in contrasting terms as a loving husband to his wife and an affectionate father to his son, despite his terrible rage. His feminine qualities are the most obvious in his attitudes regarding Nest. Although men are traditionally considered to be more assertive, he is associated with timidity. He is not only inexperienced in flirtation but also “timid” in expressing his feelings for Nest (Gaskell 119). Around Nest and his son, he would forget “all besides the present; all the cares and griefs he had known in the past, and all that might await him of woe and death in the future” (122). Like his father, Owen treats his son with affection as he “carrie[s] his boy, and tosse[s] and play[s] with him” (122). Following his death, Owen is portrayed in a complicated manner once more. First, he is described in feminine terms as he almost faints; then, putting a “long soft kiss” on Nest’s forehead, he leaves the house to go to a solitary spot in nature. There, he is described in masculine terms as he fights with destructive feelings that he has, “the rush of blood, which rose and boiled and gurgled in his brain as if it would madden him” (124-25). Despite his “wild

longing for revenge,” he decides not to do it (126). Overcoming his masculine rage, he makes plans to leave the country with Nest after taking some money from his room in his father’s house. There, he is able to control himself when his little stepbrother calls Nest “yr buten;” however, he loses his control and strikes him when he makes fun of his dead son which is another destructive act (127). Thus, his feminine side is once more revealed as he felt “bitterly repentant” following this (128). Actually, “Had Owen been left to his own nature, his heart would have worked itself to doubly love the boy” (129). However, he was not, and following his escape from the room, he accidentally causes his father’s death. Within this context, as Laura Kranzler points out, Owen attempts to avoid repeating his father’s crime of murder but cannot prevent becoming like him (xxii). Owen is portrayed as Robert’s double, a mirror image of his father in all respects.

Owen’s relationship with power is also laden with contrasts. As explained in detail earlier in this chapter, similar to his father, Owen is not characterized with mental and emotional power which becomes apparent as one looks at his incapability in dealing with the problems in his life. In addition to this, towards the end of the story, after his father’s death, his relationship with physical power is also portrayed in a complicated manner: First, Owen is characterized with physical weakness as Nest helps him change his wet clothes as he does not have the “energy enough” to do it by himself (Gaskell “Doom” 135); after that, when Nest says no one can help her deal with the death of her child, this time, Owen places “his strong helping arm round her waist” (136).

Analyzed within the context of traditional masculinity, the portrayal of masculinity in “The Doom of the Griffiths” is also unconventional. That men have strong emotional bonds to one another in contrast to women is a remarkable quality considering the lack of female solidarity. Furthermore, masculine destructiveness, that becomes apparent through the curse, the child abuse, and the murders in the story, is another detrimental effect of male bonding between Owain Glendwr and Rys ap Gryfydd as well as Robert and Owen. Alan Shelston refers to the imposition of the curse in “The Doom of the Griffiths” as “the destructive power of the human psyche, with its capacity for hatred as much as for love” (“Exploring” 21). At the beginning of the story, as the narrator comments on the history of the curse, the close relationship between Owain Glendwr and Rys ap Gryfydd is the reason behind the curse. To Glendwr, Gryfydd was “his more than brother,” so “one whom he had loved, and who



had betrayed him, could never be forgiven,” thus he accuses not only him but his descendants (Gaskell “Doom” 104).

As well as motherhood, fatherhood is described in ambivalent terms. The close relationship between Robert and Owen is defined as an “almost incestuous closeness” by Laura Kranzler (xxii). This stands in contrast to the relationship between Nest and her father who have an affectionate relationship that cannot be described as an incestuous closeness. However, their relationship becomes more complex through the remembrance of the curse. These suggest that there is a problematic relationship of great love and fear between the father and the son resembling the relationship between Glendwr and Gryfydd, which is described by Claire Stewart as “possessive male love” causing tragedy which is a theme that will also be analyzed in “Lois the Witch” and “The Grey Woman” (115).

The concept of home in the story is unconventional as it challenges the separate spheres ideology that associates the private domain of the house with femininity. Elizabeth Langland explains how this ideology developed during the industrial revolution causing the house to become a “new kind of social space that renegotiated relations between men and women” culminating in male as opposed to female spaces; as she points out, to many feminists, the hierarchy between public and private is “*the* dichotomy founding women’s oppression” (76-77). Thus, it is necessary to study the relationship between space and gender throughout the story. The male characters in the story are associated with the public as they travel for several purposes such as education, business, and amusement unlike most of the female characters. For instance, little Owen accompanies Robert to a brook, to mountain rambles or shooting excursions while Augharad has to stay at home, which highlights the public and private dichotomy about gendered spaces. However, there are diversions from this conventional relationship between space and gender. Although the female characters are expected to carry out the duties related to home and children, Robert’s depiction suggests a shift in gender roles. While more conventional and minor female characters such as the grandmother, the mother and Augharad Griffiths, are confined solely to the boundaries of their houses, these boundaries are redefined for the main female characters, the stepmother and Nest. The stepmother goes out twice: once, accompanied by Robert as they walk out in the open; after that, alone looking for her husband near the lake he died. Despite being accompanied by her father, Nest spends an evening socializing at the inn filled with men as well as women such as the hostess

of the inn, and she rides the ferry accompanied by her father and Owen, goes out to the garden, and waits for Owen outside. Thus, main female characters are associated both with the private and the public.

Another transgressive quality about the association between space and gender is that the house is not portrayed as a place of safety associated with femininity. The symbolic significance of space in the story becomes more striking considering the Victorian ideology on gendered spaces explained in the Introduction. In “The Doom of the Griffiths,” home is a place of oppression, violence, destruction and death instead of a place of peace and shelter<sup>15</sup>. Elizabeth Ludlow and Rebecca Styler also identify oppression at home as a common theme in Gaskell’s Gothic short stories: “Above all, Gaskell focuses on oppression within the purportedly safe, even sacred haven of the home in tales which criticize the abuse of power by parents and husbands, who make victims of daughters, sons and wives. For Gaskell the home is never isolated from wider society, whose prejudices buttress the abuses that occur within the home” (9). Owen marries Nest, because of the negligence at home; thus, violence and death enter the story. Carolyn Lambert refers to this sense of not-belonging as a type of “homelessness,” “a psychological, social and emotional separation” (*Lingering* 7). For instance, following his return to the house as the heir, Owen tries to escape from the stressful environment of his house at Bodowen by going to open spaces. Lambert justifiably explains that “Gaskell’s fiction presents a concept of home that often fails to provide a physical place of safety” (261). The relationship between violence and the home is made more evident as Owen’s baby boy is killed by his father in his house with Nest at Ty Glass. Similarly, Owen beats his little stepbrother at Bodowen. The only violent event out in the open is the murder of his father in Owen’s boat while he was trying to flee from his father’s estate, Bodowen. That Owen refers to Bodowen as an “accursed” place to which he will never return following his father’s death also reflects this association of the concept of home with violence, death, and destruction despite its positive connotations (Gaskell “Doom” 136).

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<sup>15</sup> The dark imagery related to natural scenes surrounding the dwelling is used to foreshadow the events to come. The Griffiths mansion is situated in a “boggy valley,” surrounded by “scrubby” trees as well as trees that “died,” having a “ghastly appearance,” it is “overhung by sea-fog” (105). As Enid L. Duthie points out the neglected trees suggest “decay” and “fatality;” complementing this dark imagery, the pond with dark and slaty clouds and the sea that they sail to at the end of the story suggest a “mysterious destiny” (28-30).

The depiction of the gaze in “The Doom of the Griffiths” causes a transgression of gender boundaries because the gaze can be read as a representation of traditional values as well as a resistance to women’s status as the surveyed female. The ideas of John Berger can be considered with regard to the gaze and its relation to gender in the story. According to Berger, “to look is an act of choice” (8); in other words, the gaze reveals a person’s perception of the world. For instance, the male and the female gaze particularly reflect the patriarchy and the subordination of women in the society;

To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men.... A woman must continually watch herself.... From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.... She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (Berger 46)

As the narrator explains, Nest is aware of her attractive appearance and uses this on men: “it was evident the little village beauty knew how to make the most of all her attractions, for the gay colours which were displayed in her neckerchief were in complete harmony with the complexion” and “she seemed to have some gay speech, some attractive look or action” for the young men (Gaskell “Doom” 116). That she has an attractive look for young men suggests that Nest reciprocates the male gaze which complicates the conventional portrayal of women as the surveyed female.

The male gaze is mostly apparent in Owen’s observations. For instance, women’s self-constraint is also represented in the stepmother whose ostensible “grace,” “faultless movements,” and “sweetness, made Owen less angry at his father’s marriage” (Gaskell “Doom” 110). However, Owen catches “a watchful glance” suggesting her insincerity when she thinks she is not being watched (110). This complicates the portrayal of the stepmother as the surveyed female since she is thus portrayed as the surveyor as well as the surveyed. Berger argues, “[m]en survey women before treating them. Consequently, how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated. To acquire some control over this process, women must contain it and interiorize it” (47). To exemplify further, we can look at the development of Owen’s romantic interest in Nest which is described in a complicated manner as he seems to be attracted to her “evident coquetry” at the beginning (Gaskell “Doom” 115-116), but later her “reserve and shyness” gives her new charms (118). This change in Nest suggests that she is trying to control her image although she has a

“great love of admiration” (117); on this matter, Berger argues that men act and women appear.

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (47)

As Berger points out, when women look at themselves it is through the eyes of the men. I would like to add to Berger’s comments on this matter; the image of the surveyed female also determines a woman’s relationship to other women because other women turn her into a spectacle, as well. To exemplify, when Nest enters the inn where she meets Owen, other women look at Nest’s beauty with “a half-jealous look, which Owen set down to the score of her extreme prettiness” because women are looking at other women from a male perspective (Gaskell “Doom” 115); this sentence reflects the traditional ideology that objectifies women as an object of vision both through male and female gaze.

In “The Doom of the Griffiths,” the representation of the traditional gender ideology and the portrayal of gender in non-binary terms opens the text to a gender conscious reading. To begin with, the narrational distancing of the story helps create a safe distance between the story and the reader and thus facilitates the transgression of gender boundaries in this Victorian story. Moreover, metafictional qualities such as intertextuality and a self-conscious narrator contribute to a questioning of reality. As Dickerson justifiably argues, although the story seems to be focused on the relationship between a father and a son, actually “the fate of these men depends to no significant degree on the women in their lives” (“Woman Witched” 114). To begin with, throughout the story, gender is problematized by the depiction of the separate spheres ideology and portrayal of female figures as victims of the phallogocentric society. First, married women’s legal disempowerment due to the laws of coverture is represented with the portrayal of Mrs. Owen Griffiths, the grandmother. Next, the subjugation of single and married women through rooted social values on gender and family is depicted through the portrayal of Mrs. Owen Griffiths, Mrs. Robert Griffiths, and Augharad whose subordinate status within the family is specifically contrasted to her brother Owen. Notwithstanding the traditional portrayal of gender, the second Mrs. Robert Griffiths (the stepmother), Nest Pritchard/Griffiths, Robert, and Owen are characterized with fluid gender identities following the traditional values in some

aspects and defying conventions in others. Although the stepmother's and Nest's beauty associates them with femininity, they are both portrayed as active and powerful figures. Especially the contrast of the stepmother's rationality and power to Robert and Owen's irrationality and weakness is striking. Another key point is Nest's description as a multi-dimensional character with a complex portrayal of her sexuality and power. Moreover, through the characterization of Nest, the virgin/whore dichotomy is subverted and gender is described as an unstable identity. The concepts of motherhood and home are other transgressive issues in terms of gender. Both concepts are associated with absence; thus, they subvert the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. Moreover, ideal representations of women are silenced and controversial female figures are assigned greater roles. Within this context, the lack of female bonding in the story stands in opposition to the presence of male bonding. The homosocial desire between Robert and Owen and their relationships to the women in their lives are depicted as the sources of conflict in the story, and the violent ending with the curse, the child abuse, and the murders is portrayed as a detrimental effect of male bonding between Owain Glendwr and Rys ap Gryfydd as well as Robert and Owen. Furthermore, masculinity is portrayed in non-binary terms as Robert and Owen have more traits related to femininity than to masculinity. For instance, they are associated with feminine concepts such as passivity, emotion, irrationality, and weakness and have a complicated portrayal in terms of power. Especially, their characterization as affectionate figures to their children is complicated through the presence of male aggression. In addition, the complicated portrayal of male and female gaze in the characterization of Owen and Nest can be read both as a representation of patriarchal values due to the objectification of women represented in the story and as the female resistance to this due to the reciprocity of the gaze between Nest and other young men as well as the reciprocity of the gaze between Owen and the stepmother. Thus, throughout the story, conventional values on gender that considers men and women to be inherently different from one another is contrasted with progressive gender values.

## CHAPTER II

### “LOIS THE WITCH”

Set out to explore the historic events during the Salem Witch Trials, “Lois the Witch,” first published in 1859 in the weekly *All the Year Round*, narrates the story of a recently orphaned young woman, Lois Barclay, who leaves her home in England to live with her uncle’s Puritan family in America following her parents’s deaths in 1691. Crossing the Atlantic so that she would have a family, Lois is first othered because of her religious beliefs, and then accused of being a witch by her distant family. The narration of the story begins with her on the Boston Pier reflecting upon her recent past in England, remembering how happy she was there at home, how she was orphaned and sent by her mother to New England with the help of Captain Holderness. The setting in late 1600s Salem, New England<sup>16</sup> witnessed one of the most violent public religious purgation acts, the witch hunt. By setting the story at a heterocosm that is remote both in time and place, the narrator tries to expose and point out the power exercised on women through patriarchy and its counterparts like religion and logocentrism; thus, Gaskell generates a new perspective to problematize women’s status in her own society which associates women with inferiority. The story has a fluid portrayal of gender; women and men are characterized with both femininity and masculinity. For example, although Lois’s beauty associates her with femininity, she is also portrayed as an active, rational and powerful figure. Similarly, other female characters such as Grace Hickson and Widow Smith are depicted as powerful female figures. In the same vein, major male characters like Manasseh and his father are depicted as passive, irrational and weak figures. Moreover, concepts such as motherhood, fatherhood, home, and the gaze have complex portrayals and hence contribute to the unconventional portrayal of gender. By centralizing Lois’s victimization, the roles of single women in patriarchal societies are particularly problematized in the story. Hence, this chapter aims to explore the representation of

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<sup>16</sup> Gaskell started writing under the pseudonym “Cotton Mather Mills” which was a reference to the narratives of witchcraft as Cotton Mather was a Puritan minister and an author who “played a significant role in the New England witchcraft trials of the late seventeenth century” (Foster 63).

gender in “Lois the Witch” which questions gender ideology by thematizing the issues of gender fluidity and women’s oppressed status in religious communities and traditional families. Focusing on the collaboration between religion and patriarchy, I will discuss gender representation in this story in the light of Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity as well as John Berger’s understanding of the gaze.

The Woman Question that was addressed in the works of such writers as Mary Astell, Mary Leapor, and Mary Wollstonecraft, became a significant theme in Victorian works produced by Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and more obviously Anne Brontë, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell, who pointed at and intensively thematized social, cultural, and political problems that women faced at the time. In particular, two of Gaskell’s novels, *North and South* and *Mary Barton* not only deal with the socio-economic condition of women at the time as they are elegant criticisms of the patriarchal practices that confine women into domestic spheres of the traditional family, but also, as Patsy Stoneman notes, draw a parallel between The Woman Question and the working class (79). In these novels, the patriarchal middle class is portrayed as a force deliberately stunting women and the lower class in order to keep exploiting them, to maintain the power structure constructed in the society, and to ensure the permanence of its superior position against those inferiors.

Like the “Doom of the Griffiths,” “Lois the Witch” fuses gothic mode of writing with the realist and challenges the relationship between history and literature by making allusions to historical facts about the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 by alluding to real characters during the trials such as “Justice Hathorne” (Easson 215) and to real documents such as the “declaration” of regret signed by the jurors in Salem (Upham 126-29). In addition to these realist elements, Gaskell “push[es] the boundaries of Gothic fiction in two specific ways that anticipate Victorian sensation fiction” by setting the story in a distant but familiar Protestant town rather than “the exotic wilds of Catholic countries,” and by portraying the family as the Gothic villain, especially the portrayal of female family members as villains rather than “a villain’s aberrant behaviours” (McCord 59-67). Within this context, Ardel Haefele-Thomas justifiably argues that through the merging of the real and the Gothic in “Lois the Witch”, Gaskell aims to show the results of eliminating the other, to criticize what happens when a woman rebels in a heteronormative society, to question the treatment of American Indians overtly and the nationalist sentiment after the 1857 Indian

uprising covertly<sup>17</sup> (“Introduction” 6). As she goes on to say, Gaskell “turns her nineteenth-century audience into ‘foreigners’ in an inhospitable, Gothic landscape” (“Escaping Heteronormativity” 51). However, the monster is not the American Indian witch or the foreigner in this new land; “what becomes monstrous are societal and familial systems of oppression” (49).

Vanessa D. Dickerson also comments on the supernatural subject matter of “Lois,” arguing that writing about the supernatural gave more freedom to Gaskell because “the patriarchal jury was either out or had declared” supernatural “childish, subjective womanish fancies” (“Woman Witched” 113). In parallel to her novels, Gaskell’s gothic short stories emphasize the patriarchal practices against women in society as mentioned in the previous chapter. In fact, this novella moves Gaskell’s aforementioned emphasis one step further as it sets the plot in a new environment, the New World, and it enables a new viewpoint to expose such ideological apparatuses as religion and family which are normally taken for granted and hardly questioned although they make up the most effective ideological practices to hegemonize and subjugate women by setting boundaries around them. While in “The Doom of the Griffiths,” Gaskell leaves it to the reader to decide if the supernatural exists, in “Lois,” Gaskell “exploits the reader’s interest in the supernatural,” but makes it clear that witchcraft does not exist (Martin 28). She does this by exploring the social mechanisms forming the idea of witchcraft. Within this context, as Marion Gibson highlights, being labeled a witch was directly related to “stereotypes” not to “realities” (4-5). As explored in the story, there are those who do not fit into any categories as they do not meet the requirements of that group or they cannot be classified because of the trouble they cause for the system, so they are grouped under a unique category of outcasts referred to as witches.

First, the story explores how women are victimized through a logocentric patriarchal mindset with the help of religion. Although women’s victimization in patriarchal societies is also explored in the previous chapter, in “Lois the Witch” the focus is on the impact of religion. Following her trip from England, in America, Lois meets strictly religious people like Elder Hawkins who interpret Lois’s empathy for a woman that is executed in England as sinful and unconventional, and speech by women as ungodly. The conversation at the dinner table is obviously dominated by

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed account of Gaskell’s criticism regarding the 1857 Indian uprising, check Ardel Haefele-Thomas’s *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity*.



men, particularly Elder Hawkins who is described as a highly authoritarian figure. The narrator introduces him as “one of the strictest of the strict” and whose “presence kept the two daughters of the house considerably in awe” (Gaskell “Lois” 145). When Hawkins is speaking, “the liberty of speech which was tacitly denied to many, under penalty of being esteemed ungodly if they infringed certain conventional limits” cannot be enjoyed by the Smith daughters or Lois (145). It is noteworthy that the narrator specifically cites how the Smith daughters were in silent awe before Elder Hawkins as they have been raised to be submissive through strict Puritan teachings. The gender hierarchy that is already prevalent in society at the time is depicted to be heightened by Puritanism<sup>18</sup>, and even at a dinner table in the household, women are deprived of chances to express themselves freely. In this specific event, it becomes clear that, religion could be, in fact have always been, a source of oppression, particularly, to confine women into the private sphere, and to deny them from such humane enjoyments as the freedom of speech in public.

Within this context, Irina Raluca Ciobanau argues that Gaskell wrote “Lois the Witch” because of her Unitarian background in order to expose the dangers of religious fanaticism since Unitarians were attacked because of their beliefs especially about their rejection of the Holy Trinity<sup>19</sup> (139). Similarly, Rebecca Styler argues that Gaskell wrote “Lois the Witch” to expose the roots of evil with a Unitarian mindset:

her tales are entirely informed by the rational premise that evil is no mystery at all, but a social construction whose sources can be understood and potentially remedied. In Unitarian thought, evil had no supernatural or abstract existence, but was an entirely moral entity, apparent in specific situations of suffering and oppression. The roots of human misery lay in ‘error’, irrational social structures and ignorant attitudes, whose cumulative effects could be profoundly damaging. (34)

As expressed in “Lois the Witch,” there is a great difference between the Puritan and Unitarian beliefs on evil, which is shown through Lois’s rational explanations

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<sup>18</sup> The supreme authority in Puritanism was the Scripture as opposed to Priests and the Church. The Puritan worship at the time avoided ceremonies and distracting rituals such as chants, repetitive prayers, candles, harmonic music, prayer books. (Goss 118-124). Although men and women were believed to be equal before God, women were not equal to men socially and they were believed to be carnal and spiritually inferior (Lindley 16).

<sup>19</sup> Unitarianism is a Christian theological belief that denies the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and declares that “Christ was divine but inferior to God the Father;” Unitarianism was against the law of England from 1680 to 1813; nineteenth century Unitarians supported the French Revolution, liberties of thought, inquiry, and conscience, tolerance, and self-improvement and argued for the education of women (Chapple, “Unitarian” 164-66). To Unitarians, people are not born tainted with sin (Ciobanau 139).

regarding witchcraft in contrast to the Puritans she meets such as Elder Hawkins as will be explained further in the following parts of this chapter.

In “Lois the Witch,” having distanced her criticism from the society she lives in, Gaskell manages to put religion under scrutiny as an apparatus used to serve patriarchy, and when the Smith siblings listen to Elder Hawkins silently in awe, they become the subjects of this religious discourse. Through the portrayal of silencing of women with the religious discourse and the portrayal of Lois who is different from other submissive stereotypes in the story and who therefore is despised and finally destroyed by the society she lives in, the stereotypical expectations of the society from a woman and conventional boundaries set around women are questioned, as will be explained later in this chapter.

In “Lois the Witch,” people who meet the social expectations of the patriarchy and whom we can regard as more conventional are not the ones that are abhorred, tortured and hanged as witches. Unconventional figures like Lois, a British intruder that is more expressive in her opinions, more courageous in her manners, less passive against men and the patriarchal society, and less strict in her religious faith are persecuted by a phallogocentric religious commune and then executed just because they are unlike the others in that society.

In addition, Elder Hawkins, who is aware of his privileged position is portrayed in an effort to maintain this power when in communication with others. As it is revealed by the narrator, he keeps a “deep bass voice, speaking with the strong nasal twang of the Puritans” while addressing others as he is preaching to the others from his superior position and trying to keep those around him under awe and control (Gaskell “Lois” 147). Lois later meets similar authoritarian religious figures who represent the law of the father to whom all around are expected to submit and obey. Particularly, Lois’s cousin Manasseh and the puritan pastor Mr. Tappau are portrayed as strictly religious figures who are also blatantly oppressive towards women. For instance, when Lois arrives at her uncle’s house in Salem, Grace Hickson, her sister-in-law is too ignorant to welcome Lois, but Manasseh interrupts her “with a quicker motion than anyone had yet used in this house” and tells his mother to stop questioning Lois and invite her in (154). Because of his gender, he believes he is superior even to his mother and is sure his words will not go wasted, on which the narrator remarks “[h]e did not attend to see the effects of his words . . . [p]erhaps he knew that his word was law with his grim mother” (154). Manasseh’s, in other words, men’s superior

position in the gender binary is amplified as a result of religion and those strict Puritan teachings as well as the internalization of these teachings by the women in this Puritan society.

In another instance, Manasseh claims that he has seen his marriage to Lois in a vision, and proposes to Lois. However, when he is refused, he is unable to accept Lois' refusal and deems his desire as God's will. The narrator describes his persistent attitude as such: "he was so convinced, by what he considered the spirit of prophecy, that Lois was to be his wife, that he felt rather more indignant at what he considered to be her resistance to the *preordained decree*, than really anxious as to the result" (Gaskell "Lois" emphasis mine 170). Manasseh is deluded to such an extent with vehement religious convictions that he does not want to allow Lois a chance to prefer or decide, and her rejection is silly for him as it is inevitable for her to escape from the destiny, the "preordained course," and he considers Lois' rejection as a "blasphemy" against God (171). Yet, from the very first moment that Manasseh sees Lois, it is clear that his own will drives him into marrying Lois as he cannot take his eyes off her. It becomes very clear in the narration that he has had feelings for her, and with his father's death, he takes the chance to use his new-found superior position in the family to get Lois's hand in marriage, and since he sees this as his divine right, he is surprised and frustrated because of Lois's rejection.

Marriage is portrayed as a source of oppression produced by the dominant ideology in the society, and getting married and building a family is presented to women as an inevitable end and surely another form of death. As it becomes clear in the excerpt below, marriage is forced on Lois. Later in the story, Manasseh even threatens her that if she is not to marry him, she has no option other than death (Gaskell "Lois" 178). The exploitation of family and marriage as an ideological apparatus by the patriarchy causes an unbearable oppression on women as it is revealed in the story that,

under the circumstances, many a girl would have succumbed to her apparent fate. Isolated from all previous connections . . . living in the heavy, monotonous routine of a family with one man for head, and *this man esteemed to be a hero by most of those around him, simply because he was the only man in the family*, - these facts alone would have formed strong presumptions that most girls would have yielded to the offers of such a one. (emphasis added 171)

The criticism the narrator makes draws attention to the function of family and marriage as an inevitable and unbearable source of oppression for women, Lois's strength in the

face of oppression, and men's privileged status in patriarchal societies. Later in the story, Lois herself mentions how disturbed she felt at certain moments when she imagined herself as having no other option but to marry him since her mind "worked upon *perpetually* by Manasseh's conviction that it was decreed that she should be his wife" (emphasis added 172). Hence, "Lois the Witch," proclaims the idea that, in the late 1600s women were coerced to marry by the society, and they were confined to the domestic sphere of the family and stunted under the burden of familial trivialities.

Studying marriage and Christianity in the works of Victorian women novelists, Dalene Fisher rightly argues that "[b]etween 1790 and 1850, the novel was used widely "for doing God's work," and English female authors, ... were exploiting the novel's potential to challenge dominant discourse and middleclass gender ideology, particularly in relationship to marriage" by creating Christian heroines who "make resistive choices ... undergirded by faith" to resist unwanted marriages (i). In line with this argument, in "Lois the Witch" religion has a paradoxical role as a reference point for oppression and resistance.

The oppressive role of religion can be explored in Manasseh's subversion of Christianity to get married to Lois because he presents their marriage as something to be done like a religious must or a ritual, and he claims,

Thou canst not escape what is foredoomed. Months ago, when I set myself to read the old godly books in which my soul used to delight until thy coming, I saw no letters of printers' ink marked on the page, but I saw a gold and ruddy type of some unknown language, the meaning whereof was whispered into my soul; it was, 'Marry Lois! marry Lois!' And when my father died, I knew it was the beginning of the end. It is the Lord's will, Lois, and thou canst not escape from it. (Gaskell "Lois" 170)

The excerpt above shows how Manasseh subverts religion to his own use, and how the mind of a traditional Victorian man assumes that women are made for men, as Gilbert and Gubar explain, "all patriarchal mythology defines women as created by, from and for men, the children of male brains, ribs, and ingenuity" (12). Thus, Jenny Uglow claims, "Lois" tells the story of "the destructive sexual frenzy of men who subvert 'texts' to their own use" ("Introduction" xi). The word "foredoom" in the passage above has a negative connotation since "doom" is used to refer to ill fortune. Indeed, Lois will not be able to escape her terrible fate as this word suggests.

The role of religion in the story can be explored in Lois' handling of the religious discourse to resist Manasseh's attempts to get married:

Again he tried to convince her that neither he nor she had any choice in the matter, by saying--

‘The voice said unto me “Marry Lois;” and I said, “I will, Lord.”’

‘But,’ Lois replied, ‘the voice, as you call it, has never spoken such a word to me.’

‘Lois,’ he answered solemnly, ‘it will speak. And then wilt thou obey, even as Samuel did?’

‘No; indeed I cannot!’ she answered briskly. ‘I may take a dream to be the truth, and hear my own fancies, if I think about them too long. But I cannot marry any one from obedience.’

‘Lois, Lois, thou art as yet unregenerate; but I have seen thee in a vision as one of the elect, robed in white. As yet thy faith is too weak for thee to obey meekly; but it shall not always be so. I will pray that thou mayest see thy preordained course. Meanwhile, I will smooth away all worldly obstacles.’ (Gaskell “Lois” 170-71)

While Manasseh expects Lois to obey because of her faith, Lois leverages her faith in order to question the oppressive gender ideology, and thus manipulates the Christian narrative that sets out to confine her.

What is more upsetting is the relevance of such confinements set around women by the patriarchy in the late 1800s, the period when this short story was written, particularly considering the fact that several novels by women writers of the time dwell upon such marital or familial boundaries constructed around women. Many well-known novels of the Victorian period, say, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), and George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) portray a female character that is brought under the yoke of patriarchy through marriage suffering from the violence or confinements of men, yet struggling to claim a place and a voice in society. What is new in “Lois the Witch” is the exposition of a collaboration between religion and patriarchy in the confinement of women through marriage. As mentioned before, such a criticism was made possible by Gaskell as a result of her historicizing and distancing the plot to two hundred years past when religious practices of the period were considered harsh and violent even by people living at the time.

The psychosis of Manasseh mentioned above derives from his excessive exposition to strict religious teachings as well as from the patriarchal ideology in the society instilling its discourse and practices in individuals thanks to institutions like religion and family, and in fact, every asset of a society that could influence an entire

community<sup>20</sup>. With the help of those societal institutions cited above, binary oppositions are constructed in the society to privilege certain groups over others. The gender binary is one of these constructions assigning superiority to the male and inferiority to the female. It is observed that those inflicted minds like Grace, Faith, and Prudence act as a part of the patriarchy-ridden mechanism functioning for the infliction, manipulation, and control of all women in order to set them back to their inferior position if any woman ever tries to move out of that stereotypical inferiority. Lois, who is already seen as an intruder different from the overtly religious Puritans, is never considered a part of the Hickson family and the Puritan society since she is portrayed as more tolerant and less radical than the members of the new commune. Hence, the women at the Hicksons house first try to instill a stricter form of religion in Lois and to confine her to her private sphere by restricting her bold manners and unfeminine ways. Once they see they cannot succeed in manipulating Lois in any way, they let the larger society punish her; and once again, in the phallogocentric religious society, the centripetal power of the ideology devours the centrifugal, leaving no place for the existence of the different, the new, or the other.

The inculcation of women's inferiority is reflected in their naming as it highlights their classification as "the other" thanks to certain processes and practices of patriarchy and ideology. The specific names given to women repetitively in the society portrayed in the story points out the existence of a systematization process at work in patriarchal societies. It is obvious that with specific names that refer more to a feminine side of women or that emphasize the good and obedient nature of women unlike the names for male characters, the purpose of the patriarchy at a religious society is the imposition of ideology.

To begin with, as Nicholson points out, "Lois" means "good and desirable" (61) which not only reflects the heroine's physical and inner beauty, virtues expected of women, but also creates an irony considering the title of the story as a witch is assumed to be evil. The names of Widow Smith's daughters are Prudence and Hester<sup>21</sup>;

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<sup>20</sup> Louise Henson rightly argues that in "Lois the Witch," there is a strong association between irrational belief and mental health portrayed through the Hickson siblings: Manasseh's fixation on Lois, Faith's fixation on Minister Nolan, and Prudence's indifference to pain and sorrow (252-260).

<sup>21</sup> The name Hester used within the context of witchcraft reminds the reader of *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which, as Louisa Jayne Foster argues, is one of the "literary sources she (most probably) used in the composition of her fictional history of the Salem witchcraft trials" as Hester is also the name of the protagonist in *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850 (64). Actually, through her letters we know that Gaskell corresponded with Nathaniel Hawthorne (Haefele-Thomas "Escaping

the two Hickson siblings are named Prudence and Faith, and their mother is Grace; Parson Tappan's daughter, who is thought to be bewitched, is also named Hester. With the influence of Puritans, names from the Old Testament and vocabulary names were commonly used for naming in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Hanks et. al. 24). While Hester is a name from the Old Testament which means "to hide" or "hidden" in Hebrew (Fuchs-Kreimer and Wiener 41), Prudence, Grace and Faith are words used as given names denoting virtues expected of women. Prudence suggests caution and sensibility, Grace suggests beauty and kindness, as well as holiness, and Faith suggests trust and belief; thus, the values expected of women are expressed; women are to be less expressive and active, yet more passive and submissive<sup>22</sup>. As opposed to male characters, almost all female characters introduced in the story are named to represent a virtuous feminine side that the society considers fitting for women. The strict Puritan society, and thus religion collaborates with the patriarchy in the systematization of women's inferior status, and women are attributed with certain labels in society as their names suggest. Therefore, the expectations of society are inflicted on them from birth, and hence it could be claimed that their social roles are predetermined or predestined for them even before their birth. In other words, their gender precedes their existence, and they are born into those social roles and personal qualities that society determines for them. Then it would be right to argue that women are, hence, doubly confined into certain limits or the private sphere as a result of not only those patriarchal practices prevailing in the society but also those inculcations in their unconscious that imprison them into certain gender roles.

As Margaret Hallisy points out, "[b]laming Eve for the entrance of sin and death into the World is a tradition as old as the Genesis story" (15). One of the earliest literary examples of associating women with witchcraft is Plutarch's story of Lamia

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Heteronormativity" 51). In line with this, Angus Easson highlights that Gaskell was aware of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as she named the judge in Salem after Hawthorne's ancestor Hathorne and Prudence's impishness resembles Pearl's in *The Scarlet Letter* (215). Similarly, Pastor Nolan in "Lois the Witch" resembles Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale (Shaw 82).

<sup>22</sup> As a woman that takes pride in her strong faith, Grace gives all of her children Biblical names. While the daughters have names symbolizing feminine virtues, Manasseh is given a Biblical name that means "to forget" (Shalev 269). It is used in two parts of the Old Testament: The first is the grandson of Jacob who was not *elect* and the other is a king who practised sorcery (Nectoux 49-50). It must be a deliberate choice the author made to expose Grace's ignorance about the meaning of this name as being forgotten has a negative connotation especially considered with regard to the Puritan belief that only the elect few would go to heaven and being forgotten suggests being forgotten by God and being denied his Grace. Moreover, reflecting the story of Joseph who was lost, Manasseh gets lost at the end of "Lois the Witch."

and Demetrius in which Lamia is accused of being a witch using her sexuality because of Demetrius' interest in her which resembles the accusations about Lois (Hallisy 93). As a result of those inculcations that propagate such ideas as the inferiority, passivity, submission, silence, repression, secrecy, faith, and benevolence among one subjugated gender, two of Widow Smith's daughters portrayed in the story are narrated to be "more reserved," "hesitat[ing] more than their mother," and not having "her prompt authority, her happy power," but being "good, orderly, kindly girls" (Gaskell "Lois" 144). That is why immediately after Captain Holderness is seen at the door of Widow Smith, they feel coerced into "putting away their spinning-wheel and knitting-needles, and preparing for a meal of some kind" (144), and they listen to Elder Hawkins in awe. By contrasting the Smith daughters to their mother and Lois who objects to Elder Hawkins' arguments, passivity of the typical Victorian woman is criticized.

Because of the inculcation of such religious ideas associating women with evil, Grace Hickson considers Lois as the culprit to blame for the "extempore," "unconnected fragments of prayer" of her son Manasseh who "wandered off into wild" (Gaskell "Lois" 195); and one of the Hickson siblings, Faith, accuses Lois of betraying her love when in fact Pastor Nolan is the one who apparently has shown interest in Lois, and he is the reason for Faith's frustration. Yet, Lois is blamed for Nolan's and Manasseh's interest in her since they have superiority against and supremacy over women, which has the power to lead them to the acquittal of any accusations thanks to those patriarchal ideological inflictions and inculcations in the collective unconscious. Hence, similar to the portrayal of feminine beauty as a factor that brings evil in the case of the stepmother in "The Doom of the Griffiths," Lois's beauty is implied to be the reason behind her suffering.

The complex portrayal of evil in the story needs to be discussed as it contributes to the unconventional gender portrayal. In "Lois the Witch," as well as the family violence which was the focus of "The Doom of the Griffiths," the violence of social chaos is studied in order to remind readers of the dangers of religious fanaticism. As Shirley Foster highlights, unlike "The Doom of the Griffiths" "the horrors of this story are less in the physical details – the hanging of Lois and Nattee, for instance, is presented from the perspective of moral reconciliation and Christian sympathies – than in the social chaos caused by uncontrollable fear and paranoia" ("Violence" 19-20). Similar to the previously discussed story, the virgin-whore dichotomy is present in the portrayal of women. As explained before, while Lois is portrayed as an angelic figure,



the Madonna, who represents a true Christian in most parts of the story; Grace, Faith and Prudence are resembled to Eve because of their roles in Lois's death. However, while Lois has evil thoughts at times, Grace, Faith and Prudence are associated with goodness from time to time. Despite her angelic acts, Lois says she feels afraid of Nattee, and she otherizes her because Nattee is different: "her look and colour were to me when I first came; and she is not a christened woman; and they tell stories of Indian wizards; and I know not what the mixtures are which she is sometimes stirring over the fire, nor the meaning of the strange chants she sings to herself" (Gaskell "Lois" 186-87)<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, Grace, Faith and Prudence's association with evil is complicated. Faith is associated with evil and good at different times in the story; she is friends with Nattee and Lois and writes a letter to save Hota which associates her with goodness, but because of her jealousy, Hota, Nattee, and Lois are murdered. Grace and Prudence have ambiguous portrayals, as well. Grace is portrayed as a Christian paragon of virtue despite her shortcomings regarding Lois. She has a part in Lois's death, but she feels ashamed of her reaction regarding the witch hunts, at the end of the story. Similarly, despite her delight in causing pain and watching others suffer, Prudence's regret and admission of guilt regarding Lois, expressed at the end complicates her association with evil. Thanks to the subversion of the virgin/whore dichotomy using these characters, evil is described in ambivalent terms and gender is portrayed as an unstable identity.

As in "The Doom of the Griffiths," there is again a lack of female solidarity effective in the realization of the curse. Vanessa D. Dickerson comments on the representation of good and evil and how it affects the gender portrayal in "Lois the Witch," and argues that Gaskell uses the contrasting figures of the witch and the angel in the house to "study women's relations to each other and to power" ("Woman Witched" 118). Exploring the lack of female solidarity, she claims that the curse was put on Lois by another woman assumed to be a witch, that no woman came to Lois's help, and that even her mother put her father before Lois on her deathbed (125). She also argues that by eliminating the male figures that could help Lois (Captain Holderness and Hugh Lucy), the story focuses on a lack of female solidarity as well

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<sup>23</sup> Suzy Clarkson Holstein points out most works on Salem witch trials builds on the premise that rational people do not believe in witches, but Gaskell chose a different route as her heroine herself believes in witchcraft and even fears that she might be one; thus, Holstein justifiably argues that a plausible reason is that Gaskell aimed to interrogate "the power of toleration and forgiveness" (48).

as the power of women's words (Hannah, Grace, Faith, and Prudence) that overpowers the male desire for Lois's salvation (Manasseh), and she rightly points out that in Gaskell's supernatural stories some women use the power of their words against other women when they actually could use it against patriarchs such as Pastor Tappau (128-29). Thus, Hannah and the Hickson women, are portrayed stereotypically as they are associated with lack of female solidarity which stands in contrast to Lois's female solidarity with Nattee.

Lois is used in the story to analyze and criticize the way witchcraft narratives are formed by the projection of irrational anxieties on outsiders (L. J. Foster 69; Styler 40). The system pushes all the individuals that do not fit into its descriptions out of the center, and it tries to keep them out forever or eliminate them completely. As a result, a certain kind of punishment takes place in the 1600s: these expatriates are burnt or hanged as witches. The namesake of the story, Lois Barclay is eliminated from the society because people label her as an outcast who deserves to die. Travelling overseas for the safety of a family, Lois gets killed because of her family. Her cousin Faith's jealousy of Pastor Nolan's interest in Lois combined with Prudence's desire to attract attention causes her to be accused of being a witch. Manasseh pleads her innocence but this hurts her case even more as people choose to believe that he is bewitched by Lois, as well. Her aunt Grace does not defend Lois, and when Grace confesses to Manasseh's mental sickness, it makes people certain of Lois' guilt.

Through its portrayal of Manasseh, "Lois the Witch" explicitly draws attention to how women are punished as a result of the insanities and extremities of men. Both by women like Grace and Faith, and by the society, Lois is accused for Manasseh's strange behavior, insane speeches, and extempore praying. When his words turn nonsensical and arguments into fragmented pieces during prayer, his mother, Grace interrupts his speech and blames Lois for Manasseh's speech. Manasseh also accuses Lois for his insanity and remarks, "[t]ake her away, mother! Lead me not into temptation. She brings me evil and sinful thoughts. She overshadows me, even in the presence of my God. She is no angel of light, or she would not do this. Avaunt! Take her away!" (195). Later on, Lois is convicted as a witch as Prudence's paralysis is considered to have happened because of her curses. Following this, as explained earlier, the entire society accuses Lois of bewitching Manasseh after he questions religious practices of the time in a radical way.

The people in Salem subvert religion to their own use which is shown through their interpretation of Manasseh's mental state following his crazy speech when Lois is accused of being a witch: "the student of abstruse books on theology, fit to converse with the most learned ministers that ever came about those parts--was he the same with the man now pouring out wild words to Lois the witch, as if he and she were the only two present? A solution of it all occurred to them. He was another victim" (Gaskell "Lois" 209). As in the possessive and destructive relationship between the father and son in "The Doom of the Griffiths," in "Lois the Witch" the tragic death of Lois is the direct result of "male possessive love" caused by Manasseh's disturbed and delusional mental state because his obsession is interpreted as a result of bewitchment (Stewart 116). What is significant in this example is the amount of effort put in to save men from accusations and executions in a patriarchal society. While Lois is hastily grabbed by two men after she is accused of being a witch without any second thoughts, the same community tries to save Manasseh from further persecutions by excusing him on the grounds of being bewitched by a woman. The story explicitly draws a contrast between perceptions about men and women in a patriarchal society, and exposes how women are prejudiced against and men are excused, and how Lois cannot get an acquittal even from her relatives let alone the whole community, yet Manasseh is pardoned by the furious people gathered to hunt witches. Presenting these examples that demonstrate the biased persecution of women, the story criticizes the victimization of women in the hands of the patriarchal, religious, and logocentric ideology. Thus, Marion Shaw refers to the ending of "Lois" as "a reconciliation of a kind ... painfully and doubtfully achieved" (81).

Within this context, the ending to the story is crucial as it "gives the final word" to Lois who was a victim of the Salem witch trials by challenging the monstrous witch narrative (L. J. Foster 77). If Lois agreed to get married to Manasseh, she would not be killed, so Lois's death suggests that being hung as a witch is better than being forced into marriage. The story concludes with the declaration of regret issued in 1713 by the jurors in the court of Salem in order to admit that they were "sadly deluded and mistaken . . . being then under the power of a strong and general delusion" (Gaskell "Lois" 220) and to beg forgiveness for their sinful conduct. Furthermore, considering Lois's depiction as a devout Christian throughout the story, as Denenholz puts it, Gaskell creates a "deepest irony in giving her story its title" because she is associated

with Christ as she comforts Nattee, by telling her the story of Christ's Passion and inspiring her betrothed Hugh to forgive the perpetrators of her death (96).

Another significant aspect of the story is that it portrays unconventional female and male figures who subvert the traditional feminine and masculine gender roles that challenge the expectations of a patriarchal society. In this society, men occupy a privileged position as Grace Hickson's privileging of her son suggests: "Grace made distinct favourites of Manasseh, her only son, and Prudence, her youngest child" (Gaskell "Lois" 166). At the beginning, the society in the story is characterized with traditional gender ideology. To exemplify, Lois's mother asks her to live with her uncle as it would be inappropriate for her to live alone. Within this context, she is accompanied by her father's friend Captain Holderness on her travel from England as he "considered her given into his own personal charge, until he could consign her to her uncle's care" (151). Moreover, in contrast to the powerful status of men such as Captain Holderness, Miller Lucy who refused to offer the orphaned Lucy a home, and Elder Hawkins who is portrayed as the religious figure whose presence keeps women in "awe," Lois is characterized with emotional and financial weakness (142). That Lois's eyes are "filled, against her will, with tears, from time to time" when she thinks of her former life suggests emotional weakness and Miller Lucy not wanting the orphaned Lois, "the penniless daughter of Parson Barclay," to be married to his son suggests financial weakness (140).

Lois's association with emotional weakness at the beginning is complicated in the following parts of the story as she is not portrayed as a passive feminine figure. To begin with, Lois does not despair but acts on her mother's words as she "swallow[s] her tears down till the time came for crying" and travels to America (Gaskell "Lois" 141). Despite her desolation to come following her parents' death, she "comfort[s]" her dying mother (141). She cries in later parts of the story such as after her uncle's death, but she is not a weak figure. Lois is portrayed as an opinionated woman as she defends her ideas in several places throughout the story. When Grace Hickson accuses her family for being ungodly as they stayed in England, she defends her family saying "no one has a right to limit true godliness for mere opinion's sake" (153). Later, she is expected to follow her new family's religious beliefs, but she refuses to do so. Despite feeling pressured to marry in a situation where "many a girl would have succumbed to her apparent fate," she refuses to do so which is another sign of her strength. Finally, when accused of witchcraft, she denies it and refuses to be intimidated by death. Even

when she is visited by her aunt in the cell waiting for her death, she defends herself against her abusive aunt, Grace. Raising her hand, Grace dooms “Lois to be accursed for ever” and summons Lois to “meet her at the judgment-seat,” Lois raises her hand and replies ““Aunt! I will meet you there. And there you will know my innocence of this deadly thing. God have mercy on you and yours!”” (221).

Several female figures are portrayed unconventionally as powerful and superior to men, thus are associated with more masculine qualities whereas several men in the story are narrated to be weaker, more passive and submissive, hence are associated with conventionally feminine qualities. In addition, such characters as Lois, Widow Smith, Grace, Ralph, Manasseh, and Captain Holderness disrupt the repetitive formula of the gender construction as they move out of the gender boundaries set around them by the patriarchy thus problematizing the stereotypical feminine or masculine profiles that are performed repetitively by all members of their society.

As Judith Butler argues in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”, “gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (901). This suggests that gender difference is a socially constructed idea that exists because we create it by believing in such a difference. She then goes on to argue that “‘woman’ is a historical idea and not a natural fact ... to be a woman is to conform to an historical idea of woman, to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility” and claims that society needs a gender concept based on oppositions for its survival (902). Thus, she argues in *Gender Trouble* it is a task for feminists “to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity” (“Subjects” 7) as these categories are not natural facts, and Elizabeth Gaskell in “Lois the Witch” presents androgynous figures with which societal perceptions of masculinity or femininity are subjected to questioning and subversion.

This is a society where men use religion to further support their privileged status and where women are not allowed to control their sexualities. The advantageous status of man as an active figure to pick wives is highlighted as “Grace Hickson [thinks] of herself entitled to pick and choose among maidens” (Gaskell “Lois” 168). Misinterpreting Lois’s refusal of his proposal as feigning reluctance, Manasseh says he “should not like to take to wife an over-forward maiden, ready to jump at wedlock (169). This is because he is raised in a society where women are raised to suppress

their sexuality. Similarly, Grace Hickson replies “Marriage is an unseemly word in the mouth of a maiden” when Lois says “I wish not for marriage at present” (179). Grace finds Lois’s attitude unmaidenly and criticizes her remark because in this society, young women are expected to look meek and disinterested in marriage. In such a society, men are never blamed, so both Manasseh and Grace accuses Lois for Manasseh’s interest in her although it was clearly the work of Manasseh’s ill mind. Lois is also accused by Faith for Pastor Nolan’s interest in her which suggests that women are ready to blame one another, too. In line with this issue, highlighting women’s commodification in traditional societies, Grace tells Lois “I value thee not, save as a medicine for Manasseh” as she realizes that Manasseh will not let go of Lois, and this remark shows Grace’s internalization of women’s secondary positions (180).

Women in the story are more logical and rational whereas men are more intuitive and superstitious which is a significant quality of the story that questions the traditional gender roles of the time. To exemplify, when Pastor Nolan brings nonsensical religious explanations for a dead horse in the town and claim it occurred because “God’s people have sold their souls to Satan, for the sake of a little of his evil power,” only Lois stands out and tries to argue that there may be no relationship between these two events by saying “perchance . . . the horse died of some natural disease” (Gaskell “Lois” 184); and on which Manasseh reacts with an intensified form of prayer as the narrator reports he “prayed aloud for deliverance from the power of the Evil One; and he continually went on praying at intervals through the evening, with every mark of abject terror on his face and in his manner” (184). As important as the portrayal of a reasonable woman like Lois is the portrayal of men who lack the logical ways of thinking and evaluating events.

“Lois the Witch” complicates the hierarchical view of judgement associating “womanly judgement” with compassion and “manly judgement” with principle as the characters cannot be associated with masculine principle or feminine compassion based on their genders considering their roles during the Salem witch trials (Childress ii). Within this context, Lois is the only female figure who is associated with compassion. Lois’s rational explanations regarding witchcraft questions the association of women with hysteria and her treatment towards Nattee can be defined as compassionate. However, Faith, Prudence and Grace all play a part in Lois’s conviction as a witch, and many other women act hysterically feigning bewitchment during the trials. Similar to female characters, male characters are not associated with

masculine principle. Only person objecting to Lois's conviction was Manasseh. The person who started the witch craze was Pastor Tappan, a man claiming that his children were bewitched. The person who decided that Lois should be tried as a witch was Dr. Cotton Mather, another man. The justices who wrongfully convicted Lois of witchcraft were men, Mr. Hathorn and Mr. Curwin. As it is pointed out at the end of the story, the jurors of Salem confess to an unfair trial with a declaration of regret. All of these indicate that all women are not compassionate in their judgement, and all men are not principled in their judgement.

Gender representation in the story functions as a subversion of the repetitive traditional gender roles since it presents fictional examples of strong women versus weak men in the characterization of minor characters. The unconventional portrayal of Widow Smith is one of them as she is described as a person of authority similar to the widowed stepmother in "The Doom of the Griffiths." Emma Liggins comments on the ambivalence regarding the status of unmarried women during the Victorian Era stating they were classified as "redundant, superfluous, anomalous, incomplete, odd" on the one hand; and as "'new,' modern, the woman of the future" on the other (1). To begin with, in contrast to the traditional binary opposition that associates power with men and weakness with women, the Widow is reported to enjoy a superior position to men and women, and she has the power to make intuitive preferences while subletting her rooms; therefore, the narrator adds, "her promptness of decision in these matters gave her manner a kind of authority which no one liked to disobey" (Gaskell "Lois" 143). Additionally, perhaps because she is a widow who has been liberated from the yoke of a husband, she is described in the story as an autonomous and authoritative person with economic and social freedom as well as unprecedented rights to speak in public even when she is around Elder Hawkins. She is reported to be "a privileged person; her known goodness of heart . . . gave her the liberty of speech which was tacitly denied to many, under penalty of being esteemed ungodly if they infringed certain conventional limits" (145). As a result of her privileges to speak her mind, she gets the chance to interfere with Elder Hawkins's little sermons at dinner when he assumes that because of Satan's power, men left a woman helpless, otherwise he claims "it was no part of Christian men to leave a helpless woman unaided in her sore distress" (148). Widow Smith interrupts, "But, Elder . . . it was no vision; they were real living men who went ashore, men who broke down branches and left their footmarks on the ground" (148). Despite Widow's more down-to-earth explanation,

Elder continues to regard the events as a result of Satan's misdeeds saying "[a]s for that matter, Satan hath many powers, and if it be the day when he is permitted to go about like a roaring lion, he will not stick at trifles, but make his work complete. I tell you, many men are spiritual enemies in visible forms, permitted to roam about the waste places of the earth" (148). As it is clear from this specific scene, a clear contrast between the interpretations of Widow Smith's and Elder Hawkins' is given, and whereas the Elder lives off his religious delirium, the Widow could see no further spiritual explanations beyond physical explanations for a simple fact.

Another female-male couple that has been unconventionally portrayed and contrasted in the story are Grace and Ralph Hickson, the characterizations of whom subvert traditional gender roles. With these characters, the traditional female and male representations in a Victorian family are problematized. As the patriarchal authority figure of the house, the father Ralph is gravely ill, Grace has the power to be in control of everything in the house. Having met her for the first time in Salem, Lois feels uneasy with her authoritative masculine attitudes and "a deep voice, almost as masculine as her son's" (Gaskell "Lois" 153) leading to the abrupt dismissal of Lois's request and the Captain's statements. When Captain refers to a letter that should have been submitted to the Hicksons days ago, she immediately refuses the existence of such a letter by saying, "[a]ny letters for him [Ralph Hickson] must come through my hands" (153). She is confident enough to declare herself as the autonomous authority in the house particularly as Ralph is absent from the public sphere because of his health, and she has the courage to dismiss any sort of familial acquaintance of the Hicksons with Lois ignoring the fact that her husband is uninformed about the situation. In contrast with Ralph Hickson, who is described like a "child" (155) and is more "affectionate" (155) towards Lois and his daughters, especially Faith, and sometimes reported to be crying like a child in Lois' care, Grace Hickson is generally portrayed in the whole story as a less emotional, less feminine, but stronger and more domineering figure towards the other members of the house, including her son, Manasseh. Claire Stewart relates Grace's embitterment to the "repressive patriarchal religion," which motivates her to care for her family out of "duty," embitters her and causes mental imbalance in Manasseh (118). Actually, her "strong, narrow affections" also cause mental issues in her daughters: Faith's fixation on Minister Nolan and Prudence's indifference to pain and sorrow. On the other hand, Ralph Hickson is introduced as never having had "the force of character that Grace, his spouse, possessed" (Gaskell "Lois" 155).



The portrayal of motherhood and fatherhood contributes to the unconventional portrayal of gender. Like the absent mother figures in “The Doom of the Griffiths,” Lois’s mother and Pastor Tappau’s wife are absent from the story and the absence of traditional mother figures allows the controversial mother figures such as Widow Smith and Grace to have more important roles. Similar to Nest, in “The Doom of the Griffiths,” Lois’s problems are a direct result of the loss of her mother.

While mother figures except for Lois’s mother are associated with strength, the father figures are not associated with power; they fail to protect and provide for their children or the ones in need. As mentioned earlier, Widow Smith and Grace Hickson are both powerful female figures who can take care of their households which is in contrast to traditional expectations about women. Widow Smith earns money by taking in lodgers and she has “a kind of authority which no one liked to disobey” (Gaskell “Lois” 143). Along with her son, Grace Hickson is one of the “pious and godly heads of a family” (199). Moreover, this “tall, largely-made woman” (153) who has “a deep voice, almost as masculine as her son’s” is not a feminine figure (153); she is “ambitious” (168); she has “the force of character” unlike her husband (155). Grace claims that “there is never a man in Salem that dare speak a word to Grace Hickson about either her works or her faith” (156). In contrast to these two mothers, Lois’s father fails to protect Hannah, a woman who was assumed to be a witch. Hence, in her last breath, she shouts out the curse to be fulfilled: “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” (150). Similarly, he fails to provide for Lois which causes her to go to Salem for the safety of a home. Likewise, Hugh Lucy’s father makes his son unhappy by refusing to provide a home for Lois as he does not want Hugh to marry her. Finally, Ralph Hickson cannot provide for his family due to his medical condition. In this vein, Deborah Morse Denenholz points out that “[a]s in so many of Gaskell’s fictions, fathers are inadequate, like Lois’s father, or hard and unrelenting, as is Hugh Lucy’s father” and associates Lois’s death to inadequate father figures (94). Within this context, the association of fatherhood with weakness contradicts with the conventional portrayal of fathers as powerful figures and causes a transgression of the Victorian notions of motherhood and fatherhood.

As in “The Doom of the Griffiths,” home is described in ambivalent terms in “Lois the Witch” in order to question the separate spheres ideology. Highlighting the public and private dichotomy of gendered spaces, public spaces are associated more

with men and private spaces are associated more with women. To exemplify, Manasseh goes hunting and works outside; the authority figure in the ship is male as well as the authorities in other public places such as the church and the courtroom. However, this association is complicated through the portrayal of the Smiths where the all-female house is also a public space since they take in lodgers into the family home and through the portrayal of Hicksons, where Ralph Hickson, the father figure, is home-bound due to his illness and his wife Grace goes out as a head of the family along with her son. These two households can be read as diversions from the traditional understanding of gendered spaces associating women with the private sphere as opposed to men with the public.

Moreover, home is not portrayed as a place of safety associated with femininity which is in contrast to the Victorian understanding of home. The first home environment, Lois's home in England, reflects Ruskin's understanding of Victorian homes as a "sacred place" (44). However, all the other homes in America are associated with evil, oppression, and violence. To exemplify, in the Smith home, Lois does not feel that she belongs because she is not afraid to voice her beliefs. She questions the truth to the fearful stories on the natives as she asks "But is it all true?" and the witches as she narrates the story of Hannah the witch from Barford by referring to her as "poor, helpless, baited creature" (Gaskell "Lois" 150). Thus, Elder Hawkins thinks Hannah the witch might have "infect[ed] her mind" when she cursed Lois (150). Lois comes to the Hickson home for the safety of a family, but she is othered and abused by almost everyone and her search for safety brings her closer to death as explained before. Tappau house is also related to danger as the Tappau children have seizures which starts the witch hunt. Hence, Grace says "Satan is of a truth let loose among us" with reference to the Tappau house (183). By associating home with violence, the story, thus, criticizes the abuse of power by authority figures such as Elder Hawkins, Grace, and Mr. Tappau. Because of this abuse of power, people are hanged as witches.

As explained in "The Doom of the Griffiths," the exhibitionist role of women in patriarchal societies is also depicted in "Lois the Witch" through the male and female gaze. The male gaze in the story can most clearly be analyzed through Manasseh and Pastor Nolan. In line with Berger's argument that "[m]en survey women before treating them, how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated," Manasseh and Pastor Nolan survey Lois and treat her accordingly (47). Lois

is described as a desirable woman for both Manasseh and Mr. Nolan. Manasseh highlights her desirability as he expresses his desire to marry Lois, "I have seen no maiden so pleasant in my sight as thou art, Lois!" (Gaskell "Lois" 169). Similarly, when Mr. Nolan meets Lois, he is attracted to Lois's feminine appearance:

possibly, he had not heard of the English girl who was an inmate in the house where formerly he had seen only grave, solemn, rigid, or heavy faces, and had been received with a stiff form of welcome, very different from the blushing, smiling, dimpled looks that innocently met him with the greeting almost of an old acquaintance. (175)

This excerpt shows Pastor Nolan's pleasure in looking, but the reciprocity of the gaze complicates the portrayal of gender in this case.

The disturbing impact of the male gaze on women can be analyzed through the first encounter of Manasseh and Lois:

She caught her cousin Manasseh's deep-set eyes furtively watching her. It was with no unfriendly gaze; yet it made Lois uncomfortable, particularly as he did not withdraw his looks, after he must have seen that she observed him. She was glad when her aunt called her into an inner room to see her uncle, and she escaped from the steady observance of her gloomy, silent cousin. (Gaskell "Lois" 155)

Although this shows Manasseh's voyeuristic pleasure in looking, his gaze is reciprocated by Lois, and this complicates the portrayal of gender, as well. Later on, when Manasseh explains his plans to get married to Lois, she starts to "loathe" him and his "dark fixed eyes, moving so slowly and heavily" is a part of what "made her dislike him now" (167). The way Manasseh stares at her body is what makes Lois loathe him because she feels that she is objectified through his gaze.

Having become a spectacle, Lois feels disturbed by the male gaze, but other women in the story are not as disturbed by being looked at. For instance, Prudence acts as if she is bewitched to get attention. Because she feels jealous of the attention Pastor Tappau's daughter gets, she acts as if she is bewitched by Lois which is signalled through the excerpt below:

Prudence was excited by the novel scene into a state of discordant high spirits. 'I am quite as old as Hester Tappau,' she said; 'her birthday is in September and mine in October.'  
'What has that to do with it?' said Faith sharply.  
'Nothing; only she seemed such a little thing for all those grave ministers to be praying for, and so many folk come from a distance; some from Boston, they said, all for her sake, as it were. Why, didst thou see, it was godly Mr Henwick that held her head when she wriggled so, and old Madam Holbrook had herself helped up on a chair to see the better? I wonder how long I might wriggle, before great and godly folk would

take so much notice of me? But, I suppose, that comes of being a pastor's daughter. She'll be so set up, there'll be no speaking to her now. (Gaskell "Lois" 189-90)

The following day, Prudence acts as if she is bewitched and gets the attention she craves. Next, other women act in the same manner "tittering strange cries, and apparently suffering from the same kind of convulsive fit" most probably with the same intention (207).

John Berger also contends that the gaze determines women's relationships with one another (47), and this can be exemplified through the female gaze in "Lois the Witch." The image of the surveyed female determines Lois's relationship with other women especially with Faith. Once a friend, Faith turns on Lois because she feels "jealous" of the attention Pastor Nolan pays to Lois as she has long been in love with him (Gaskell "Lois" 198). Thus, Faith calls Lois a "witch" with a "deadly," "bad," and "wicked" smile on her face in order to get revenge, which turns out to be the beginning of the end for Lois (201). All of these representations of the male and female gaze expose how women are objectified unlike men. However, the conventional portrayal of gender is complicated by the reciprocity of the gaze.

As in the "Doom of the Griffiths," in "Lois the Witch," gender has an unconventional portrayal because the story explores the victimization of women due to Victorian social expectations, religion, and patriarchy and portrays gender in non-binary terms. By focusing on Lois's victimization due to the constraints of a religious community and a traditional family, the story especially problematizes the status of single women in patriarchal societies and presents a new type of woman that resists the separation of spheres. The narrational distancing of the story creates a safer space for the author to criticize the disadvantageous status of women in her own society as the events are distanced through time and space. Although some minor characters such as Widow Smith's daughters and Elder Hawkins are portrayed traditionally, major characters such as Lois, Grace, and Manasseh are characterized with gender fluidity as they have traditionally masculine as well as feminine qualities. The association of women with activity, power, and reason and men with passivity, weakness, and emotion results in gender fluidity. Furthermore, the complex portrayal of concepts such as motherhood, fatherhood, home, and the gaze contribute to the unconventional gender portrayal. What is suggested with such transgressive portrayal of gender roles in the story is that the traditional boundaries set socially, culturally, and religiously around men and women, which historically purports the continuation of stereotypical

gender roles are, in fact, fabricated social constructs, and do not reflect the reality as they are arbitrary and subject to changes and variations.



### **CHAPTER III**

#### **“THE GREY WOMAN”**

“The Grey Woman” centralizes women’s experiences as the main story is narrated by a mother to warn her daughter about marriage. Throughout this precautionary tale, the oppression of women from various walks of life is depicted but the narrative focuses on Anna and Amante. While Anna’s portrayal as a daughter and wife problematizes the status of single and married women, her maid Amante’s portrayal questions the role of unmarried women in a patriarchal society. Anna’s portrayal as a single woman is characterized with oppression since she is forced into getting married, and after her marriage she is oppressed by her husband. Although she is depicted as a conventionally submissive female figure who unwillingly complies with social expectations at the beginning of the story, she is transformed following her marriage thanks to Amante, who saves the damsel in distress. Amante is associated with masculinity because of her physical, mental, and emotional strength as well as her disguise as a man. However, she is killed by Anna’s husband, so despite her strength, she is not strong enough to fight the power of the patriarchal terror. She is the problematic figure of the Victorian age, neither a daughter nor a wife, and through her disguise as Anna’s husband, she breaks boundaries, so she is punished with death by M. de la Tourelle, Anna’s husband and the representative of patriarchy, for not yielding to social expectations.

Female companionship is instrumental in the ambivalent portrayal of gender in “The Grey Woman” because of the existence of obvious homosocial and implied homosexual desire between Anna and Amante. Anna’s husband M. de la Tourelle’s portrayal also contributes to the blurring of gender boundaries because of his gender fluidity as he has traditionally masculine as well as feminine qualities. Moreover, the homosocial and implied homosexual desire between him and his servant Lefebvre contribute to the unconventional gender portrayal. Thus, focusing on Anna’s and Amante’s victimization, the gender ideology at the time is questioned, and through the gender fluidity of male and female characters, gender is portrayed in non-binary terms. I will discuss these issues in the light of John Berger’s understanding of the gaze,

Judith Butler's ideas on gender performativity, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Jeffrey Weeks's writings on homosexuality. Within this context, the aim of this chapter is to analyze the ambivalent portrayal of gender through a close reading of Gaskell's "The Grey Woman" which is noteworthy in terms of its portrayal of gender as an unstable concept, its blurring of gender boundaries and its questioning of gender ideology.

Although the story was first published in 1861, the main narrative takes place during the French Revolution (1789-1799) in Germany and France. Similar to "The Doom of the Griffiths" and "Lois the Witch," in "The Grey Woman," narrative distancing of the story through time and space not only creates a safe distance between the horrific events and the reader, but also allows the author to transgress gender boundaries of her time. However, as Julia Chavez McCord highlights, although Gaskell's choice of setting invokes a sense of otherness, it is "familiar enough to discourage a total separation between reader and tale" (65). "The Grey Woman" has a multilayered narrative framework in which an extra-homodiegetic narrator comes to an inn around the 1840s and, having noticed the portrait of a young woman, is told the story of beautiful but unfortunate Anna Scherer. The narrator finds out more about Anna's story through the letter she wrote to her daughter, Ursula, in order to explain why she ended her daughter's engagement to the man she loves. The intra-homodiegetic narrator Anna, daughter of a German miller, gets married to a French nobleman named M. de la Tourelle who seems to be a charming man but later turns out to be a controlling and cruel husband that locks her in his castle. Later, she finds out that her husband is also a dangerous murderer. Learning about his crimes including the murder of his previous wife, Anna, pregnant with M. de la Tourelle's child, runs away with her maid, Amante. They travel in disguise as a married couple; Anna pretends to be a peasant woman, and Amante pretends to be Anna's husband. When M. de la Tourelle eventually finds and kills Amante, Anna is protected by Doctor Voss, whom she later marries. Although she leads an uneventful life with Doctor Voss who is the antithesis of M. de la Tourelle, Anna turns into a completely different woman who has turned grey with terror, and is afraid to leave home even after her ex-husband's death. The story ends as Anna explains to Ursula that she is actually the daughter of M. de la Tourelle, the murderer of her lover's father.

Unlike the previous two stories, this novella does not have a third person omniscient narrator which is significant in terms of the portrayal of gender. Its

narrative framework is a reversal of traditional gender roles associating speech with men in contrast to silence with women as it has multiple narrative levels and the narrators are not male. It has an embedded narrative with overt narrators at both levels of narration. The gender of the narrator on the first-level is ambiguous and the second-level narrator, Anna, is a woman. In relation to the gender of the extradiegetic narrator, the reader only knows that the narrator travels with a female friend referred to as a “she” which strongly suggests a female narrator (Gaskell “Grey” 289). The extradiegetic narrator of the first-level narration learns about Anna’s story in the form of a letter from a mother to a daughter, and the autodiegetic narrator of the second-level narration, Anna, recounts the events she has gone through as an abused woman. Two distancing narrative strategies are used throughout the text: First, the extradiegetic narrator comments at length about the background of the story; second, the reader cannot identify with the narratee as the narratee is Anna’s daughter Ursula who is addressed as “thou” (291). Both of these highlight the reality of the story’s textuality. As Renzo D’Agnillo points out, “the whole story is nothing less than her attempt to express the difference between the image of her young self in the portrait and the Grey Woman she finally becomes” (42). The narrative framework in this story puts Anna’s character to the center of the text as it allows the reader to learn about the events from her perspective and to understand how marital abuse has affected her character culminating in her immense and irreversible transformation. The manuscript should be read as a cautionary tale from a mother to a daughter about how marriage is an imprisonment and it is used to show how little Ursula actually knows her fiancé as she does not even know his real name (Reddy 186).

The epistolary form is a significant narrative quality in terms of gender portrayal. In his study on the contribution of women to epistolary literature, Albrecht Classen argues that “women not only contributed to a large extent to the production of the astoundingly extensive body of epistolary literature, but they also determined the development of this genre more often and to a higher degree than has been thought so far” (9). In the same vein, Susan Lanser identifies letter writing as a “display of ‘female ingenuity’” as it allows women a way around censorship and reveals woman as “man’s equal in intellectual capacity” since women were not prohibited from writing at all, but they were prohibited from writing for a public audience (352-355). In terms of gender portrayal, the epistolary form in “The Grey Woman” is relevant not only because of its historical association with women’s writing but also because it is an act



of female vocalization and empowerment as the story relates the victimization of women from a woman's perspective.

Like the previous stories, "The Grey Woman" belongs to the genre of sensation fiction which achieved popularity in Britain in the 1860s. Sensation fiction is defined as novels that involve "mysteries, murders, and social improprieties usually within the respectable middle class or the aristocratic home" (Fantina and Harrison xii). As the successor of gothic fiction, sensation fiction is closely related to gothic as both genres "represent experiences inexpressible in literary realism by providing access to a dark, unconscious mode of knowledge" (Brock 1). The categorization of "The Grey Woman" is a rather controversial topic because of its relation to realist, gothic, and sensational modes of writing, but one issue critics agree on is its transgression of boundaries thanks to its mode of writing. Like "The Doom of the Griffiths" and "Lois the Witch," "The Grey Woman" is a true story as it was "suggested by old tales related to or read by her" (Rubenius 279)<sup>24</sup>. Diana Wallace justifiably categorizes the story as a combination of gothic and realist modes of writing; gothic, due to the framing devices of the portrait and yellowing manuscript of the letter, and realist, due to its setting located on the French and German border during the French revolution (60). Arguing that the story "push[es] the boundaries of Gothic fiction," Julia McCord Chavez explains that "The Grey Woman" has two sensational elements: First, it starts and ends in a distant yet familiar setting, Lutheran Germany although Anna is imprisoned in France in Gothic fashion; second, family is portrayed as the villain as it plays a great part in Anna's imprisonment as will be explained in detail later in this chapter (59-67). Jenny Uglow also comments on the significance of the story's gothic and sensational qualities in terms of the portrayal of gender explaining that the story is "a blind disguise under which she [Gaskell] sneaks her unspeakable subjects into family homes" such as cross-dressing and bigamy ("Introduction" xii). Thus, in "The Grey Woman," by writing sensation fiction with gothic elements, Gaskell frees herself from the constraints of her society in order to critique male dominance, challenge the binary understanding of sexuality, and transgress gender boundaries of her time.

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<sup>24</sup> "The original manuscript of the story contains the writer's brief acknowledgement that it 'is true as to its main facts, and as to the consequence of those facts from which this tale takes its title'" (qtd. in d'Agnillo 39)

Various critics have identified “The Grey Woman” as an example of the Female Gothic rewriting the “Bluebeard<sup>25</sup>” story as it involves a husband that murders and/or imprisons his wives. Elizabeth Ludlow and Rebecca Styler refer to “The Grey Woman” as an example of female Gothic (9). In her study on Queer Gothic, Paulina Palmer argues that the haunting of the present in Gothic literature is closely related to the portrayal of queer identities and uses “The Grey Woman” as an example since the story depicts Anna’s transformation into a ghost-like figure with the erasure of her identity having lost the protection of her husband and husband-like “lover” Amante (23-24). Ardel Haefele-Thomas also studies the representation of the queer in Victorian Gothic, and as she points out, “‘Gothic’ and ‘queer’ are aligned in that they both transgress boundaries and occupy liminal spaces, and in so doing, they each consistently interrogate ideas of what is ‘respectable’ and what is ‘normal’” (“Introduction” 2).

The first time Anna enters the castle, she is frightened by her uncanny double reflected in the mirrors:

I caught my own face and figure reflected in all the mirrors, ... I clung to M. de la Tourelle, and begged to be taken to the rooms he had occupied before his marriage, he seemed angry with me, although he affected to laugh, and so decidedly put aside the notion of my having any other rooms but these, that I trembled in silence at the fantastic figures and shapes which my imagination called up as peopling the background of those gloomy mirrors. (Gaskell “Grey” 300)

Anna is frightened of her reflection as it looks familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Her fear of her image in the mirrors reflects her fear of marriage as she is required to leave behind the people and the places she has known and loved until that day. What she sees in the mirror is her married self, it looks like Anna Scherer, but she knows it is actually Madame de la Tourelle, a completely different person, a ghost of Anna. In her analysis of “The Grey Woman” as an example of female gothic, Diana Wallace points out that “the Female Gothic is perhaps par excellence the mode within which women writers have been able to explore deep-rooted female fears about women’s powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy” (57). Wallace argues that the story

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Perrault authored “La Barbe Blue” (The Blue Beard) in 1695, but it became available in English with the 1729 translation of Robert Samper named *Tales of Past Times* (Hermansson 38). A shortened version of the story with slight changes was also included in Grimm’s 1812 collection of fairy tales. In this version of the tale, “instead of a mother with two daughters, there is now a father with one daughter and three sons living in the woods; Bluebeard is a king instead of a wealthy man” (Hiltbrunner 4). Gaskell’s story resembles Perrault’s “Bluebeard” as a young woman unwillingly marries a rich man who turns out to be a murderer, which is thematized in both versions of the Bluebeard story.

explores “the ‘ghosting’ of women within patriarchy” and identifies the uncanny in the story in Anna who fears her husband will kill her as he has killed his previous wife, and she argues that M. de la Tourelle kills Anna three times throughout the story and turns her into a “ghost” neither he nor Anna’s own brother can recognize: first, with their marriage, he kills her identity; second, he kills a woman who looks like her by mistake; third, through her transformation from a young woman into the Grey Woman due to her sufferings (60). These remarks on the ghosting of women imply a representation of total disempowerment of women.

Despite the undeniable victimization and transformation of Anna, it must be noted that M. de la Tourelle actually fails in his attempts to kill Anna; thus, it is not an absolute disempowerment. Anna’s victorious escape and her husband’s unavailing struggles to locate her suggest that Anna’s ghost has haunted him, which connotes a shift of power in their relationship. He might have killed her spirit and her companion Amante, but in the end, Anna is the one that survives and gets to see M. de la Tourelle decapitated for his crimes. Actually, it is implied that his death is caused by his endeavors to kill Anna because Baron de Roeder was involved in M. de la Tourelle’s execution since he had caused the murder of his wife, the Baroness, mistaking her for Anna. Rose Lovell-Smith identifies “The Grey Woman” as a “proto-feminist” rewriting of Bluebeard, because of the relationship between Anna and Amante which “offers a model of female strength and solidarity” and the story’s “interest in women’s work, in female bonding, in female independence of male financial support, and in their sensational departures from images of the centrality of the happy home and the finality of the happy marriage” (204). In fact, the solidarity between Anna and her savior Amante is the most significant differentiation from “Bluebeard” in which the wife is saved by her brothers who kill her murderous husband Bluebeard (Grimm 202-204).

As Clare Stewart points out, none of Gaskell’s stories illustrates the blurring of gender divisions better than “The Grey Woman” (120). As in “The Doom of the Griffiths” and “Lois the Witch,” this story has characters that both reflect and resist traditional notions of gender. To begin with, Anna has a fluid gender identity as she follows the traditional gender ideology in some respects while defying conventions in others. She is a symbol of female suppression throughout the story, as her father’s daughter, as her husband’s wife, and even in her escape from her oppressive husband.

To Aina Rubenius, Anna's passivity is implied to be the reason behind her terrible fate (81). Anna explains that she does not care for the responsibilities related to her home twice in the story. First, she says she is happy about "giving up my [her] post" as mistress to Babette when she gets married to her brother (Gaskell "Grey" 293). Second, after marriage, she is "thankful to be spared any responsibility" (303). Next, she explains how she got married to M. de la Tourelle because of her passivity: "I had got into a net through my own timidity and weakness, and I did not see how to get out of it" (298). Enid L. Duthie claims that the story was written to criticize "the rapid courtship" that would lead to disastrous marriages because Anna did not have the courage to resist her family (122).

Anna is silenced several times in the story by male and female characters who act as the agents of patriarchy; she is first silenced by Madame Rupprecht who pushes her towards marriage, and later by her father who does not listen to her objections about her desire not to marry. After she gets married, she is silenced by her oppressive husband who does not care about her wishes. In such a patriarchal society, marriage is not a matter of choice for a young woman like Anna who cannot refuse to get married to a seemingly good match like M. de la Tourelle as this would mean loss of respectability, so Anna explains her impossible situation: "She (Madame Rupprecht) never seemed to think that I could refuse him after this account of his wealth, nor do I believe she would have allowed Sophie a choice, even had he been as old and ugly as he was young and handsome" (Gaskell "Grey" 296).

Anna is shaped by the society as a passive woman being the subject to men's desires and acts accordingly for most of her life, but she succeeds in breaking this cycle with Amante's help. At the beginning, she seems to accept the social norms which put her in an inferior position. For example, she agrees to get married to M. de la Tourelle in order to protect her reputation. However, this does not mean that she wants to get married. Her unwillingness is obvious in the following quote:

One day I said to my father that I did not want to be married, that I would rather go back to the dear old mill; but he seemed to feel this speech of mine as a dereliction of duty as great as if I had committed perjury; as if, after the ceremony of betrothal, no one had any right over me but my future husband. And yet he asked me some solemn questions; but my answers were not such as to do me any good. (Gaskell "Grey" 298)

This quote shows that Anna actually acted to stop this marriage by having a conversation with her father prior to her marriage, but failed because of the constraints of a patriarchal society. This conversation reflects the suppressed positions of women

as commodities because her father considers her unwillingness “a dereliction of duty” so abominable that it is resembled to committing “perjury” (298). His speech makes Anna feel like an object, as if her ownership rights were passed from her father onto her fiancé.

Anna’s docility as a daughter is followed by her docility as a wife. When Anna’s husband does not let her go out or even see some parts of the castle where they live, she complies with his wishes despite her discontent and restlessness. However, this compliant and subdued woman is bold enough to secretly go through her husband’s mail, and when she learns about his murders, she takes control of her own life by running away with her maid. Anna describes herself as a woman of “timidity” and “weakness” (Gaskell “Grey” 298), and she almost faints several times in the story; however, she is able to contain her emotions and hide her real identity when she encounters M. de la Tourelle who is after her. Although Amante is generally the one to give strength to Anna, Amante also needs Anna’s help. To exemplify, after they run away, during their night at the blacksmith’s house when the blacksmith talks about the crimes that M. de la Tourelle’s gang committed, “Amante would have fainted” if it was not for Anna (328). Like the women in “The Doom of the Griffiths” and “Lois the Witch,” the women in “The Grey Woman” can weather crises.

The passivity expected from women is observed clearly in the criticism of Babette’s assertiveness and Anna’s escape. When Anna and Amante ask about the well-being of Anna’s brother, Fritz, to a Heidelberg man, he starts to criticize Fritz’s wife, Babette, who “got the upper hand” of her husband “who only saw through her eyes and heard with her ears” (Gaskell “Grey” 334). Anna questions the credibility of what he says but mentions that she believed him at the time which is a reflection of the inculcation of social expectations regarding the passivity of women. As the man points out, both Babette and Anna are vulnerable to gossip because of their actions:

That there had been much Heidelberg gossip of late days about her sudden intimacy with a grand French gentleman who had appeared at the mill—a relation, by marriage-married, in fact, to the miller's sister, who, by all accounts, had behaved abominably and ungratefully. But that was no reason for Babette's extreme and sudden intimacy with him, going about everywhere with the French gentleman; and since he left (as the Heidelberg said he knew for a fact) corresponding with him constantly. (334)

As this excerpt shows, passivity seems to be the trait expected of both women as both are expected to show subordination to the authority of their husbands. Babette is criticized for having close relations with a man although he is a part of the family, and

it is insinuated that such a relationship is immoral. Similarly, Anna is also criticized for leaving her husband, and this action is described as an even more serious crime as a woman is expected to be grateful to her husband but Anna acted “abominably” (334). The Heidelberger, then, comments on Fritz’s reaction to Babette’s actions: “Yet her husband saw no harm in it all, seemingly; though, to be sure, he was so out of spirits, what with his father's death and the news of his sister's infamy, that he hardly knew how to hold up his head” (334). As the excerpt shows, the Heidelberger expects Fritz to be disturbed by Babette’s assertiveness, so he links Fritz’s lack of reaction to the shame he feels because of “his sister’s infamy” (334). Thus, the comments of the Heidelberger reflect the binary nature of the traditional gender ideology.

The most exceptional example of blurring of gender divisions is embodied in the figure of Amante. Carolyn Lambert rightly argues that the story “treads an uneasy boundary between acknowledging the courage and practicality of Amante, without which, Anna would not have survived, and ultimately sacrificing her in the interests of conventional domesticity” (*Lingering* 101). Unlike Anna, Amante is portrayed as an unconventionally strong woman in whom animus runs strongly. With reference to the contrast in the characterization of Anna and Amante, Jenny Uglow explains that Gaskell sensed vulnerability and power in all women and split these qualities between the two characters (“Introduction” xii). Because of this, Enid L. Duthy points out, in “The Grey Woman,” Anna, “the timid and weak-willed heroine never entirely gains the reader’s sympathy” and Amante is “the only completely sympathetic character” (148). She is not only courageous and emotionally contained, but also carries on her life disguised as Anna’s husband so that they can get away from M. de la Tourelle. Amante plans the escape and the disguise, and starts to work as a tailor to provide for Anna. When the disguised Anna and Amante encounter M. de la Tourelle, Amante is the one that encourages Anna. Amante’s control over her feelings is contrasted with Anna’s weakness in this matter. Amante’s bodily image reflects her conventionally unfeminine actions, too. For instance, during the night of the murder in the castle, Amante takes Anna in her “vigorous arms” and carries her to bed (Gaskell “Grey” 316). In contrast to Anna, Amante is not afraid to speak up even to M. de la Tourelle:

Amante feared no one. She would quietly beard Lefebvre, and he respected her all the more for it; she had a knack of putting questions to M. de la Tourelle, which respectfully informed him that she had detected the weak point, but forebore to press him too closely upon it out of deference to his position as her master. (303)

Amante's mental, emotional and physical strength is directly related to her freedom from the boundaries of family life. Because of that, Amante is like the widow figures in the previous stories and Madame Rupprecht. In contrast to the boundaries of unmarried daughter and wife figures, Amante as a spinster represents a transgression of norms. Being a member of the working class does not limit her, on the contrary, working provides her with freedom as well as a specific skill set. She does not have a father or a husband and she works as a maid, so she has control over her own life. Thus, unlike Anna, she is not timid or afraid; she is not told what to do and where to go by others; she speaks her mind more freely; she has the necessary skills to escape from the castle and continue earning her life disguised as a man. Thanks to her job, she can plan such an escape because she knows the castle unlike Anna; also, they can exist in disguise because she knows the life behind the walls and can work as a tailor.

Amante's cross-dressing is central to the story's critical perspective to women's disempowered status, as according to Ann Heilmann, it "demonstrates performativity of gender" (83). In the same vein, Shirley Foster argues that "the cross-dressing foregrounds false assumptions about gendered roles and behavior, as well as stressing women's vulnerability in a world of male violence and treachery" ("Shorter Pieces" 123). Amante's disguise gives her the freedom of a man as this allows her to work and also helps both women to travel alone. As Ruth McDowell Cook explains, Gaskell presents work as a way for women to become "autonomous" and "forg[e] their own destinies" (69). Robin B. Colby also argues that Gaskell's portrayal of work is unconventional; to her, Gaskell denied Victorian association of femininity with leisure as women both had a potential for labor and a need for it (12). For instance, in "The Grey Woman," work is portrayed as an empowering concept that creates the contrast between Anna and Amante in terms of autonomy. Amante's work as a maid equips her with self-confidence and her work as a tailor helps both women to survive. As Judith Butler states, "gender is in no way a stable identity... it is an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts;" it is a "rehearsed" act that is "performative" which means that gender identity becomes real to the extent it is performed as observed in the society ("Performative" 900-907). Butler also comments on the relationship between body and gender suggesting that "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" and "this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes" (903-905). In line with Butler's comments

that heterosexuality is shown through appearance and behaviors, in her disguise, Amante changes her body and acts in order to perform as a man thanks to her observations on how men act in her society and her performance as a man defines how she is identified by others. Actually, Amante's disguise as a man is so natural that no one including M. de la Tourelle is able to recognize her when she is in disguise, and this highlights the fact that gender is a constructed identity. In fact, even before the disguise, hearing Amante's voice, a woman thinks that she is a man; so, actually, cross-dressing might have allowed Amante a freer expression of her underlying gender identity (Lambert "Cross-dressing" 81). As Butler emphasizes, we should not think of gender in binaries, but society compels us to do so ("Performative" 908). Within this context, Amante's unconventional gender portrayal illustrates the irrelevance of gender binaries.

Similar to the homosocial desire between Robert and Owen in "The Doom of the Griffiths," Anna and Amante seem to have a relationship with romantic undercurrents. Carolyn Lambert claims that "it is plausible to suggest that Gaskell was interested in writing about lesbian relationships" (*Lingering* 100). What their relationship entails sexually differs from one critic to another and it might differ from reader to reader; however, as Lambert points out, Amante certainly represents "emotional safety and security within the home" for Anna (*Lingering* 100). To Rose Lovell-Smith, the story "touches lightly on a 'disguised' idea of love or marriage between women," but the "dangerously subversive element" of "female bonding" is resolved by Amante's death (199-204). Likewise, Carol Lansbury argues that the story explores lesbian love (211-212) and Maureen Reddy argues that there is sexual spark between Anna and Amante (190). As d'Agnillo points out, their relationship might "suggest a lesbian attraction (on the subconscious level)," but more importantly, it should be read as an expression of the "power of female solidarity against male victimization" (48).

Considered within the context of naming in the previous stories, the use of symbolic names such as Anna, Amante, and M. de la Tourelle must be considered as a deliberate choice highlighting the nature of the relationship between the characters. To begin with, in line with her timid characterization in the story, the name Anna suggests virtue as it is a derivation of the biblical name Anne, borne by the mother of Virgin Mary (*A Dictionary of First Names*). In addition to this, "Amante" means "lover" in French which hints at a romantic and sexual relationship between these



women. Moreover, M. de la Tourelle's name has a phallic connection as "Tourelle" means "tower" in French, and that his true nature as a criminal is revealed at night contributes to the significance of his naming and his demonic portrayal. Actually, Anna and Amante do not have a mistress-servant relationship, not even when Amante first arrives; Amante is Anna's confidante first; she becomes her savior next, and her surrogate husband after that. Anna's first impression of Amante suggests that she sees a kindred spirit in Amante: "But, on first seeing her, I liked her; she was neither rude nor familiar in her manners, and had a pleasant look of straightforwardness about her that I had missed in all the inhabitants of the château, and had foolishly set down in my own mind as a national want" (Gaskell "Grey" 302-303). Thus, Anna explains that, in weeks, she "became sadly too familiar" with Amante as she felt "lonely" and goes on to explain the reason behind their close relations: "But you know that by birth we were not very far apart in rank" (303). As Anna points out, her husband does not like the homosocial bond between the two women: "[M. de la Tourelle] was jealous of my free regard for her—angry because I could sometimes laugh at her original tunes and amusing proverbs, while when with him I was too much frightened to smile" (303). In addition to their female homosocial desire, the lesbian nature of their relationship is implied by their spiritual and physical closeness and their later disguise as a heterosexual couple. For instance, when Anna finds out that she is pregnant, her husband does not know about it, but it is implied that Amante does, and she gives Anna a kitten to lift her spirits. Anna recounts this incident suggesting that the kitten was a symbol for her own baby: "So, though I did not choose to tell her all, I told her a part; and as I spoke, I began to suspect that the good creature [Amante] knew much of what I withheld, and that the little speech about the kitten was more thoughtfully kind than it had seemed at first" (305). That Anna's pregnancy is not known by her husband may also be related to their sexual distance which stands in contradiction to M. de la Tourelle's closeness to Lefebvre and Anna's closeness to Amante.

In addition, there are references to Anna and Amante's physical closeness throughout the story to which Anna Koustinoudi refers to as "suggestive erotic scenes" (139). To exemplify, following their escape, they did not need words to understand each other anymore as "touch was safer and as expressive" (317). Their physical closeness is also highlighted in the following descriptions after their escape: "Amante sat a little above me, and made me lay my head on her lap. Then she fed me" (Gaskell "Grey" 318), and later, "We crept into our bed, holding each other tight" (330). As

these excerpts suggest, Amante and Anna get physically closer after the escape because of the danger of getting caught by M. de la Tourelle; to Anna, Amante is the safe harbor from the violence of M. de la Tourelle. The close relationship between Anna and Amante is characterized with selfless love as opposed to the distant relationship between M. de la Tourelle and Anna which is an embodiment of women's entrapment and the oppression of men.

In his study of sexuality since the 1800s, Jeffrey Weeks argues that there was a "low social profile of female homosexuality" compared to male homosexuality (143). Although there were "many examples of gender inversion, cross-dressing, women passing as men, and 'female husbands' by women over a long historical period," these were not assumed to be related to lesbianism in the modern sense because female sexuality was conceptualized within the boundaries of "maternal instinct" and "male stimulation" (143-44). However, the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diaries and letters prove that women "formed long-lived emotional ties with other women" which had "passion," "kissing and holding hands," but "explicit sexual activity" was not documented, so Weeks refers to these relations between women as "lesbian continuum" and argues that recent studies uncovered a "much more complex and rich lesbian history" (144). Hence, Weeks concludes "[t]he meanings given to homosexual activities can vary enormously" (146). The variety of criticism regarding the representation of homosexuality in "The Grey Woman" is related to Weeks's conclusion. What constitutes lesbianism to one critic is not lesbianism to another. To understand the representation of lesbianism, the relationship between female homosocial and homosexual desire should be studied. In her discussion of the "continuum" between homosocial and homosexual desire, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "the diacritical opposition between the 'homosocial' and the 'homosexual' seems to be less dichotomous for women, in our society, than men" (2). Analyzing the relationship between Anna and Amante, hence, it would be right to interpret the obvious homosocial desire between Anna and Amante as hinted homosexual desire.

Like the other stories that have been studied, male sexuality in "the Grey Woman" is also unconventional since men transcend gender boundaries as well as women. Within this context, Carolyn Lambert considers Gaskell's portrayal of feminized male figures her "contribution to the feminist debate" (*Lingering* 107). In "The Grey Woman," M. de la Tourelle is painted in "most sinister colours" to justify

Anna's decision to leave him (Rubenius 81). He is an abusive and violent husband, but he is portrayed as an effeminate character numerous times throughout the story. For instance, 'his hair was powdered' and 'his features were as delicate as a girl's' (Gaskell "Grey" 295), but he turns out to be a cold-blooded murderer which is in contradiction to his effeminate portrayal. He is the head of a gang who strangely happens to be "a great cultivator of flowers in his leisure moments" (308). He has a bedroom full of "scent bottles of silver that decked his toilet-table, and the whole apparatus for bathing and dressing, more luxurious even than those which he had provided for [Anna]" (309). At first, Anna is attracted to M. de la Tourelle's physical appearance, so she says "I thought I had never seen any one so handsome or so elegant" (295). Before he is introduced to her she is "lost in admiration" of his features "as delicate as a girl's" (295). However, later in the evening the elegant appearance she is attracted to is overshadowed by the "effeminacy of his manners" as Anna becomes "tired" of his "exaggerated compliments" (295). His excessive form of love "frighten[s]" Anna (296). However, after their marriage, Anna finds "an amount of determination, under that effeminate appearance and manners" (299). She comments on the contrasts in his character as she finds out that no one "could bend the terrible will of the man who had on first acquaintance appeared to me too effeminate and languid to exert his will in the slightest particular" (301). The contrast between his effeminate appearance and his cruelty is used to criticize the Victorian indissolubility of an engagement as M. de la Tourelle's sinister nature is used as a justification for Anna's decision to run away from him (Rubenius 81-82).

As well as M. de la Tourelle, other male characters such as Anna's father, Karl, Fritz, and Doctor Voss have untraditional gender portrayals. On the one hand, Anna says her father reflects traditional gender values as he is "stern enough with the apprentices in the mill;" on the other hand, this authoritarian male figure is "always gentle and indulgent towards us women" (Gaskell "Grey" 292). While he forces Anna to get married, he is associated with "kindness" (292), and following her marriage, he says "If my child is unhappy—which God forbid—let her remember that her father's house is ever open to her" (299). All of these refer to a questioning of the association of authority with men. Similarly, Karl has contrasting qualities: "Karl was rough-spoken, and passionate--not with me, but with the others--and I shrank from him in a way which, I fear, gave him pain" (292). Despite his rough appearance, Anna's rejection gives him pain, and this suggests a reversal of male association with power.

Also, Anna's brother Fritz and Dr. Voss are unconventional men as they are not portrayed as authoritative figures and are also associated with kindness. When Anna comes back to the mill, Fritz describes her as "a blessing to him in his old age, as I (she) had been in his boyhood," and despite Babette's insistence, he does not force her to relate what happened which makes Anna thankful "for his trust" (292). In this part of the story, Babette's bitterness and psychological abuse is contrasted with Fritz's kindness. Furthermore, Dr. Voss is described as the "good doctor" and the "dear husband and father" in contrast to the murderous and controlling husband M. de la Tourelle (339-40). The kindness and good nature of these male figures also stands in stark contrast to the abusiveness and violence of M. de la Tourelle and his gang, which highlights a questioning of traditional values on gender associating authority, power and aggression with men.

M. de la Tourelle and Lefebvre have homosocial desires, as well. Instead of spending time with his bride, he goes hunting with his gang. Lefebvre treats Anna as if she is an "intruder" rather than "master's chosen wife" (Gaskell "Grey" 301); Lefebvre "rule[s] his master in some things" which is surprising as M. de Tourelle has a "terrible will" impossible to "bend" (301). Moreover, from Anna's point-of-view, Lefebvre seems to be jealous of her:

...the more M. de la Tourelle was displeased with me, the more Lefebvre seemed to chuckle; and when I was restored to favour, sometimes on as sudden an impulse as that which occasioned my disgrace, Lefebvre would look askance at me with his cold, malicious eyes, and once or twice at such times he spoke most disrespectfully to M. de la Tourelle. (302)

As this quote suggests, M. de la Tourelle and Lefebvre have a close relationship unlike master and servant. Lefebvre sees Anna as a rival, and this supports the possibility of a homoerotic relationship between these men.

Although M. de la Tourelle seems to be "fond" of Anna in his own way, the relationship between him and Anna is strange; Anna describes it as "My husband loved me, I said to myself, but I said it almost in the form of a question. His love was shown fitfully, and more in ways calculated to please himself than to please me" (Gaskell "Grey" 304). Anna's opinion on their relationship combined with the secretive life M. de la Tourelle leads as a criminal, thus, suggests that her husband uses her as a façade either for his criminal activities or for his homosexuality since he poses as a respectable married nobleman. As Jeffrey Weeks explains, male homosexuality was a

notion to be feared as it was believed to be an “illness” punishable by death until 1861 (125-129). However, there was ambiguity regarding the definition of homosexuality in Victorian society:

Another type of homosexual involvement which avoided all the problems of commitment and identity was the highly individualised, deeply emotional and possibly even sexualised relations between two individuals who were otherwise not regarded, or did not regard themselves as ‘homosexual’. It was widely accepted in Victorian society that strong and indeed often emotional relationships between men were normal. The notion that ‘a homosexual’, whether male or female, could live a life fully organised around his or her sexuality is consequently of a very recent origin. (Weeks 135)

The relationship between M. de la Tourelle and Lefebvre should be analyzed within this context. M. de la Tourelle obviously has homosocial inclinations, but he may also have closeted homosexual inclinations as his distant relations with Anna and intimate relations with Lefebvre suggest. In this respect, Anna is one of those women who are used by men as “exchangeable objects, as counters of value, for the primary purpose of cementing relationships with other men” because M. de la Tourelle uses Anna to solidify his status in a heterosexual world (Sedgwick 123).

In “The Grey Woman,” the focus of the story is the terrifying female experience in a patriarchal society, and the male figures occupy unheroic, villainous, and secondary roles. That the story is narrated in the form of a letter from the mother to the daughter creates a reversal of the separate spheres ideology associating men with speech and women with silence. As Mariaconcetta Costantini points out, M. de la Tourelle is “deprived of any psychological depth,” “even lacks criminal ingenuity,” and “is only functional to producing his wife’s paranoid fears” (56). Thus, the narrative framework allows the reader to see events through Anna’s eyes, so male characters are not only given inconsequential roles but also are silenced. The protagonist Anna and her companion Amante occupy primary roles as the moral and mental superiors of their doubles M. de la Tourelle and his companion Lefebvre who are portrayed as the villains of the story.

M. de la Tourelle is an embodiment of male abuse of power in a patriarchal society as he traps Anna in his castle and isolates her from her past life by hiding her letters. Looking at the leading characters, M. de la Tourelle and Lefebvre are associated with evil and Anna and Amante are associated with good. However, taking a closer look at the minor characters, the association of evil with masculinity is problematized as Babette, a minor female character, is associated with evil while

Anna's father, brother and Dr. Voss are associated with good. This complicates the polarized views on gender by portraying men and women as human beings who are capable of doing good and evil regardless of their gender.

As Ardel Haefele-Thomas points out, in "The Grey Woman," "Gaskell employs the Gothic to create a space for her radical family restructurings" by portraying them as husband and wife in their "chosen" family ("Introduction" 6); thus, Gaskell explores "the threat of forced marriage and the rejection of heteronormativity" ("Elizabeth Gaskell" 62). Anna's perception of love and marriage is a point that separates her from other characters as she contradicts traditional expectations with her unwillingness to get married. To begin with, she is unwilling to get married to Karl although her sister-in-law and father expect her to do so:

I began to see that Babette was egging on Karl to make more open love to me, and, as she once said, to get done with it, and take me off to a home of my own. My father was growing old, and did not perceive all my daily discomfort. The more Karl advanced, the more I disliked him. He was good in the main, but I had no notion of being married, and could not bear any one who talked to me about it. (Gaskell "Grey" 293)

As seen in this excerpt, to Babette, a woman with traditional values on gender, marriage is not something that a woman decides to do or something that brings happiness; she describes marriage as if it is a burden to "get done with" as in finished better sooner than later (293). To her, Anna does not have a house of her own as she is single, and a woman belongs to her husband's home not her father's. However, Anna has unconventional views on marriage for a woman raised with the ideal of becoming a wife as she has "no notion of being married" (293). Karl keeps making unwelcome advances, Babette keeps encouraging these advances, and Anna's father expects Anna to get married to Karl. Later, Anna is disturbed by M. de la Tourelle's "exaggerated compliments;" however, a woman with traditional values like Madame Rupprecht is "pleased about" his attention to Anna as he is a rich, handsome, and young bachelor, so she congratulates Anna about this "conquest" (296). This remark portrays the social expectations regarding marriage as an achievement women are prepared for all their lives. However, to Anna, marriage is a notion to be dreaded; she feels "frightened" by M. de la Tourelle's love; she describes the circumstances prior to her marriage as non-consensual, since she is pushed towards marriage (296). First, Madame Rupprecht forces her to accept presents from M. de la Tourelle and Anna says "by accepting these I doubled the ties which were formed around me by circumstances even more than by

my own consent” (297). When Madame Rupprecht writes to her father about Anna’s future betrothal, Anna feels forced to get married: “I had not realized that affairs had gone so far as this. But when she asked me, in a stern, offended manner, what I had meant by my conduct if I did not intend to marry Monsieur de la Tourelle” (297). Madame Rupprecht, hence, accuses Anna of being unchaste; to her, she has allowed M. de la Tourelle’s advances, but actually she was forced to accept his visits and presents by Madame Rupprecht who let him make those advances by inviting him to her house and pressuring Anna to accept the gifts. The emphasis on how the father and the brother are impressed by the money spent by M. de la Tourelle although they do not actually like him suggests that the betrothal is portrayed as an economic transaction between three male characters in which Anna is treated as an object:

But he a little scoffed at the old-fashioned church ceremonies which my father insisted on; and I fancy Fritz must have taken some of his compliments as satire, for I saw certain signs of manner by which I knew that my future husband, for all his civil words, had irritated and annoyed my brother. But all the money arrangements were liberal in the extreme, and more than satisfied, almost surprised, my father. Even Fritz lifted up his eyebrows and whistled. I alone did not care about anything. (297-98)

After her betrothal, she still feels like she belongs to her father’s house, not her future husband’s, so she tells her father about her desire to not get married, but her father replies as if Anna belongs to M. de la Tourelle.

M. de la Tourelle has similar expectations from Anna as he thinks that he owns her after their marriage: ““you will move in a different sphere of life; and though it is possible that you may have the power of showing favour to your relations from time to time, yet much or familiar intercourse will be undesirable, and is what I cannot allow”” (Gaskell “Grey” 299). When Anna asks her brother and father to visit her, they are not enthusiastic as she is a Frenchwoman now,” and this remark shows a similar mindset regarding women as an accessory of their husbands (299). Despite his traditionalism, Anna’s father acknowledges that marriage might mean misery to Anna, so he says his home will always be open to Anna. However, as he points out, the refuge from a husband’s home is father’s home, never a woman’s own home. All of these remarks reflect how women are oppressed as daughters and wives as they are considered to be subordinates of men in a phallogocentric society, and the expression of Anna’s unhappiness and unwillingness about marriage contributes to a reversal of traditional gender ideology.

Since Anna considers men as a destructive force, she is afraid of having a son: “It was a girl, as I had prayed for. I had feared lest a boy might have something of the tiger nature of its father, but a girl seemed all my own. And yet not all my own, for the faithful Amante's delight and glory in the babe almost exceeded mine” (Gaskell “Grey” 335). This excerpt suggests that Amante is the other parent in their relationship. That Anna has a daughter is significant to the gender portrayal in the story as this makes her household with Amante a happy all-female family. Actually, it is irrational to think a son would resemble his father and a daughter her mother, but it highlights Anna’s need to escape from destructive male influences in her life.

Rather than ending with Anna and Amante’s companionship, the story ends with Anna’s marriage to Doctor Voss, and this could be criticized as a traditional ending in which a man comes to the rescue of a woman. Throughout the story, the companionship between Anna and Amante is juxtaposed with Anna’s marriage to M. de la Tourelle. Within this context, Michael Hiltbrunner describes “The Grey Woman” as “a story of oppression and friendship” and points out that the story focuses on “women’s rights and love without marriage” by questioning the concept of marriage (1).

The secondary status of women compared to that of men leave them vulnerable as in the case of Anna, but the bravery of Amante and the goodwill of Doctor Voss help save a vulnerable woman like Anna. As Domínguez-Rué rightly argues, cross-dressing and bigamy are portrayed as “the only escape from imprisonment (and death) within the Law of the Father” (135). To Anna Koustinoudi, Amante’s death and Anna’s marriage to Doctor Voss should be interpreted as a punishment of sexual transgression as “the heroine is subsequently given over this time to the benevolent protection (and sexual possession) of another male” (138). Maureen Reddy also refers to Dr. Voss as a “benevolent master” and argues that the ending is “pessimistic” because it shows how women cannot escape the limited space assigned to them in a patriarchal society (191). Their interpretation of the ending cannot be refuted, but one should bear in mind that Anna defies conventions by committing bigamy as she gets married to Doctor Voss when her husband, M. de la Tourelle is still alive. Moreover, there is a positive outcome of the story:

Anna has been sacrificed to male violence, but it is possible to argue for a more positive interpretation of the outcome. All her energies, and her newly discovered courage are poured into ensuring that her daughter does not repeat her mistakes. Set in front of her are positive images of both men and women for her to imitate. Thus,



female tradition is able to ameliorate gender in the course of passing generations. (Stewart 125)

Furthermore, considering the historical realities of the time limiting women writers, the ending should not be condemned as a celebration of patriarchal values. As Luce Irigaray states “There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one ‘path,’ the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it” (795). As a proto-feminist writer, challenging patriarchy directly was not really an option for Gaskell since it would have kept her from being published. Thomas Recchio comments on the ending as he relates it to the earlier parts of the text:

In place of a system that defines human potential in restrictive ways, “The Grey Woman” enacts a model human relationship, in which the expression of homosocial, homosexual, and heterosexual desire can bind people together in configurations determined by human need and the unpredictable particulars of the individual life. (14)

As Recchio points out, the characters in “The Grey Woman” are not restricted by their gender roles in their relationships.

The portrayal of motherhood and fatherhood contribute to the ambivalent portrayal of gender in this story. Similar to the other stories, the absence of Anna’s mother and father is influential in the plot development. Commenting on the theme of absence in Elizabeth Gaskell’s works, Brandi Jo Fuglsby argues that Gaskell uses absence as a theme in several ways to voice pressing issues for women (v). As Fuglsby points out, “the deceased absent characters represent the ideal Victorian woman, whom Gaskell wishes to silence, for their ideality is unattainable” (v). Like “The Doom of the Griffiths” and “Lois the Witch,” the protagonist in “The Grey Woman” has lost her mother and the problems she goes through are directly related to the absence of the mother figure. As in the other stories, with the mother’s absence, ideal and unattainable femininity is suppressed. Moreover, as Anna’s mother could not pass on the female experience to her, she could not protect her. Anna’s letter to her daughter should be analyzed within this context, as it is indeed an active attempt by Anna to warn her daughter, and the knowledge it passes on empowers Ursula, and she decides not to get married. Furthermore, as Fuglsby highlights, “Gaskell suppresses the male characters by removing them from the story, forcing the female protagonists to venture into the public realm to experience those roles traditionally assigned to men” (v). In “The Grey

Woman,” male characters such as Anna’s brother and father are removed from the story which forces Anna and Amante to take more active roles in the public realm by running away from M. de la Tourelle.

Anna’s letter warning her daughter about her marriage shows her change from the naïve young girl who got married because of her timidity and weakness. As a passive female figure, she got married to M. de la Tourelle because she was a young woman who felt she had to conform to the dictates of society about marriage, but the mature Anna does not stay silent as she does not want her daughter to follow in her footsteps and get married in want of propriety to someone whose real name she does not even know. Maureen Reddy draws parallels between the contrasts in M. de la Tourelle’s character and Anna’s naivety about marriage arguing that “‘The Grey Woman’ can be read, on one level, as a highly symbolic rendering of the psychological shock an inexperienced young woman was likely to feel when confronted by her husband’s desire for sex” (188). To Reddy, Anna’s inexperience is caused by her lack of a mother and Anna’s letter is an attempt to pass on the female experience (188).

Both Anna and Amante defy their boundaries in the private sphere which makes their gender portrayal unconventional. As previously explained, to the Victorians, home was a sacred domain associated with safety and femininity. However, home is far from this portrayal in “The Grey Woman.” Thus, in her analysis of the representation of domestic space in Gaskell’s “The Grey Woman,” Anna Enrichetta Soccio comments on the use of diverse settings in the story, arguing that it “renders more problematic the Victorian ideology of home, calling into question the then current interpretations of class power, gender and agency from the viewpoint of the intimate relationship between domestic spaces and their inhabitants” (85).

The first domestic space Anna describes is her family home, a traditional household where women are assigned to the private sphere. To begin with, until Babette comes along, Anna is happy in her private sphere although she feels insecure about her domestic duties. The source of the problem between Anna and Babette is Babette’s desire to control the private sphere<sup>26</sup>. The association of the domestic sphere and passivity with femininity is also reflected in Anna’s mention of the cherry tree

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<sup>26</sup> Maureen Reddy argues Babette is both an “agent” and a “victim” of patriarchy (187); however, she fails to explain how she was victimized, and I am not convinced that she is portrayed as a victim in the story as the story does not express her state of mind regarding women’s status in the society. Moreover, she is portrayed as a strong female figure who can change her husband’s opinion about Anna’s visit to Rupprechts and the venue of Anna’s marital ceremony.

which her brother Fritz used to climb while she “sat on the window-sill” (291). On this matter, d’Agnillo rightly argues that Anna’s memory of herself sitting on the window-sill in contrast to her brother climbing the cherry tree is a significant detail as it is “symptomatic of the passivity and weakness that lead to her ruin” (43).

The second domestic space described by her is Sophie’s house, and her description of the house as “cramped-up” and “pinched” does not only emphasize the dimensions of the house; it also reflects the discomfort women feel because of the strict rules of social conduct that they need to follow in a courtly household (Gaskell “Grey” 294).

The third place is M. de la Tourelle’s castle, which is referred to as an “apparent imprisonment” by Anna (Gaskell “Grey” 304). As it would be inappropriate for a young woman to travel alone, Anna is always chaperoned; Anna’s brother Fritz accompanies Anna on the journey to Sophie’s house, and in a similar manner, her husband “never encourage[s] [her] to go out alone, either in a carriage or for a walk” (308). Thus, Anna’s confinement to the private sphere at her father’s home is followed by her entrapment in her husband’s home. Moreover, she is only permitted to enter a limited part of the castle and the only outer space she is allowed to go is the flower-garden which was designed in a way as to enable M. de la Tourelle to watch Anna. As Soccio points out, the garden represents an “illusion of freedom” (94). Although she was raised to be an obedient woman who has to live by her husband’s rules, she is disturbed by these constraints as she feels that it is an “imprisonment” (304), and the desire to get her father’s letter triggers the events that will cause her to run away from her husband, disguise herself as a peasant and earn her place in the public sphere with Amante.

The next domestic space described by Anna is the miller’s house that they hide in following their escape. The strict boundaries between men and women can also be seen in this household where the miller is portrayed as a cruel and violent authority figure of whom his housekeeper is terrified. The housekeeper allows Anna and Amante to spend the night there but keeps worrying that her master is going to be angry with her as he ordered her to not “let any man into the place during his absence” (Gaskell “Grey” 319). When the miller comes back at night, he hits her, and she is found dead in her bed the next morning, which implies that she died because of it. In this respect, there is a resemblance between Anna’s and the housekeeper’s victimization as they both suffer at the hands of authoritative and cruel men. Similarly, the blacksmith’s

house that they stay in is also a traditional household in control of men. While the wife does the feminine chores, the husband works outside and orders the wife about household chores such as bringing food.

The inn that they stay in following their escape also shows a dichotomy between the public and the private. There, Baroness de Roeder, the young lady that arrives, does not want to stay in such a public domain unsuitable for her: “The poor young creature tossed her head, and shrank away from the common room, full of evil smells and promiscuous company, and demanded, in German French, to be taken to some private apartment” (Gaskell “Grey” 329). As the Baroness acts in line with social expectations from a woman, everyone is sympathetic towards her victimization. However, throughout the story, other women like Anna and Amante are blamed for their sufferings as they overstep their boundaries.

Later, when she gets married to Doctor Voss, he adopts a different attitude in terms of Anna’s place in the public sphere as he tries “to persuade [her] to return to a more natural mode of life, and to go out more” (Gaskell “Grey” 340). However, she is so much affected by the earlier events that she will not be comfortable in the public sphere for the rest of her life. The representation of Doctor Voss as an antithesis to M. de la Tourelle suggests that all men are not oppressive beings which makes the reader question the gender ideology based on dichotomies.

Similar to “The Doom of the Griffiths” and “Lois the Witch,” in “The Grey Woman,” the objectification of women in patriarchal societies is portrayed through the male and the female gaze. Traditionally, the act of gazing is associated with men and being gazed at is associated with women, and as Laura Mulvey highlights, “[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed” (442). The society in “The Grey Woman” is in line with this traditional gender ideology, and it is highlighted through the portrayal of Madame Rupprecht who ensures the continuity of these traditions by reminding Anna of the rules of etiquette, enabling the courting of M. de la Tourelle by literally displaying Anna, writing to Anna’s father, and practically doing everything for marrying Anna off. While Madame Rupprecht has internalized women’s exhibitionist role in the process of courting, Anna does not like it, but she cannot do anything:

I became a little tired of ... the exaggerated compliments he paid me, which had the effect of making all the company turn round and look at me. Madame Rupprecht was, however, pleased with the precise thing that displeased me. She liked either Sophie or

me to create a sensation; of course she would have preferred that it should have been her daughter, but her daughter's friend was next best. (Gaskell "Grey" 295)

As this excerpt shows, female characters have different reactions toward the male gaze. Unlike her sister-in-law, Babette, who "like[s] to be admired," Anna feels discontent as she "fear[s] admiration and notice, and the being stared at as the beautiful daughter of the miller, 'Schöne Müllerin'" (292). Moreover, the narrator points out that Anna looks "as if she almost shrank from the gaze which, of necessity, the painter must have fixed upon her" in the portrait that the narrator sees at the inn (289).

In the novella, the male gaze should also be analyzed with respect to the portrayal of M. de la Tourelle. As Anna explains, M. de la Tourelle gets married to Anna because of her physical attractiveness: "I understood that M. de la Tourelle was fond enough of me in his way—proud of my beauty, I dare say (for he often enough spoke about it to me)" (Gaskell "Grey" 302). This shows how beauty plays a considerable role in women's victimization. The flower garden in the castle symbolizes masculine authority as it "was designed in order to give me [Anna] exercise and employment under his [M. de la Tourelle's] own eye" (304).

In addition to the male gaze, women are gazed at by women. As John Berger explains, the gaze "determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves" (47). The sexual objectification of women is reflected in Anna's portrayal because her beauty is implied to be the reason behind her suffering. Anna starts to have problems at her father's house because of her beauty. The image of the surveyed female determines Anna's relationship to other women. The female gaze is specifically seen in the relationship between Anna and Babette. Babette who is "a great beauty," looks upon Anna, "a reckoned beauty," as a "rival" and tries to encourage Karl who is in love with her to "take me [Anna] off to a home of my [her] own" which brings "daily discomfort to Anna; thus, when she receives an invitation to go to Karlsruhe to visit Sophie, Babette is "all for my [Anna's] going" (Gaskell "Grey" 292-93). If it were not for Babette, Anna would not have gone to Sophie's and would not have met M. de la Tourelle, so as Anna points out Babette is indeed "the cause of all my [Anna's] life's suffering" (292). The female gaze is also exemplified in the relationship between Anna and Sophie which is contrasted with her relationship with Babette. Anna specifically mentions how "gratified" she feels "by Sophie's ungrudging delight" due to M. de la Tourelle's interest (296). All of these

suggest that traditional gender ideology turns a woman into an object of vision both through the male and the female gaze.

For a thorough analysis on the gaze, the motif of disguise in the story should be studied as it is closely related to the image of the surveyed female and the dichotomy between the public and the private. As a beautiful woman, Anna is objectified and subdued by her husband and confined to the private sphere. By running away and changing her appearance, she gains her freedom and starts to exist as a human being, not an object to be admired. Anna's disguise allows her to overstep her boundaries since it gives her a sense of empowerment and the destruction of her beauty allows her to be free. However, as Suzanne Lewis argues, Anna's disguise also means she has inflicted on herself the violence threatened by her husband (xviii). Hence, in this story, the notion of feminine beauty is represented as a limitation on the free will and individuality of women, and being disguised as men is the only way women can be as free as men.

In the later parts of the story, the gazer/gazed binary is complicated as Anna gazes at her husband when hiding in his study. Similarly, as Anna and Amante hide up in the loft of the miller's house, they gaze down at men. The gaze between Anna and M. de la Tourelle becomes reciprocal in two parts of the story: First, in the blacksmith's house and later from the window of her own house. In both instances, M. de la Tourelle does not recognize Anna which puts her at an advantageous position. Finally, when she sees him for the last time she looks at him, but he cannot reciprocate the gaze as he is dead, which highlights a reversal of the gazer/gazed opposition.

As Elaine Showalter states in her seminal work *A Literature of Their Own*, Gaskell received gender-biased criticism like other writers of the feminine phase (73). Especially her blurring of gender boundaries in the portrayal of male figures is criticized heavily by Lord David Cecil who refers to her portrayal of masculinity as a matter "outside of her imaginative range" because he regards the gender fluidity of her male characters as problematic (179). For the modern reader, such a blurring of gender boundaries as in "The Grey Woman" may be nothing exceptional. However, it must be considered that in Gaskell's time, a woman with masculine traits like Amante or a man with feminine traits like M. de la Tourelle was not socially acceptable, a tyrannical husband like M. de la Tourelle had to be tolerated, and a pregnant wife running away with her maid and marrying somebody else when her husband was alive was abominable. Had Gaskell set this story in Victorian England, she would have received

harsher criticism. Gaskell was able to undermine the patriarchy in her time by situating the story at a different time and place instead of her own. In this story, gender is portrayed as an unstable concept as gender boundaries are blurred and gender ideology is questioned through its narration and its character portrayal.



## CONCLUSION

Having studied Gaskell's short fiction, I have discovered a more complex gender representation than her realist novels, which was unexpected because these Gothic tales have not been regarded among her serious fiction, and are instead considered mostly written as a pastime activity. As explained in detail in the previous chapters, the research process leading to this thesis has shown me that I was not alone in my views about the serious nature of the criticism these texts presented on the Victorian gender ideology. Thus, I would like to comment on an issue that still affects the critical reaction to Gaskell's fiction. Although there have been changes in the reception of her texts recently, due to the continuum of biographical criticism that still forms an influential part of Gaskell criticism, Elizabeth Gaskell is still assumed to be a conventional Victorian writer because of "the conventionality of Gaskell's own family circumstances" (Shelson "Supernatural" 145); however, a close reading of her texts, especially her gothic/sensational short fiction proves these arguments wrong since the subversive nature of gender representation in her short fiction suggests that she is anything but conventional. As explored through a close reading of "The Doom of the Griffiths," "Lois the Witch," and "The Grey Woman," the questioning of traditional gender roles based on the conventional hierarchy between men and women and the deconstruction of these traditional views with the portrayal of gender in non-binary terms open these texts to a gender conscious reading.

To begin with, in all of these texts, patriarchal views in phallogocentric societies are presented in order to question the hierarchical notion of gender that has caused women's disempowerment and victimization through oppressors such as family, society, religion, and law. Thus, all of these stories portray male and female figures that embody traditional values on gender. In "The Doom of the Griffiths," Mrs. Owen Griffiths, Mrs. Robert Griffiths, and Augharad are conventional female figures who do not question their inferior status in contrast to men and are, thus, removed from the storyline. Throughout the story, the traditional notion of gender is problematized by the exposition of the separate spheres ideology that limited women to their domestic environment and the demonstration of female figures as victims of phallogocentric



society. First, married women's legal disempowerment due to the laws of coverture is represented with the portrayal of Mrs. Owen Griffiths, the grandmother. Next, the subjugation of single and married women through rooted social values on gender and family is depicted by the portrayal of Mrs. Owen Griffiths and Mrs. Robert Griffiths, whose secondary status within the society is contrasted to their husbands as well as Augharad whose subordinate status within the family is specifically contrasted to her brother Owen. Similarly, in "Lois the Witch," some minor characters such as Widow Smith's daughters and Elder Hawkins are portrayed traditionally, and removed from the storyline as soon as they are contrasted with unconventional figures. In "The Grey Woman," traditional feminine figures such as Anna's mother, Madame Rupprecht, and Sophia are also removed from the storyline leaving the place to unconventional characters.

Secondly, in these texts, some characters are associated with gender fluidity as they act in line with the separate spheres ideology in some respects and against it in others. In "The Doom of the Griffiths," the second Mrs. Robert Griffiths (the stepmother), Nest Pritchard/Griffiths, Robert, and Owen are characterized with gender fluidity. On the one hand, the stepmother's and Nest's beauty associates them with femininity; on the other hand, they are both portrayed as active and powerful figures. Especially the contrast of the stepmother's rationality and power with Robert and Owen's irrationality and weakness is striking. Another key point is Nest's depiction as a multi-dimensional character with a complex portrayal of her sexuality and power. Moreover, masculinity is portrayed in non-binary terms as Robert and Owen have a close association with femininity and masculinity. For instance, they are associated with feminine concepts such as passivity, emotion, irrationality, and weakness and have a complicated portrayal in terms of power. In the same vein, in "Lois the Witch," major characters such as Lois, Grace, and Manasseh are associated with gender fluidity due to their masculine and feminine qualities. The depiction of women like Lois, Widow Smith, and Grace as active, powerful, reasonable figures as opposed to the portrayal of men like Manasseh, Elder Hawkins, and Ralph Hickson as passive, weak, and emotional figures results in gender fluidity. By centralizing Lois's victimization due to the boundaries of religion and family, the status of single women in patriarchal societies is problematized, and a new type of woman that resists the separation of spheres is presented. In "The Grey Woman," the gender portrayal of the characters is complicated through a blending of femininity and masculinity; especially Amante

through her disguise as a man resists traditional values on gender as her unconventional gender portrayal illustrates the irrelevance of gender binaries. Although Anna is associated with timidity and weakness at the beginning of the story, she refuses to settle for M. de la Tourelle, which indicates a change in her portrayal, as well. M. de la Tourelle is another person with transgressive gender portrayal as there is a stark contrast between his effeminate appearance and his cruelty. Similarly, Anna's father, Fritz, Karl, and Doctor Voss are associated with masculinity as well as femininity. Moreover, the homosocial desire between Anna and Amante and M. de la Tourelle and Lefebvre also contribute to the unconventional portrayal of gender.

Finally, these texts all portray gender as a complex notion that cannot be described in binaries thanks to the discussion of issues such as motherhood, fatherhood, home and the gaze. The concept of motherhood as presented in these stories causes a subversion of Victorian ideals as motherhood is associated with absence instead of protection in all of the stories. In "The Doom of the Griffiths," due to the absence of the mother figure, Augharad is mistreated by the father; when Augharad, the maternal figure after the mother's death, gets married, this time Owen is mistreated by the father. The loss of the mother figure, thus, leads to an irreparable damage between the father and the son. Also, Nest fails to protect her baby from Robert. Similar to Augharad in "The Doom of the Griffiths," Lois's problems are a direct result of the loss of her mother because her dying mother asks her to go to America, which results in Lois's death. Like the absent mother figure in "The Doom of the Griffiths," Lois's mother and Pastor Tappau's wife are absent from the story and the absence of traditional mother figures allows the controversial mother figures such as Widow Smith and Grace to have more important roles. Widow Smith and Grace Hickson are both powerful female figures who can financially take care of their households, which is in contrast to traditional expectations about mothers. The absent mother figure is a recurrent theme in "The Grey Woman," as well. Similar to the other stories, the problems that Anna goes through are directly linked to the absence of the mother figure since she did not have anyone to defend her about her not wanting to get married. Thus, Anna writes a letter to her daughter in order to protect her unlike the other mother figures mentioned.

Like motherhood, the concept of fatherhood is also problematized because the father figures presented in the stories are not in line with the Victorian understanding of father as the protector of family. In all of the stories, fathers fail to protect their

children, which leads to the violent endings. In “The Doom of the Griffiths,” Robert kills his grandson, which also causes his death at the hands of his own son. Likewise, in “Lois the Witch,” the absence of Lois’s father, and thus his failure in protecting his daughter results in Lois’s death. In “The Grey Woman,” Anna’s father fails to protect her from M. de la Tourelle by refusing to listen to her when she does not want to get married to him, and he becomes one of the major sources in Anna’s victimization. Therefore, it is seen clearly that in these stories, there is no powerful protective father figure presented, which is important in the portrayal of masculinity.

When considered in relation to motherhood and fatherhood, the concept of home also causes transgression of Victorian values since it is associated with evil and lack of protection, which is mostly caused by the absence of maternal and paternal figures in all of the stories. In these stories, home is not portrayed as a place that provides protection and feminine warmth, which is in contrast to the Victorian understanding of home. The murders happen in the privacy of home, and thus complicates its association with femininity in these stories. In “The Doom of the Griffiths,” the evils of infanticide and patricide associates home with evil. Owen finds warmth first at the inn which is a public space and later in Nests’s house. In “Lois the Witch,” the family home in England as well as the uncle’s home in America fails to protect Lois. Home is depicted as a source of evil since Lois is hanged as a witch because of her aunt and cousins. Also, the association of home with femininity is complicated through the portrayal of the Smiths because the Smith household has an ambivalent portrayal. Although it is an all female household, they take in lodgers, so it becomes a public sphere. Hence, the association of private with femininity is complicated. “The Grey Woman” has a similar association of domestic space with evil as traditional family home is portrayed as a prison for women. Babette’s desire to control the family home is a factor leading to Anna’s marriage to M. de la Tourelle. In Sophie’s home, the strict rules of social conduct to be followed in a courtly household also play a great role in her marriage. The marital home in “The Grey Woman” is portrayed as a literal imprisonment and is depicted as a source of evil because of the murders. The miller’s home is also portrayed as a violent place in the control of authoritative men. In contrast to all these traditional portrayals of private sphere failing to protect women, unconventional home structures are portrayed as sources of protection as Anna’s home with Amante and with Doctor Voss both provide her warmth, safety, and freedom.

Portrayal of the gaze in the texts complicates the depiction of women as objects of vision since women resist their sexual objectification through the male gaze by occupying the gazer position. In “The Doom of the Griffiths,” the complicated exposition of the male and female gaze in Owen’s, Nest’s, and the stepmother’s characterization can be read both as a representation of patriarchal values with which women are objectified and as a female resistance to these values due to the reciprocity of the gaze between Nest and young men as well as the stepmother and Owen. Similarly, in “Lois the Witch,” the voyeuristic male gaze is reciprocated by Lois. Another point that complicates the portrayal of gaze is that Lois feels disturbed by the male gaze, but other women in the story do not share her disturbance. Finally, in “The Grey Woman,” the gaze is presented in ambivalent terms. From the beginning until the escape from the castle, Anna is displayed and exposed to the male gaze multiple times. However, hiding in her husband’s study, she gazes at her husband’s real self and becomes the gazer. Similarly, hiding up in the loft of the miller’s house, Anna and Amante gaze down at the men. The gaze between Anna and M. de la Tourelle becomes reciprocal in two parts of the story: in the blacksmith’s house and from the window of her own house, which also associates Anna with power because M. de la Tourelle does not recognize her. During their final encounter, Anna is associated with power because M. de la Tourelle cannot reciprocate her gaze as he is dead, and as a result, a reversal of the gazer/gazed opposition is highlighted.

To conclude, portraying the victimization of women at different points in their lives: single, married, widowed, and spinster, in all of these stories, ideal representations of women are silenced and controversial female figures are assigned greater roles. While some female figures like Lois transgress gender boundaries, male figures remain passive, weak, and irrational. These female figures are given major roles in the stories as opposed to the symbolic roles that are given to men; thus, *redundant* is not the female in these stories; it is the male. As Alan Shelston rightly argues, in Gaskell’s “later pieces we see her at her most experimental, and perhaps her most surprising” (“Exploring” 18). Hence, Gaskell’s experimentation enables her to deconstruct certain Victorian values about gender and women. Also, for centuries, women and men have been thought to have immense inborn differences, and Rubin Gayle comments on the existence of these so-called natural gender differences noting,

Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night [...] In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else. [...] Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities (179-180).

In parallel to this extract, in these three examples of Gaskell's short fiction, gender is presented as a fluid concept dismissing the traditional gender stereotypes, so relationships between key binary oppositions that form the basis of Victorian gender ideology are problematized. Hence, through the questioning of Victorian values on gender, Gaskell uses her fiction to provide alternatives to ideology-based hierarchical gender roles, which possibly would result in the reconstruction of society.

Gender is a common subject matter in Elizabeth Gaskell's short stories and novellas. Although many of her short fiction have gothic and sensational elements and narrational distancing as studied in this thesis, Gaskell also has realistic novellas such as "My Lady Ludlow" and "Cousin Phillis" set in Victorian England. The narrational distancing in her gothic and sensational short stories, provides a better area for experimentation as it creates a safer space for Gaskell to transgress the gender boundaries of her time which might either be interpreted as a lack of courage in the author or a clever way to push boundaries since appropriateness of the subject matter in her fiction would lead to better chances for getting published and a wider audience<sup>27</sup>.

In all her short fiction, Gaskell focuses on the Woman Question as she demonstrates and challenges Victorian values on gender by portraying the victimization of single, married, widowed, and spinster women. She problematizes the notions of motherhood, fatherhood, home, and the gaze in other short stories, as well. To exemplify, in "Poor Clare" women are victimized in a phallogocentric society as they occupy a secondary position compared to men. The curse in this story resembles "The Doom of the Griffiths" or "Lois the Witch" as Lucy, the heroine is cursed because of her father's actions who abuses his power in the absence of a maternal figure. Moreover, the homosocial desire between the mother and the

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<sup>27</sup> The harsh criticism Gaskell received after the publication of *Ruth*, her most controversial novel depicting a fallen woman should be discussed within this context. As Anita Wilson explains Gaskell is the first Victorian author to make a fallen woman her protagonist and despite the literary convention about the death of illegitimate children, Ruth's son lives (85). Gaskell's portrayal of motherhood and childhood is a subversion of the ideology of the time since "the novel complicates and challenges the essentialism of the 'fallen woman,' 'illegitimate child,' and any reductive categories" (108). Thus, *Ruth* was "banned, burned, and denounced from the pulpit" (Stoneman 65)

daughter resembles the close relationship between Robert and Owen, as well as Anna and Amante. Furthermore, male and female figures are characterized with gender fluidity. “Old Nurse’s Story” is also about the victimization of women at the hands of cruel men as a young woman seduced by a musician has a baby in secret and learning of this, her father leaves both to freeze to death. In one of her most extraordinary stories, “Curious if True,” Gaskell brings together famous fairytale characters such as Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella and Bluebeard’s Bride in a castle and rewrites their stories portraying their victimization in an androcentric society. While Sleeping Beauty explains how love in fairytales turns out to be unmagical after marriage, Cindirella complains of the terrible pain in her feet to show how women torture themselves for the sake of conforming to beauty standards. With the gender fluidity of Bluebeard’s Bride, Gaskell questions the gender norms as she is portrayed as an outspoken woman unlike her husband.

A thorough study of “The Doom of the Griffiths,” “Lois the Witch,” and “The Grey Woman” indicates new research topics in Gaskell studies. To exemplify, the research for this thesis has identified the portrayal of family in Elizabeth Gaskell’s fiction as a topic that requires further study since family is portrayed as a notion that fails to provide safety to women. As my research on the concept of the gaze has shown, there is not many critical works focusing specifically on the gaze in Gaskell’s fiction, which could also be another avenue for further research.

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