The Victorian Home Sweet Home

Falling to Pieces

A Comparative Analysis of Troubled Family Relationships in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell

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(27.480 words)
1. Introduction

Anthony S. Wohl explains in *The Victorian Family* (1978) that "if one had to select for some time capsule just one photograph with which to evoke both the essential fabric of Victorian society and its self-image, there could surely be no better choice than a snapshot of the family."¹ In the Victorian era, English society witnessed a rapid succession of political, industrial, cultural, scientific, military and social changes and in the midst of modernisation and industrialisation, Victorians all too often felt lost and disoriented. They were desperately looking for something to hold on to and were striving to find a kind of warmth that the cold and estranging world around them could no longer offer. English society gradually started "to cling to the idea that family might provide stability and access to eternal values"² and Victorian society strongly became family-centred. To the Victorians, the family became the anchor that would keep the family members from drowning in the sea of changes and transitions.

Soon, family devotion became elevated to an icon, an ideal state of happiness that everyone in society needed to strive for and needed to achieve. Victorians came to cherish and worship the family home as a place of peace, a shelter from the troublesome and chaotic world around them. As Elizabeth Thiel explains, "the inclusive, supportive family had been in existence for centuries, but it was the Victorians who sought to elevate its status to that of an icon and, in so doing, to create a sense of permanence and stability in a country beset by social anxieties."³ Consequently, the Victorian home and family became to be presented and portrayed as a perfect domestic haven in which the family members could find repose from the estranging outside world. Artists started to depict harmonious, joyful domestic situations and also many advice manuals, articles and didactic novels, such as the moralistic family tales of Maria Edgeworth and Mary Martha Sherwood or John Angell James' *A Help to Domestic Happiness* (1828), guided the family through their duties in the Victorian home and presented the family in a quasi-sacred light. Anthony S. Wohl explains that "it was en famille that the Victorians liked to be remembered and were so often recorded, not in photographs alone, but also in song, print, and paint."⁴

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This wide-spread image of domestic peace, however, was not as self-evident and as realistic as Victorian society liked to claim. The Victorian family home was not always a castle, but could be a prison full of twisted emotions and conflicts, parents were not always good at child-rearing and the family could be strongly affected by financial problems and poverty. The beautiful and perfect-looking Victorian house could conceal many terrible dark truths and consequently, the outer appearance of the home could differ greatly from what took place on the inside. From the 1850s onwards, some British painters such as Richard Redgrave and Augustus Leopold Egg and British authors such as Henry Mayhew or Charles Dickens began to show a much bleaker, yet more honest and realistic side of the Victorian family. They began to challenge and threaten the myth of familial bliss and started to shake the very foundations of the Victorian family home. The Victorian home sweet home was falling to pieces and was gradually uncovering another reality.

With her remarkable insight in the psychology of people and sincere interest in problematic situations in both society and family, Victorian novelist and short story writer Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) gladly subscribed herself in this tradition of challenging the Victorian family ideal. Elizabeth Gaskell herself had known a troublesome youth: her mother died when she was only thirteen months old, she lost her brother when he got missing during a voyage to India with the Merchant Navy when she was only eighteen years old and her father neglected her all her life so she grew up with her aunt. During her many travels, Elizabeth Gaskell came to witness unjustice in society by coming across a variety of social ranks and the outskirts of society. Moreover, she had a Unitarian background, which stimulated her to promote equality and justice for every individual and to become an active member in society. All of these life-experiences "quickened her compassion for the victims of social conflict so that she was often drawn to write about situations and incidents more explosively than she realized." She decided to adjust the distorted image of the Victorian family and wanted to voice the complications in society and in the family which had been silenced for so long.

Scholars such as Edgar Wright, Patsy Stoneman, Coral Lansbury, K. C. Shrivastava and Stanton Whitfield have already characterised Elizabeth Gaskell as a very skilfull author with a masterly insight in the psychology of her characters. They have discussed and analysed her works independently and they most often have done research about how class, financial status and gender are portrayed in her works as a whole. In their research, however, these

scholar have not as yet touched upon the theme of the Victorian family: they have not studied how this family is portrayed in the works and how the events that the family members face influence them. These researchers have not yet tried to find a pattern in the problematic situations that Gaskell depicts, while considering the whole of her oeuvre. Moreover, Elizabeth Gaskell's short stories have not yet received the attention they require and deserve. In my research, I will apply the analyses of the aforementioned and other scholars and take their analyses into consideration, but I would like to take it a step further.

In this Master's thesis, I will explore how Elizabeth Gaskell challenges the idyllic images of the Victorian home and family by categorising the problematic family situations that she addresses in her works. I will concritise my research by analysing and focusing on four works of Elizabeth Gaskell: three short stories, "The Heart of John Middleton" (1850), "The Half-Brothers" (1859) and "Lizzie Leigh" (1855), and one novel, North and South (1854-1855). Before selecting these works and to be able to categorise the problems that Gaskell addresses, I first wanted to gain a better understanding of her oeuvre and the themes running through her works in general. During the twenty years of her life that Gaskell dedicated to writing, she was able to produce a remarkable number of works: she has published seven novels, four novellas and more than forty shorter works, which include essays, stories, autobiographies and travelogues. I have gathered information about all of these works and was able to conclude that almost all of them address problems concerning family life, with only a few exceptions; something which really struck me. For each story, I have made a list of the nature of the family conflicts that were being introduced.

Finally, I was able to discern three main problematic situations that keep on recurring and that seem to be prevailing throughout the whole of Elizabeth Gaskell's works: (1) the relationship between the parents and the children is thwarted and problematised because either the father figure in the family is irresponsible, abusive, violent and negligent or the mother figure has deceased and leaves the children motherless, (2) the family members experience financial difficulties or (3) suffer from diseases or pass away. I have decided to focus on the four aforementioned works, because they address all of these problems and according to me, also give a representative and clear idea about the problematic themes in Elizabeth Gaskell's oeuvre in general. Moreover, I was able to find interesting and similar themes and motifs while comparing the works. These themes and motifs will be the subcategories of the three main categories in this Master's thesis. With the aid of these categories, then, I will examine how the family members react to problematic situations and if and how they overcome the perilous situations they find themselves in.
Additionally, I want to look at these problematic situations from a feminist point of view and I especially want to focus on the female reactions to and possible solutions for these situations. For my Bachelorpaper, I have analysed Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901) and I have examined how the New Woman in these works reacted to the various situations and challenges she had to face: how she was dealing with her self-image, her financial background and the colonial environment which she was living in. In this Master's thesis, I will involve the knowledge that I have gained from writing my Bachelorpaper and I will apply a similar feminist approach. I will research how the female characters deal with the problems that occur in their family life. My research will explore if and how these women are able to solve these problems and how they behave and react when they are confronted with troublesome situations around them.

In my Master's thesis, I will firstly provide a historical context of the image of the Victorian family and how this image gradually developed and was adjusted. Thereafter, I shift my focus to Elizabeth Gaskell's background. Gaskell's Unitarian heritage, the family losses and neglect she has suffered in her youth, her married life, her own children and her travels all seem to account for her status as an advocate of social reform. The third chapter of my Master's thesis contains the main research and focuses on the four works of Elizabeth Gaskell that I have selected and will analyse. This chapter is subdivided in the three categories of problems that I discerned. Firstly, I will explore how the relationship between the parents and children is being depicted and more specifically how the children experience being reared with an irresponsible and violent father figure and/or without a mother figure. The second category will research how the family members of the Victorian household react to their, sometimes, troublesome financial situation and/or the unequally distributed wealth in the society in which they live. Lastly, I will explore how the characters in Gaskell's works cope with disease and death within their family. By the end of this research, I hope to have gained a better idea of the way in which Elizabeth Gaskell has presented the anxieties, struggles and behaviour of her literary characters during family conflicts and, consequently, of the way in which she was able to establish herself as one of the most significant and esteemed social reformers of her time.
2. The Victorian Home

2.1. The Victorian Dream of Home Sweet Home

In the Victorian era, the Victorians "saw the world change before their very eyes": they were confronted with political, industrial, cultural, scientific and military change and they saw the British Empire expanding more and more every day. In this rapidly changing world, there was one dream that fuelled the Victorian imagination: the family home. As Elizabeth Thiel explains in The Fantasy of Family (2008), "in the wake of revolution overseas and in the midst of industrialization and modernisation at home, it was scarcely surprising that the Victorians were preoccupied with order and classification, and their conceptualization of the family as the lynchpin of society from which all else emanated was palliative." To the Victorians, family devotion was seen "as the answer to the woes of public life" as it offered a stability that the disorderly and estranging world around them could no longer provide. When the Victorians went into their houses and closed the door, they could lock out all the chaos of the outside world and open up for a secure and peaceful shelter. The Victorian family home was cherished as a domestic haven and gradually became a rock to build on, a safe refuge.

Soon, this idea of a well-established Victorian home became an ideal to strive for, a state of happiness that every single family needed to achieve. Families publically wanted to display that they embraced this ideal and that they fit into the picture of the home sweet home perfectly. In this period, "keeping up appearances was what it was all about . . . Rich families commissioned pictures to tell the world they were upright, content and respectable . . . Most people, of course, couldn't afford an oil painting of their family, but the local photographer could provide something that looked just like one." Victorian artists and painters as well loved to portray cosy and peaceful domestic scenes. These paintings and family portraits proclaimed that life was wonderful in the Victorian home and showed Victorian life as it should be.

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6 The Victorians: Home Sweet Home, BBC Documentary History, produced and directed by Kate Misrahi, 2009, UK: BBC Productions.
7 Thiel, The Fantasy of Family, 3.
9 The Victorians: Home Sweet Home, BBC Documentary History, produced and directed by Kate Misrahi, 2009, UK: BBC Productions.
10 The Victorians: Home Sweet Home, BBC Documentary History, produced and directed by Kate Misrahi, 2009, UK: BBC Productions.
Many Happy Returns of the Day - William Powell Frith (1856)

Breakfast Time Morning Games - Charles West Cope (1857)

The Children's Holiday - William Holman Hunt (1864)
In this ideal Victorian household, every family member was assigned certain duties and responsibilities which were to be carried out perfectly. Elizabeth Thiel argues that "according to Victorian ideology, the idyllic home was eminently achievable for all and the family within its hallowed walls could, and should be suitably perfect." The husband-father was expected to be the chief authority figure, the moral guardian and the sole or at least the main breadwinner in the family. He was to be "the risk-taker, the protector, the partner toughened by contact with the world. His strengh, and his willingness to be coarsened morally by his exposure to conflict and corruption, would provide a safe place for woman to carry out her own duties." When the head of the household returned from work, he wished to be welcomed in a refined, orderly and warm home in which he could find repose and refuge from the outside world. His wife, therefore, ideally was the "the Angel in the House": she was supposed to be pure and good and needed to provide love and comfort. Her duty was "not only the maintaining of a pleasant and tranquil home but also the moral uplifting of its occupants." Her practical duties depended on her social status. As Claudia Nelson explains, "the wealthier the wife, the more likely it was that she would be supervising the housekeeping rather than engaging in it directly." A comfortably situated middle-class woman was aided by at least one, but more often three or more, servants. As these servants saw to the house, kitchen and children, the middle-class wife and mother herself was mostly concerned with overseeing the home and the employees, planning events, ordering household supplies, sewing or purchasing clothing, paying visits to acquaintances and acting as a hostess at social

occasions. The working-class woman, on the other hand, was mostly not aided by servants and therefore took on most domestic tasks herself. She "was typically responsible for cooking, cleaning, washing and sometimes making the clothes, marketing, budgeting, and either providing or (if she went out to work) arranging child care. If she fell ill, the family's comfort would suffer." The working-class woman was not solely confined to the family home, however, but very often contributed to the family's income by working outdoors like her husband.

To help to construe and invigorate this ideal of the perfect household, Victorian society provided numerous models of what the family and the Victorian home should be like. Queen Victoria herself embodied the perfect Victorian woman: she was widely known to be a caring mother and a dutiful wife:

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\text{By 1857, she had borne nine children, and her devotion to her consort and to her home life had established her as a model bourgeois housewife . . . After Albert's sudden death in December 1861, Victoria embarked upon an ecstasy of mourning, secluding herself as much as possible from the public gaze for the next fifteen years and making it obvious that like the ideal woman of her age, her chief priorities were domestic.}^{17}
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The Victorian era also witnessed the publication of a wide range of advice manuals, articles and didactic novels, guiding the family and especially the women through their duties in the Victorian home: the moralistic family tales of Maria Edgeworth and Mary Martha Sherwood, John Angell James' *A Help to Domestic Happiness* (1828), Isabella Beeton's *The Book of Household Management* (1861), Eliza Acton's *Modern Cookery for Private Families* (1845) and Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Women of England and Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), *Family Secrets, or Hints to Those Who would make Home Happy* (1841), *The Wives of England, their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence and Social Obligations* (1843), *The Mothers of England, their Influence and Responsability* (1843), *The Daughters of England, and Their Position in Society, Character and Responsabilities* (1845).^{18}

\[18\] Thiel, *The Fantasy of Family*, 3-5.
2.2. From Idealism to Realism: The Victorian Home Starts to Crumble Away

Despite all of these efforts, however, this portrayal of the perfect family could not hold out and the disjunction between the ideal and the real gradually became apparent. Slowly but surely cracks started to appear in the framework of the ideal Victorian home and the family home was about to collapse like a house of cards. Behind the walls of the home unfolded a completely different story. From the 1850s onwards, Victorian culture gradually started to move from Romanticism to Realism and the Victorian ideal of home sweet home consequently became greatly challenged and questioned in this period. One the one hand, "the political and philosophical voices that extolled home and family were forceful and persuasive and allowed no deviation from the ideological stance"\(^\text{19}\); on the other hand, however, some British women, painters and authors now dared to show that there was a discrepancy between the Victorian families as they were imagined and the Victorian families as they actually were. This emerging ambiguity "contributed to the many stresses and anxieties surrounding the Victorian family."\(^\text{20}\)

In the 1840s, women started to speak up and called into question "English law's assumption that the family had only one face, namely the husband's."\(^\text{21}\) This way, they managed to set in motion the improvement of their rights. In 1839, the Custody of Infants Act was passed. This new act established that women who had divorced from their husbands could receive custody of children under seven and visitation rights to children under sixteen. Another, more dramatic change in law occurred with the passage of the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Legal dissolution was now not only possible for the wealthy and the higher classes, but for the middle classes as well. Moreover, women could own property and control their own money after the separation\(^\text{22}\). In the 1880s followed the dress reform movement: reformers now freed women from clothing that scarcely allowed them to breathe and suggested more practical and comfortable clothing. Moreover, women "fought the prejudice that education was only for men."\(^\text{23}\) From the middle of the century onwards,

\(^\text{19}\) Thiel, *The Fantasy of Family*, 4.
\(^\text{23}\) *The Victorians: Home Sweet Home, BBC Documentary History*, produced and directed by Kate Misrahi, 2009, UK: BBC Productions.
women's cry for education was heard and more opportunities to receive formal education and to attend universities were created. Liberated from all these conventions that kept women bound to their husband and locked in their house, women now "found there was a life beyond the family home."  

Gradually, during the same period, some artists as well began to abandon the myth of familial bliss and began to show what could go wrong in the Victorian family household. The art of painters, such as Richard Redgrave, Augustus Leopold Egg, Alexander Farmer, Frank Holl and Samuel Luke Fildes, expressed the Victorians' greatest fears: "poverty and disease, the evils of drink, the shame of illicit sex, all waiting in the shadows to destroy the Victorian dream of home sweet home."  

*Past and Present* - Augustus Leopold Egg (1858)

*The Last Day in the Old Home* - Robert Braithwaite Martineau (1862)

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From the 1850s onwards, some Victorian authors and commentators also dared to show the flip side of the Victorian dream. Fiction, non-fiction, social studies and newspapers gradually began to reveal and suggest another world "in which home was sometimes the site of violence, suffering and despair." \(^{26}\) Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) and John Hollingshead's *Ragged London in 1861* (1861), for example, observe and describe the state of the working people in London in the Victorian era. Charles Dickens was another important commentator who often criticised the abuses of the Victorian era through his fiction \(^{27}\). Anne Brontë argues in her novels "that domesticity can be as stifling as it can be satisfying, and that marriage does not inevitably bring permanent happiness." \(^{28}\) In her 1858 novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, for example, the protagonist Helen Huntingdon enters in a disastrous marriage to a man who is a malicious and corrupt alcoholic. By establishing herself

\(^{26}\) Thiel, *The Fantasy of Family*, 4-5.  
\(^{27}\) Thiel, *The Fantasy of Family*, 4.  
as a professional artist, however, she is able to become financially independent and she manages to save herself and her son from their tenuous home situation. Charlotte Brontë's novel *Shirley* (1849) also pleads for more rights, employment and equality for women\(^{29}\). Wilkie Collin's *Armadale* (1866) expresses the thought that most Victorian women would do anything to escape the dullness and monotony of their lives in the family home\(^{30}\).

Critics were horrified that the ideal of familial bliss was now threatened. Paintings and writings were "supposed to evoke feelings of comfort, harmony and security, not to expose terrible dark truths."\(^{31}\) It was too late now, however: the Victorian fears had become very tangible and the Victorian dream was proven to be elusive. Reality was catching up with idealism: the family home was not always a castle, but could be a prison full of "twisted emotions and disreputable secrets."\(^{32}\) Parents were not always devoted to their children and ever-mindful of their responsibilities, nor was the husband always the authoritarian protector and provider, nor the wife the appeasing homemaker. Moreover, the family could be plagued by financial crises and diseases and death could cast a black shadow over the family members. The Victorian "home sweet home could be hell on earth."\(^{33}\) From this moment onwards, "we would never look at the home in the same way again."\(^{34}\)

This Master's dissertation will explore how and in what ways Victorian novelist and short story writer Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) has helped to pierce the dream of the Victorian home sweet home and contributed to open up the eyes of the Victorians by showing another reality. In almost all of her writings, Elizabeth Gaskell presents troubled family relationships and troublesome family situations in a very trustworthy and honest way. To fully understand how she has become such a skilful psychological realist and how she was able to empathise with her literary characters and their experiences to such an extent, one first needs to get more familiar with Elizabeth Gaskell's own background. While reading her works, I recognised various of the events that occurred in her life and numerous of the difficult experiences she herself has gone through. Her own experiences, therefore, seem to have played a very significant and decisive role for the way in which she perceived Victorian society around her. The following chapter will expand on Elizabeth Gaskell's religious beliefs, childhood, married life and travels to demonstrate how she has grown to be a major social reformer.

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3. Inside the Victorian home of Elizabeth Gaskell: A Social Reformer in the Making

Elizabeth Gaskell is a figure who has roused and puzzled generations of readers and critics. Although her reputation has often been disputable because of her at times startling and bleak portraits of Victorian society and family, she is now widely recognised as a great author and skilful observer of psychological and social complications. The context in which Elizabeth Gaskell was brought up and her later life played an important role in the formation of her opinions about society in general and more specifically about the family home. Nurtured by her religious beliefs, her desolate home situation, her marriage and her travels, she became inspired to write about social reform and boldly decided to look at society's flaws with a magnifying lens.

3.1. Born with a Unitarian Heritage

Elizabeth Gaskell was born Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson on the 29th of September 1810 in Chelsea. Her parents, William Stevenson and Elizabeth Holland, were both fervent Unitarians. Her father had been a Scottish Unitarian minister in Lancashire for some time, he worked as a farmer and as editor of *The Scots Magazine* and wrote a number of articles for *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Monthly Repository*, which was the main Unitarian journal at that time. His wife, Elizabeth Holland, came from a family with even longer Unitarian traditions which had been active in religious and political reform since the eighteenth century.\(^{35}\)

Unitarians denied the divinity of Christ and the belief in the Trinity and proclaimed that Christ was a human being who could not be worshipped. In their doctrine, man was a rational being who could fully control his own life and fate by trusting the power of reason without having to rely on marvels and miracles. Coral Lansbury explains that Unitarians "were a singular and distinct community in Victorian society"\(^ {36}\); their minds were not troubled with the uncertainty and doubt that other Victorians struggled with and they were much more


\(^{36}\) Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 12.
released from the oppressions and prejudices of Victorian society. The Unitarian community was an advocate of equality and justice for every individual. When Unitarians married, it was more important to commit themselves to someone who was alike in mind, than to find someone who could offer them property or political and social advancement. Education was a right for everyone, male and female, and also in the way in which education was provided, no distinctions between the sexes were made. Education stimulated the children to become meaningful and active members in society. Furthermore, it was all-important for Unitarians to speak honestly and truthfully: "truth to a Unitarian was the torch that would eventually illuminate the whole of mankind."³⁷ With these views, Unitarians were encouraged to further social and political reform and they have proven to be active contributors in the advancement of human's and women's rights in history³⁸.

The Unitarian influences which have surrounded Elizabeth Gaskell throughout her life are significant to take into account while interpreting her literary writings and her stance vis-à-vis society. Readers can clearly distinguish that she has interwoven Unitarian values in her work. The fact that she was "born to a heritage of political and social reform, and a passion for individual liberty and justice"³⁹ may have been a key factor in her kind of perception of the family, women's rights and society in general. Jill L. Matus explains that "guided by Unitarian and humanitarian principles, Gaskell valued open-mindedness and the ability to explore a problem from different points of view."⁴⁰ Likewise, Coral Lansbury acknowledges that "Elizabeth Gaskell never doubted that she was born with the right and the ability to change society. Her novels and her life as a woman and social reformer were expressions of this theology of optimism."⁴¹

3.2. The Loss of and Search for Family Connections

Despite the comfort and the strength that her Unitarian background offered her, Gaskell's early life was marked by disappointment and uncertainty. As a child and young adult, she became disillusioned by multiple broken family bonds and family losses and consequently

³⁷ Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell, 15.
³⁸ Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell, 11-15.
³⁹ Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell, 12.
⁴¹ Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell, 15.
had no real home or firm future. Already in the very beginning of her life, a first family member was taken from Elizabeth Gaskell: she lost her mother when she was only thirteen months old. Elizabeth Holland's death left her husband bewildered and distraught. He saw no other option than to send his daughter to live with her aunt, Mrs. Hannah Lumb, in Knutsford, Cheshire. Although Gaskell's father married four years later to another woman, Catherine Thomson, he did not invite his daughter to live with his new family and hence, Elizabeth Gaskell stayed with her aunt for the remainder of her childhood. While she thus saw her father only occasionally, she was warmly received in the home of her aunt and also rejoiced in visiting her mother's relatives at Holland Park. Between her and her aunt grew a steady and loving connection, which was as strong as the bond between mother and daughter. Gaskell found that "it is possible for the love of parent and child to be established between strangers or distant relations" and later realised that the fact that she was growing "to maturity in the security of love was a tribute to her aunt and her relations at Holland Park" and not to her father or stepmother. From 1821 to 1826, Elizabeth Gaskell attended a fine school at Avonbank in Stratford-upon-Avon, run by the Miss Byerleys. At Avonbank, "Elizabeth Stevenson was encouraged to write, and education was regarded as a woman's vocation, not adornment." She kept on living with her aunt, until she was asked in 1827 to help with the nursing of her father who eventually died two years later, in 1829. However, Elizabeth Gaskell's distressing times were not over yet: around the same time that she lost her father, she also lost her only brother, John Stevenson. In 1828, John mysteriously vanished at sea on a voyage to India with the Merchant Navy. The loss of her brother struck Elizabeth Gaskell deeply. The siblings had shared a warm-hearted and powerful bond and John had always recognised and supported his sister's creativity and talents. The only family member of the Stevenson household now remaining was Elizabeth Gaskell's stepmother, Catherine Stevenson. Gaskell, however, did not feel any affection for her and did not see her for another twenty-five years after her father's death.

Because of this accumulation of disappointments and loss, Elizabeth Gaskell had soon come to understand "the ephemeral nature of human ties." Although she had found a new mother figure in her aunt, Mrs. Hannah Lumb, and had been fostered in a new home by a new

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43 Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 16.
44 Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 16.
family, she often felt alone in the world, being exiled from all parental bonds. The death of her mother, the absence of her father and the loss of her brother caused a pain which would never leave her heart. Deirdre D'Albertis clarifies that Elizabeth Gaskell "felt the absence of maternal nurturance sharply and idealized the role of maternity throughout her life. Having no memories of her absent mother, Gaskell could only dream of a mother's elusive presence, much as her disconsolate heroines do in times of trouble." This maternal loss is reflected in her fiction: "more often than not, the beloved mother is powerless, dead, or dying; motherless daughters are left to fend for themselves or to seek out surrogates in kindly spinsters and rough, homespun domestics."

3.3. Married Life and Journeys

On the 30th of August 1832, Elizabeth Stevenson married William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister. Gaskell was pregnant seven times, but only four of her children survived. Her first child was stillborn in 1833 and her two other sons died in infancy. Frightened by these losses, Gaskell became a very caring mother for her remaining four daughters and wanted to fulfil her maternal task in the best possible way; she "was never free from worry over their health or welfare." Despite this maternal commitment and the Victorian expectations about the family, Elizabeth Gaskell was given the freedom to build a life of her own and to preserve her autonomy: she was in charge of her own money from 1849 onwards and she often absented herself from maternal and household responsibilities for the sake of travelling or writing. William Gaskell recognised his wife's creativity and was a great support in her endeavours to become a professional writer. Being a gifted scholar himself, he corrected her proofs, helped her to collect material for her works and freely allowed her to express opinions even if they did not stroke with his own. Coral Lansbury admits that "it was an unusual marriage in which each was able to lead an individual life despite all the Victorian calls to wifely obedience and domesticity . . . but it endured with affection and respect to the end." The marriage was "based not so much on compromise or subordination as on compatibility and an

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acceptance of parallel lives . . . William and Elizabeth eventually maintained divergent work lives, social schedules, friendships, and travel itineraries.\textsuperscript{54}

Elizabeth Gaskell loved travelling and even spent more time away from home than her husband. She travelled to France, Italy, Belgium and Germany. On her numerous journeys, Elizabeth Gaskell was not only concerned with the centre of social life, but also became acquainted with the outskirts of society\textsuperscript{55}. In this respect, she was remarkably unique: "no writer of her day had travelled so far through all the ranks of society and been accepted in all of them."\textsuperscript{56} She received a better understanding of all living conditions in society, good and bad, witnessing both poverty and crime. Consequently, Gaskell became compassionate about the outcasts of society, the ones who did not perfectly fit the picture of ideal Victorian society\textsuperscript{57}. Coral Lansbury argues that "as a writer, Elizabeth Gaskell's preoccupation was with the behaviour of people in society, the problems of environment and the definition of social class."\textsuperscript{58}

3.4. Writing Career and Reception

Supported by her husband and inspired by her experiences, Elizabeth Gaskell began to write and established herself as a professional author from the 1840s onwards. She would keep on writing until her death, in 1865. Her writing career thus lasted for a good twenty years and enabled her to produce work of great variety and scope. Gaskell has published seven novels, four novellas and has written more than forty shorter works: essays, stories, autobiographies and travelogues. In her short pieces, Elizabeth Gaskell experimented with multiple narrators and multiple genres: ghost story, Gothic, melodrama, mystery story, fantasy and non-fictional narrative. Gaskell wrote some pieces in \textit{Howitt's Journal} and the \textit{Sartain's Union Magazine} and from 1850 onwards, she started to contribute to Dickens' \textit{Household Words}. Later, she also wrote short pieces for \textit{All the Year Round}, \textit{Fraser's Magazine}, the \textit{Ladies' Companion}, \textit{Cornhill Magazine} and the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette}. These shorter works, however, have never been the main object of study in the past decades; it is only recently, that scholars have discovered those shorter pieces and have come to value them as much as Gaskell's larger works. Gaskell

\textsuperscript{54} Matus, ed., \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell}, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{55} Lansbury, \textit{Elizabeth Gaskell}, 17-21.
\textsuperscript{56} Lansbury, \textit{Elizabeth Gaskell}, 20.
\textsuperscript{57} Lansbury, \textit{Elizabeth Gaskell}, 20.
\textsuperscript{58} Lansbury, \textit{Elizabeth Gaskell}, 21.
also wrote one very important autobiographical work, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), which was significant in her contribution to change the conceptions of the autobiographic genre.

Although Elizabeth Gaskell was a well-loved and lionized figure in her time, her writings more often provoked controversy which outraged and disoriented many critics: she was accused of libel because she handled sensitive material in her biographies, copies of *Ruth* (1853) were burnt because it would not be apt for family reading and the portrayal of the "fallen woman" would be too empathetic and favourable, and she was given the blame of providing a reckless and ill-considered treatment of Victorian society's problems. Alarmed by this commotion, Gaskell sometimes even doubted herself and deprecated herself by saying "to her dear friend Tottie Fox: 'I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it, I do so manage to shock people' (L, 223)." Also after her death, her literary talents were often depreciated by critics who considered her one of the minor novelists of the Victorian era, because she would not reach the level of Thackeray, George Eliot, Jane Austen or Charles Dickens. However, "in the past few decades, Elizabeth Gaskell has become a figure of growing importance in the field of Victorian literary studies" and critics have increasingly come to acknowledge that she is "neither artless nor transparent", but that she is instead a "gifted storyteller, with a zest for anecdote, legend, and social observation."

3.5. Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Family

Nourished by her Unitarian background, the neglect and family losses she suffered in her childhood, her experiences of being a wife and a mother and the confrontation with other social ranks in society than her own, Elizabeth Gaskell grew to be a firm advocate of social transformation and change. In her fiction, she liked to explore social problems and made the voice heard of all those suffering and aching in society. Gaskell proves to be "a master of psychological realism . . . she does not describe physical appearance with originality or at length, but she does delineate with exquisite accuracy the convoluted patterns of emotion and thought . . . Elizabeth Gaskell was less concerned with describing events than with imitating
the way in which people regarded those events and themselves.” Shirley Foster acknowledges that despite Gaskell’s feel for warm humanity and genial affections, she was "an author drawn to explore violent emotions and psychological forces, the uncanny and the otherworldly, the dark and more complex aspects of human relationship, and the jarring elements of human life.”

Elizabeth Gaskell's background and her interest in human conflict also helped to shape her idea about the Victorian family. She distinguishes herself from many other Victorian authors by exposing what families really can be like when they are enclosed between four walls. Coral Lansbury states that "it was in her delineation of the family that Elizabeth Gaskell is the least Victorian of novelists. Far from seeing the family as a heaven-ordered haven of bliss, she regarded it as a stifling and often blighting influence on children's lives.”

Thus incited to bring change in an unjust and disregardful society, Elizabeth Gaskell's literary works tore down the ideal Victorian home with all its fantasies about familial bliss and lay the foundations of a new home, in which troubled family relationships and family scandals were no longer disguised but finally unmasked.

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64 Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell, 9-10.
66 Lansbury, Elizabeth Gaskell, 8.
4. Elizabeth Gaskell's Works: The Foundations of a New Home

In this Master's thesis, I will explore how Elizabeth Gaskell challenged the longstanding idyllic image of the Victorian home sweet home by analysing the way in which she presents problematic family situations in her works and, more specifically, the way in which her literary characters experience and cope with these circumstances.

After gathering information about all of the works that Elizabeth Gaskell has written and after determining the nature of the problems that she addresses, I have discerned three main categories of problematic family situations that are recurring and seem to be prevailing throughout Gaskell's oeuvre: (1) the relationship between parents and children is problematised because the children grow up with an irresponsible, violent and negligent father figure and/or without a mother, (2) the family members witness or experience financial distress or (3) they witness or suffer from diseases and death.

To carry out my research, I have selected four works from Elizabeth Gaskell's oeuvre: three short stories, "The Heart of John Middleton" (1850), "The Half-Brothers" (1859) and "Lizzie Leigh" (1855), and one novel, North and South (1854-1855). These four works present and include the three aforementioned categories of problematic family situations and, according to me, provide a representative picture of the motifs and opinions that Elizabeth Gaskell involves in her oeuvre as a whole. Moreover, I was able to discern interesting connections between the works and I have found similar themes, motifs and symbols in all four of them. I have opted to discuss mainly short stories stories since only little research about Elizabeth Gaskell's short stories has been conducted thusfar in the field of Victorian literary studies. Consequently, I will rely to a great extent on my own research and analyses throughout my Master's thesis. In what follows, I will first give a brief summary of the four works that I have chosen to analyse (4.1.) and I will subsequently apply the three categories to these selected works (4.2.).
"The Heart of John Middleton" (1850) tells the story of John Middleton who is brought up by a criminal father and without a mother, the cause of which he becomes a vengeful person who has lost his moral bearings. It is only when he meets and falls in love with Nelly, that he is able to alleviate the bad feelings that he holds in his heart.

In the story "The Half-Brothers" (1859), the mother figure, Helen, shares a very strong and loving connection with Gregory, the child she had with her first husband who died an early death. Helen later remarries William Preston, with whom she has a second son. After Helen has passed away, William Preston needs to take care of and is fully responsible for two boys: his own son whom he loves and privileges and his stepson Gregory whom he despises.

Lizzie Leigh is the protagonist of the eponymous short story "Lizzie Leigh" (1855). After her family has learnt that she was led astray and is now pregnant, - and is therefore considered to be a "fallen woman" - Lizzie Leigh's severe and unforgiving father banishes her from the family home to go live on the streets. He forbids his pleading wife to find out her whereabouts. However, after Lizzie Leigh's father has died, her mother summons up the courage to go find her daughter nonetheless, after all these years.

*North and South* (1854-1855) revolves around the nineteen-year-old Margaret Hale. Margaret's parents live in Helstone, in the south of England, but Margaret herself has lived for most of her time with her aunt Shaw and her cousin Edith in London, in luxury and comfort. Margaret's life, however, is turned upside down when her father decides to quit his job and decides to move from Helstone to Milton together with his wife and daughter. Being located in the north of England and being a manufacturing town, Milton sharply contrasts with Helstone and especially with London; not only in terms of living conditions, but also in terms of the mentality of the inhabitants. Although Margaret has great difficulty feeling at home in the bustling, smoky town of Milton at first, she eventually learns to appreciate the city and its hard-working people.
4.2. Disturbing the Domestic Peace: Problematic Family Situations in Gaskell's Works

In this chapter, I will identify the three aforementioned categories and explore various themes and motifs in the four works that I have selected. I will more specifically and especially focus on the experience and perception of the male and especially of the female family members by contrasting and comparing the stories: I will examine how the family members react to these problematic situations and if and how they overcome the perilous circumstances they find themselves in, with the aid of the three categories and the themes and motifs, which will be the subcategories. In the first category, I will explore how in these four works the relationship between the parents and children is being presented and more specifically how the children experience being reared with an irresponsible and violent father figure and/or without a mother figure (4.2.1.1. and 4.2.1.2.). In the second category, I will research how the family members of the Victorian household deal with their own bleak financial situation and/or how they react to the unequally distributed wealth in the society in which they live (4.2.3.). In the third category, I will explore how the characters in Gaskell's works cope with disease and death within their family (4.2.4.).

4.2.1. Troubled Child-Parent Relationships

4.2.1.1. Irresponsible, Violent and Negligent Father Figure

4.2.1.1.1. Identifying the Malevolent Father Figures

In "The Heart of John Middleton", "The Half-Brothers", "Lizzie Leigh" and North and South, certain children become the victim of irresponsible, negligent, alcoholic and at times even violent and aggressive father figures.

The protagonist of "The Heart of John Middleton", John Middleton, grew up with a criminal father and without a mother. John's father behaves in a corrupt and irresponsible way, he is nothing like a father was expected to be according to Victorian ideology. His father often swore at him and kicked and cursed him. Moreover, his father's addiction to alcohol and his deplorable behaviour even caused them to be turned out of their lodgings so they had to go
live in a brick-kiln. John Middleton's father also commits criminal deeds, the cause of which John, as the son of such a criminal man, is often mocked at, looked down upon and even excluded from society.

Also in Gaskell's "The Half-Brothers", the theme of the negligent and irresponsible father figure arises. Helen, the mother figure in the story, has married twice, due to the early death of her first husband. With her first husband she has one son, Gregory, and also with her new husband, called William Preston, she has one son, who is the narrator of this story. William Preston was a "stern, hard man"67 (11) who "liked better to be angry than sorry" (10). When he perceives that Helen feels an intense love for her son, which seems to outweigh her feelings for her husband, he grows to be aggrieved and jealous every day more. He cannot bear to feel left out and increasingly starts to mistreat his wife and especially his stepson Gregory:

It just turned him sour to see how her eye brightened and her colour came at the sight of that little child, while for him who had given her so much, she had only gentle words as cold as ice . . . He was so jealous of the ready love that always gushed out like a spring of fresh water when he came near. He wanted her to love him more, and perhaps that was all well and good; but he wanted her to love her child less, and that was an evil wish. (9)

After Helen has died and after his own son has been born, William Preston starts to have a grudge against Gregory more and more as he grows up. He deprecates and curses Gregory while he praises his own son with every possible superlative. Gregory gets the financial support he needs from William Preston, but he does not receive any emotional and genuine warmth from him.

Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh" begins with the death of Lizzie Leigh's father. It soon becomes clear that her father was an upright, yet "hard, stern, and inflexible"68 man (3). When his daughter turned out to be pregnant with an illegitimate child, he banished her from the family home and told her never to come back, which placed a heavy burden on the family and on the mother who wants to go find her: "He had forbidden his weeping, heart-broken wife to

67 All quotations from Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Half-Brothers" (1859) are taken from Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Half-Brothers" (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015). Subsequent references to the page number are included parenthetically in the text.

68 All quotations from Elizabeth Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh " (1855) are taken from Elizabeth Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh", in Cousin Phillis and Other Stories, edited by Heather Glen, 3-31 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Subsequent references to the page number are included parenthetically in the text.
go and try to find her poor, sinning child, and declared that henceforth they would have no daughter; that she should be as a one dead, and her name never more be named at market or at meal time, in blessing or in prayer" (7). Susan Palmer, who takes care of Lizzie Leigh's daughter, is also confronted with a negligent and uncaring father: he has lost all of his money because of a business failure, often gets furious and likes to get drunk at a public-house at night.

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, the poor and ailing Milton girl Bessy Higgins and her sister Mary Higgins are also confronted with a violent and alcoholic father. In the beginning of the novel, Nicholas Higgins, is presented as a positive father figure who means well with both of his daughters. In the course of the novel, however, it becomes clear that he is frequently intoxicated, strikes his daughters, or talks to them in a violent and frightening tone. One of the most violent scenes occurring in the Higgins family is the moment when Nicholas Higgins learns about the death of his daughter Bessy. One day, he comes home after work in a drunken state and after finding Bessy's dead body, he suddenly becomes extremely aggressive: he throws his own body across the table, starts to shake every piece of furniture in the room, beats his head against hard wood, cries and wildly strikes his other daughter Mary when she comes to comfort him, exclaiming "'Get thee gone! - Get thee gone!' . . . 'What do I care for thee?'" 69 (203). After he has thus raged against everything and everyone around him, he wants to leave the house and his daughter Mary to go drinking again all night long. When she wants to keep him from doing so, he violently shakes off his daughter, "whose face was bleeding from her fall against a chair" (204).

4.2.1.1.2. Influence of the Father Figure on the Other Male Characters

In these stories, the reckless, irresponsible ways of the father figure seem to influence certain characters because they appear to adopt similar modes of behaviour.

In the beginning of John Middleton's story, when he is about seventeen years old, his father commits a cruel deed and consequently has to flee the country. Although John's father is now left out of the picture and not mentioned again in the story, John is still not free as he is surrounded by various other male figures who treat him in a similar malicious way as his father did previously. They keep on exercising a bad influence on him and continue to make

69 All quotations from Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-1855) are taken from Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994). Subsequent references to the page number are included parenthetically in the text.
his life difficult. Especially Richard Jackson, who overlooks the mill where John and his father work, does everything in his power to complicate John's life and to make him a laughing stock:

[Richard Jackson] was the bane of my life . . . My hate raged like a fire. I believed that he was the one sole obstacle to my being received as fit to mix with good and honest men. I was sick of crime and disorder, and would fain have come over to a different kind of life, and have been industrious, sober, honest, and right-spoken (I had no idea of higher virtue then), and at every turn Dick Jackson met me with his sneers. (5)

Also in "The Half-Brothers", the father William Preston adversely affects his immediate familial and communal circles. William Preston's own son, the narrator, has been pampered and praised all his life and has witnessed the ways in which his father mistreats his stepbrother. Consequently, he himself gradually begins to adopt an arrogant and superior attitude and begins to pester and bully his half-brother in the same way as his father: "The habit of being considered in all things, and being treated as something uncommon and superior, made me insolent in my prosperity, and I exacted more than Gregory was always willing to grant, and then, irritated, I sometimes repeated the disparaging words I had heard others use with regard to him" (13-14). Not only William Preston's own son, however, but also other people around him start to take Preston as an example and start to humiliate Gregory: "Many a hard word and sharp scolding did he get from the people about the farm . . . everyone said he was stupid and dull, and this stupidity and dullness grew upon him" (13-14).

While Lizzie Leigh's father is still alive, but especially after his death, Lizzie Leigh's elder brother Will follows the footsteps of his father as he adopts a similar arrogant and negligent behaviour in Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh". In the story, Will is described to be exactly "like the father, stern, reserved, and scrupulously upright" (6) and consequently, he "had sympathised with his father's stern anger" (7) when his sister turned out to be a fallen woman. Both Will and his father are dominant figures who want to have all power in their hands. They are tough, unforgiving and they rather like women to be silent than to grant them their wishes. Will likes girls and women "all the better for never speaking" (10). When Anne Leigh tells

70 All quotations from Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Heart of John Middleton" (1850) are taken from Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Heart of John Middleton" (Kessinger Publishing, 2010). Subsequent references to the page number are included parenthetically in the text.
her elder son Will that she wants to go search for her daughter, Will only reluctantly agrees. He does not support this idea, because he thinks that his sister has already died in loneliness and to him, that is "more a comfort than to think of her living . . . He could not help hoping, [that his sister] was dead rather than alive" (8-12).

4.2.1.1.3. A Bleak and Troublesome Childhood for the Victims

Certain characters in the stories thus seem to be surrounded by a primarily male and harmful environment and consequently experience tough, bleak and troublesome times during their childhood.

Because of the abuses that John in "John Middleton" has undergone in his youth, he comes to carry a lot of hatred and envy in his heart towards his father and the other characters who have made him feel this way: "[Father] kicked me where I lay, a heavy lump on the factory floor, and cursed and swore at me till I got up for very fear, and to my winding again. But, when his back was turned, I paid him off with heavier curses than he had given me, and longed to be a man, that I might be revenged on him" (1). Because of his regrettable upbringing, John has bad manners, uses blasphemous words, often indulges in cursing and feels the urge to gain money in a dishonest way. The male figures in this story all seem to have a blighting influence on John Middleton and he is desperately in need of positive female figures to bring him on the right path again.

In Gaskell's "The Half-Brothers" as well, Gregory suffers greatly from the way in which his stepfather and half-brother treat him. This harmful behaviour eventually and partly cause Gregory to die, which might symbolise his intense emotional pain. Towards the end of the story, Gregory's stepfather acts so fiercely and imperiously towards Gregory, upbraids him with his father's poverty and reproaches him his stupidity which according to him makes Gregory useless. Gregory, however, cannot take it anymore and that is when he gets out of the family home in the snow and finally dies in the cold.

In Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh", the severe and unforgiving attitude of her father compels her to live an impoverished, lonely life excluded from all social and familial bonds. Lizzie Leigh is extremely hurt because of the problematic youth that her father caused her to have. When her mother found her daughter again after she had spent some years away from home, she is no longer the bright and cheerful girl she knew before. Rather she is "old before her time; her beauty was gone; deep lines of care, and alas! of want (or thus the mother imagined)
were printed on the cheek . . . Even in her sleep she bore the look of woe and despair which was the prevalent expression of her face by day; even in her sleep she had forgotten how to smile" (27). Lizzie Leigh, however, is not the only character in the story who is oppressed by a negligent father figure. Susan Palmer's grievances especially become clear towards the end of the story. One night, her father comes home late in an "unusually intoxicated state" (23), stumbling "with many a loud, incoherent murmur" (23). Although her baby was sleeping next to her upstairs, Susan goes downstairs and comes to her father's assistance. Meanwhile, however, her little baby is unwatched, falls down and finally dies. Partly because of the irresponsible behaviour of Susan's father and his expecting unconditional help from her, Susan's little baby perishes. When Susan is in pain because of these events, her father does not console her but is "asleep on the settle downstairs; and useless, and worse than useless if awake" (23). When he wakes up, he even savagely blames Susan for the death of the child.

Neither in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* does the father figure, Nicholas Higgins, have a positive influence on his daughters Bessy and Mary. Especially as the strike in Milton is approaching, his temper worsens: he starts to drink and grow aggressive more and more and his children are greatly burdened by this behaviour. Because of the savage and violent tone in which Nicholas Higgins speaks to Bessy, the young girl grows anxious, starts to feel weaker and even more ill than she already is and does not have a positive outlook on life. Bessy confides to Margaret that she sometimes feels like she wants to die because of everything that her father says to her. When Bessy is about to die, her father is not even around and is not to be found to take care of her. The very last words that she utters are a positive message about Margaret, whom she came to consider as a mother, and a negative message about her father: "Give her [Margaret] my affectionate respects; and keep father fro' drink" (201). Also Bessy's sister Mary feels lost in life without a mother figure to guide her and suffers from her father's behaviour: "Mary hurried out of the house, catching gladly at the open door, and crying aloud when she got away from her father's presence" (144).

4.2.1.1.4. Characters Resisting the Negative Influence of the Father Figure

Although there appear many malicious father figures and male figures in these stories who cause certain characters to suffer greatly, there however also seems to be a chink of light in these stories as not every male character gets influenced by the deplorable behaviour of the father figures that they come in contact with. Some male characters resist this influence and
decidedly choose to deviate from this behaviour. Consequently, they even seem to assume female traits and female characteristics instead.

In Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Half-Brothers", both the old shepherd Adam, who was training Gregory to become a shepherd, and Gregory himself resist the negative influence of the father figure William Preston. While no one believes that Gregory could have any talents to offer, Adam seems to be the first and only one who truly sees Gregory's abilities and worth: "I think old Adam was almost the first person who had a good opinion of Gregory . . . My father would try to bring Adam round to speak of Gregory's faults and shortcomings; but, instead of that, he would praise him twice as much, as soon as he found out what was my father's object" (15). Gregory himself as well resists the negative influence of his stepfather William Preston. He seems to have a very close and loving connection with his mother and after she has died, he follows her footsteps in terms of behaviour. When people scold and curse him, he does not take revenge but patiently bears the injustice that he is confronted with. Unlike his brother, he gives his own concerns a lower priority and takes care of the people around him in the same way as his mother would have done. When his brother is in danger at the end of the story because he is lost in a snow storm, Gregory takes care of his brother as if the latter were a little baby and he his mother: he takes off his own garments to wrap his stepbrother in it and lies by him and embraces him to keep him warm. His stepbrother takes his hand and gladly and selfishly receives this help, without thinking how it might affect Gregory: "Here! roll thee in my maud, lad, and lay thee down on this sheltered side of this bit of rock. Creep close under it, lad, and I'll lie by thee, and strive to keep the warmth in us' . . . In my drowsy stupor I felt that I was being tenderly covered up by my brother" (23). This heroic deed enables Gregory to save his brother, but he himself however freezes to death.

Similarly, in Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh", there is one son choosing the side of the father and one son choosing the side of his mother. While the elder son Will is greatly influenced by his father, his younger brother Tom, seems to be subject to the influence of his mother and displays a rather girlish behaviour: "Tom (who was ten years younger) was gentle and delicate as a girl, both in appearance and character. He had always clung to his mother, and dreaded his father" (6). Tom has a soft and gentle character and instead of rejoicing over his sister's disappearance - like his brother Will - because she has brought a disgrace over the family, he rather bemoans the fact that he lost her and cannot see her again.
4.2.1.2. Children Growing up without a Mother Figure

4.2.1.2.1. Maternal Loss Causing an Emotional Gap in the Children's Lives

As I have pointed out in the previous section, many characters in the stories I have selected and in Elizabeth Gaskell's works in general are brought up with an irresponsible, violent and negligent father figure, the cause of which their childhood becomes bleak and miserable. There mostly is an additional reason for the children's distress, however: they have to undergo all of this injustice without a mother figure to take care of them and to ease their minds.

Although John Middleton in "The Heart of John Middleton" grows up with an aggressive and criminal father and is consequently in desperate need for consolation, he has no mother figure to turn to. He has never known his mother and this absences causes an immense pain in his heart. According to him, his being motherless also contributes to the fact that he has become such a vengeful and senseless character. He feels like he would have become a better man if he had only known his mother.

Also in "The Half-Brothers", the two children Gregory and his stepbrother grow up without a mother in their childhood. Gregory, who is the elder of the two children, has known his mother Helen in his early childhood and was able to connect with her and to share a loving bond with her. His stepbrother is three years younger than Gregory and was only just a baby when his mother passed away. Both of the boys, however, suffer from this maternal loss during the rest of their lives. Gregory is struck even more by this loss since everyone around him takes advantage of his mother's death: because she is no longer there to protect him, they can scold and bully him as much as they like.

In "Lizzie Leigh", the eponymous protagonist is banished from her family home by her father because she is a fallen woman and consequently she is also obliged to live without her mother. In this story, therefore, mother and daughter are not being separated by the mother's death but by the mother's being prevented to see her daughter. Lizzie Leigh's own daughter is also separated from her mother, as Lizzie does not have the financial requisites nor the mental strength to take care of her daughter, being only a teenager herself.

In Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South, Bessy and Mary Higgins grow up without a mother figure as their mother died when they were only little children. Especially the ailing Bessy, however, is in desperate need for motherly cares: she misses someone who speaks to her gently, who comforts her and who gives her emotional warmth: "my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and o' all my troubles" (95).
To Fill up the Emotional Gap: the Rise of a New Mother Figure

The aforementioned characters, however, do not remain motherless. In the course of the story, they seem to find another, new mother figure who cares for them and fills up the emotional gap in their lives. These new mother figures exercise a positive influence on the characters: they make them flourish and find their sense in life again.

In "The Heart of John Middleton", John finds a mother figure in Nelly, who guides him through life. When John is about seventeen years old, he has a very significant encounter with this young, orphaned girl. From the moment that John has met Nelly, his life purposes change radically: he increasingly wants to better his life to win Nelly's favour. To accomplish this rise in status, John goes to school for the very first time in his life and in one year time, he learns to read and write. Afterwards, he tries to work his way up and does everything in his power to become a well-respected man in Sawley, the town where he and Nelly live. John's father strongly opposes to his son's endeavours to become a literate and educated man as he "hated the notion of folks learning to read" (3). Before his encounter with Nelly, John would have collapsed under his harsh words and restrictions, but now he has met Nelly, he has finally found the strength to persevere and to stand up against his father: "My father talked, and swore, and threatened, but I stood to it" (3). John seems to succeed: he becomes a skillful workman, earns good wages, marries Nelly and they have a daughter, Grace, together. After Richard Jackson causes John to be dismissed from work, however, John feels tempted again to follow his father's footsteps and lead a life of dishonesty and sin so he can earn money to support his family. Nelly, however, can prevent this from happening and keeps him on the right path in life: "Stronger and stronger came the force of the temptation to lead a wild, free life of sin; legions seemed whispering evil thoughts to me, and only my gentle, pleading Nelly to pull me back from the great gulf” (10-12). The encounter with Nelly clearly symbolises a turning point in John's life and the emptiness that John experienced in his life because of the empty space left by his mother's death finally seems to be filled up again by the presence of Nelly. This woman replaces the mother figure that John was missing and looking for and stays and lives as long as John really needs her. She gives him all the tools he needs to become a good and virtuous man: she encourages him to go to school, tells him about God and the holy texts, turns his bad manners into good ones and teaches him other valuable lessons in life. In the course of the story, Nelly eventually manages to melt John's heart of ice and to make him feel human compassion: for the first time in his life, John feels like he really
wants to take care of someone and he is genuinely committed to and concerned about Nelly. At the ending of Nelly's life, John has learnt all the values to lead an honest life: he has grown to be a good and intelligent man and is finally able to deal with life and people in a correct way.

When Lizzie Leigh lacks the financial and mental requisites to take care of her little baby daughter, she gives her child to Susan Palmer who transforms herself into a new mother figure. Susan Palmer takes care of Lizzie's child and loves the child as if it was her own. She does not only support the child financially, but also feels an intense and genuine love for the child: "She's worked for it, and kept it, and tended it ever sin' it were a mere baby, and loves it fondly" (22). She keeps an ever-watchful eye over the baby and keeps the girl by her side day and night.

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, it is Margaret who behaves like a mother figure. As Margaret Hale's mother is ailing from the beginning of the story onwards and is consequently no longer able to perform her motherly duties, it is Margaret Hale who takes over the motherly role in her family: she takes care of her mother, father, brother Frederick and the family's servants. Moreover, Margaret presents herself as a mother figure for the daughters of Nicholas Higgins, but especially for Bessy Higgins. As Bessy is growing up only with a violent and alcoholic father figure, she is deeply missing a female leading figure in her life to comfort her in a gentle way and to raise her spirits. When Margaret meets Bessy Higgins, she quickly perceives that Bessy is in need for care and decides to mother and look after her: she embraces Bessy, tries to give her courage, ease her mind and support her when her father gets violent and angry at her. She tries to make everyone feel comfortable and uplift the moral in the Higgins home, like the Victorian mother was supposed to. Margaret fills up the emotional gap in Bessy's life; she embodies the female presence that Bessy needed and was previously lacking in her life. Lastly, Margaret also looks after the children of Mr and Mrs Boucher - who are the neighbours of the Higgins family - after they have died and have left their children parentless. She takes care of the children, together with Mary Higgins, and she even starts to teach the two younger Boucher children. To a certain extent, the children start to depend and rely on Margaret and thankfully allow the helping hand that she wants to offer them: "The Boucher children, left motherless orphans, claimed what of Margaret's care she could bestow, and she went pretty often to see Mary Higgins, who had charge of them" (313).
4.2.1.2.3. Searching for the Motherly Voice: the Motif of Sound in Gaskell's Works

Throughout my research, I have discovered that the sound of the female voice is a very important and prevailing motif in these four selected works from Elizabeth Gaskell's oeuvre. When the characters have lost their mother in the stories, it seems to be especially the sound of their mother's voice that they are missing. They consequently begin to search for a female voice that reminds them of or that they associate with the sound of their own mother. The motherless children often find these sounds that they are missing in the new mother figures. However, other characters than these children as well seem to focus on the sound and identify the sound as a significant quality of the characters around them.

Already on the first page of "The Heart of John Middleton", John mentions that he wishes that he had heard the sound of his mother's voice as he thinks that this would have made him a better man: "I never remember my mother. I should have been a better man than I have been, if I had only had a notion of the sound of her voice, or the look on her face" (1). During his life, John has the feeling that he misses the sound of a female and gentle voice to soothe him. When he meets Nelly, the sound of her voice is almost the first thing that he notices about her and he remarks that it was the very first time that he "had ever been spoken to gently" (2). Once John has heard her tender voice, he desperately seeks to hear it again: "I longed to hear her speak to me again. I said the words she had used to myself, trying to catch her tone" (3). John goes to primary school in order to see and hear Nelly: "I found out that she went to school, and nothing would serve me but that I must go too . . . It was the best place for seeing her, and hearing her voice again" (3). While attending classes in school, he finally hears her speak in class and expresses that he "had never heard a prettier music" (4). When they speak to each other again after class, John is still captivated by her "soft, holy kind of low sound" (4) which "seemed so loving and tender" (4) to him. After John has married Nelly, he really respects and obeys her and wants to turn all her wishes into reality. He has almost become like a child who attentively listens to his mother: "She could lead me as a little child, with the charm of her gentle voice, and her ever-kind words" (9). John seems to be very much attracted to the sound of Nelly's voice and even tries to adopt the gentleness and politeness with which Nelly speaks to him: "I could never speak to her but in my gentlest tones" (14).

The sound of the voice is also a significant motif in "The Half-Brothers". John Middleton in "The Heart of John Middleton" had never heard the sound of his mother's voice
and during his life, he keeps on looking for the same sounds that his mother might have produced. Likewise, Gregory values the sounds of his mother's voice and tries to adopt similar sounds. The narrator in "The Half-Brothers" explains that Helen, the mother of Gregory, was never a great talker, but rather "very silent by nature" (4). Gregory himself also always seems to be silent and expresses himself rather by means of acts than by means of words. Even when he suffers injustice, he remains silent and courageous: "He used to turn silent and quiet . . . He would sit without speaking a word, sometimes, for hours" (14). The second son of Helen, on the other hand, had never known his mother and was brought up under the influence of his father. This son had always been a great talker, who pestered his brother in his selfish ways along with the others around him. Towards the end of the story, however, when he is in danger because he is stuck in a snow storm and when he thinks he is about to die, his mindset and attitude gradually begins to change. At this point in the story, Gregory's stepbrother starts to distance himself from his father and starts to value his half-brother and mother more and more. His father tells him to follow his commands and to return by the road after his errands, but he does not listen to him anymore: "He bade me return by the road, whichever way I took in going . . . [but] I took the decision of the way by which I would return into my own hands". From this moment onwards, Gregory's stepbrother is less and less able to speak: "I tried to shout - with the dimmest possible hope of being heard - rather to reassure myself by the sound of my own voice; but my voice came husky and short . . . [and] was getting choked with tears" (17-18). When he then hears a cry in the distance and thinks that help might be on the way he cannot utter any words: "I could not reply for a minute or two. I nearly fancied I had lost the power of utterance" (19). When Gregory finds his stepbrother and comes to rescue him, the latter says "'Oh Gregory!' said I, and I fell upon his neck, unable to speak another word" (20). After this experience, Gregory's stepbrother suddenly has become a better person who is able to empathise with the people around him much more.

In Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh", sounds are also given much attention. Lizzie Leigh has not seen her mother for years as she was sent away from the family home by her father. During those years, Lizzie severely misses her mother and her soothing motherly sounds. When the two women have found their way back to each other at the end of the story, and when her mother embraces and hushes her as if she were a baby, Lizzie Leigh finally seems to find rest for the first time in years: "She threw her arms round the faithful mother's neck, and wept there as she had done in many a childish sorrow; but with a deeper, a more wretched grief. Her mother hushed her on her breast; and lulled her as if she were a baby; and she grew still and quiet" (31). In this story, however, the search for sound is also reversed: here, it is not
only the daughter who is looking for the sounds of the mother, but also the mother figure who is searching for the sounds of her lost daughter. Lizzie's mother misses her daughter's presence so much that she even imagines to hear her daughter's crying voice: "And often, when the south wind was blowing soft among the hollows, I've fancied (it could but be fancy, thou knowest) I heard her crying upon me; and I've thought the voice came closer and closer, till at last it was sobbing out 'Mother' close to the door . . . [and I] turned sick and sorrowful when I heard no living sound but the sough of the wind dying away" (7). Anne Leigh is not the only mother, however, searching for the sound of her daughter's voice. Also Lizzie Leigh longs to hear the voice of the baby that she gave away right after it was born. When she perceives that her child is in danger, Lizzie Leigh finally summons the courage to see and embrace her daughter. After her daughter has died, Lizzie expresses that she wished she had heard the sound of her daughter's voice: "Could she speak? Oh, if God - if I might but have heard her little voice! Mother, I used to dream of it" (30). As she is holding the baby in her arms, she finally really and truly becomes a mother and her voice even changes because of this transition: "'May I have my own child to be in my arms for a little while?' Her voice was so strange a contrast to what it had been before she had gone into the fit, that Susan hardly recognised it; it was now so unspeakably soft, so irresistibly speaking" (25). Moreover, the voice of Lizzie Leigh's brother changes when he starts to become a better person. As with Helen's second son in "The Half-Brothers" whose voice begins to change when he suddenly realises that his father might be wrong and his mother right. Gradually, Will starts to feel more sympathy for his mother and also seems to choose the side of his mother instead of his father as "the opening of her heart had unlocked his" (14). When Anne Leigh shows herself to be a powerful woman who deserves to be treated with respect, Will suddenly alters the tone of his voice:

She stood, no longer, as the meek, imploring, gentle mother, but firm and dignified, as if the interpreter of God's will. Her manner was so unusual and solemn, that it overcame all Will's pride and stubbornness. He rose softly while she was speaking, and bent his head as if in reverence at her words, and the solemn injunction which they conveyed. When she had spoken, he said in so subdued a voice that she was almost surprised at the sound, 'Mother, I will' (22).
As Bessy Higgins in *North and South* grows up motherless and with a violent and negligent father figure, she is missing gentle, female sounds in her life which she finally finds in her conversations with Margaret, whom she considers as a mother figure. When Bessy complains to Margaret about her father, it is often the motif of the sound that comes up. Bessy despises the things that her father says at times because it makes her feel desperate and discomforted: "He's a rare good man, is father - but oh! said she, falling back in despair, 'what he says at times makes me long to die more than ever" (85). Later she expresses a similar concern and it is clear that her father' words do not comfort her, but rather add to her mental and physical distress: "I wish father would not speak as he does. He means well, as I telled yo' yesterday, and tell yo' again and again. But yo' see, though I don't believe him a bit by day, yet by night - when I'm in a fever, half-asleep and half-awake - it comes back upon me - oh! so bad!" (95). Moreover, Bessy exclaims that she has missed motherly, comforting, female chats because all her life she has had to hear rough, male talk:

'Poor Bessy!' said Margaret, turning round to her. 'You sigh over it all. You don't like struggling and fighting as your father does, do you?' 'No!' said she, heavily. 'I'm sick of it. I could have wished to have had other talk about me in my latter days, than just the clashing and clanging and clattering that has wearied a' my life long, about work and wages, and masters, and hands, and knobsticks.' (127)

Margaret mentions that something would change if Nicholas Higgins was but able to express himself differently: "By instinct she felt, that if he could but be brought to express himself in plain words, something clear would be gained on which to argue for the right and the just" (215). Bessy Higgins is desperately looking for comfort and she cannot find this comfort in her father's speech. The presence of and conversations with Margaret Hale, who is said to be having a "soft low voice" (187), however, seem to make up for the rude, unpolished talk of her father. Bessy likes the sound of Margaret and she finds pleasure and comfort in Margaret's visits and her story-telling: "'Tell me about it,' said Bessy. 'I like to hear speak of the country, and trees, and suchlike things.' She leant back, and shut her eyes, and crossed her hands over her breast, lying at perfect rest, as if to receive all the ideas that Margaret could suggest" (94). At a certain point, Bessy even explicitly refers to herself as a baby and Margaret as her mother: "I thought when father left, oh! if I could just hear her voice, reading me some words o' peace and promise, I could die away into the silence and rest o' God, just as a babby is
hushed up to sleep by its mother's lullaby" (185). The Bible as well comforts Bessy, because again, she likes the sound of it: "Many's the time I've repeated the verses in the seventh chapter to myself, just for the sound" (129). Bessy, however, is not the only one indicating the power of Margaret's voice. Also Mr Thornton, who is in love with Margaret, perceives that "the very sight of that face and form, the very sounds of that voice (like the soft winds of pure melody) had such power to move him from his balance" (311). Moreover, other characters than Bessy Higgins in the story miss a gentle voice around them and/or try to adopt a gentle and female sound which reminds them of a mother figure they lost or are about to lose. When Margaret's mother has just died and her father consequently has lost the wife and mother figure for his children, he produces some kind of motherly sound and behaves like a mother: "Margaret sat with her father in the room with the dead. If he had cried, she would have been thankful. But he sat by the bed quite quietly; only, from time to time, he uncovered the face, and stroked it gently, making a kind of soft inarticulate noise, like that of some mother-animal caressing her young" (232). Although Mr Thornton is not motherless, at the end of the story he is desperately worrying about his business and his factory. He seeks to hear the voice and comforting words of his mother, which remind him of his childhood: "Help me, as you helped me when I was a child . . . You said brave, noble, trustful words then, mother, which I have never forgotten. . . If you would say the old good words, it would make me feel something of the pious simplicity of my childhood. I say them to myself, but they would come differently from you, remembering all the care and trials you have had to bear" (392-393). Afterwards, he feels that "it was a great comfort to have had this conversation with his mother" (393).

4.2.1.2.4. The New Mother Figure as the "Angel in the House"

As the new mother figures in the story have such a positive influence on the characters they have decided to take care of, angelic qualities and features are ascribed to them. The image that is depicted from them seems to correspond to a great extent to the Victorian ideal of the "Angel in the House".

Nelly in "The Heart of John Middleton" represents everything that a Victorian woman should be: she is innocent, good and pure. She dedicates herself to guiding John through life and she teaches him the essential moral values. When John sees her for the first time, while he is standing on a wooden bridge over a brook, it seems to him that she is almost like an angel, ready to fly: "She was so light on her feet that, had it not been for the weight of the pitcher, I
almost believe the wind would have taken her up, and wafted her away as it carries off a blow-ball in seed-time; her blue cotton dress was blown before her, as if she were spreading her wings for a flight" (2). Later on in the story, John describes the appearances of Nelly and again, she is given angelic characteristics: he mentions that she is "pure and holy" (10) and that she had "the face of an angel, full of patience and happy faith" (15).

In Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh", the new mother figure Susan Palmer takes care of Lizzie Leigh's daughter and remains faithful to the ideal of the "Angel in the House". She takes care of Lizzie's daughter as if it was her own child, she works hard for it to support her and gives her all the cares she needs. When Will meets Susan and falls in love with her, he is overpowered by the saintly power she exudes: "When she did speak, it was in so low and so soft a voice, that silence, speech, motion, and stillness, alike seemed to remove her high above Will's reach into some saintly and inaccessible air of glory - high above his reach" (12). Afterwards, he tells his mother about her and the love he feels for her and he explains that she is "so gentle and so good, - she's downright holy. She's never known a touch of sin" (14). The mother of Lizzie Leigh also compares Susan to an angel who will remain hopeful for the future of Lizzie and her child: "Here's Susan, good and pure as the angels in heaven, yet, like them, full of hope and mercy, and one who, like them, will rejoice over her as repents" (22). After Lizzie's child has died, Susan is said to look pitifully at Lizzie and her child with her "clear, sweet, angel-eyes" (24).

Angelic features are also attributed to Margaret Hale, who presents herself as a new mother figure for her own family and for the Higgins and Boucher children. When Margaret's mother dies and leaves her son Frederick and husband heartbroken, Margaret tries to pick up the pieces and pushes her own pain and worries aside so she can console her brother and father. While doing so, she "became as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother" (231). Also to Bessy Higgins, Margaret is like an angel who possesses a remarkable strength to help her persevere in life. Bessy mentions that she has been dreaming about an angel, who came to give her strength and she explains that Margaret greatly resembles this angel in her dreams: "That face - [is] as bright and strong as the angel I dream of" (30). Later on in the story, Bessy even believes that Margaret not only resembles this angel, but in fact is the angel that appeared in her dreams and has now been personified in real life to console: "Yo've come, as I knew yo' would, when I saw yo'r movement in my dream, - and when yo're here about me, I reckon I feel easier in my mind, and comforted" (140).
4.2.1.2.5. Reversing the Roles in the Victorian Home: The New Mother Figure as a Powerful and Courageous Character

However, these new mother figures do not only have angelic gentleness to offer, like the idealised "Angel in the House", but are at the same time also very powerful figures who even seem to take on the strength and responsibility that usually was assigned to men in the Victorian era.

In "The Heart of John Middleton", the new mother figure Nelly and her daughter Grace try to defend John and display courageous behaviour to reach this goal. When Richard Jackson aims a rock at John, Nelly wants to protect John from harm and sacrifices her own body and health for it: "She clung round me as a shield, making her sweet body into a defence for mine. It hit her, and she spoke no word, kept back her cry of pain, but fell at my feet in a swoon" (8). When Nelly has grown weak and ill towards the end of the story, it is his daughter Grace who takes the responsibility to protect John. When John goes outside of his home in the middle of a storm to go and take revenge on his enemy Richard Jackson, his daughter Grace saves him from danger by risking her own life. The little girl goes out of the house all alone, at night and in the middle of the storm to rescue her father from any harm he might suffer during his nocturnal and reckless wanderings. When Grace finds her father, she delivers a message from her mother, who implores John to come home instead of embarking on a dangerous adventure.

The mother figures Susan Palmer and Anne Leigh in "Lizzie Leigh" as well assume a kind of responsibility that was normally attributed to men and they partly give up their female duties in order to show resistance against the stern, male figures around them. Susan Palmer's father had once been a successful businessman, but suddenly he "had failed for more money than any greengrocer he had heard of" (11). Because of this fiasco, he henceforth "rested from his past exertions (in the bankrupt line), and depended on his daughter, who kept a small school for very young children" (11). The roles in this family, therefore, are reversed: the father is no longer the main breadwinner in the family, as was expected in the Victorian household, but instead the daughter of the family provides her father with the financial support he needs without doing anything himself. Lizzie Leigh's mother is also presented as a powerful figure who at times has an overwhelming and overpowering influence on the male figures around her. When her husband prohibited her from seeing her daughter, she pushed aside her wifely obedience to assert her own will and own rights: she "rebelled against her
husband as against a tyrant, with a hidden, sudden rebellion, which tore up the old land-marks of wifely duty and affection, and poisoned the fountains whence gentlest love and reverence had once been for ever springing" (3).

Also in Gaskell's *North and South*, Margaret Hale is a very powerful and strong figure and seems to reverse the roles that were assigned to men and women in Victorian society. Margaret displays a remarkable courage, strength and responsibility and that way seems to distance herself from the ideal of the "Angel in the House". She takes responsibility wherever and whenever needed and takes charge of both the male and female duties in her family home. The men in the family home feel lost and do not assume their responsibility as they should, but instead pass on all responsibility to Margaret. Everyone around her completely depends on her, both men and women. She is the only one who can properly give directions in the household and becomes the head of her family, the one true leading figure who is able to keep everything on a good track. Moreover, Margaret almost never shows any signs of weakness and never gives in, but always shows herself to be a strong woman. Even when she finds herself in a problematic, frightening or painful situation, she shows "no fluttering fear, no anxiety" (253) and "with sweet patience did she bear her pain, without a word of complaint" (178). She is brave and remains strong in whatever difficulty that crosses her path, which is unlike many other girls in her society and therefore quite unique: "Another, who had gone that deadly colour, could never have come round without either fainting or hysterics. But she wouldn't do either - not she! And the very force of her will brought her round" (119).

She also grows interested in the conversations of the men around her and does no longer want to debase herself by participating in the at times trivial female chat: "I was very much interested by what the gentlemen were talking about . . . I was quite sorry when Miss Thornton came to take me to the other end of the room, saying she was sure I should be uncomfortable at being the only lady among so many gentlemen. I had never thought about it, I was so busy listening; and the ladies were so dull, papa - oh, so dull!" (156). She clearly wants to "listen to something larger and grander than the petty interests which the ladies had been talking about" (153). Furthermore, Margaret is a self-assured young lady who is always honest and "speaks plain out what's in her mind" (271). She is a strong woman with a firm and fixed own opinion who dares to challenge the opinions of other men, such as Mr Thornton. She will always assert herself and say what she really feels and thinks. Margaret's responsible and courageous behaviour especially becomes clear when she is contrasted with four important men in her life: her father Mr Hale, her brother Frederick, her suitor Mr Thornton and her acquaintance Mr Higgins. These figures depend on Margaret, obey her, respect her and are sometimes even
overpowered and overwhelmed by her. Consequently, their own male authority often declines and they are assigned female characteristics instead. In the first place, Margaret shows herself to be stronger and more responsible than her own father and, later on in the novel, than her brother Frederick: she takes over a number of tasks and duties that are actually theirs. In the beginning of the story, her father, Mr Hale, decides to move from Helstone to Milton. He however does not dare to mention this decision to his wife and although it is his own decision and he is the one responsible for it, it is Margaret who has to deliver the difficult message to her mother:

'Margaret, I am a poor coward after all . . . Help me to tell your mother. I think I could do anything but that: the idea of her distress turns me sick with dread . . . Would you dislike breaking it to her very much, Margaret?' . . . Margaret did dislike it, did shrink from it more than from anything she had ever had to do in her life before . . . Then she conquered herself, and said, with a bright strong look on her face: 'It is a painful thing, but it must be done, and I will do it as well as ever I can.' (35)

Before and during their relocation, everyone in the family home seems to be lost in confusion and clueless about what to do first. While her father is just "examining papers, books, registers" (50) and her mother is lying in bed out of distress and illness because of the situation, Margaret takes matters into her own hands and tries to find ways to get the relocation moving in the right direction. She always remains "calm, and collected, ready to counsel and advise" (49) everyone around her, even though she is surrounded by tumult, chaos and despair on the part of her mother, father and servants. Margaret also does not dare to tell her father about her mother's deadly illness, because she admits that her father is not as strong as she is and would be heartbroken by the horrifying news: "'No Dixon,' said Margaret, sorrowfully, 'I will not tell papa. He could not bear it as I can'" (122). When Margaret's mother dies, her brother Frederick and her father are grief-stricken and consequently no longer able to arrange the funeral. They do not take up their responsibilities as they should: they give way to grieving and crying and leave all the rest to Margaret. Margaret tries to set aside her own sorrows and pain so she can console her father and make the necessary arrangements for her mother's burial: "Her eyes were continually blinded by tears, but she had no time to give way to regular crying. The father and brother depended upon her; while they were giving way to grief, she must be working, planning, considering" (232-233). The two
male figures of the household and everyone else seem to be disoriented and completely depend on Margaret. If she gives in and does not fulfil all the duties in her family home, all is lost: "Come, Miss Hale - come, my dear! You must not give way, or where shall we be? There is not another person in the house fit to give a direction of any kind, and there is so much to be done" (233). After the burial of Margaret's mother, Margaret's father feels very weak and it is again Margaret who summons the courage and takes care of her father: "He sighed twice or thrice when all was ended, and then, putting his hand on Margaret's arm, he mutely entreated to be led away, as if he were blind, and she his faithful guide" (249).

Because Margaret assumes this power over her father and brother, their own authority and manliness shrinks. At a certain point in *North and South*, even female features are assigned to Margaret's father: "The lines in her father's face were soft and waving with a frequent undulating kind of trembling movement passing over them, showing every fluctuating emotion; the eyelids were large and arched, giving to the eyes a peculiar languid beauty which was almost feminine" (75). Also her brother Frederick is given female characteristics: when he was talking about the good position he has in Spain, he "reddened like a girl" (238).

Margaret also assumes a notably powerful and courageous behaviour in contrast with Mr Thornton, a renowned mill-owner in Milton who is in love with her. When Mr Thornton and Margaret meet for the first time, Mr Thornton is already flabbergasted by her overpowering presence: "Mr Thornton was a good deal more surprised and discomfited than she . . . Mr Thornton was in habits of authority himself, but she seemed to assume some kind of rule over him at once" (58). When Margaret then tells Mr Thornton that she cannot and will not return his love for her, her words seem to crush him and he appears to be in great mental distress. He just wants to cry next to and like a little boy: "He called himself a fool for suffering so . . . It would have been a relief to him, if he could have sat down and cried on a doorstep by a little child, who was raging and storming, through his passionate tears, at some injury he had received" (192). At a certain point in the novel, there is a strike in Milton and the factory workers start to fight against the mill-owners to receive higher wages. When Margaret perceives that Mr Thornton is in danger because the angry factory workers are planning to throw their heavy wooden clogs and other missiles at him, she immediately springs into action: to protect Mr Thornton from any harm, Margaret throws herself in front of him, but consequently gets hurt herself. This scene is remarkably similar to the scene in "The Heart of John Middleton". Both John and Mr Thornton are being assaulted by a rival with a sharp missile and the two women Nelly and Margaret bravely come to the rescue:
She only thought how she could save him. She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond . . . A sharp pebble flew by her, grazing forehead and cheek, and drawing a blinding sheet of light before her eyes. She lay like one dead on Mr Thornton's shoulder (167)

At the end of North and South, Mr Thornton fears that he will not be able to keep his factory out of lack of money. As with Susan Palmer in "Lizzie Leigh" who financially supports her father, Margaret decides to give Mr Thornton part of the money she inherited from her deceased godfather Mr Bell. Margaret, being a woman, financially supports a man, which is again an unwomanly thing to do as it should be the other way around according to Victorian ideology. However, Mr Thorton feels like Margaret threatens and affects his male authority and responsibility and also his mother reproaches him for letting Margaret overpower him. When Margaret protects Mr Thornton by throwing herself in front of him, he feels somewhat "jealous of anything that should come between him and danger" (166) and he tries to shake her off and tells her that the scene of violence is no place for her: 'Still, with his arms folded he shook her off. 'Go away,' said he, in his deep voice. 'This is no place for you.' 'It is!' said she. 'You did not see what I saw'" (167). Even after Margaret is hit, Mr Thornton goes standing in front of the crowd so they can try to attack him again, this time without him being protected by a woman. The mob, however, hurries away, frightened by Margaret and by what they have done to her and they are not interested anymore in assaulting Mr Thornton. Mr Thornton's mother as well reproaches Mr Thornton for his unmanliness during the strike: "'Are you become so helpless as to have to be defended by a girl?' asked Mrs Thornton scornfully. He reddened. 'Not many girls would have taken the blows on herself which were meant for me'" (173). Lastly, also Margaret's neighbour Mr Higgins, seems to be weaker than Margaret and feels somewhat dismayed by the extreme strength and courage that she exudes. When Mr Higgins, who lives next to the Boucher family, learns about Boucher's death, he does not dare to report this painful news to the latter's wife: "'I canna go', said Higgins. 'Dunnot ask me. I canna face her'" (273). It is again Margaret who gathers her courage and takes on the heavy task to inform Boucher's wife about what happened. One night, Mr Higgins comes home in an intoxicated state and when he hears about the death of his daughter Bessy, he gets violent and wants to leave his other daughter Mary alone in the house to go drinking again all night long. Margaret, however, tries to prevent this by decidedly standing in front of him and although he threatens to use violence against her, she eventually manages to set his mind at rest:
But Margaret stood in the doorway, silent yet commanding . . . He looked ready to strike Margaret. But she never moved a feature - never took her deep, serious eyes off him . . . Margaret felt that he acknowledged her power. What could she do next? He had seated himself on a chair, close to the door; half-conquered, half-resenting; intending to go out as soon as she left her position, but unwilling to use the violence he had threatened not five minutes before. (204)

Afterwards she continues to appease him by speaking calmly and confidently and "there was no fear or doubt expressed" (204) in her speech, although Mr Higgins is an aggressive man who could strike and hurt her right away. Margaret's courageous and calm approach seems to be efficient and throws Mr Higgins off balance: the otherwise violent, malicious and self-confident Mr Higgins suddenly feels "daunted and awed by her sever calm" (204) and stands before her "uncertain, with dogged irresolution upon his face" (204). She manages to change Mr Higgins' attitude and exercises a power which no woman ever had over him. Mr Higgins, who claims never to have listened to a woman before in his life, now fully acknowledges Margaret's strength and patiently and respectfully obeys her: "I do it for yo'r sake Miss Hale, and it's first time in my life as e'er I give way to a woman. Neither my wife nor Bess could e'er say that much again me" (285).

4.2.2. Poverty and Financial Problems

4.2.2.1. Running into Financial Difficulties

In the selected stories, however, not only problematic child-parent relationships are to be found, but some characters also witness or run into financial difficulties which greatly complicate their lives.

In "The Heart of John Middleton", Richard Jackson causes John Middleton to lose his job right after John has married Nelly and has a newborn child with her. Consequently, John experiences great difficulty in financially supporting his family. When John does not seem to find a new job, the family members start to suffer greatly from their financial distress, both mentally and physically:
[Richard Jackson] induced his father to dismiss me among the first in my branch of the business; and there was I, just before winter set in, with a wife and new-born child, and a small enough store of money to keep body and soul together, till I could get to work again. All my savings had gone by Christmas Eve, and we sat in the house, foodless for the morrow's festival. Nelly looked pinched and worn; the baby cried for a larger supply of milk than its poor, starving mother could give it. (9-10)

With the passing of time, their distress even increases: Nelly gets desperate and weakens every day more. She is completely exhausted by the lack of food and drink and stays in bed all day long. John could not help comparing his own situation to that of the the man who did him wrong, Richard Jackson: the latter was "prosperous and glad" (12), while he himself was "starving and desperate" (12) and the perception of this stark contrast affected him deeply.

Also in "The Half-Brothers", Helen has great difficulty with supporting herself and her little son Gregory. She loses her husband after only three years of marriage and this leaves her "with a little child only able to walk, and the farm on her hands for four years more by the lease, with half the stock on it dead, or sold off by one to pay the more pressing debts, and with no money to purchase more, or even to buy the provisions needed for the small consumption of everyday" (2-3). Because her eye-sight increasingly begins to fail, Helen can no longer do fine sewing and earn money. Consequently, it becomes more and more difficult for her to sustain herself and her child financially and she greatly suffers from this failure: "She took it sadly to heart that she could no longer gain anything towards the keep of herself and her child" (5). Eventually, Helen is seized by despair and tries to find a solution for her social distress. She eventually agrees to marry William Preston, who was an old bachelor and one of the wealthiest farmers in the neighbourhood and who "had promised to take good charge of her boy, and to let him want for nothing, neither in the way of keep nor of education" (7). Helen's financial distress causes her to live an unhappy life with a man she does not love: she marries William Preston for the sole purpose of surviving together with her son Gregory and not because she wants to be with William. Consequently, she "hardly ever looked up, and never smiled after the day when she promised William Preston to be his wife" (8) and is torn apart by the woeful decisions that her financial problems have forced her to make.
In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, the theme of financial problems and unequally distributed wealth is most prevailing. Various families in the novel are not as prosperous as they would hope for and have to face many financial hardships. Margaret and her family live in the "beautiful, beloved Helstone" (31) where they seem to experience relative comfort and have a good and happy life. In the beginning of the novel, however, Margaret suddenly learns that her parents are less prosperous and that the family's income is smaller than she initially thought. Her father is only a poor clergyman and her family has to live on a limited budget. Moreover, Margaret's parents give away a large part of their income to support Margaret's brother, Frederick, who lives in Spain:

'I suppose we have about a hundred and seventy pounds a year of our own. Seventy of that has always gone to Frederick since he has been abroad' . . . 'Could not you, and I, and mamma live on a hundred a year in some very cheap - very quiet part of England? Oh! I think we could.' 'No!' said Mr Hale. 'That would not answer. I must do something.' (35)

In the beginning of the novel, Mr Hale also mentions to Margaret that Mr Thornton has struggled to keep his family alive earlier on in his life. Mr Thornton's father dedicated himself to speculating wildly and when he had failed, he killed himself, leaving his wife and two children with all the depts. In these challenging times, "no one came forwards to help the mother and this boy" (82) and "they absolutely lived upon water-porridge for years" (82). Boucher as well cannot find any work in Milton and consequently, his wife and children are starving. At a certain point in the novel, he becomes so desperate that he cannot face his financial problems anymore and commits suicide. The poor financial situation of the working class in Milton does not only oppress Boucher, but also many other families in Milton: "Their nerves are quickened by the haste and bustle and speed of everything around them, to say nothing of the confinement of these pent-up houses, which of itself is enough to induce depression and worry of spirits" (279).

### 4.2.2.2. Climbing up the Financial Ladder

Characters such as Helen, who has to marry a man she does not love for the sake of money, and Boucher, who commits suicide because he cannot manage to support his family anymore,
have presented a bleak portrait of life in poverty. Other characters, however, try to find a way to climb the social ladder and strive to make money and to solve their financial problems.

Although John Middleton and his family become almost desperate because of their financial distress in "The Heart of John Middleton", John does not lose heart but fights to keep himself and his family alive. At a certain point in the short story, John resolves to leave Sawley, where he has always lived, and moves to Padiham. In Padiham, John is finally able to find a job and the family starts to revive: "I was happy then. I rose in men's esteem. I had work in plenty. Our child lived and thrrove" (13).

In *North and South* as well, some characters remain hopeful and fight to have a comfortable life. They try to find positive solutions to become prosperous again. As was the case with John Middleton, who moves from one town to the other to find a job and earn money for his family, Mr Hale as well decides to move from Helstone to Milton, the manufacturing town in Darkshire, to take better care of his family. Milton seems to be the ideal place to move to, because there, "everybody [is] rushing over everybody, in their hurry to get rich" (306) and he can earn bread for his family easily and quickly. In Milton, Mr Hale becomes a successful and respected private tutor and earns enough money to live comfortably together with his family. Mr Thornton as well manages to save himself and his family from the financial distress in which they were living. Again, a relocation takes place to earn more money: the Thornton family moves to Milton to make a living. There, Mr Thornton works himself to the bone and works his way up the social and financial ladder. Eventually, he manages to pay off all of his father's debts and even becomes a very renowned and powerful mill-owner.

4.2.2.3. Where Wealth Meets Poverty: the Enriching Influence of the Poor

Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* overflows with passages in which wealth and poverty are contrasted with each other. On the one hand, Margaret, who lives a comfortable life, is often contrasted with the people she meets around her in Milton, who live a much more impoverished life. On the other hand, there also seems to be an inequality in the wealth distribution in Milton in general: while the factory masters and the higher classes in Milton are prosperous and thriving, the factory workers are struggling to make ends meet. However, these poorer inhabitants of Milton seem to have an enriching influence on the more prosperous people in Milton: they teach them valuable lessons in life and open their eyes.
While Margaret Hale's parents live in the southern Helstone, Margaret spends most of her childhood in Harley Street, in London, with her aunt Shaw and her cousin Edith, where she learns to be a cultivated, elegant and refined young lady. In Harley Street, Margaret lives a life of comfort, ease and luxury that is centred around "the habitual dinners, the calls, the shopping, the dancing events" (63). Because of this comfortable and effortless way of living, Margaret somewhat starts to act haughtily and feel superior to the other people around her: "Sometimes I used to hear a farmer speaking sharp and loud to his servants; but it only reminded me pleasantly that other people were hard at work in some distant place, while I just sat on the heather and did nothing" (95). Margaret's life, however, changes radically when her parents resolve to move with the whole family to Milton, a smoky and bustling manufacturing town in the north of England where the financial situation markedly differs from the situation in the south of England. Suddenly Margaret is thrown in a completely different world and witnesses living circumstances around her that greatly deviate from her own life of comfort and ease. At first, Margaret has a difficult time adapting and she looks down upon Milton and the people who live and work there: "What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?" (36). Margaret painfully remembers the time when she lived in luxury in London with her aunt Mrs Shaw and her cousin Edith: "The recollection of the plentiful luxury of all the arrangements, the stately handsomeness of the furniture, the size of the house, the peaceful, untroubled ease of the visitors - all came vividly before her, in strange contrast to the present time" (63). Margaret's attitude, however, starts to change when she befriends people in Milton and starts to connect with them on a human level. These friendships enable Margaret to peep into their houses and to get a glimpse of the bitter circumstances in which they have to live. Margaret especially builds a close bond with the poor and ailing girl Bessy Higgins, whose family struggles to earn money. By showing and explaining her own living conditions to Margaret and showing the contrast between their lives, Bessy gradually encourages Margaret to have respect for the people who are not as prosperous and fortunate as she is: "I think, if this should be th' end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to sicken i' this dree place, wi' them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o' quiet" (95). Bessy, therefore, does not only receive help from Margaret, as I mentioned earlier on, but equally helps Margaret to grow as a person. Bessy

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In his *Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment* (Aylesbury: Oxford University Press, 1965; 127) Edgar Wright points out that it is only when Margaret has made a personal contact with Bessy Higgins that she is able to appreciate the Milton inhabitants.
triggers this personal growth by repeatedly contrasting their lives and she consequently can be seen as a literary foil to Margaret in the novel. Especially when Margaret hears that they have the same age, she finally learns to see that being wealthy is not self-evident, but rather a privilege. Bessy has already lived as long as she has, but yet their lives have been radically different: "'How old are you?' asked Margaret. 'Nineteen, come July.' 'And I too am nineteen.' She thought, more sorrowfully than Bessy did, of the contrast between them. She could not speak for a moment or two for the emotion she was trying to keep down" (96). From that moment, onwards, Margaret gradually starts to sympathise with the hard-working Milton people around her and even starts to save money for other working-class families who live in bitter life circumstances and run short of money: "How was she ever to go away into comfort and forget that man's voice, with the tone of unutterable agony, telling more by far than his words of what he had to suffer? She took out her purse; she had not much in it of what she could call her own, but what she had she put into Bessy's hand without speaking" (146). At the end of the novel, after the death of both of her parents, Margaret goes to live in London again with her aunt Shaw and her cousin and this moment represents a true turning point for Margaret in the novel. When she was living in Milton, Margaret had often wished to return back to London. However, when she is finally there again, spoiled and surrounded by luxury and comfort, she feels like this does not compose her idea of home anymore. She starts to find her life in London, which she used to love and praise once, monotonous and unsatisfactory and instead starts to value the ways of a modest, frugal lifestyle and the charms of the hard-working Milton people more and more. She begins to admire the Milton manufacturers with "their energy, their power, their indomitable courage in struggling and fighting, their lurid vividness of existence" (384) and begins to deprecate the unchallenging lifestyle of the Londoners who seem to be carried away by vanities. To her, London now seems to be all about outward display, while Milton focuses on internal growth:

She was getting surfeited of the eventless ease in which no struggle or endeavour was required. She was afraid lest she should even become sleepily deadened into forgetfulness of anything beyond the life which was lapping her round with luxury . . . There was a strange unsatisfied vacuum in Margaret's heart and mode of life. (344-345)

K. C. Shrivastava explains in her *Mrs. Gaskell as a Novelist* that "Mrs Gaskell has made an admirable use of contrast as a plot device in her novels" (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1977; 111).
When Margaret then visits her childhood home in Helstone, she perceives that everything around her is different now: her home "was not like the same place" (363) anymore, "every room in the house was changed . . . There was change everywhere; slight, yet pervading all" (364-365). By comparing herself to her altered surroundings, Margaret increasingly starts to realise that not only everything around her has changed, but that she herself as well has undergone major changes: "And I too change perpetually - now this, now that - now disappointed and peevish because all is not exactly as I pictured it, and now suddenly discovering that the reality is far more beautiful than I had imagined it" (371). These alterations inside of the house that was once so significant to Margaret might therefore symbolise the changes that have taken place in Margaret's outlook on the world. Margaret's values have changed and she is now a different person. In *North and South*, also in society in general, there is a clash between the wealthy higher classes and the factory masters on the one hand and impoverished working-classes and factory workers on the other hand. In the beginning of the story, it becomes clear that the mill-owners, such as Mr Thornton, look down upon the lower classes and their factory workers. Mr Thornton calls his workmen "fools - ignorant, wayward men" with "weak silly heads" (135) and considers himself to be superior to them as, according to him, the factory masters have "head as well as hands, while they [the factory workers] had only hands" (137). The manufacturers, themselves, on the other hand, have the feeling that the factory masters expect "a blind unreasoning kind of obedience" (112) from them so they can boss them around as much as they like. When they perceive that the factory masters are planning to lower their wages, they grow angry and make the Milton streets unsafe by means of a enormous strike. At the end of the story, however, Mr Thornton starts to respect and see the value of his workmen and he suggests a reconciliation between the lower and higher classes in Milton. According to him, society should "bring the individuals of different classes into actual personal contact" as "such intercourse is the very breath of life" (399). He realises that the higher and lower classes can learn and strengthen each other so much if they only connect with each other on a human level: "[We should] find means and ways of seeing each other and becoming acquainted with each other's characters and persons, and even tricks of temper and modes of speech. We should understand each other better, and I'll venture to say we should like each other more" (399). Miriam Allott explains that in *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell has "tried to make her readers understand the suffering experienced on both sides in the industrial disputes
of the 1830's and 1840's... and at the same time vividly bring home to her readers the dangers of imperfect human sympathies".73

4.2.3. Disease and Death

4.2.3.1. Victims of Disease and Death

Not only do certain family members in these four stories end up in problematic child-parent relationships or in financial distress, but their problems often even exacerbate when they experience or witness disease and death.

In the course of Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Heart of John Middleton", Nelly increasingly grows weaker and finally dies at the end of the story. After Richard Jackson has thrown a sharp stone at her, who was actually aimed at John himself, John explains that "the bright colour had left her cheek, the mouth quivered with repressed pain, the eyes were dim with tears that agony had forced into them" (9). Nelly never fully seems to recover from this blow and weakens every day more: "My Nelly was suffering yet from that blow. How or where the stone had hurt her, I never understood; but in consequence of that one moment's action, her limbs became numb and dead, and, by slow degrees, she took to her bed, from whence she was never carried alive" (14). When John lost his job in Sawley, he could no longer properly support his family and Nelly's condition increasingly got worse: Nelly began to look "pinched and worn" (10) and finally became a "powerless cripple" (19). At the end of the story, Nelly has become so ill that she succumbs to her illness.

Also in Gaskell's "The Half-Brothers", the theme of death is pervasive. Already in the very beginning of the story, the narrator mentions that Helen's first husband had died when she had been married to him for only three years. Shortly afterwards, Helen's little daughter also passed away because of a scarlet fever. Since she has lost these two dear people in such a short time period, Helen's gladness starts to vanish while her grief starts to vanquish. Helen begins to cry day and night and to such an extent that even her eye-sight begins to fail. When Helen marries William Preston, her mental and physical conditions does not become better, but even deteriorates: Helen starts to grow more desperate and weak and eventually passes away. Her son, Gregory, as well dies while rescuing his brother. When his brother is about to

73 Allott, Elizabeth Gaskell, 8-17.
freeze to death in a snow storm, he takes off his own garments and wraps his brother in them. By doing so, he manages to save his brother's life, but loses his own life instead.

In "Lizzie Leigh", both Lizzie's father and her baby daughter, Nanny, pass away. Lizzie Leigh's father dies already in the very beginning of the story. Nanny dies later on in the story because of a deadly fall down the stairs. At a certain point in the novel, Nanny is sleeping next to her new mother figure Susan Palmer, while the latter's father comes home in an intoxicated state and requires Susan's help. When Susan goes downstairs to provide him assistance, Nanny immediately wakes up and, feeling lonely without Susan by her side, endeavours to go downstairs herself but meets her end while doing so: "Nanny missed her darling Susy, and terrified at being left alone in the vast, mysterious darkness, which had no bounds, and seemed infinite, she slipped out of bed, and tottered in her little nightgown towards the door . . . She went onwards two steps towards the steep, abrupt stairs; and then dazzled with sleepiness, she stood, she wavered, she fell! Down on her head on the stone floor she fell!" (23).

Gaskell's *North and South* as well depicts various grim cases of disease and death. In the beginning of the novel, Margaret already mentions that her mother has a delicate health. In the course of the novel, however, Margaret's mother is growing seriously ill and becomes "more and more of a suffering invalid" (97). When Margaret summons Dr Donaldson to find out what is wrong, she discovers that her mother in fact suffers from a deadly disease and will not be alive for a long time anymore. After months of suffering and fighting against her illness, her mother finally succumbs. After Margaret's father has lost his wife, he himself as wells starts to have physical complaints. Because he has lived for so long in the smoky Milton air, he occasionally starts to have difficulty in breathing and begins to grow ill. When Mr Hale goes to visit his friend Mr Bell, who lives in Oxford, he suddenly passes away. Margaret is crushed by the death of both of her parents. She is completely numbed by her grief and finds herself in a permanent state of apathy: she becomes "white, motionless, speechless, tearless" (329) and loses all her appetite. Margaret's parents, however, are not the only ones in *North and South* who are ailing or dying. After the death of her parents, Margaret also has to cope with the death of Mr Bell, her godfather who had always taken care of her. Bessy Higgins as well is severely ill because the fluff of cotton got into her longs and poisoned her during her work in the carding room. Consequently, she is feverish and continuously has to cough. The girl is desperate and cheerless because her grim physical condition requires her to lie down quietly in bed all day and all night long. Lastly, death and disease also affect the Boucher
family: Boucher resolves to commit suicide because he can no longer deal with his financial distress and soon after his death, also his wife passes away and leaves the children parentless.

4.2.3.2. Smiling through the Tears: a Peaceful Death

However, when these aforementioned characters are ailing, dying or even right after their death, they seem to bear their sufferings patiently and bravely and often are said to be smiling through the pain.

When Nelly is dying in "The Heart of John Middleton", John describes that she dies a peaceful death. He explains that she is almost saint-like and will placidly go to heaven: "Her saint-like face looked on us all, for the last time, glorious with the coming light of heaven... Instead of the dim shadow of death stealing over her face, a quiet light came over it, which we knew was the look of a soul at rest" (19).

Likewise, Helen and her son Gregory seem to die peacefully in "The Half-Brothers". Although Helen felt miserable in her marriage to William Preston, she looks up at him and smiles at him right before she dies: "She looked up in his face and smiled, almost her first smile at him; and such a sweet smile! as more besides aunt Fanny have said. In an hour she was dead" (11). Until the very ending of her life, therefore, Helen remains strong and brave and even summons the courage to smile at the one who has treated her and her son badly. Later on in the story, her son Gregory comes to an untimely death as well. After his mother dies, Gregory assumes the role of mother figure for his stepbrother. When the latter is about to freeze to death in a snow storm, Gregory wraps him in his own garments around his stepbrother and lies down beside him, embracing him in a protective way, just like a mother would embrace her newborn child. Because of this heroic deed, however, Gregory loses his own life. Remarkably, Gregory is also described in the very same way as his mother while dying. Both Gregory and his mother smile while they are dying or when they have just passed away, even though they both almost never smiled during their lives: "I was covered over with my brother's plaid, and his thick shepherd's coat was carefully wrapped round my feet. He was in his shirt-sleeves - his arm thrown over me - a quiet smile (he hardly ever smiled in life) upon his still, cold face" (25). Helen and her son Gregory are brave characters throughout life and patiently endure the injustice that surrounds them. Their bravery, however, is not only explicit during their lifetime, but continues until the very ending of their lives.
In "Lizzie Leigh", Lizzie Leigh's father expires and also her baby Nanny becomes the victim of a deadly fall down the stairs, but yet they both seem to die peacefully. After Lizzie's father has finally shown his respect for his daughter, by admitting his wife that he was wrong and is sorry, she suggests that he will now have a peaceful death: "Oh my love, my dear! only get well, and I will never cease showing my thanks for those words. May God in heaven bless thee for saying them. Thou'rt not so restless, my lad!" (3). Furthermore, Lizzie's baby Nanny seems to maintain a harmonious countenance after she has been taken from Lizzie and Susan. Lizzie Leigh's mother mentions that Lizzie's daughter might be "gone to be an angel" (30) in heaven and that in that case, she will speak to God to clear Lizzie's name and to justify her mistakes. Moreover, she seems to have died tranquilly, "so quiet and peaceful, and happy she looks" (30). At the end of the story, Lizzie Leigh and her mother bury the little deceased child in a beautiful, harmonious and fertile environment, "on the sunny slope, where the earliest spring-flowers blow" (31). Although her mother has fallen in disgrace because she gave birth to Nanny, Nanny herself does not seem to be dogged by her mother's dishonour and grief as she is presented in a positive light during her life and even on her death.

Similarly, the ailing and dying characters in North and South face their problems in a brave, peaceful and cheerful way. Throughout her mortal illness, Margaret's mother stays optimistic and possesses a remarkable strength, which Margaret greatly admires. After Dr. Donaldson has examined Mrs Hale to determine the nature of her illness, Margaret goes to visit her mother to console and comfort her. She, however, looks surprisingly peaceful and calm despite the sufferings she has to bear and the bad news she must just have received from the doctor: "Her face had a little faint colour in it, and the very exhaustion after the examination gave it a peaceful look. Margaret was surprised to see her look so calm" (120). While Margaret's mother is growing more severely ill, she still keeps on smiling and tries to stay strong: "'She's awake now, Margaret. She quite smiled as she saw me standing by her. Just her old smile. And she says she feels refreshed, and ready for tea'" (132). Mrs Hale does not only stay strong mentally, but also physically as she is still looking good despite her illness and her sufferings. She even looks better than her husband Mr Hale who is at that point not ill yet: "[Mrs Hale was] sitting in her easy chair, with her hand lying in her husband's, who looked more worn and suffering than she by far" (160). Remarkably, Elizabeth Gaskell only describes how Mrs Hale behaves during her illness, but this time does not involve a scenario about the countenance of Mrs Hale at the moment of her death. After Mrs Hale's death, her husband's health starts to deteriorate as well, which eventually causes him to die a sudden, yet again peaceful death: "The servant who entered his room in the morning, received
no answer to his speech; drew near the bed, and saw the calm, beautiful face lying white and cold under the ineffaceable seal of death. The attitude was exquisitely easy; there had been no pain - no struggle. The action of the heart must have ceased as he lay down" (324). Margaret's godfather Mr Bell as well is described in a positive way when he passes away: the story's narrator explains that Margaret and her cousin's husband Captain Lennox took a "a quiet farewell . . . of the kind old face that had so often come out with pleasant words, and merry quips and cranks" (381). After Bessy Higgins has succumbed to her illness, Margaret goes to the family home of the Higgins to see Bessy one more time before she is buried. Margaret perceives that Bessy is resting peacefully and that she has something positive about her, which strikes Margaret: "The face, often so weary with pain, so restless with troubulous thoughts, had now the faint soft smile of eternal rest upon it. The slow tears gathered into Margaret's eyes, but a deep calm entered into her soul. And that was death! It looked more peaceful than life" (202). The girl has stayed strong during her whole life and even now, at the very ending of her life, she manages to maintain this strength and bravery. In the story, and in the four selected works from Elizabeth Gaskell, there is one character who stands out in this respect, as he is the only one who is not described positively after he has met his end. Boucher, the neighbour of Mr Higgins, commits suicide by drowning himself in a moment of despair because he can no longer face his financial distress. When some inhabitants of Milton discover his death, they find him in a completely disfigured condition, with a "swollen and discoloured . . . distorted, antagonised face" (273). This description is clearly completely different from the previous descriptions of deceased literary characters. The only difference seems to be that the other characters are either strong, positive women or men who are brought under the positive influence of these women while Boucher is a more dubious character in the story who acts more independently from his wife and family and who is disliked by various other characters in the novel. An explanation for this grim description of Boucher, therefore, might be that only the powerful and especially positive characters in Gaskell's stories are granted a peaceful depiction of their death. After Boucher has died, his wife loses her life as well, but there is no description of her appearance after her death in the novel.
4.2.3.3. "Forgive My Hardness of Heart"\textsuperscript{74}: Death Causing a Moment of Agnorisis

In the four selected stories, death often brings about a moment of anagnorisis, a turning point for many characters. The intense shock at the death of someone they love or know suddenly makes them regret or reconsider their past actions and often causes them to change and improve their lives. Often, it is the irresponsible and violent male and/or father figure who starts to blame himself for the distress he has caused the deceased victim to have.

Earlier on, I mentioned that Nelly represents a new mother figure for John in "The Heart of John Middleton" who guides him through life. She teaches him valuable life lessons and tries to make him a better man. At the very ending of her life, Nelly asks John to forgive Richard Jackson even though Richard has wronged them. While losing his beloved wife, John learns the last lesson that he needs to comprehend to become an honest and good man and he finally manages to purge his heart from anger and envy: "I learned that it is better to be sinned against than to sin. In the storm of the night mine enemy came to me; in the calm of the grey morning I led him forth, and bade him 'God speed.' And a woe had come upon me, but the burning burden of a sinful, angry heart was taken off" (19-20). In her work \textit{Mrs. Gaskell and Her Friends}, Elizabeth Haldane explains that "The Heart of John Middleton" is in fact one of Gaskell's "ostensibly moral tales enforcing the duty of forgiveness of sins"\textsuperscript{75}. After John has learnt this final valuable lesson, - that he should never harm anyone, not even his enemy - his wife Nelly dies in peace. Nelly has committed herself to educating John and turning him into a righteous and exemplary man and when she has succeeded and fulfilled this task, she vanishes again. Nelly's death however does not only cause her husband John to reconsider his vengeful feelings towards Richard Jackson, but also makes Richard Jackson himself realise and regret his mistakes: "Oh, woman - dying woman - you have haunted me in the loneliness of the Bush faraway - you have been in my dreams for ever - the hunting of men has not been so terrible as the hunting of your spirit, - that stone - that stone!' He fell down by her bedside in an agony" (19).

Likewise, Gregory's stepbrother and stepfather William Preston in "The Half-Brothers" realise that they were wrong and that they never had any right to mistreat Gregory when he is taken from them. Gregory's stepson is the narrator of the story and throughout his

\textsuperscript{74} Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Half-Brothers" (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 24.

\textsuperscript{75} Elizabeth Haldane, \textit{Mrs. Gaskell and Her Friends} (London: Hodder and Toughton), 1930.
account of the events, it becomes clear that he regrets his behaviour. He realises that he was selfish and that he should have cared more about his half-brother when he was still alive: "I am ashamed - my heart is sore to think how I fell into the fashion of the family, and slighted my poor orphan step-brother . . . I was too dull, too selfish, too numb to think and reason" (13-23). After Gregory has lost his life, his stepfather realises that it was wrong of him not to give his stepson the attention that he needed and deserved: "My father's stern old face strove in vain to keep its sternness; his mouth quivered, his eyes filled slowly with unwonted tears. 'I would have given him half my land - I would have blessed him as my son, - oh God! I would have knelt at his feet, and asked him to forgive my hardness of heart.'" (24). Moreover, William Preston decides that he does not deserve to be buried next to his wife Helen, but that instead Gregory should be buried next to her, which "marked the depth of his feeling of repentance, perhaps more than all" (27). He who was always begging for attention and reproaching Helen for loving Gregory more than him, now sets his pride aside and deprives himself of the privilege to be buried next to his own wife.

When Lizzie Leigh's father is about to die, in the beginning of the short story, he suddenly realises that it was a mistake to banish his daughter from the family home because she was a fallen woman and he tells his wife that he forgives his daughter and wants to be forgiven for his own mistakes: "A few minutes before his death, he opened his already glazing eyes and made a sign to his wife, by the faint motion of his lips, that he had yet something to say. She stooped close down, and caught the broken whisper, 'I forgive her, Anne! May God forgive me!'" (3). After the death of her daughter, Lizzie Leigh herself as well, brings an important realisation forward: although she had given her baby to Susan Palmer to take care of her, she for the first time really wants to see and be with her daughter, when she perceives that the latter is in danger. At that point, however, it is already too late: Nanny passes away and leaves her poor mother in a state of misery and despair. Afterwards, Lizzie greatly reproaches herself for not being there for her daughter and for not being able to take care of her: "Oh mother, if I strive very hard, and God is very merciful, and I go to heaven, I shall not know her - I shall not know my own again - she will shun me as a stranger and cling to Susan Palmer and to you. Oh woe! Oh woe! She shook with exceeding sorrow"" (30). Although other people forgive Lizzie Leigh for her disgrace and for what she has done, she herself "prays always and ever for forgiveness - such forgiveness as may enable her to see her child once more" (31).

While finding themselves in a grief-stricken condition, certain characters in *North and South* as well suddenly realise that they have behaved in an undesirable and incorrect way
towards the other literary characters around them. As was the case with Lizzie, who wishes she had been there for her daughter while she was still alive, Margaret mourns about the fact that she has not spent more time with her mother and her family in general while she still could. When her mother gets severely ill and is close to death, Margaret starts to realise that she should not have lived for such a long time in London in the midst of all those vanities, but that her family home, where she can experience real and true human warmth, is where she really belongs. It does not matter what kind of dresses she wears, to which balls she goes and where she lives, but what suddenly really matters to her is her family and spending time with them: "She would fain have caught at the skirts of that departing time, and prayed it to return, and give her back what she had too little valued while it was yet in her possession" (159).

Margaret, however, is not the only one who starts to change and grow in terms of behaviour and mindset. Also Mrs Thornton seems to be greatly affected by the death of Margaret's parents. Mrs Thornton had always been very proud and looked down upon Margaret and her family. She dislikes the fact that her son Mr Thornton is acquainted with and even in love with Margaret Hale and wishes that Margaret's family would never have moved to Milton. When she learns about the illness of Margaret's mother, she doubts the reality of the illness and even believes it to be a momentary girlish fancy of hers. However, when both of Margaret's parents have died and when she perceives that Margaret goes through a very difficult time, she gradually starts to soften her heart and empathises with Margaret:

Her countenance was blander than usual, as she greeted her; there was even a shade of tenderness in her manner, as she noticed the white, tear-swollen face and the quiver in the voice which Margaret tried to make so steady . . . Mrs Thornton was for once affected by the charm of manner to which she had hitherto proved herself invulnerable." (341)

Lastly, the death of his daughter Bessy Higgins causes Mr Higgins to be heartbroken and desperate on the one hand, but at the same time also causes him to realise that he has always lived his life in the wrong way and that he needs to change his conduct. Although he is feeling an intense pain in his heart after his daughter has succumbed to her illness, he experiences "a sudden turn in his ideas" (205). Shocked by this terrible loss and by the intense emotions it causes him to feel, he decides to have a conversation with Mr Hale, who had always been a parson in Helstone. After his daughter's death and this conversation, Mr Higgins seems to be a changed man: Mr Higgins who previously was a violent and alcoholic man, suddenly talks
politely, starts to show human compassion and it increasingly becomes clear that he actually "has a good warm heart under his bluff abrupt ways" (266). He even fully and heartily takes Mr and Mrs Boucher’s children under his care after they were left parentless and finally shows himself to be a responsible father figure after all this time: "In all his little plans and arrangements for these orphan children, Nicholas showed a sober judgement, and regulated method of thinking, which were at variance with his former more eccentric jerks of action" (313).
5. Conclusion

The Victorians greatly cherished and worshipped the idea of the Victorian family and gradually even started to elevate the status of a perfect and harmonious family life to that of an icon, an ultimate state of happiness that everyone in the Victorian society needed to achieve. This carefully constructed image of the perfect Victorian family however proved to be elusive from the 1850s onwards when certain authors, painters and other critical voices started to show the flip side of this ideal: according to them, the family home was not always a castle where the family members could find repose, but it could also be a prison and a place of violence and despair. In my Master's thesis, I wanted to research how Elizabeth Gaskell has contributed to this transition and how she has challenged to the longstanding idealistic image of the Victorian family by analysing the way in which she presents problematic family situations in her works. More specifically, I wanted to explore the way in which her literary characters experience and cope with these problematic family situations, if they are able to find solutions and and if and how they overcome the perilous situations they find themselves in. Additionally, I will examine these situations from a feminist point of view and focus especially on how the female characters in the story react and behave when they are confronted with problematic family situations around them.

To carry out this research, I have decided to analyse four works of Elizabeth Gaskell: the three short stories "The Heart of John Middleton" (1850), "The Half-Brothers" (1859), "Lizzie Leigh" (1855) and the novel North and South (1854-1855). In Elizabeth Gaskell's works in general and specifically in these works, I have discerned three main categories of problematic family situations that are recurring and seem to be prevailing throughout Gaskell's oeuvre: (1) the relationship between parents and children is challenged and problematised because the children grow up with an irresponsible, violent and negligent father figure and/or without a mother, (2) the family members experience or witness poverty and financial difficulties or (3) they witness or suffer from diseases and death. While analysing and comparing these categories in the four selected works, I have also discovered interesting analogies: I have found various similar themes and motifs which have formed the subcategories in my Master's thesis. These main categories and subcategories have enabled me to investigate the behaviour of the male and especially of the female characters in the four selected works of Elizabeth Gaskell.
The first part of my first category focused on the influence of the irresponsible, violent and negligent father figures on the literary characters around them. Many characters in the four selected works grow up with a malevolent father figure: John Middleton has a criminal father who curses and kicks him, Gregory's stepfather deprecates Gregory while he praises his own son, Lizzie Leigh has a severe and unforgiving father, Susan Palmer's father is negligent and an alcoholic and also Bessy and Mary Higgins' father is often violent and talks to them in a way that frightens them. The malicious father figure does no only harm certain characters in the stories but also inspires other characters to take him as an example and to humiliate and pester others in a similar way as he does. The victimised characters suffer greatly from these abuses and consequently experience tough, bleak and troublesome times during their childhood. Some characters in the story, however, resist the negative influence of the father figure and instead decidedly choose to deviate from his behaviour. When they do so, they often assume female traits and characteristics. In two of these four stories, there are two sons, of which one son follows the footsteps of his negligent and violent father and becomes a malicious figure himself, while the other son chooses the side of the mother and becomes a gentle and amiable person.

The second part of my first category explored the way in which the characters behave when they have to spend their childhood motherless. In the four selected stories, many literary characters, such as John Middleton, Gregory, Lizzie Leigh and Bessy Higgins, do not only grow up with an irresponsible, negligent and violent father figure, but also without a mother to take care of them. This absence of a mother figure in their lives causes them to feel empty and lost in life. These aforementioned characters, however, do not remain motherless. In the course of the story, they seem to find another, new mother figure who makes up for their troublesome experiences and who has a positive influence on them instead. As they spend more time with this new mother figure, the characters start to flourish again: they find sense in life and they find the courage to persevere despite their hardships. However, to fill up the empty space left by their mother's death, the characters do not only search for a new mother figure, but also start to look for a gentle, low, soft, female sound which they associate with their mother's voice. Conversely, the mother figure at times also looks for the sound of her daughter's voice. Also other characters in the stories seem to focus on the sound and identify the sound as a meaningful quality of the characters around them. The new mother figures who appear in the stories have such a positive influence on certain characters that even angelic qualities and features are ascribed to them. They are good and pure as angels, much like the "Angel in the House" in Victorian ideology. In these stories, however, the new mother figures
do not only show themselves to be gentle and kind, but also display a remarkably courageous and responsible behaviour in comparison with the male characters. This way, they manage to overwhelm the male characters, who often lose part of their authority and are given female characteristics instead.

In my second category, I have shifted the focus onto the theme of financial problems and I have examined how the literary characters behave when they experience or witness financial difficulties. At a certain point in the selected stories, many characters, such as John Middleton, Helen, Mr Hale, Mr Thornton and Boucher, find themselves in financial distress, which greatly complicates their lives and which places a heavy burden on them: their family is starving, they have to marry someone they do not love just because they desperately need money and their living conditions are horrible. Some characters in the stories, however, remain hopeful and strive and fight to work their way up the social and financial ladder again. In many of the stories, the characters move from one place to the other to earn money. This relocation from one place to the other might symbolise their rise from a lower to a higher status. In *North and South*, the clash between this lower and higher status is depicted most clearly. Margaret Hale, who at first looks down upon the manufacturers in Milton, gradually starts to appreciate them nonetheless by befriending Bessy Higgins. Likewise, the strike that occurs in Milton learns the factory masters that they need to connect with their factory workers on a much more human level. In this novel, therefore, the poorer classes teach the higher classes valuable lessons and that way actually enrich them, in a figurative sense.

In my third and last category, I have examined the experiences of the literary characters when they are witnessing or suffering from disease and/or death. In the stories, numerous characters, such as Nelly, Helen, Gregory, Lizzie's father, Nanny, Bessy, Mrs Hale, Mr Hale, Mr Bell and Boucher, are ailing or dying. However, when these characters are ailing, dying or even right after their death, they seem to bear their sufferings patiently and bravely and seem to die a peaceful death. They are sometimes even said to be smiling through the pain. Moreover, death often brings about a moment of anagnorisis, a turning point for many characters. The intense shock at the death of someone they love or know suddenly makes them reconsider their past actions and often causes them to change and improve their lives: they most often start to wish that they had spent more time with their beloved ones while they were still alive or they start to regret the fact that they have wronged or mistreated someone.

Drawing on these analyses, I am able to conclude that the literary characters experience many problems in their families in terms of child-parent relationship, financial
situation and physical condition, but they most often do seem to find solutions for these problems and do seem to overcome them. Despite of the fact that the malicious father figure causes various characters to suffer greatly and causes other characters to display an incorrect behaviour as well, there also seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel: not every male figure adopts the same modes of behaviour as the malicious father figure as they resist his negative influence. When the characters come in contact with such an irresponsible, violent and negligent father figure and have no mother figure, they try to find a new and inspiring person in their lives who helps them to find the right path in their lives again. When they are in financial distress, they try to climb up the financial ladder again and fight and persevere to live a comfortable and good life. When there is an inequality in the wealth distribution in society and a clash between the higher and the lower classes, the characters try to overcome their differences and solve their conflicts. When the characters suffer from an illness or when they pass away, they are still presented in a positive light. Even in their most difficult moments and until the very moment of their death, therefore, they manage to stay strong and brave.

Especially the female characters in these stories seem to overcome their problems in a remarkably brave and courageous way and that way are given more credit than the male characters in the story. Although there are some good-natured male characters in the stories, it is mostly the women in the stories who come across as very powerful and positive figures who even assume a certain power over the men in the stories. The women in these stories often save the men from the negative influence that their malicious father figures previously had over them and guide them through life. They give them the tools to become better persons and teach them valuable lessons in life. Moreover, they at times behave in a very courageous and responsible way and protect the male characters when they are in danger. At that moment, the male characters appear to be afraid, undecided and irresponsible, while the female characters immediately take control. Moreover, the female characters in the story are always said to bear their sufferings patiently and to die peacefully. In the four selected works, not only the women are presented in a positive way, but some male characters in the stories as well, such as Gregory, Tom Leigh, Mr Hale, Frederick and Mr Thornton, have good intentions. However, these male characters all seem to be greatly impressed and inspired by the women in their lives and they are often said to have female characteristics.

More generally, my research enables me to conclude that Elizabeth Gaskell shows a much more bleaker side of the Victorian family because she dared to show a reality that few other author and painters of her generation dared to face: she gives a glimpse inside the
Victorian home as it really was and sets up a less harmonious, less perfect image of the Victorian family that was at odds with Victorian ideology. Gaskell does not simply approve the idealised image of the Victorian family, stereotypically "dominated by a bewhiskered father, surrounded by his submissive wife, his respectful children, and perhaps a spinster aunt and an aging grandparent"\(^76\), but her sincere interest in social observation and insight in the psychology of her characters have enabled her to tell a much more honest and truthful story of the Victorian family. In her oeuvre, and specifically in the works that I have selected, Gaskell shows that there could be a malevolent father figure in the family and that the children could grow up motherless, that the family could have tremendous financial problems and that diseases and death were regretfully common in the Victorian families. At the same time, however, her works also suggest that there is a light in the darkness: although many families in her works are greatly affected by problematic family situations, they can still overcome these problems as long as they remain strong and courageous and keep on fighting to have a better life.

For my Master's thesis, I have chosen to analyse four stories out of Elizabeth Gaskell's oeuvre. Subsequent research might explore how Elizabeth Gaskell has approached and incorporated the three categories of family problems in the other works of her oeuvre and if and how the themes and motifs that were to be found in all of the four selected works also occur in these other works. I think it would be especially interesting to examine if these categories, themes and motifs are also involved in Gaskell's gothic stories, which is a completely different genre than the genre of the works that I have analysed. This subsequent research might investigate further how Elizabeth Gaskell managed to become a major social reformer of her time and could raise the well-earned appreciation of her works.

6. Works Cited


