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The Trauma of Loss as a Turning Point in Elizabeth Gaskell's Works

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The aim of this paper is to look into how Elizabeth Gaskell reflects trauma in her literary works and what she may have been trying to teach her audience through them. As a social and realist writer, she used narrative as a means to denounce the evils of her time, many of which give rise to social traumas. However, this paper will focus on more personal traumas, particularly the trauma of loss, and also how Gaskell handles these traumatic experiences in her writings. With this purpose in mind, it is important to consider Gaskell's own experience, how she overcame her own traumatic losses and how she used fiction both to reflect her experience and as a form of therapy. At the end of this paper, we will establish how Gaskell uses traumatic losses as turning points throughout her literary works.

Keywords
Elizabeth Gaskell; trauma of loss; Victorian literature; Realism; literary trauma; fiction as therapy

It is interesting to note that the vast majority of trauma studies and literary trauma theories revolve around those traumas caused by either war or violence, along with those caused by the *battle of the sexes*, while scarcely addressing the trauma of loss that arises from the death of a beloved one, a trauma that affects every human being, regardless of race, gender, social class or age. Although this trauma of loss is a natural event each of us must experience, it is not always considered as such. However, not every death affects or is endured in the same way. Furthermore, even though death is universal and natural, this does not make it easier to bear and should not be underestimated, neither the loss itself nor its consequences on every human being. And this is precisely what can be found in Elizabeth Gaskell's works.

As a starting point, it would be interesting to have a look at the existing

theory related to how, sometimes, authors use literature as a means to endure certain traumas in their own lives. One can find theories and studies both in favour of and against this idea. Jane Robinett, in "The Narrative Shape of Traumatic Experience", demonstrates that although this idea is unacceptable among many trauma and narrative theorists, there are a number of equally important theorists that suggest reconsidering this position is necessary:

> [...] studies of cognitive, physiological, psychological and behavioural implications of expressive writing corroborate what readers of literature have long suspected: writers often turn intuitively to writing as a way of confronting and surviving trauma suffered in their own lives.
> [...] By turning clinical insights towards literary trauma narratives, we may well discover that some writers have indeed found eloquent linguistic expression for their traumatic experiences. This [...] will invite a more complex evaluation of the relationship between narrative and experience. (291–292)

Elizabeth Gaskell was a realist author, and as such, "[a]lthough literary influences, such as Wordsworth, Crabbe and Tennyson, continue to feature in Gaskell's writing, the work which comes from her second decade in Manchester is most notable for its source in real-life experience" (Foster 30). Thus, Gaskell uses her own experience to build up her stories, reflecting not only the problems of Victorian society but also her own worries, sorrows and traumas: "The emphasis on betrayal, violence, suffering and loss is noteworthy. An aspect of Gaskell's writing which has been generally neglected in favour of her more comic or social-domestic realism" (Foster 79). Given this, it is necessary to consider Gaskell's life and her own losses, and to connect them with her narratives.

Michelle Balaev alludes to the idea, based on Cathy Caruth's works, that the evolution of trauma theory in literary criticism relies on the semiotic, rhetorical, and social concerns that belong to the study of trauma in both literature and society. She also refers to the contradictory theories and contentious debates that have occurred throughout the history of the concept of trauma, allowing literary scholars to work with different definitions of trauma and its effects. Balaev points out that many critics explore both how and why traumatic experience is represented in literature by combining different theories such as psychoanalytic theory, cultural studies and postcolonial theory, and that

"trauma's function in literature and society is more varied and curious than first imagined by early theorists" (4).

Gretchen Braun, in "A Great Break in the Common Course of Confession: Narrating Loss in Brontë's *Villette*", makes an interesting statement regarding trauma theories, narrative, and social relations, and their relationship with nineteenth-century realist fiction:

> Trauma theory has several points of connection with the development of nineteenth-century realist fiction. First, any theory of trauma – clinical no less than literary-critical – is inherently both a theory of narrative and a theory of social relations. Thus trauma theory knits together two crucial axes of development within the nineteenth-century realist novel: formal innovation and increasing social consciousness. Further, trauma theory, with its focus on uneasy yet inevitable intersections between subject and object, can help elucidate the blurring of subject and object position that inheres in the process of novel reading. (193)

Geoffrey Hartman's "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies" refers to the idea of art as testimony and representation at the same time. Later he argues that "we gain a clearer view of the relation of literature to mental functioning in several key areas, including reference, subjectivity, and narration" (547), and that there are still no definitive answers in trauma theory, at least as far as literary studies are concerned.

Throughout her life, Elizabeth Gaskell experienced a number of losses caused by the death of beloved relatives. Most of these deaths were a trigger for significant changes in Gaskell's life. Moreover, since all of them are reflected in her literary works, we can say that these losses left an important and ineffaceable mark on Gaskell's life, character and memory.

Among these various losses, we must start with her mother's death. Elizabeth Gaskell was born on September 29, 1810, in Lindsay Row, Chelsea. Her mother died a year later, on October 29, 1811: "Almost immediately afterwards, the small girl was sent to Knutsford to be brought up by her maternal aunt, Hannah Lumb (Foster 6), and so, "at the age of thirteen months – a sturdy infant with brown curly hair and blue eyes, who had walked from the age of ten months – Elizabeth, soon to be known as Lily, came to Knutsford, the place she was to re-create nearly forty years later as Cranford" (Uglow 13).

The next important loss took place in 1828, when her only brother, twelve

years older, who was a sailor, drowned at sea. If that were not enough, the news of this death devastated her father, who went into a deep depression. This made Elizabeth return to her father's household in London, where she nursed him until his death in 1829.

> Gaskell's other immediate family relationships were similarly characterized by loss. A year or so before the death of her father, her brother John, twelve years her senior, mysteriously disappeared while on naval service. (Foster 8)
>
> That winter John vanished from her life. He was lost, either at sea or after his arrival in India: no definite news ever came of his fate. [...]
>
> During the winter of 1828-9 Elizabeth went to Chelsea. Her father was devastated by John's disappearance and was ill and anxious. On Friday, 20 March, at tea with his family, he suffered a stroke and was temporarily blinded, and although he recovered slightly, a second stroke came two days later, which he did not survive. On 27 March 1829 his funeral was held at St Luke's, Chelsea. (Uglow 53–54)

Finally, regarding the more relevant deaths for this paper, a few years later, in 1832, Elizabeth married William Gaskell, who was the assistant minister at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel in Manchester. They settled in Manchester and she helped him in his work with the poor. William and Elizabeth had four daughters and a son, born between 1834 and 1846. But the boy, named William, died in childhood of scarlet fever at Porthmadog, Wales, during a family holiday. It was after little William's death that Gaskell's husband suggested that Elizabeth turn to creative writing as a way to help her to get over their son's death, considering that writing would offer a distraction from her grief. Thus, *Mary Barton* began "on William's suggestion, as an attempt to alleviate the continuing painful memories of Willie's death, the novel was associated from the start with suffering, drawn from first-hand knowledge" (Foster 36).

It is important to mention here Tanya Lee Allport's suggestion, in her thesis titled *Women Writing Trauma*, that "[r]e-organizing through telling the story of trauma involves the mental processes that create a structure or a context to the trauma, allowing the storyteller to make sense out of chaos and disorganisation" (46). Later on, she explains how

> Another manifestation of the trauma narrative has been the act of fictional

> writing as a means of representation. The role of 'creative writing' has not been to produce strictly autobiographical re-construction of trauma, but rather as a means to organise trauma through the representational context of literary constructs. As such, it is the fusion of inner consciousness, outer experience and a search for self-definition supporting the creative process, and enabling such representation. Creativity is therefore a tool for reorganising an experience to take on a form that externalises the internal ordeal. [...]
> Creative literary trauma representation does not necessarily undertake the telling of one's own story, as throughout history writers have depicted traumas that they have not directly experienced themselves. This second-hand representation of trauma can result in a change to the underlying power implications of the voicing of trauma. Representation of trauma, just like the conceptualising and the experience of trauma, is therefore imbued with a multitude of social and political ramifications. (47–48)

And so, Gaskell began to write fiction and became a renowned writer in her time. As a realist writer, she reflects in her narrative what she saw and experienced, using her fiction to denounce the evils of her age. Thus, it is not surprising to find reflections of her personal experience in her novels as well, among which we can see a pattern: all of her narratives feature dead mothers, disappeared brothers and dead sons. This pattern of repetition is of particular interest if we take into account Caruth's allusion to *Post-Traumatic Disorder* and its definition as "a peculiar kind of historical phenomenon [...] in which the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who lives through them" (Caruth *Trauma* 151). So it is not strange to find narrative representations of traumatic experiences in the work of a social novelist like Gaskell, who uses not only her own experiences, but also those lived by her acquaintances and neighbours, as a means to denounce the evils of her time. Nevertheless, it is worth analysing Gaskell's works to see how she uses traumatic experiences, particularly traumatic losses, as the primary cause for the main actions of her narratives.

Regarding Victorian literature, culture and theories of consciousness and unconsciousness, Carolyn Lambert, among other things, mentions the studies of Jill Maltus, whose book *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, establishes how although literary and cultural critics have made interesting contributions that help us to understand Victorian theories of consciousness and unconsciousness, there has been no sustained examination

of how Victorians perceived the effects of both psychic shock and emotional crisis. Thereupon Lambert mentions how Maltus

> draws attention to the contribution literature made to these Victorian debates as part of a common discourse in a society where the boundaries between disciplines were far more porous than they are today, and where psychological terminology was highly dependent on literary techniques such as metaphor and analogy to explain and discuss the workings of mind. Victorian fiction, therefore, [...], helped to shape emerging theories of the mind not simply as supplementary illustrations, but as primary cultural documents. Read in this way, in the rich context of Victorian medical and scientific writings, mental physiology and psychology, religion and law, fictional texts provide challenging and complex portrayals of disrupted consciousness, memory and emotion. (Lambert 432)

Maltus links bodily and psychic consequences of trauma and discusses how this link reflected in Victorian literature. Amongst other things, she talks about "brain fever", depicted in Gaskell's fiction as a consequence of shock. In this way, we can read how

> An interesting borderland between bodily and psychic orders in the Victorian novel is that suitably undefined ailment, 'brain fever', which functions as a loose and catch-all diagnosis for many kinds of mental crisis and is especially often related to emotional shock. [...] [T]he Victorian versions of this disorder were rather different from the conditions of encephalitis or meningitis to which the term may refer today. Patients were warned to avoid shocks to the system and the experience of strong emotion, since these were often the putative causes of the problem.
> In *Mary Barton* (1848) the eponymous heroine develops a brain fever after the strain of defending Jem in the dock while still trying to keep secret her father's identity as murderer. She raves deliriously for weeks. [...] In Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* (1864), the disappointment and shock of being quietly jilted by the lover she thought was hers plunges Phillis into a dangerous fever. (Maltus 5)

Maltus alludes to how, during the Victorian period, interiority and individual psychology became subject matter for novels. She establishes that one of the distinctive characteristics of the Victorian novel, and its omniscient narrator,

is to explore the interior life of its characters (12). This is the case in Gaskell's fiction. We can mention, as an example, the different inner reflections one can find when reading *North and South*, such as when Margaret thinks about her position after lying to Thornton and what he would think of her; Thornton's own ruminations both after Margaret's lie and after her refusal to marry him, and Mr Hale's musings on his loss of faith and its consequences. Maltus also maintains that a wide range of Victorian fiction, such as that of Gaskell, Dickens and Eliot, "engages in one way or another with questions of the structure of the mind and its response to overwhelming emotions such as fear, grief and shock" (15). In the chapter on Gaskell's fiction, Maltus explains, among other things, how "Gaskell is abidingly concerned with interiority – states of mind that alter under the pressure of social and psychic causes, producing effects such as 'langour', mental fatigue and stunned consciousness" (62).

Maltus's is a great and interesting study of shock and how it psychically and physically affects Victorian people, but here we are going to focus our attention just on how Gaskell reflects her own losses in her fiction, as well as how she uses them as turning points within her narrative. Thus, one can find examples of dead mothers, and the different consequences of their deaths, in works such as *Mary Barton*, where, along with the pain this death causes to John and Mary, it creates great communicative difficulties between father and daughter. It can be said that these communicative difficulties are a reflection of Gaskell's relation with her father after her mother's death:

> Though Gaskell's father, William Stevenson, was still responsible for the upbringing of her twelve-year-old brother, John, it seems that he was unwilling, or felt himself unable to cope with a motherless daughter. Gaskell thus virtually orphaned in infancy. She did spend some of her childhood and adolescence with her father in London [...] But Stevenson had remarried in April 1814 [...] and various sources suggest that Gaskell did not get on with her stepmother. (Foster 6)

In the case of *North and South*, the mother's death produces a great grief in both her husband and her daughter, as well as feelings of guilt in the husband. And in *Wives and Daughters*, the absence of a mother to guide Molly finally spurs Mr Gibson to get married again.

At this point, it has to be said that not all of the deaths or traumatic losses reflected in Gaskell's novels function in the same way. For example, in the case of the disappeared brothers, it is not their disappearance but their

reappearance that provokes an essential change in the life of their relatives. And if we consider the topic of the dead son, we find just such an example in *Mary Barton*, in which Gaskell uses this death as an example of the great differences that existed in nineteenth-century industrial cities between masters and workers (rich versus poor).

Now, we can say that things change if we pay attention to Gaskell's dead mothers. This loss functions as the cause of a number of important facts in her literary works. One example occurs in *Mary Barton*, where the title character's mother dies in the third chapter of the book; throughout the whole story, Gaskell shows us the consequences of her death. First of all, she describes the grief this death provokes in Mary's father, John Barton; how he feels he is incapable of educating his daughter; and how he turns to drink to bear his sorrows. We also see how John and Mary love each other, but, at the same time, they do not have the other's confidence and are unable to communicate with each other. In addition to this, her mother's death is shown as the cause of Mary's flirtation with Harry Carson, as a consequence of not having a mother's guidance. This flirtation is one of the triggering events of the novel.

The consequences of Mary's mother death appear again at Jem's trial. Here, at the beginning of Mary's statement, she expounds on how being motherless brings her to commit wrong actions as the consequence of not being properly educated:

> 'For you see, sir, mother died before I was thirteen, before I could know right from wrong about some things; and I was giddy and vain, and ready to listen to any praise of my good looks; and this poor young Mr. Carson fell in with me, and told me he loved me; and I was foolish enough to think he meant me marriage: a mother is a pitiful loss to a girl, sir: and so I used to fancy I could like to be a lady, and rich, and never know want any more.' (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 466)

The idea that the lack of a proper education related to the knowledge of the barriers regarding class distinctions and courtship is a consequence of being motherless, discussed in the above quotation, appears again in *Ruth*. In this novel, Gaskell presents a young orphan who, without a mother who can guide her, finally falls, socially speaking, because she does not know or understand the dangers of a relationship with a man like Bellingham or the dangers of a relationship with a man to whom she is not married. The only

one who perceives that Ruth is in danger and tries, unsuccessfully, to advise her, is an old acquaintance of her parents whom she encounters when visiting her childhood home:

> He longed to give her a warning of the danger that he thought she was in, and yet he did not know how. [...]
> She never imagined that the grim warning related to the handsome young man who awaited her with a countenance beaming with love, and tenderly drew her hand within his arm.
> The old man sighed as he watched them away. 'The Lord may help her to guide her steps aright. He may. But I'm afeard she's treading in perilous places. I'll put my missis up to going to the town and getting speech of her, and telling her a bit of her danger.' [...]
> The poor old labourer prayed long and earnestly that night for Ruth. (Gaskell, *Ruth* 51)

Valerie Ann Hyatt's thesis addresses the social and sexual consequences of motherlessness. Hyatt analyses three motherless characters within Gaskell's literary works, and states that "[t]he fates of the three women are different, but the painful loss and longing for their deceased mothers are ever present" (4). About Ruth, she establishes that:

> Ruth's mother suffered a prolonged illness, which would explain Ruth's ignorance on many matters concerning society. [...] Edelman's analysis explains Ruth's social difficulties through much of the novel. She has no idea how to be a proper Victorian lady; she was too young to be morally indoctrinated by her mother with the codes that guided female Victorian behavior. Prior to his death, her father was in such a terrible state of mourning that he also gave her no moral guidance. Thus, Ruth, at fifteen, enters into the Victorian laboring class as 'a sheep among the wolves' (King James Bible, Matthew 10:16).
> When Mr. Bellingham enters Ruth's life, she feels a rush of new and unfamiliar feelings. Ruth is not a worldly character, she has no knowledge of the barriers regarding class distinctions, she is ignorant regarding social customs and she has never been taught the rules regarding male/female-courting rules. (Hyatt 24–26, 30)

Moreover, in Ruth's case, she also loses both her job and her best and only

friend, who leaves Mrs Mason's house due to illness. These latter losses finally lead Ruth into Mr Bellingham's arms, thus triggering her fall.

In *North and South*, after Mrs Hale's death, we can see how Mr Hale feels he is, in some way, responsible for this loss. He thinks that, maybe, if he had not resigned and decided to move to the North, his wife would still be alive. His remorse, in addition to the grief produced by his wife's death, causes him to fall into a depression until his own death, which comes shortly after his wife's. We can find some similarity between these two consecutive deaths and those of Gaskell's brother and father.

Mr Hale's remorse can be seen throughout the novel as, after the family has arrived in Milton and Mrs Hale starts to fill ill, Mr Hale comments, on several occasions, whether his wife's illness is not a consequence of their removal to the North, a removal caused by his own religious doubts and loss of faith. All this can be seen in his reaction to his children's proposal of a move to Spain: "'No – no more removals for me', said Mr. Hale. 'One removal has cost me my wife. No more removals in this life. She will be here; and here will I stay out my appointed time'" (Gaskell, *North and South* 253).

Another example of a relative's death that functions as the impetus for an important action in the novel is Sylvia's father death in *Sylvia's Lovers*. In this story, Gaskell presents a young girl, Sylvia, who falls in love with a sailor named Charley Kinraid. Moved by jealousy, Philip, Sylvia's cousin, leads Sylvia to think Charley is dead when the latter is captured by a press-gang. When Sylvia's father dies, she feels obliged to marry Philip as her only option to survive, thus completely changing what Sylvia's life could have been.

We also find in Gaskell's novels examples of disappeared brothers, but, in this case, we can observe certain differences between Gaskell's works and her life, since the disappeared sailors in her novels eventually reappear, something that did not happen with her own brother. Perhaps Gaskell reflects here her own desires, whether consciously or unconsciously:

> That winter John vanished from her life. He was lost, either at sea or after his arrival in India: no definite news ever came of his fate. She never wrote or talked about this loss [...] But the figure of the sailor in peril moves through her fiction with the power of a recurring dreaming like the vision which haunts Mrs Hale, in *North and South*, longing for news of her son. [...] In her novels and stories the sailors are strong, reckless, warm-hearted. Whether they return or not, they are figures of loss and longing, mingled fear and hope. (Uglow 53–54)

In *North and South,* we find the character of Frederick Hale, who disappears after his participation in a riot on his ship, and who, despite the dangers of returning home, reappears before his mother's death. As mentioned above, Frederick's disappearance is one of the causes of his family's grief. Later, although the family is happy when he reappears to visit his mother on her deathbed, his presence in Milton is also a danger as well as a triggering event (Margaret lies to save him, which causes Thornton's jealousies and suspicion). Another example is the case of Peter Jenkins in *Cranford*, who, after a terrible quarrel with his father, leaves the family house and joins a ship as a sailor. Later he disappears and the Jenkins family receives no more news from him, so they are convinced that he is dead. This causes deep grief in the family, especially in his father. However, at the end of the novel, he suddenly reappears and settles in Cranford with his sister, helping her with the shop and being her companion in old age. Another example of a disappeared sailor can be found in *Mary Barton*, in which Gaskell presents the case of Will Wilson, Jem's cousin, who is on a ship and has lost contact with his family. But again, unlike Gaskell's brother, he reappears and, as Gaskell's brother did during his first years as a sailor, he entertains his family, Mary, Margaret and Job with his stories and sea legends.

Regarding the issue of the dead son, an example can be found in her first novel, *Mary Barton*. This is not a surprising fact, as Gaskell began writing as a form of therapy following her son's death, with *Mary Barton* being the result. In this novel, John Barton and his wife had two children, a girl, Mary, and a boy who died as baby. Like Gaskell herself, Barton's wife was never the same after the death of their child: "I'm sorrier for my wife. She loved her next to me and Mary, and she's never been the same body since poor Tom's death" (Gaskell, 2009:16).

Finally, we must once again mention *North and South*, where, in addition to the ones we have already seen, we can find various examples of traumatic losses. First of all, we, as readers, are faced with Mr Hale's loss of faith. As he is the parish priest of Helstone, when he realises his loss of faith, he feels that it is impossible to continue to carry out his duties at the parish, so he decides both to resign and to leave the village.

> He made her take a chair by him; he stirred the fire, snuffed the candles, and sighed once or twice before he could make up his mind to say – and it came out with a jerk after all – 'Margaret! I am going to leave Helstone.'
> 'Leave Helstone, papa! But why?'

> [...] He looked up at her suddenly, and then said with a slow and enforced calmness:
> 'Because I must no longer be a minister in the Church of England.' (Gaskell, *North and South* 34–35)

Mr Hale's doubts and consequent loss of faith force him to make a decision that changes both his life and that of his family; his loss of faith, then, is the prime cause that instigates the developments of the novel.

However, these losses have different effects on the Hales' daughter, Margaret. Her father's loss of faith leads her to make new acquaintances, from whom she learns many things that make her more tolerant and strengthen both her character and personality. Moreover, throughout the novel, Margaret learns from every loss she suffers (deaths, loss of faith by her father, when she thinks she has lost Thornton's confidence and admiration...), becoming stronger both morally and psychologically speaking.

Having reached this point, and to conclude this paper, we can say that Gaskell, whose life changed several times as a consequence of relatives' deaths, and who was able to overcome her little boy's death using narrative as a way to express her feelings and, at the same time, distract her from her own grief, demonstrates through her novels that traumatic experiences can be overcome. After little William's death, she may never have been the same again but, with the help of her husband and family, she found a way to overcome her sorrow. And this is what she teaches us in her novels, that everyone has two options: succumb to trauma, which probably leads to death (as happened to her father and some of her characters, such as Mr Hale); or to defeat it, learn how to overcome, and live again; that one can always learn something from traumatic experiences and then continue living, as she already had. Moreover, traumatic experiences should not be forgotten, as they function as important life experiences from which we can draw some kind of lesson.

Thus, we can say that Gaskell uses traumatic losses as turning points throughout her literary works. Without Mr Hale's loss of faith, Margaret would never have gone to Milton and, consequently, would never have met people like the Higgins or the Thorntons, from whom she learns a great deal and whose influences finally determine both her character and personality. Other examples within the novel can be mentioned, such as how after Bessy's and Boucher's and his wife's deaths, Margaret makes Higgins realise that he cannot stand still and let himself be carried away by grief and anxiety. These deaths and losses force him wake up, move, even tilt his head and look for

a job in any of Milton's factories, now that he has more children in his charge and therefore more responsibilities. For her part, Margaret cannot allow herself to be carried away by desolation after her mother's death; she has to remain strong and firm in order to help and support her father, who is carried away by guilt, sadness and remorse until he dies. Finally, in the case of Mr Bell's death, this last loss provides Margaret with the necessary financial solvency to help Thornton, as well as foster a relation of equality between them. Regarding Thornton, it is interesting to emphasise how the trauma caused by the loss of his father, a loss that joins the shame of the latter's actions and his eventual suicide, strengthens his character and makes him the upright man we know when the Hale family arrives in Milton.

Another example can be found in *Ruth*, where, if Ruth were not motherless, perhaps she would not have fallen into Mr Bellingham's arms. And in the case of Sylvia, in *Sylvia's Lovers*, if her father did not die on the gallows, or if she did not think that Charlie was dead, she might never have married Philip.

Although I cannot categorically affirm the usefulness of literature as a means of expression or even exorcism of trauma, I do believe that literary writing can have a certain effect along these lines, and that an example can be found in Gaskell and her literary career. As we have noted within these pages, narrative gave her, first of all, something to do and distract her from her grief (as she herself comments in the preface to *Mary Barton*, where she says that "[t]hree years ago I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a work of fiction" (Gaskell, *Mary Barton* 3), even though she does not explain what causes her anxiety); on the other hand, it gave her the occasion to express her yearnings by giving the characters of her novels opportunities that the "real characters" of her life did not have, such as the return of the sailors (contrary to what actually happened to her brother); it also gave her the opportunity to convey to her readers the lesson she herself had drawn from these traumas: that one has to defeat them, learn how to overcome and live again; that one can always learn something from traumatic experiences and then continue living, as she already had; and, finally, that traumatic experiences should not be forgotten, as they function as important life experiences from which we can draw some kind of lesson.

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