

The themes of love
and lost in the half
brothers by elizabeth
gaskell



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Love and lost plays an integral role in the story of the Half Brothers, which successfully leads to an inevitable ending. Each character rein act different aspects of the definition of love and lost.

For this reason, I will explore the way Elizabeth Gaskell epitomises love in each of the characters Helen, William and Gregory.

The reader is forced to feel sorry for Helen, as she has experience much pain and heartache. She was previously married but then her husband died of ill health and left her a widow with a child on the way. Her little girl she had when her husband was alive became sick and died also. Helen then gave birth to a new baby boy called Gregory. At that time She was poverty-stricken because the farm she had wasn't doing well so she didn't have enough money to take care of herself and her new baby Gregory. Never the less her problems were solved when William a man asks her to marry him. When Helen and her sister are conversing about the marriage it obvious to the reader that she is going to marry William purely because of the love she has for her son.

' She seemed after that to think of nothing but her new son '

Helen and Gregory are bought closer by the death of her previous husband and daughter Perhaps it is because the Gregory may resemble the father or daughter in some way. It is obvious that she marries William because of this immense love for her son Gregory as she makes William promise something before they get married.

' William Preston had asked her to marry him, and had promised to take good charge of her little boy.....neither in the way of keep nor of education'

The author substantiates that she has not entirely got over the death of her previous husband, in the text it mentions ' after they married she never smiles again' However later on in the story, it shows us that the only time she is happy this occurs when she has her son in her hand. It is this, which unfortunately leads to William being envious of Gregory the little boy.

' And he took a positive dislike to Gregory he was so jealous of the ready made love that always gushed out like a spring of fresh water that came near'.

When ever Helen sees her son her eyes lit up and she never fails to smile or to stick up for her son whenever there is need too. However it mentions that she did all she could to please her husband so one could make the assumption that she has a child for William to show that she does have some love for him and maybe because she realised he was slightly jealous of the relationship between her and Gregory.

' It was hard enough to have to keep another mans child'

This is quite cruel considering that William made promises to look after her son, before he got married to Helen. Through out the marriage the only time she gives affection to William this is when she gives birth to his son. ' She looked up in his face and smiled' this is to a certain extent quite ironic

considering that this is the first time she has actually smiled at her husband William.

‘ He wanted her to love her child less and that was an evil wish’

Before Helens death she bonds with her children, the son from previous marriage and the new son. Which is symbolic, which suggest she has equal love for them. ‘ One of her request was to have Gregory laid on her side and then she made him take hold of my little hand’. Its seems Helens death was inevitable because she got everything she wanted that day, after the birth of her child because within in a hour she was dead.

William initially in the story is described as a decent steady man who owns a farm. However he is also portrayed as a jealous type of person. After he married Helen he takes a positive dislike to Helens son Gregory this suggest that because of this immense love Helen has for her son it is a great lost for him. When Helen his wife dies he starts treating his stepson badly and one wonders whether he is trying to retaliate from the lost of love from his wife. This is revealed further when Helen dies and he ill-treats him because Helen had showed much affection for her son than for the marriage.

‘ My mother never got over his grudging dislike to his stepson’

In the story William breaks all his promises, he made before he got married to Helen. William treated his son better than his stepson because his own son reminds him of Helen whom he loved, however, his stepson reminded him of the lack of love Helen showered on her own son by the previous marriage ‘ And at last I advised my father just to take him away, and set him

to do some farm work' This shows that instead of giving him the education he needed and he had promise Gregory mother, he made him do farming work. Gregory doesn't help him self any further by acting immature. It gives William the admonition because aunty Fanny already thinks he is ' stupid and dull' and no wonder he had no one around who cared enough to guide him. The situation changes however, but by this time it is too late, Gregory risks his own life for his brother who did not care enough for him and who did not understand him. In this situation his is death is to be expected, similarly, like the mother who only got what she wanted priory to her died. So did Gregory but this time at his death.

At this point William feels really guilty for the vast amount of pain he has caused his stepson.

' I would have given him half my land- I would have blessed him as my son on God. I would have knelt at his feet and to forgive my hardness of my heart'

William only appreciates Gregory after he has saved his son ' I would have given him half my Land' as mentioned

William tries to make up for this lack of love he did not give to Gregory by having his body place at the side of his mother body where h e should be place at his death and then her request that when he William dies he should be place at her foot. Such contrast too late Gregory will never know and no amount of love could ever replace the loss love and the guilt he will experience the rest of his life.

Gregory whom the reader has sympathy for is seen as a simplistic person. One could depict him as kind hearted and loving person. Even though his stepfather treats him badly one could use the expression that he turns the other cheek because he doesn't retaliate this might be because he has some kind of love for William.

' Whatever he meddled in, and many a hard word and sharp scolding did he get from the people about the farm'

The reader is led to believe throughout the story that Gregory doesn't speak much, this might be away of telling his stepfather that he doesn't have to hit him. The author Elizabeth Gaskell leads the reader into thinking that Gregory is going to retaliate back on the younger brother when the opportune moment arise and the younger brother is in problem because he is the cause of him being treated badly. The brother is made to feel superior, by the rest of the families; despite all these things Gregory still treats him like a brother.

This is made crystal clear when his brother is in danger, when he disobeys his father by taking the wrong road and he ends up getting lost. Gregory finds him and takes off his coat even though it is cold and gives this to his brother to keep him warm. It is quite obvious therefore; that he has this immense love for his brother, why he does this no one knows. The author Elizabeth Gaskell, also leads the reader into thinking that he will just leave the brother; he may have decided not to do that, as he doesn't want to put his stepfather through pain.

When they are lying down the two off the brother's rein act the bonding of what they did with their mother on her deathbed, as a sign of love between the two off them.

'Thou canst not remember, lad how we lay together thus by our mother. She put thy small wee hand in mine'

This is repeated imagery and it is quite a dramatic touching moment and there is a combination of love and lost in this part of the story. Gregory's death was inevitable. It starts with his father and Sister dying. His mother marrying William not out of love and then his mother dying through childbirth. Gregory found peace when he was united with his brother.

Already because of this death of Gregory Williams only recognises that Gregory was a kind person when it is far too late. He is feeling bad because it is a loss of a life and a messed up opportunity for a son and a stepfather relationship.

Each character experiences there own type of love and lost. It is quite astounding how each of the characters ends up the same way alone, and death it seems is the only unifying force. In this story there is a special moral to it. It is saying love while you are alive and try to appreciate people for what they are, while they are alive. Helen experiences lost from when her daughter and husband die. William experiences lost when his wife neglected him for Gregory but what he did not realise is that Gregory needed more attention because he was a child, and she was trying to love them equally. He experience love from his son and from his stepson later on in the book

when he dies. Gregory experiences lost from when his mother dies and the love he normally gets vanishes and also when he talks to his stepbrother.