

## THE QUESTION OF VICTORIANISM AND PROGRESS IN GASKELL'S CRANFORD: A ROMANTICISED OFFER\*

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### Abstract

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) can be regarded as a notable work in terms of the attitude towards the dominant idea of progressivism in the Victorian era. Many works by Gaskell's contemporaries tended to deal with social problems of the period, among which her own industrial novels can be included. However, *Cranford* has an exceptional stance in that the novel takes place in English countryside remote from all the turmoil created by industrialisation. Setting her characters in the middle of an idyllic landscape where the railways and impact of the capitalist economy are quite far away from the inhabitants of the little town Cranford, Gaskell presents a lifestyle associated with the remote past, which is still alive in the memories of English people. In view of the representation of a small town in the mid-Victorian period and the praise on a simple lifestyle, Gaskell's attitude in *Cranford* can be defined as a challenge against progressivism. Hence, this article aims to analyse Gaskell's *Cranford* in the light of the industrial transformation of the Victorian era and argues that Victorianism and the philosophy of progressivism were severely challenged longing for pre-industrial conditions.

**Keywords:** : Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, Victorianism, progress, challenge.

## GASKELL'IN CRANFORD ESERİNDE VİKTORYA TOPLUMU VE İLERİCİLİK FELSEFESİNİN SORGULANMASI: ROMANTİK BİR ÖNERİ

### Öz

Elizabeth Gaskell'ın *Cranford* (1853) romanı, Viktorya çağındaki ilerencilik düşüncesinin ele alınması bakımından dikkate değer bir eserdir. Gaskell'ın çağdaşları tarafından yazılan eserler dönemin toplumsal sorunları ile ilgilenmeyi hedefler ve yazarın sanayi romanları da bu eserler arasında sayılabilir. Yine de *Cranford* eseri, sanayileşme nedeniyle ortaya çıkan karmaşadan uzakta, kırsal bir bölgede geçmesiyle özel bir bakış açısına sahiptir. Romanın başlığına kaynaklık eden Cranford isimli küçük kasabanın sakinlerini demiryollarından ve kapitalist ekonominin etkilerinden oldukça uzakta, sessiz ve sakin bir bölgeye yerleştiren Gaskell, İngiliz halkının toplumsal hafızasında halen canlılığını koruyan, ancak uzak geçmişte kalmış bir yaşam tarzını sunar. 19. yüzyıl İngiltere'sinde görülen sorunlardan uzak kalarak küçük bir kasabanın kendi halindeki yaşantısının yansıtılması ve buradaki sade yaşam biçimine değer verilmesi nedeniyle, *Cranford* romanı ilerici felsefeye karşı çıkış olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu makalenin amacı, Gaskell'ın *Cranford* romanını Viktorya çağındaki sanayi dönüşümü ışığında incelemek ve sanayi dönemi öncesindeki yaşam biçimine duyulan özlem yüzünden Viktorya dönemi yaşantısı ile ilerencilik felsefesinin ciddi biçimde sorgulandığını ortaya koymaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, Viktorya toplumu, ilerencilik, karşı çıkış.

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## INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* started in the form of instalments in Charles Dickens's *Household Words* in 1851, which would be only one of her few works to be published in the periodical (Jaffe 2007: 46). Although the original idea behind the publication does not indicate that Gaskell aimed to produce a rather long work in the form of a novel, the reading response to the first two chapters that were regarded as sketches on their own forced Gaskell to continue writing this novel. This led to a lack of structural unity among some chapters. Apart from the plot structure, however, the portrayal of the characters, the representation of social circumstances and, especially, the attitude of these characters to Victorian conditions bring forward a controversial case when inclination in the major works of these decades is taken into account. In fact, Crawford's mid-nineteenth-century English community, isolated from the discussion on the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation, experiences a condition that challenges dominant social tendencies at the time. As Jaffe states, "[*Cranford has*] oddities within the Victorian literature canon: [it does not] fit neatly within the usual categories of Victorian novel criticism" (2007: 47). On the other hand, Croskery claims that "*Cranford's charm is best understood as the successful embodiment of just such an experiment in formal representation. [...] This novel represents a significant moment not only in the development of the novel of sympathy but also in the novel of reform*" (1997: 199). In an era characterised and promoted by change, progress and innovation, the novel focuses on the stability, mutual trust, social bonding and economic welfare of a small community in English countryside. This controversy in *Cranford*, in comparison to major literary trends such as the industrial novel in the mid-nineteenth-century, invites a critical reading of the novel. Hence, this work aims to analyse Gaskell's *Cranford* as a questioning of Victorianism and more prominently as an example of questioning progress.

The setting of *Cranford* is the nineteenth-century England, a time characterised by social class conflicts between the middle class and the working class, industrialisation and industrial strife between these classes, urbanisation and overcrowded cities, factory acts to regulate working life, public acts passed as measures for improving public health in a metropolitan habitat, economic doctrines supporting capitalism, free trade and utilitarianism, all of which contributed to the building of a new social order. In other words, it was a time of change for English people, according to the popular term of the Victorian era. Despite these issues that seemed to play an important role in the general notion of Victorianism, there was almost always an inclination to question the impact and significance of such matters. As Gilmour says, "*then generalisations about the Victorians [...] tend to be unduly derived from the society's public discourse about itself, which, since this was the great age of the middle classes and they had most at stake in this discourse, was predominantly middle-class, masculine and metropolitan*" (1993: 1). From a contemporary perspective, such generalisations about the Victorians stem from "*conflicting feelings of envy, resentment, reproach, and nostalgia*" and the fact that "*we have picked up the habit from the Victorians themselves*" (Gilmour 1993: 2). For these reasons, the Victorians and their representations in literature were approached from a general point of view in the nineteenth century, too. As a result, challenging voices were usually ignored, or at best not paid due attention, which can be valid in the case of Gaskell's *Cranford*. As Jaffe argues, "*Cranford's attention to detail, charming as it may be, points toward a deeply fictionalised view of the world*" (2007: 48). The focus of the novel on a provincial setting and characters that are not involved in Victorian issues, actually in a fictionalised world, drew less attention to *Cranford* than Gaskell's major works like *Mary Barton* and *North and South*.

## VICTORIAN PROGRESS

Accordingly, the reason for the choice of this topic is the changing focus of the novelist in the middle of her career. When we consider Gaskell's interest in industrial problems and her attempts to offer solutions in other novels like *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, it is quite clear that the yearning for an idyllic past, almost in the form of Romantic movement, needs to be elaborated

upon. So, Gaskell's attitude towards progress is an important matter to be questioned. In order to discuss progress, particularly in relation to industrialisation as a marker of progress in all aspects, the term needs to be defined according to the mid-Victorian understanding of progress. According to Thelen,

*recent historians have explained the origins of the Progressive movement in several ways. They have represented progressivism, in turn, as a continuation of the western and southern farmers' revolt, as a desperate attempt by the urban gentry to regain status from the new robber barons, as a thrust from the depths of slum life, and as a campaign by businessmen to prevent workers from securing political power. Behind such seemingly conflicting theories, however, rests a single assumption about the origins of progressivism: the class and status conflicts of the late-nineteenth century formed the driving forces that made men become reformers (2016: 323).*

Despite various views on the origins of the idea of progress, it is clear that the desire to progress and improve oneself was the main motive for those who favoured progress. Indeed, the supporters of progress were industrialists who benefited from the developments produced by the process of industrialisation. As Thelen further points out, "*whether viewed by the historian as a farmer, worker, urban elitist or businessman, the progressive was motivated primarily by his social position*" (2016: 323). The social position of the supporter of progress was marked by his relationship to industrial production in the Victorian era. Social, cultural and economic insecurities and class tensions encouraged the support for progress in the industrial and bourgeois society of the nineteenth-century England. It was widely believed that all sorts of conflicts could be solved as a result of progress that resulted in change as a positive concept. In other words, through the idea of progress, progressivism promotes development and advancement in science, technology, economy and social organisation, which in fact constitute the foundations of Victorian issues.

Since industrialisation process was accepted as a continuation of the developmental phase that started with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in Europe, the Victorians believed that the movement away from a barbaric state to a developed, intellectual, industrial and, later on, modernist condition was essential in order to fulfil one's duties to the nation. Hence, the changes in Victorian society were a result of industrialisation and this process was further triggered by an industrial society that was accompanied by, on the one hand, capitalist economic doctrines, and, on the other hand, social inequalities against the welfare of ordinary people. When discussing the principles of utility and greatest happiness in *Utilitarianism*, J. S. Mill also touches upon this matter calling humans "*progressive beings*" (2011: 22). So, progress was an essential aspect of intellectual and daily life in the Victorian era as a result of the changes created by industrialisation. Under these circumstances, progressivism was deemed to be an indispensable philosophy that made people's lives better along with various industrial projects starting with railways, technological innovations and improvements in daily life. It can be argued that progressivism was an attempt towards civilisation in the eyes of the nineteenth-century English people.

### GASKELL'S APPROACH

In the light of this overview on progress, it is clear that Gaskell's *Cranford* takes the readers to the little town Cranford, in order to present a challenging attitude towards the dominant tendency at the time. Although the name of a nearby town Drumble is occasionally mentioned as the narrator Mary Smith travels between these two locations and we know that Peter goes to India after being punished by his father, Cranford is almost like a haven or a shelter for the characters to be protected from the outer world in which the above mentioned matters affect lives in a new world order. *Cranford* begins to challenge Victorian issues at the outset as the readers are introduced to the characteristics of this small community in which women dominate. The first chapter entitled "Our Society" introduces the community that contradicts patriarchal social order as follows:

*In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses above a certain rent are women. If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears; he is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for being with his regiment, ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, distant only twenty miles on a railroad (Gaskell 2011:1).*

Victorian society was a strictly patriarchal society in which the male authority especially in the public space was not questioned, but this seems to have changed in Cranford where women, in fact Amazons, control public space. While men are almost useless in many daily tasks such as “keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers,” “frightening away little boys,” “rushing out at the geese that occasionally venture in to the gardens,” “keeping their neat maid-servants in admirable order” and intellectual responsibilities like “deciding all questions of literature and politics,” Cranford women “are quite sufficient” on their own (Gaskell 2011: 1). According to Mulvihill, “anything beyond this sufficiency is by definition superfluous” (2016: 339). The daily chores in Cranford are, therefore, necessary for survival from the perspective of the ladies. Mulvihill argues that “the reader of Cranford is thus not invited finally to scorn the foibles of the Cranford ladies but rather challenged to see how their habits reflect the many economies of living that form the economy of Cranford’s life” (2016: 339). Jaffe also believes that “[Mary Smith’s] narrative is especially concerned with the townswomen’s rigidity: their sensitivity to any behaviour that seems to violate some Cranford-ordained rule, whether it be the wearing of hats, the telling of jokes, or the donning of clothing more commonly associated with the other sex” (2007: 49). For this reason, “Cranford has been described as a critique of the constraints of Victorian ideology, particularly the destructive effects of the ideology of separate spheres (the widely accepted view that women ruled the domestic realm, men the world outside)” (Jaffe 2007: 49). The male authority in patriarchal Victorian society is questioned at the beginning of the novel by means of dominant women. This questioning attitude against male authority is maintained in the rest of the novel. Since Victorianism depends on a male-dominant worldview, this approach about the social domination of women is a clear challenge to one of the norms of Victorian society.

As for the influence of the matriarchal society in Cranford over typical gender roles, the intellectual discussion between Captain Brown and Miss Deborah Jenkyns on the literary quality and taste of Dickens and Dr. Johnson needs to be closely inspected. This discussion shows that Cranford ladies are intelligent enough to challenge men in literary domains. During tea time, when the Captain calls Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers* “Capital thing!”, this comment is taken as “a challenge” by Miss Jenkyns in view of her literary knowledge (Gaskell 2011: 10). Against the dauntless remark by this gentleman, Miss Jenkyns quite boldly argues that “I must say, I don’t think [*Pickwick Papers*] are by any means equal to Dr. Johnson. Still, perhaps, the author is young. Let him persevere, and who knows what he may become if he will take the great doctor for his model?” (Gaskell 2011: 10). Moreover, the publication in instalments appears to be “vulgar and below the dignity of literature” (Gaskell 2011: 11). Despite mutual remarks by each character on their literary taste, the discussion is concluded a little bit awkward as the Captain says “D-n Dr Johnson!” (Gaskell 2011: 12). Although there seems to be no final remark as regards the literary quality of these writers, Miss Jenkyns’s attempt to discuss her idea against a respectable gentleman is noteworthy in that she challenges this male character in public space. As Hopkins states, “there is a mild foreshadowing of the feminist movement in Cranford, [...] although [Miss Deborah Jenkyns] dressed in a cravat and a little bonnet-like jockey cap, which gave her altogether the appearance of a strong-minded woman” (2016: 72). After all, Miss Jenkyns “would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men” (Gaskell 2011: 14).

A similar impact on female characters can be found out in Miss Matty’s affair with Thomas Holbrook, her curious admirer, in which she cannot express her interest in this farmer due to her elder sister’s obsession with appearances and Matty’s attitude leads their relationship to an unhappy ending, leaving the man in a passive condition (Gaskell 2011: 39). Moreover, Miss Jessie

Brown's timid, yet strong characterisation during both her elder sister's illness (Gaskell 2011: 22) and after her father's immediate death (Gaskell 2011: 27) makes her a unique young lady in the novel. In a similar manner, Peter's making fun of her elder sister in public (Gaskell 2011: 69) and his consequent public beating by his father (Gaskell 2011: 71) can be interpreted as serious challenges to Victorian manners and gender roles. Moreover, Lady Glenmire's marriage with Dr. Hoggins is a clear challenge to Victorian propriety in the eyes of Cranford ladies among whom Miss Pole shares the news in an excited manner that results from this shocking development (Gaskell 2011: 150). Miss Matty and the narrator greet the news for their marriage exclaiming "Marry! Madness!" (Gaskell 2011: 150). Finally, Miss Matty Jenkyns's attempts to survive economically after the failure of her bank can be pointed out as a proof for the challenging attitude against the rules of propriety (Gaskell 2011: 173). Although Miss Matty herself and her environment find it improper for a lady to run her own shop and to make her living selling tea in her home, this naïve lady succeeds in her attempts to recover herself from the economic difficulties created by the turmoil of the time. Even before Peter's arrival as her saviour, she seems to run her business without benefits from her friends, which shows that a woman can quite successfully support herself and stand on her own feet. Above all, the narrator Mary Smith's dominant role in the public sphere and attempts to direct social issues can be regarded as an exception to the idea of submissive women in Victorian society throughout this novel. These examples based on the decisions, remarks and behaviours of the characters show that dominant Victorian social values of the patriarchal order are questioned in *Cranford*. In particular, these Amazons living in Cranford pose a great challenge to the gender roles in the mid-nineteenth century and question the notion of Victorianism.

#### INDUSTRIALISATION

In accordance with this approach in gender roles, Gaskell's attitude against Victorianism can be questioned within the context of industrialisation and capitalisation, which are two important aspects of progressivism. Although progressivism can be treated as a dominant view of life that stems from the idea of progress and the mid-Victorian society is one of the best representatives of that attitude, *Cranford* seems to contradict this fundamental ideology. Firstly, this work needs to focus on the attitude towards industrialisation as represented in *Cranford*. It must be admitted that industrialisation is a highly complicated and detailed matter to take into consideration. Still, we can argue that industrialisation is a transition from agricultural to industrial social order symbolised by changes in terms of production through mechanisation, social dynamics and class structures as well as economic changes.

Industrialisation has direct consequences on social and economic organisation of a community as we can clearly observe in the Victorian era. Especially, in the industrial or the condition of England novels of the 1840s and 1850s, the consequences of industrialisation in these spheres are closely examined. To give an example of Gaskell's attitude in these decades, we may refer to her industrial novels like *Mary Barton* or a later work *North and South*. In both novels, it is possible to observe the influence of an industrial economy accompanied by a market that requires the rapidly growing working classes to contribute to the economy by means of consumption leading the way to consumerism. Moreover, industrialisation symbolised by railways, canals and use of machines in production can be observed in both works. For instance, in *Mary Barton*, class struggles are observed in the conflict between John Barton and John Carson; while this struggle takes place between Nicholas Higgins and John Thornton in *North and South*. The growing influence of railways leads the way to an increasing amount of trade not only in Britain, but also on a global scale in both novels. The machines enable the mill owners to make more money, while trade unions enable the workers to fight against the tyranny of their employers. The capitalist

economy is gradually established as the dominant economic order. Because of industrialisation, the social environment completely changed in a few decades.

As opposed to these representations in Gaskell's two industrial novels, social and economic conditions in *Cranford* are completely different. As mentioned above, the setting of the novel is a small town in English countryside. This small town is quite remarkable because there is no sign of the industrial turmoil that dominated the mid-Victorian social life. In a chronological order, Peter's story takes the incidents to an early stage that the readers listen from the memories of Miss Matty. Even the narrator Mary Smith has no idea about this period in the lives of the inhabitants of Cranford: "*Poor Peter! His lot in life was very different to what his friends had hoped and planned. Miss Matty told me all about it, and I think it was a relief to her when she had done so*" (Gaskell 2011: 66). The original plan for Peter was "*to win honours at Shrewsbury School, carry them thick to Cambridge, and after that, a living waited him, the gift of his godfather, Sir Peter Arley*" (Gaskell 2011: 66). Peter's story is controversial when he is compared to other characters in the novel. Except for the captain and the noblewoman, who are outsiders in this town, the character in Cranford are all stuck to this town without any possibility of moving outside. The plan prepared for Peter by his father shows the conventional familial relationships and the evident prospects for Peter.

In Cranford, Peter was supposed to follow the example of his father and have a career remote from the daily concerns of industrial society. His decision to leave Cranford behind marks a turning point not only for Peter, but also for other characters in terms of the reflection of Victorian issues. Kiesel states that "*in fact, the story of Peter is really one of origin – it's the violent rupture of his parting that seals Cranford off from the rest of the world and locks it in a timeless, changeless, Eden of 'Amazons'*" (2016: 1002). In this timeless condition, not only Peter, but also all characters in the novel seem to have been squeezed regardless of the changes out of their small world. When the daily tasks of Cranford people, discussed above, are taken into account, it is clear that there is no sense of change in the town. As Schor points out, "*Cranford is most often praised for its own quality of loving nostalgia, but what it in fact registers is panic about change; it is being written in the face of its own demolition, in the face of social changes that novels like Mary Barton [...] address more directly*" (1992: 85). Similarly, Kiesel argues that "*in this short, deceptively tranquil novel, Gaskell portrays the intricate codes and interpretative systems that this new Eden requires while simultaneously chronicling the story of its transformation/corruption*" (2016: 1003). In the story of this countryside transformation, the female characters are entrapped in their environment.

So, the industrial transformation that affects English society as a whole is not a matter for people living in Cranford. In other words, these characters can be described as "*a captive population or a historical artefact*" (Gillooly 2016: 884). The feeling of being entrapped in Cranford is dominant on all characters including the narrator who lives in a larger town, yet spends most of her time among the ladies in Cranford. While the world as it is known craves for progress in the Victorian era, the world as it is known by Cranford people has already stopped to progress. So, *Cranford* does not witness any sort of progress in people's lives contrary to the condition in Victorian society.

### PROGRESS

About the representation of progress in *Cranford*, the attitude towards railways needs to be examined too. The captivation of the characters in the novel results from their social and physical isolation. The latter is actually a result of the difficulties in transportation. In the novel, Gaskell does not present a detailed account of the whereabouts of this town, except for the reference to a nearby town called Drumble. Despite the growing significance of railways in the Victorian era, they do not play a significant role in the novel in terms of making the lives of the characters easier. As Seaman puts forward, "*the economic advance that took place from the mid-forties onward was largely a consequence of the development of the railways and then of steamships*" (1995: 26). In relation to the impact of the railways, it can be argued that "*the achievements of Victorian England marked the*

beginning of the end of the long period of human history during which the normal mode of human existence had been based on agriculture" (Seaman 1995: 26). As a result, rural lifestyle was gradually replaced by the industrial and urban society that benefited from the advantages of machines over manual labour. Despite the significance of railways in Victorian England and the references to railways in industrial novels, railways are explicitly referred only once in *Cranford* after Captain Brown's death. As Mary Smith and Miss Jenkyns wonder the cause of the excitement in the street, they learn the news from Jenny after a brief inquiry: "Oh, ma'am! Oh, Miss Jenkyns, ma'am! Captain Brown is killed by them nasty cruel railroads" (Gaskell 2011: 20). A detailed account of the news is given by a carter as follows:

*The captain was a-reading some new book as he was deep in, a-waiting for the down train; and there was a little lass as wanted to come to its mammy and gave its sister the slip and came toddling across the line. And he looked up sudden at the sound of the train coming, and seed the child, and he darted on the line and cotched it up, and his foot slipped, and the train came over him in no time* (Gaskell 2011: 21).

Beside the news being a shock to almost all characters in the town since the Captain was adored by Cranford people, railways are presented as a highly unpleasant and repugnant object. Furthermore, the reference to railways seem to ignore their benefits. By the time Captain Brown died in this incident, he was actually occupied by his favourite writer and literary work. As the account in a local newspaper reports, "gallant gentleman was deeply engaged in the perusal of a number of *Pickwick*, which he had just received" (Gaskell 2011: 22). By the mid-nineteenth century, printing techniques had already improved and made it easier for the general public to access printed materials like the periodicals in which Dickens's *Pickwick* was published.

Furthermore, the railways allowed the publishers to distribute these works more quickly and efficiently, so that a weekly periodical could be distributed all over England in a short time to make it available for the readers. However, Captain Brown's pleasure in reading his favourite publication so easily seems to be disregarded. Apart from the unexpected and early death of Captain Brown and the catastrophic consequences of his death especially for his daughters, the ladies of Cranford feel devastated by the news to the extent that railways are blamed for the incident.

Hence, the symbol of industrial revolution is simply underrated by the inhabitants of this small town contrary to its function in industrial novels. Moreover, the railways are not referred in any way during Peter's adventures abroad when he goes to India to follow the colonial mission of the British Empire. This attitude shows that Gaskell has no intention to bring forward the symbol of industrialisation and progress in the mid-nineteenth-century England. While the railways are only the object of cursing, the idea of progress does not seem to be emphasised in the novel. This can be interpreted as a kind of favouritism for the idyllic countryside, still untouched by the adverse effects of industrialisation. Contrary to the Victorian belief in the benefits of progress and change, Gaskell prioritises the state of nature that has not yet been dominated by an intention to progress. In this representation, railways and the idea of progress entailed by them do not necessarily bring out a desirable condition.

### ECONOMY

In relation to Gaskell's questioning of Victorianism in *Cranford*, the last point to be touched upon in relation to progress is about economy. It is not possible to talk about the industrial revolution and its effects on production as well as social structure without taking into account capitalisation in economy. In addition to being one of the earliest industrial societies in the world, the Victorians were one of the earliest to embrace capitalism based on the ideas of free trade and *laissez faire*. The capitalist economy was accompanied by the rise of the middle class that acted to some extent as the employers of the working class people and investors in economy. It can be asserted that capitalisation had its great impact on the social structure.

As it is the case in all other matters discussed till now, capitalisation in economy is to a great extent ignored in *Cranford*. Due to their lack of a proper income, the ladies in Cranford struggle quite hard to save up and manage their economic condition. Poverty is a dominant, yet never mentioned term in this town:

*“Elegant economy!” How naturally one falls back into the phraseology of Cranford! There, economy was always “elegant,” and money-spending always “vulgar and ostentatious”; a sort of sour-grapeism which made us very peaceful and satisfied. I never shall forget the dismay felt when a certain Captain Brown came to live at Cranford, and openly spoke about his being poor—not in a whisper to an intimate friend, the doors and windows being previously closed, but in the public street! in a loud military voice! alleging his poverty as a reason for not taking a particular house (Gaskell 2011: 4).*

This condition can be observed in the rest of the novel by means of small economies that Cranford ladies use to save some money such as lighting only a single candle instead of two, covering the carpets with paper to keep them clean, never attempting to show off in front of other ladies so that no one is made to spend more than enough and never wasting their money on items of luxury. These examples make it clear that consumerism and the capitalist instinct to make more money have not yet affected the community in Cranford. The dominant economic rule of the nineteenth-century England seems to have been avoided in Gaskell’s novel.

In line with the study of progress in *Cranford*, the conditions that result from the bankruptcy of the Town and County Bank in which Miss Matty invested her savings need to be touched upon as well. On a visit for shopping at the town, Miss Matty and the narrator learn that the bank has had difficulty in payment and eventually the investors lose all their money in order to cover for the loss of clients: *“The next morning news came, both official and otherwise, that the Town and County Bank had stopped payment. Miss Matty was ruined”* (Gaskell 2011: 168). As DaGue states, *“Loss of income can be traumatic to Victorian ladies. The closing of a local bank produces altered circumstances for Matty, who must then decide how to support herself financially”* (2016: 51). The foundation of such banks and their destructive effects on individuals can be explained as follows since the problem was a source of uneasiness for the Victorian public: *“With the passage of the Joint Stock Companies Act a sort of legal monster was born; composed of many people and yet legally considered ‘as one single person,<sup>2</sup> the limited corporations allowed by the Act vexed the notions of subjectivity then current in economic and legal discourse”* (Miller 2016: 139). The confusion between private and public selves aggrieved many people in the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the case of Miss Matty. In relation to the portrayal of a female character as the victim of such companies, Miller argues that *“the sequestration of private experience received its most enduring emblem in the definition of the domestic as feminine; supervising the private world threatened by unlimited liability, women were also seen as especially ignorant of and vulnerable to the depredations of unlimited joint-stock companies”* (2016: 141). Hence, it can be argued that the choice of a woman for this economic problem can be treated as a response to the social attitude that naturalised the victimisation of women at the time.

However, the representation in *Cranford* seems to be meaningful when treated from the critical perspective of this work. In this case, the attitude of Miss Matty and the inhabitants of Cranford show that they do not actually think about having a proper job to make their economic conditions better. More importantly, it appears that investing one’s inheritance on a local bank and hoping to survive in a capitalised economy is much better than working for one’s own shop. Among the communal effort to raise money and help Miss Matty overcome her economic difficulties, it is seen that Miss Matty is captured by the rural lifestyle in Cranford and she has nothing to do with the daily struggle of a typical Victorian:

*Teaching was, of course, the first thing that suggested itself. If Miss Matty could teach children anything, it would throw her among the little elves in whom her soul delighted. I ran over her accomplishments. Once upon a time I had heard her say she could play “Ah! vous dirai-je, maman?” on*



*the piano, but that was long, long ago; that faint shadow of musical acquirement had died out years before. She had also once been able to trace out patterns very nicely for muslin embroidery. [...] Miss Matty's eyes were failing her, and I doubted if she could discover the number of threads in a worsted-work pattern, or rightly appreciate the different shades required for Queen Adelaide's face in the loyal wool-work now fashionable in Cranford* (Gaskell 2011: 173).

After going through many options that can be offered as a means of survival for Miss Matty, the narrator exclaims that "No! there was nothing she could teach to the rising generation of Cranford, [...] with all that she could not do" (Gaskell 2011: 174). As DaGue argues, "in *Cranford*, there is no idea of professions for women, no attack on an inadequate educational system for women, only gentle scorn directed at a solid English education. [...] Miss Matty has no visible means of financial support" (2016: 52). Furthermore, working at one's own shop is taken as a downgrade by Miss Matty and her friends. At the end of all preparations for her new life, she reacts as follows:

*When we came to the proposal that she should sell tea, I could see it was rather a shock to her; not on account of any personal loss of gentility involved, but only because she distrusted her own powers of action in a new line of life, and would timidly have preferred a little more privation to any exertion for which she feared she was unfitted. [...] They had such sharp loud ways with them; and did up accounts, and counted their change so quickly! Now, if she might only sell comfits to children, she was sure she could please them!* (Gaskell 2011: 188).

Miss Matty's adventure as a shop owner who sells tea in the small town of Cranford starts in this manner and continues regardless of her lack of calculation in running a proper business. Although she likes to give people an extra amount of her tea and candies, she succeeds in surviving until the arrival of Peter in the form of a young prince from the colonies. Despite the representation of Cranford as a "fortress of feminism," Victorian women at the same time continue to suffer due to their femininity that is associated with a cultural code of inferiority (Wolfe 2016: 163). Wolfe further argues that "this expiation is accomplished by a series of incidents proving the insufficiency of the female in a world of two sexes" (2016: 161). Nevertheless, it needs to be asserted that "Miss Matty, champion of Christian ethics and paragon of all feminine virtues, determines the progression of *Cranford* by her willingness to develop as a human being" (Wolfe 2016: 162). The ignorance of Cranford ladies in the matters of survival in a rapidly industrialised and capitalised society of the nineteenth-century England is thus presented in a naïve perspective. In a sense, professionalism for women is brought forward for discussion on a wide scale. However, it must be noted that Gaskell challenges the dominant social and economic norms of the Victorian era in such representation. The daily habits and manners of Cranford ladies, along with their indifference about the reality of public life at the time, show that Gaskell questions the idea of progress and Victorian values in general.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be argued that Gaskell's *Cranford* presents a challenging attitude towards the social context of Victorianism and the idea of progress. It is clear that *Cranford* aims to create a kind of idyllic lifestyle in the mid-nineteenth-century English countryside in which almost all characters lead their lives in a sense of simplicity independent from the developments brought about by the industrial revolution and the attempt for progress. As Mary Smith's father indicates, "such simplicity might be very well in Cranford, but would never do in the world" (Gaskell 2011: 196). In their captivity characterised by simplicity in economic, social and cultural aspects, these characters seem to resist progress. Furthermore, due to their sense of daily habits and routine, the Victorian public in *Cranford* implicitly challenges this dominant concept. Thus, for the inhabitants of the small town Cranford, progress is depicted like a curse rather than a blessing.

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