



The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies

JASSS

International Journal of Social Science

Doi number:<http://dx.doi.org/10.9761/JASSS7987>

Number: 74 , p. 233-242, Spring 2019

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Yayın Süreci / Publication Process

Yayın Geliş Tarihi / Article Arrival Date - Yayın Kabul Tarihi / Article Acceptance Date

22.01.2019

22.03.2019

Yayınlanma Tarihi / The Published Date

25.03.2019

AN EVALUATION OF PROTO-FEMINISM IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S CRANFORD

ELİZABETH GASKELL'İN CRANFORD ROMANINDAKİ PROTO-FEMİNİZMİN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

Lect. Dr. Nilay Erdem Ayyıldız

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1779-8464>

Firat University, School of Foreign Languages,

yalinmedre@hotmail.com

Abstract

The term "feminism" took its origin from France in the 1880s and started to be used in England in the 1890s. Therefore, it was not used by Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) and her contemporaries. However, many works of such female authors as Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) who lived until the mid-Victorian period (1850-1870) are studied as proto-feminist, in other words, early samples of feminist works, considering that they include protests against gender stereotypes of the period. On the other hand, most Victorians took adopting and perpetuating gender roles in the society seriously. Therefore, it is controversial that Gaskell is either a proto-feminist or a patriarchal female author. The aim of the study is to examine Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) to explore to what extent the novel develops a proto-feminist voice through the lives of the female characters. The novel is set in Cranford, inhabited by a group of women limiting themselves into the strict cultural norms of the Victorian period. It presents a patriarchal way of life in contrast to Amazon-like town lives of the women. The Cranfordian ladies are away from being a female community liberated them from patriarchy; conversely, they form just a feminine community that maintains a unity among themselves with patriarchal teachings in their conventional lives by limiting themselves and escaping from capitalist effects even though they end up with interfering with men and capitalism. They lead their lives in accordance with the patriarchal norms because of their marriages or their fathers. Therefore, the study reveals that it is the ladies themselves who oppress each other and make their own lives difficult with their tough social rules. Thus, it indicates that the female characters in the novel do not evoke proto-

feminist voice; however, the novel calls the female reader for a feminist action with the ironic portrayal of the patriarchal oppression which the Victorian women put themselves under.

Key Words: Elizabeth Gaskell, Proto-Feminist, Oppression, Patriarchy, the Victorian Period

Öz

“Feminizm” terimi, kaynağını 1880’lerde Fransa’dan almış, İngiltere’de ise 1890’larda kullanılmaya başlamıştır. Bu nedenle, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) ve çağdaşları tarafından kullanılmamıştır. Fakat, Jane Austen, Brontë kızkardeşler, ve George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) gibi orta Viktorya dönemine (1850-1870) kadar yaşayan kadın yazarların birçok eseri, döneminin toplumsal cinsiyet basmakalıplarına itirazlar içerdiği düşüncesiyle proto-feminist, diğer bir ifadeyle feminist eserlerin ilk örnekleri olarak değerlendirilir. Diğer taraftan, çoğu Viktorya dönemi halkı, toplumdaki toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin benimsenmesi ve sürdürülmesini ciddiye almıştır. Bu nedenle, Gaskell’in bir proto-feminist yazar mı yoksa ataerkil bir kadın yazar mı olduğu tartışmalıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Gaskell’in *Cranford* (1853) adlı romanını inceleyerek, söz konusu eserin kadın karakterlerin yaşamlarıyla ne derece bir proto-feminist ses geliştirdiğini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Roman, Viktorya döneminin katı kültürel normlarıyla kendini kısıtlayan bir grup kadının yaşadığı Cranford’da geçmektedir. Bu roman, kadınların Amazon-vari kasaba yaşamının zıddına, ataerkil bir yaşam biçimini sunmaktadır. Cranfordlu kadınlar, ataerkillikten kurtulmuş bir kadın topluluğu olmaktan uzak olup; aksine, en sonunda erkeklerle ve kapitalizmle yolları kesişse de, kendilerini kısıtlayarak ve kapitalist etkilerden uzaklaşarak geleneksel yaşamlarındaki ataerkil öğretileriyle kendi aralarında bir bütünlük sürdüren sadece bir kadın topluluğunu oluşturmaktadır. Bu kadınlar evlilikleri ya da babaları yüzünden yaşamlarını ataerkil normlara göre sürdürürler. Bu yüzden çalışma, birbirlerine baskı kuran ve katı sosyal kurallarıyla kendi hayatlarını zorlaştıranın, kadınların kendisi olduğunu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Böylece, çalışma; romandaki kadın karakterlerin bir proto-feminist ses uyandırmadığını, fakat romanın Viktorya dönemi kadınlarının altına girdikleri ataerkil baskıyı ironik biçimde resmederek kadın okuyucuyu feminist hakerete geçirdiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Elizabeth Gaskell, Proto-Feminist, Baskı, Ataerkillik, Viktorya Dönemi

Introduction

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) is one of the most significant female writers of the Victorian period during which man and woman were regarded as two-separate spheres that could not be thought to be equal. The term ‘feminism’ took its origin from France in the 1880s and started to be used in England in the 1890s. However, many works of such female authors as Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) who lived until the mid-Victorian period are studied in terms of feminist perspective, considering that they include protests against gender stereotypes of the period. Accordingly, while the terminology ‘feminism’ was not used by Gas-

kell and her contemporaries, it is obvious that, in those times, “an understanding of the ways in which expectations of gender worked and how they were instilled into boys and girls existed and was very much a part of Victorian thought” (Morris 12) because the issue about bringing up a child in accordance with the proper gender roles was the main concern of most Victorian parents. In this respect, considering Gaskell’s works, there is much debate about her: Is she either a proto-feminist or a patriarchal female author? For instance, while Davis’ reading of her works suggests that Gaskell is “a feminist prototype” (518), Vasiliu states that “[f]or the militant feminist movement of the late twentieth century, Cran-

ford was old-fashioned and a tributary to a strong, oppressive set of patriarchal values" (1). Furthermore, Dodsworth identifies the real problem as the one that worries readers about women in Gaskell's works. The critic questions "whether she espouses radical proto-feminist doctrine or accepts and condones the patriarchal status-quo, or does one thing consciously or overtly, and the other subconsciously or subversively" (133). This problematic approach also comes out with Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853). Dodsworth argues that its women "pretend to be as good as, or even better than, men" (133). However, they seem to have adopted socially constructed gender roles in society. Thus, the study aims at indicating that the Cranfordians are away from being a feminist community, but Gaskell called her female readers for an action against patriarchy through which the Victorian women totally broke away from the real life.

The Cranfordians: The Women of the Patriarchal Grain

Gaskell starts *Cranford* with the depiction of a small town 'Cranford' which is "in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women" (3). The phrase sounds like that the ladies are like masculine women warriors occupying Cranford and fighting against men and patriarchy. However, the ladies turn out to be women fighters not against men but against any changes in their values, customs and traditions they have constructed and confined themselves within the bold lines of these cultural norms inherited from their patriarchal roots. As Byrne claims, Cranford's idealized women-based society is "a self-contained world with its own support networks" (57).

Cranford is a work, which became a novel later, as Gaskell did not intend to write it as a novel. She informs that "[t]he beginning...was one paper in Household Words and I never meant to write more" (Gaskell, Letters 747- 748). The plot of *Cranford* is said

to mainly "set in the 1830s, the time of Gaskell's youth, with some flashbacks even earlier, to the 1810s. The town of Cranford is based on Knutsford in Cheshire, where Gaskell was brought up by her maternal aunt, Hannah Lumb, from the age of one, after the death of her mother" (Lundquist 4). In *Cranford*, Gaskell depicts a utopic female-populated town in contrast to the capitalist, thus the male-oriented vision of metropolitan Manchester, upon which industrial Drumble is modelled. The interests of these "quite sufficient" (Gaskell 3) ladies are far from the hustle and bustle of both capitalist enterprise, epitomized by "the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble" (Gaskell 3) and romantic adventure. The novel is narrated by Mary Smith who is at the same time a character in the novel paying frequent visits from Drumble to the elderly women in Cranford. As she herself asserts by stating: "[f]or my own part, I had vibrated all my life between Drumble and Cranford" (Gaskell 219), Mary Smith oscillates between two opposing cultures of urban and industrial Drumble and of rural and traditional/anti-industrial Cranford. She observes:

If a married couple comes to settle in town [Cranford], somehow the gentleman disappears; he is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties,...or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, distant only twenty miles on a railroad. In short, whatever does become of the gentlemen, they are not at Cranford. (Gaskell 3)

It is obvious that gentlemen are scarce in Cranford and if a gentleman happens to move there, he soon disappears, either scared off by the female dominance at the social events or forced out of town by some kind of business. Cranford represents a closed female

society carefully organized around a set of strict social practices and a binding code of linguistic propriety and decorum; whoever happens to come to Cranford is promptly informed of the “regulations for visiting and calls” (Gaskell 4), the amount of time given to each (never to exceed a quarter of an hour) or of the appropriate ‘eatable’ or ‘drinkable’ refreshments to be served at evening entertainments. Thus, in Langland’s words, Cranford can be defined as a world, “structured by women’s signifying systems: calling and visiting, teas and dinners, domestic economies, charitable activities, and management of servants” (Gaskell 118).

The novel revolves around a group of single, elderly ladies and childless widows, who spend time with visits, including card games and gossips about Britain rapidly changing from a rural to an industrial country. Therefore, it is obvious that despite its seemingly militant idealism, Gaskell’s Cranford is not a fictionalized feminist manifesto. According to Vasiliu, “[t]o view the Cranford ladies as a bunch of feminist activists campaigning for women’s rights or subversively infiltrating the mighty patriarchal citadel would be far-fetched” (10). These women are not overtly at war with the patriarchal culture and its expectations. Theirs is a war of resistance against dehumanizing industrial capitalism “that seeks to stabilize meaning and value in productivity, profit and use” (Langland 122) and that assigns progress as its ultimate goal. Regarding Cranford as a community narrative, the novel can be said, as noted by Zagarell, to “represent a coherent response to the social, economic, cultural, and demographic changes caused by imperialism, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism” (499). Thus, it could have been written as a reaction to the ongoing changes in the Victorian period. Despite the changes all over Britain, the Cranfordian women do their bests to keep their conventions alive.

There is a hierarchy and code of behaviour based on a class distinction among

women. It becomes clear with the depiction of the Assembly Room where the Cranfordian women come together. In the absence of the county families, the ladies can move from the second to the first row in the room. It can be inferred from it that the aristocracy is at the top of the remaining Cranford society. The seating also proves the ladies’ superiority in rank to the shopkeepers, who “huddled together on the back benches” (Gaskell 105). As the ladies are spinsters or widows, they have little influence in ranking themselves. It is principally determined by the position of the men in their lives, the spinsters’ fathers or the widows’ late husbands. It indicates that they pay attention to the class issue so much. Even among themselves, they are first respected in accordance with their classes, rather than their proprieties. For instance, Mrs. Jamieson is at the top of the ladies’ own hierarchy and called “the Honourable”, not because she is morally valuable, but because she is the daughter of a governor and the daughter-in-law of a baron, which seems to be as close to the aristocracy as Cranford can boast. Mrs. Jamieson is the expert on rank, determining who is admissible or “inadmissible to Cranford society” (Gaskell 140). Well aware of her own distinction, she continuously highlights her rank and wealth. Initially, she even wants to keep her aristocratic sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, away from her friends, wishing “to appear to her noble sister-in-law as if she only visited ‘county’ families” (Gaskell 86). The Jenkyns sisters, Miss Matty and Miss Deborah, also come from a respectable background. They have an aristocratic connection, vaguely “related to Sir Peter Arley. . .” and all the ladies are aware that Miss Matty used to visit at Arley Hall in her youth (Gaskell 36). The sisters are the daughters of a deceased rector, a highly-esteemed occupation of the period. It proves Young’s claim that acceptable work for genteel people in Britain was traditionally associated with the government, war, the Church, medicine and the law, in that order (65). Thus, considering their associations with

these institutions dominated by men, it is obvious that they cannot exclude their identities from their patriarchal roots, and they owe their own ranks, positions, and respects in the society to their male relatives such as their fathers, brothers, and husbands. For instance, inheriting their father's rank, the sisters, Matty and Miss Deborah, would belong to the upper-middle class. However, maintaining this rank is very difficult. In spite of their short income after their father's death, the sisters feel obliged to continue employing at least one maid. Furthermore, as an officer's daughter and the widow of a major, Mrs. Forrester has a military connection, which puts her in the upper-middle class, like the Jenkyns sisters. Despite her struggles to make ends meet, she also has one maid. Thus, it is clear that a certain amount of wealth is needed for the ladies to live a middle-class life.

The Cranfordian ladies have lived in accordance with the patriarchal norms due to their marriages or their fathers. For instance, among the ladies in Cranford, two ones from the upper rank, Mrs. Forrester and Mrs. Jamieson, are childless widows who have been unhappily married. Although not much is said about Mrs. Forrester's married years, it is implied that she has led a "not very happy or fortunate life" (Gaskell 147) while the Honourable Mr. Jamieson (Mrs. Jamieson's late husband) is remembered to have drunk "a good deal and occasioned [his wife] much uneasiness" (Gaskell 144). As for the Jenkyns sisters, of special interest is the relationship with male authority experienced by them, especially by Miss Deborah. Miss Deborah's role models throughout her life were her father, the Late Rector, from whom she has inherited many severe patriarchal values, and she has some sort of callous insensitivity to the misery of her own siblings. For instance, she and her father prevent young Miss Matty from marrying her lover Mr. Holbrook because he is considered to be not 'good

enough' for a rector's daughter and eventually the maiden ends up a spinster herself. As for Miss Matty, she experiences both the coercive and unemotional facets of male authority. She cannot come together with her lover Mr. Holbrook because of her rigid father and sister. However, when Mr. Jenkyns and Miss Deborah die and the limiting forces upon her disappear, she decides to marry him before his death. Secondly, her brother who has left the town for the colonial mission in India also ignores her. Left alone after the death of her sister, she is helped by Mary Smith who sends a letter to Peter Jenkyns to acknowledge him about Miss Matty's financial situation. Peter's marriage to any other women is also another way of leaving his sister alone. Although he seems to be helpful for Miss Matty at first, he reveals his insensitivity towards his sister in his words to Miss Matty: "I could have sworn you were on the high road to matrimony when I left England that last time! If anybody had told me you would have lived and died an old maid then, I should have laughed in their faces. ... You must have played your cards badly, my little Matty" (Gaskell 189).

Miss Matty is portrayed as a passive woman who has suffered from her father's and elder sister's rigid limitations and her brother's ignorance. However, Miss Deborah appears to be a dominant figure with her rules not only over her sister Matty, but also all Cranfordian ladies. As noted by Vasiliu, we are familiar with Miss Deborah only in the first two chapters of the novel, but "her influence can be felt throughout the remaining fourteen as an iconic image of unflinching authority" (8). Miss Deborah imposes patriarchal rules she has inherited from her father instead of opposing them and overbearing the feminine ethos. Her "strict code of gentility" has become a means by which her dead father goes on to rule the community of women as a "dominating patriarch" (Vasiliu 8). The narrator says: "She would have despised the mod-

ern idea of women being equal to men. Equal, indeed! She knew they were superior" (Gaskell 17). It can seem to be ambiguous whether the word "they" in her answer refers to "men" or "women". However, considering Miss Deborah as representative of women who have internalized patriarchal system, it can be claimed that the word "they" refers to "men".

Indeed, the conventions Miss Deborah tries to maintain are not crucial, but trivial and restricting the women's lives. Some unwritten and constructed rules shape their social interactions, limited with clothing and even the times and conversations of calling hours. The Cranford rules on visiting do not differ much from the etiquette books of the time. Young draws analogy between the visit rules in Cranford and Agogos' Hints on Etiquette and the Usages of Society, with a Glance at Bad Habits from 1838 and claims that the women's visits should take place between two and four o'clock and last 10-15 minutes, being "so short that bonnets and shawls were not taken off. . ." just like in Cranford (140).

The women in Cranford leads their life through "elegant economy" (Gaskell 4). It is a phrase Gaskell quotes from herself in her letter (Gaskell 174), and it describes everything from managing household expenditures to regulating one's life. The narrator uses the term "Cranfordisms" to refer to daily practices of the Cranfordian community. Gentility and "elegant economy" are hand in hand in Cranfordisms. Young explains "gentility" as "a name for the culture of the middle class. . ." used for the "values, beliefs and behaviours that united its practitioners . . .", sometimes defined as "respectability and refinement" (Gaskell 15). The ladies seek to conceal their "unacknowledged poverty" behind a "very much acknowledge gentility" (3), even though they also avoid showing-off. Their "elegant economy" includes a set of social rules. For instance, it is "considered 'vulgar' to speak of money,...to give anything expensive, in the

way of eatable or drinkable, at the evening entertainments. Wafer bread-and-butter and sponge-biscuits were all that the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson gave..." (Gaskell 3). Seven o'clock teas are arranged "on the most elegant and economic principles"- old plate and scanty portions-are followed by "a supperless turn-out at nine" (Gaskell 7). Furthermore, Mrs. Forrester's maid needs to retrieve a tray from under the sofa of the cramped little room. Considering all these practices, the narrator says: "everyone took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world; and talked on about household forms and ceremonies, as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with house-keeper and steward..." (Gaskell 5). It is obvious that even if it is not logical, the behaviour of an elderly, upper middle-class woman is adopted by the others and accepted as an established code they also need to apply in their lives.

Moreover, in the Cranfordian culture, a person's posture and language are significant signs determining the respect of the other people to himself/herself. Physical self-control is represented regarding the control of one's posture. In this term, men are considered to be less polite and even vulgar as they ignore this detail in the community: "...the male gender seems to embody the lack of refinement. Mary Smith ironically remarks that they "had almost persuaded [themselves] that to be a man was to be 'vulgar'..." (Gaskell 10). For example, Dr. Hoggins, the local surgeon in Cranford, is considered to be vulgar because he crosses his legs when sitting down. Young points out that, in the nineteenth century, a "genteel person must stand and sit erect to demonstrate moral backbone as much as a naturally strong spine" (82). Another example of physical self-control is related to manners on a dinner table. For instance, the Jenkyns sisters find sucking the juice out of an orange an enjoyable task, but they do not do so as it is not a very genteel one, and they retreat to their rooms to suck in privacy.

Thereby, it is obvious that despite their enjoyment, they restrict themselves within the conventions they themselves set. As for using language and voice moderation, Captain Brown and Mr. Holbrook also fail in these respects. We learn that Captain Brown "spoke in a voice too large for the room..." (Gaskell 7), and that Mr. Holbrook sees "no necessity for moderating his voice" (Gaskell 36) unless someone is ill. As for Mr. Holbrook, he misbehaves as he speaks "the dialect of the country in perfection" (Gaskell 36). However, dialect and slang must also be avoided according to the codes of gentility. The language of Dr. Hoggins is also no better (Gaskell 125). Besides being a man, for Mrs. Jamieson, all these misbehaviours are sources of his being excluded and "tabooed as vulgar, and inadmissible to Cranford society; not merely on account of his name, but because of his voice, his complexion, his boots, smelling of the stable, and himself, smelling of drugs" (Gaskell 140). It is clear that the Cranfordians give importance to physical qualities, behaviours, uses of language and voice while evaluating people's respectability.

The Cranfordian women lead a life away from reality and they do nothing intellectual to develop themselves. The subject they talk about is, for instance, Mrs. Forrester's lace collar she is wearing. As a communal leisure time activity, they read *St. James's Chronicle*, published three times a week, and it gathers the ladies of the town and provides them with "plenty to say" (Gaskell 64), that is, trivial matters to gossip about. It is also a routine activity of reading the newspaper aloud. As Matthew Rubery observes that it was common in the early Victorian period: "News reading...had been a largely communal activity by which a single issue was estimated to reach upwards of twenty readers through coffeehouses and public assemblies" (Gaskell 6). Patricia Ingham notes that the *Chronicle* reporting about the actions of the aristocracy

appealed to the elite of England (243). Regarding the economic conditions of the ladies in *Cranford*, it seems ironic for them to read the *Chronicle* for entertainment. It can be claimed that they want to imagine themselves as the members of "genteel society" (Gaskell 3), which is written between quotations purposely by the narrator to draw attention to the ironic situation because the narrator Mary Smith adds that as the women of *Cranford* lack the money for individual subscriptions, they, in fact, share the fees and trade the newspaper among themselves. In fact, the newspaper appears not having any intellectual value for the women because they ignore the content of the newspaper. For instance, it is told that Miss Matty and Mary Smith use it as paper walkways to protect Miss Jenkyns's new rug from the dirty feet of her guests. In this respect, Jewusiak claims: "The content of the paper transforms: from an account of things happening elsewhere and to other people, the newspaper takes on a material meaning as a pathway for Miss Jenkyns's guests" (<http://www.ncgsjournal.com>). The newspaper has another function for the Cranfordian ladies: to protect the Jenkyns' new rug from the discoloration of the sun. Miss Matty and Mary Smith place the leaves of newspapers over the carpet. The narrator says: "We spread newspapers over the places, and sat down to our book or our work; and, lo! in quarter of an hour the sun had moved, and was blazing away on a fresh spot; and down again we went on our knees to alter the position of the newspapers" (Gaskell 20). Thus, it can be claimed that the importance of the newspaper changes depending upon the purpose why they use it. As a sign, the newspaper becomes sometimes a material providing news and subject matter for conversations, sometimes a sign of intellectuality to show-off, and sometimes an item used to protect the carpet.

As for Miss Deborah's discussion

with Captain Brown about the literary merits of Dickens versus Dr Johnson. While Captain Brown appreciates Dickens' earthy and humorous style, Miss Jenkyns favours Dr Johnson's sharp rationality. Indeed, Miss Deborah has not even read Dickens but does not wish to reveal her ignorance and still insists on Dr Johnson's superiority. Thus, it is obvious that the Cranfordian women's intellectual life is shallow and they escape from the reality and modernity in their rural small town they have constructed with conventions and rules.

However, the narrator observes that these rules are human-constructed and can change or can be ignored on some occasions. For instance, during their visit to Mr. Holbrook's farm, rather than resorting to the crude expedient of eating with a knife, Miss Matty and Miss Pole "could not muster up courage enough to do an ungentle thing...", whereas after long consideration, Miss Mary shovels up the peas with her fork as Mr. Holbrook does (Gaskell 41). The hungry ladies cannot help devouring Miss Betty's offerings because as the basic needs sometimes becomes important enough to violate the rules of gentility. The narrator Mary Smith tells: "'Oh, gentility!' thought I, 'can you endure this last shock?'" (Gaskell 82) It is clear that for hungry people, it becomes "better to submit graciously, even at the cost of [their] gentility" (Gaskell 83). Furthermore, although, according to their rules of gentility, calls must be paid between 12 and 3 o'clock and dress is changed in the expectation of a guest, it is observed that the ladies break this rule in some occasions. For example, the gossip lady, Miss Pole cannot wait until twelve o'clock to share the news about Dr. Hoggis and Lady Glenmire's hasty marriage. She says: "...I can't wait – it is not twelve, I know – but never mind your dress – I must speak to you" (Gaskell 138). Miss Matty herself is a rule-breaker one morning, as she goes to get a glimpse of the new dresses before 12 o'clock. She excuses herself to avoid the crowd as she tells Miss Mary that "it is not etiquette to go

till after twelve, but then, you see, all Cranford will be there, and one does not like to be too curious about dress and trimmings and caps, with all the world looking on. It is never genteel to be over-curious on these occasions" (Gaskell 146-147). They also break the rule for a more serious reason: to summon the ladies to a secret emergency meeting, one day at eleven o'clock in order to discuss what they can do to help Miss Matty who becomes penniless because of the failure of her bank. More seriously, although working women are generally frowned upon and wealth earned through labour and trade is despised in the Cranford society, especially by Miss Deborah who does not allow Jessie to work after her father's death, it is seen that this convention can also be broken, especially by her own sister, Miss Matty who has to open a tea shop after she loses all her money because of the bankruptcy of The Town and Country Bank. Miss Deborah's death has a great impact upon Miss Matty's breaking the rules. For instance, Miss Matty cannot marry Mr. Holbrook in her youth, as he is not a suitable man for Matty because of his lower rank in her father's and older sister's opinions, but after Miss Deborah's death, reappearing of Mr. Holbrook excites Miss Matty, and she defies her sister's view on rank, when she accepts an invitation to dine with him.

Love affairs and probable marriages, as well as antipathy towards such men as Captain Brown in the novel, make it indispensable to discuss the last point about the ladies in Cranford. The point is related to their approach to male characters. It is obvious that they are prejudiced not only against men but also women who come to the town later. For instance, their behaviors towards Captain Brown derives not from being a man, but from their "panic about change" revealed with his arrivals of with her two sisters in Cranford (Schor 85). Their ignorance of gentility rules irritates the ladies, and for them, Captain Brown working in the railway in Drumble is the representative of the capitalist

industrial world, and they are afraid that he may also bring railway to Cranford and violate its nature. However, their opinions change, when Captain Brown and his daughters are appreciated for their good senses of humour and friendliness. Moreover, Captain's "excellent masculine common sense" (Gaskell 7) is recognized by the ladies, who previously have only considered men as being "so in the way in the house!" (Gaskell 3). When Captain Brown die on the railway while saving a little daughter's life, Miss Deborah realizes well the narrowness of her previous judgements and exclaims, "...I must go to those girls [Captain Brown's daughters]. God pardon me if ever I have spoken contemptuously to the Captain!" (Gaskell 22). It is also Miss Deborah who makes it her mission to help Miss Jessie care for her dying sister and to support her in her grief. She accompanies Miss Jessie to her father's funeral by claiming: "It is not fit for you to go alone. It would be against both propriety and humanity were I to allow it" (Gaskell 23). It is obvious that their biased approaches are not limited to male newcomers to Cranford. Obviously, Miss Deborah makes the girls behave in accordance with the cultural rules of Cranford and seeks to impose it even in the girls' funeral.

A similar prejudiced approach is also observed in their attitudes to another newcomer, Lady Glenmire, who is Mrs. Jamieson's sister-in-law. In the beginning, as she is not an original Cranfordian, the ladies keep her at distance and criticize her as she does not apply gentility rules. In time, she becomes a good company and a skilled card player, and the ladies make her a member of their little circle of friends. However, her marriage to the local doctor of the town, Dr. Hoggin who is from her lower rank, surprises the Cranfordian ladies. Miss Pole claims: "What a fool my lady is going to make of herself!" (Gaskell 138), as she, just like the other women, is concerned with the classes of partners in

marriages. That is, the class of the male partner is thought not to be lower than the one of the female one. However strictly they keep the rules, the ladies decide to visit their "bright, and kind, and sociable, and agreeable" (Gaskell 142) friend, "whether allowed or not by Mrs. Jamieson who refuses her sister-in-law furiously following this marriage (Gaskell 174). Thus, the women are in control of Cranford and their initial prejudice is not special to men. They are prejudiced towards any newcomers, let it be men or women. Moreover, there is no indication of any male oppression over the Cranfordian ladies, who have been grown up or experienced the patriarchal oppression. On the contrary, the few men that Cranford can boast are kind and comparatively sensitive, and they are increasingly accepted as their value becomes more and more apparent to the ladies. Gaskell's model society does not consist solely of women, but of men and women in fruitful cooperation with each other (Lundquist 33). Indeed, it is the ladies themselves who oppress each other and make their lives difficult with their tough social rules.

Conclusion

To conclude, the incidents in Cranford that there is no escape from males and anything related to them. The ladies confine themselves in Cranford within the sets of values and norms they have established. They lead their lives with patriarchal values they have inherited from the older generations who internalised the passive role of women, thus, rather than liberate themselves in a society abound of women, they limit themselves by the strict rules and conventions they have constructed and not allowing anything new or anybody new to penetrate into their society. However, with newcomers, they break their shells a little bit and realize that humanity is over the gentility they have constructed even though they attempt to resist against them and any changes brought by them. Therefore,

the women in Gaskell's *Cranford* are away from presenting a proto-feminist voice in the mid-Victorian literature. Nevertheless, Gaskell's novel may be interpreted as a call for action in regards to the Victorian women who internalised and sustained patriarchal teachings.

REFERENCES

- Byrne, Katherine. " "Such a fine, close weave": Gender, Community and the Body in *Cranford* (2007)." *Neo-Victorian Studies*. 2:2 (Winter 2009/2010): 43-64.
- Davis, Deanna L. "Feminist Critics and Literary Mothers: Daughters Reading Elizabeth Gaskell." *Signs*. 17.3 (1992): 507-32.
- Dodsworth, Martin. "Women without Men at *Cranford*." *Essays in Criticism*. 13 (1963): 132-45.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Cranford*. 1853. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007.
- . *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*. Ed. Cleg-horn, J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard. New York: Manchester University Press.
- Jewusiak, Jacob. "The End of the Novel: Gender and Temporality in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*." *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*. 7.3 (Winter 2011). Web. 21 October 2018. <<http://www.ncgsjournal.com>>.
- Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Lundquist, Ingrid. "Hierarchy, Gentility and Humanity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*." B.A. Thesis. Sweden: Linköping University, 2013.
- Morris, Emily Jane. " 'Some appointed work to do': Gender and Agency in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell." Ph.D. Dissertation. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, April 2010.
- Rubery, Matthew. *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction After the Invention of the News*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Schor, Hilary Margo. *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Vasiliu, Dana. "Challenging the Victorian Patriarchal Ethos: The Role of The Amazons In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*." *The Victorian*. 2.1 (2014): 1-11.
- Young, Linda. *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Zagarell, Sandra. "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre." *Signs*. 13.3 (1988): 498-527.

Citation Information/Kaynakça Bilgisi

Erdem Ayyıldız, N. (2019). An Evaluation of Proto-Feminism in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*, *Jass Studies-The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*, Doi number:<http://dx.doi.org/10.9761/JASSS7987>, Number: 74 Spring 2019, p. 233-242.