Contesting the Rural Idyll in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*

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Sammendrag på Norsk

Denne avhandling tar for seg den litterære sjangeren, arkadisk idyll/pastoral romanse, og hvorvidt den utfolder seg i verket *Cranford* (1853) av Elizabeth Gaskell. Den arkadiske idyllen assosieres ofte med en estetisk provinsiell setting som florerer av vakre detaljer fra naturen. Sjangeren fremstiller rurale områder som naturskjønne, sjarmerende, rustikke og harmoniske. Videre synes relasjonene innad i et bygdesamfunn å være eksepsjonelt gode og sunne. Denne sjangeren er derfor kjent for å idealisere den rurale livstilen i England på attenhundretallet. Spesielt blir den utbredte fattigdommen i provinsielle områder oversett og neglisjert i glansen av idylliske fremstillinger.

Flere litterære kritikere har plassert *Cranford* i den pastorale romansen. Jeg vil likevel hevde at dette er en sannhet med modifikasjoner. Selv om det er trekk som kan sies å sammenfalle med denne sjangeren, er det svært mange komponenter i denne romanen som går imot den bukoliske idyllen. Dette prosjektet søker derfor å vise at *Cranford* motsetter seg en tradisjonell tolkning av attenhundretallets provinsielle idyll.

I denne utredningen argumenterer jeg blant annet at dette verket søker å fremme saken til fattige i rurale strøk. *Cranford* idealiserer ikke fattigdom slik som denne sjangeren i sin helhet gjør. For å få et sannferdig bilde av *Cranford* og Gaskells forfatterskap, er det derfor essensielt å gjenkjenne hvordan dette verket utfordrer sjangeren, pastoral romanse.

Jeg utforsker flere aspekter ved denne sjangeren, deriblant idealiserte fremstillinger, naturskjønne detaljer/litterær setting, kjønnsroller, nasjonal identitet, nostalgi og Bakhtins konsept, den 'idylliske kronotop'. Jeg sammenligner også *Cranford* med verket, *Our Village* . Denne romanen passer mer helhetlig inn i sjangeren arkadisk idyll. Denne analysen og sammenligningen tydeliggjør ytterligere at Gaskells roman, *Cranford,* motsetter seg en tradisjonell tolkning av sjangeren, pastoral romanse.

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Introduction

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Britain saw an immense alteration in its demography. The age of modernity brought about new city centres and suburbs, and the countryside and remote villages were consequently no longer where the majority lived. In the cities, peasant societies were a distant reality. However, an interest in the countryside gained popularity among middle class readers and art collectors. In consequence, there was an increase in artists who drew paintings of rural subjects, and authors who wrote narratives set in the English countryside. The displacement of the poor from view in the cities, however, engendered unrealistic and glorified textual and artistic depictions of life in the small towns, and "helped perpetuate and uphold a myth of archaic beauty" (Short 1992, 2), often referred to as the 'rural idyll'. The novel *Cranford* (1853) by Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810 - 1865), first published as a serial in Dickens' *Household Words,* and often mentioned as a "touchstone in the final reviews, obituaries, and surveys" of Gaskell's authorship (Easson 1991, 7), features life of the small town in this epoch and is often denoted a 'rural idyll'. With a basis in the 'myth of archaic beauty', this thesis sets out to investigate the usefulness of denoting *Cranford* as a rural idyll and how *Cranford* engages with this genre. How does this novel relate to the myths espoused by the rural idyll? Does the novel embellish representations of living conditions in line with the rural idyll? Does it perhaps counter the rural idyll in any respects? These are central questions when investigating the rural idyll in a literary work. In fact, I will seek to demonstrate that there are numerous ways in which the novel challenges our expectations of the genre.

Elizabeth Gaskell initially wrote the first chapter of *Cranford*, 'Our Society', as a short story for Dickens' magazine, *Household Words.* However, Gaskell saw further potential in the piece, and consequently wrote several follow up narratives featuring peasant life in the fictional Cranford village. These individual episodes later became the collected novel on 21 May 1853, published by Chapman and Hall (Easson 1991, 6). *Cranford* depicts the life of a village society, constituted almost entirely of women, and is set in the Victorian countryside. Gaskells' depictions of the English countryside are marked by her own childhood experiences as she grew up in the small town Knutsford in Cheshire. Later in life, she lived in an urban area, Manchester, and her own experience of living in both rural and urban areas found a way into her fiction. While *Cranford* is particularly concerned with rural life, Gaskell's first novel,

Mary Barton (1848), and the later novel, *North and South* (1855), are often referred to as industrial novels.

Gaskell's career as a prominent English writer began through the pen name Cotton Mather Mills, but before she wrote *Cranford*, Gaskell was well known by her audience. However, interestingly, her critical reception was altered when her identity as a female writer became known: "[h]er originality, her intellectual achievement, her artistic achievement, all are to be veiled by 'feminine accomplishment'" (Stoneman 2006, 2). Before her identity was unveiled, her fiction was considered to be to the point, and to engage with the condition of England questions. For instance, an unsigned review of *Mary Barton* in *The Inquirer* in 1848 reads: "[t]his work deserves a place beside the 'Carol' of Dickens and the poetry of Eliot. It is an attempt to describe faithfully and simply the lives of the very poor; and privation has seldom found a fitter expounder of its misery and its wrongs" (quoted in Easson 1991, 78). However, after Gaskell's identity as a female writer became known, critics tended to remark her sympathy, her meekness, and the feminine qualities of her fiction. Her social concerns were even estimated less relevant. Lord Davies Cecil pointed to Gaskell's accounts of the industrial revolution and argued that "It would have been impossible for her if she had tried, to have found a subject less suited to her talents. It was neither domestic nor pastoral" (Cecil 1934, 235). Cecil's contention was that Gaskell should not have been concerned with berating social conditions. He believed instead that her talents should be honed with merely addressing the domestic and pastoral: the pleasant countryside. Like Cecil, many of Gaskell's readers leaned towards seeing Gaskell as a rural idyll novelist rather than a nuanced writer who probed the courser and seamier sides of rural areas.

As a female writer, Gaskell was, then, to be acknowledged more for what was considered female qualities in her fiction, than for social criticism; yet more significantly she was also a part of a paradigm shift where female authors gained credibility by proficient writing. In consequence, these writers were able to shape the novel form of the period. Easson argues that "women were not only a significant portion of Victorian novelists, but also that they had developed the novel, making it pre-eminently *the* female genre, with its domesticity, its representation of emotion, its 'feminine' qualities of detail and empathy" (Easson 1991, 2). In the time after the Victorian period female writers are considered a substantial part of the Victorian authorship. However, during the epoch, many of the female writers chose to write anonymously, with a male, or sexually vague pseudonym with a presumption that their work would be better received. Authors with male pseudonyms, besides Gaskell, include Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot), and the Brontë sisters with the sexually vague names, Acton, Currier,

and Ellis Bell (Easson 1991, 2). In consequence, there was a significant increase in the recognition of female writers. Judd asserts: "By shrouding the 'disability' of femininity, male-pseudonyms offered a way for women to overcome the prejudices of the marketplace" (Judd 2003, 289). The prejudices of female writers as less talented were overcome. Accordingly, by the time Gaskell wrote *Cranford*, her identity was well known by the public, and she received a wealth of critical attention. How, then, is *Cranford* associated with the rural idyll?

Previous Criticism of Cranford as a Rural Idyll Narrative

Cranford was included in *The Series of English Idylls* published in 1904. It was printed a along with Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), and *Our Village* (1824) by Mary Russell Mitford. Several subsequent critics have referred to *Cranford* as a rural idyll using interchangeable terms for this genre. Nina Auerbach specifically denotes *Cranford* a "rural idyll" novel (Auerbach in Levin 1992, 62) and Anna Koustinoudi designates *Cranford* as an innocent "nostalgic idyll of rural life" (Koustinoudi 2011, 53). Other examples include Clement Shorter, who describes *Cranford* as "an idyll of country life" (Shorter 2008, viii), Stoneman more generally points out that "the 'industrial' novels imperceptibly slide from view and the rural idyll is reinstated as the true Gaskell world" (Stoneman 2006, 4). In my opinion, the critics cited above who maintain that Cranford should be regarded a rural idyll do not explain substantially enough why they label *Cranford* a countryside idyll. It appears merely to be an agreed upon reading of the novel without any rigorous evidence or questioning. The aim of this thesis is therefore to provide analytic examples with considerably greater detail and depth concerning how one might come to see *Cranford* as a bucolic romance, and where it profoundly differs from this myth and genre.

Establishing the Importance of the Project

What is the relevance of determining whether or not *Cranford* is a rural idyll? And how is the rural idyll essential in a literary analysis of this novel? For one, it is my contention that if one concedes that this novel is a rural idyll, the label 'idyll' can hinder the reader from comprehending several intricate aspects of what the novel actually achieves. When placed within the rural idyll genre, Gaskell is in a sense 'accused' of hindering the voices of the rural poor in her period; while her novel seeks to do the very opposite in its critique of undivided recourses and poverty. I find that this concept can be useful to a certain extent when addressing this novel. However, besides idealisations of rural poor, there are several aspects where *Cranford* does not correspond to the 'rural idyll' genre.

Another reason to investigate the rural idyll in literature is that the rural idyll is closely associated to British national identity. This conception that the rural idyll is part of the public perceptions of Britishness has become axiomatic following Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973). His work addresses how idyllic art and literature monumentally reflect British national identity and that idyllic art and literature also came to influence ideas of Britishness. Therefore, representations of rural idylls in literature shed light on how aspects of rural life have become symbolically contained in the national identity. One implication of the rural idyll as embedded in the national identity is the construction of 'others', perhaps in particular 'others' to the rural 'ethnic' white citizen. An investigation of rural idyll literature and ethnic ideals in the rural sphere engages with a larger debate of the need to espouse a more inclusive British national identity, as there is ample scathing critique of British national identity's racial exclusions (Hansen 2000, 3).

Finally, the novel and Gaskell's authorship in its entirety can be better understood when we discern the genre at work, where it differs, and recognise that this work is more than a rural idyll. Contesting the rural idyll in *Cranford* will unveil Gaskell as a more holistic author. She did not merely render social criticism in her industrial novels. Her writing of the countryside similarly probed deeper into social concerns, a focus which destabilises the rural idyll formula.

Thesis Outline

The various chapters in this thesis will offer textual examples from the novel with in-depth analyses of the novel as a rural idyll narrative and in consequence demonstrate to what extent, and if at all, *Cranford* belongs to the idyll genre, and how this novel alternatively should be read with more sensitive understanding of genre and historical context.

Chapter 1 will address the idyllic setting, the prototypical idyll figure and the painted illustrations of Hugh Thomson. In this chapter I will contend that while Gaskell has an idyllic use of setting on some occasions, she, additionally, renders some depictions of the natural setting which challenges the genre. Gaskell uses flowers to mimic an agonised psychological interior in some of the characters; in addition, she employs some natural elements to create a dissonance to unbearable emotions: two very non-idyllic uses of flowers and setting. Moreover, I will demonstrate how the character Mr. Holbrook functions as a generic idyll figure, and how his death serves a powerful emblematic function in this respect. I will further discuss how Hugh Thomson's illustrations may have influenced readers of the novel to regard the novel as an idyll. This may elucidate to some extent the central question: why was

Cranford placed within the idyll genre in the first place? I will also address how Thomson himself serves as an example of an individual who intentionally seeks out elements which correspond to the idyll, and leaves out parts of the story, which do not align. He then exemplifies important aspects of how the idyll genre functions.

In *Chapter 2* I will investigate realism and *Cranford*, then I focus on whether the novel portrays an unrealistically pleasant experience in line with the rural idyll. Does the novel idealise provincial life? Does it counter the idyll in this respect? In addition, I will look into the rural idyll as patriarchal, and explore portrayals of women in *Cranford*. Here I will argue that the novel opposes and challenges the gender roles of the rural idyll, and simultaneously the gender roles of the Victorian era in general.

Chapter 3 is concerned with national identity. In this chapter I will discuss the rural idyll as monocultural, and how Gaskell engages with views of the foreign 'other'. I will aim to demonstrate that Gaskell challenges the rural idyll as a 'white space'. In addition, I will address the function of tea in the novel. Tea is often described as an inherent part of the Victorian countryside idyllic experience. Moreover, tea became a part of the national identity during the nineteenth century, at the same time as the rural idyll phenomenon. In *Cranford* tea serves a central function as a part of the narratives' backdrop and reveals some interesting socio-historical aspects of tea. For instance, the novel reflects a pervasive Victorian view of green tea as vehement while black tea was considered the good and 'pure' product.

Chapter 4 will examine notions of temporality with a focus on nostalgia and the idyllic chronotope. Nostaglia has fuelled the emergence of the rural idyll, and hinges on a separation of time and/or space. *Cranford* itself appeals to an urban audience with nostalgic yearnings for the countryside. In addition, the novel itself propagates nostalgic yearnings, which favours the rural over the urban. Consequently, it seems that this is an element where the novel aligns with the genre. The second element, which I will explore in this chapter, is Bakhtin's idyllic chronotope which is concerned with the function of time and space in an idyll; these will be applied to *Cranford.* I will argue that *Cranford* does not adhere to Bakhtin's concept of the idyllic chronotope.

The last chapter, *Chapter 5*, is a comparison of *Cranford* to the novel, *Our Village* (1824), by Mary Russel Mitford. *Our Village* is an example of a literary work which pertains more holistically to the rural idyll genre. This comparison will support the argument that *Cranford* differs from the rural idyll on several accounts.

Method

My method in this project primarily involves close reading of my main text *Cranford,* with in-depth examples from the novel. I will also provide close reading from the novel *Our Village* by Mary Russell Mitford. This book will provide apt material for comparison as this novel agrees more fully with the countryside idyll genre than *Cranford.* The analysis will benefit from such a comparison, as it will provide an additional dimension to the analyses. I believe that this comparison will make the discussion even more concrete than if I only were to discuss genre traits without any generic textual examples of what *Cranford* differs from. I have not given *Our Village* nearly as much focus or space as I have devoted to *Cranford.* This is because *Our Village* is merely a resource to better understand the rural idyll in *Cranford,* and is not included in the scope on its own account.

My method is further a socio-historical approach to the literary analysis. This is because the rural idyll, as a genre and myth, is a socio-historical phenomenon. The rural idyll was by many thought to be 'real' – a myth that was anchored in the public imagination – an image that has in part remained. The socio-historical nature makes it impossible to address this subject without some historical context as a reference. My approach in this thesis also involves image analysis of the illustrations by Hugh Thomson, who has illustrated several of the editions of *Cranford* which have been in circulation for a long time. For the most part, however, my analysis will be a study of *Cranford* through a comparison to the genre traits of the rural idyll, which I will delineate in the following.

The Rural Idyll Concept and Genre

The pastoral idyll was according to Shelagh Hunter one of the predominant genres of the nineteenth century in Britain (Hunter 1984) and the rural idyll has become a topos in British rural studies (Dirkmeister 2008, 160). The rural idyll as a phenomenon and as a literary genre has been applied to several periods and countries. I will be concerned with the rural idyll in nineteenth century Britain. The rural idyll in Britain is, moreover, the far most discussed, and often serves as a model to evaluate the pastoral idyll in other countries (see Frisvoll 2014, 3; Dirkmeister 2008, 160).

The rural idyll concept evokes images of a peaceful lifestyle in bucolic areas of aesthetic scenic beauty. However, the idea of a 'rural idyll' is at best speculative at this stage, and a more rigorous explanation of the term is needed. When providing a delineation of 'rural idyll', it seems helpful to separate the two terms 'rural' and 'idyll' initially.

‘Rural’ stems from Latin *ruralis*, which means 'country' (Oxford English Dictionary). What is challenging, however, with wider definitions of ‘rural’ is that the term most often is defined in relation to urban, rather than on its own merit. While definitions of ‘urban’ focus on specific properties of urban spaces, definitions of ‘rural’ often focus on what rural is not when contrasted to geographical spaces or properties of cities and towns. Halfacree states that “neither at the official nor at the cultural or popular level is there consensus on the delineation of the 'non-urban' spaces that the term 'rural' seeks to encapsulate” (Halfacree 2006, 45). By referring to rural as non-urban, Halfacree here emphasises the various understandings of rural as intricately tied to urban, while acknowledging existing quandaries of finding a unified designation of rural. Cloke explains that a rural definition seems unattainable, and that this may be due to its ability to encompass a vast number of notions within a single term (Cloke 2006, 18). Cloke further asserts that when “attempts are made to deconstruct the rural metanarrative, much of that conceptual strength dissipates into the nooks and crevices of particular locations, economic processes and social identities” (Cloke 2006, 18). Cloke here points to three various elements, which are often included in the term ‘rural’: geography, economy and social identity. A frequent process when defining rural is to classify rural in the approaches: descriptive definitions, sociocultural definitions, the rural as locality and the rural as social representations (Halfacree, 1993; Frisvoll 2014). These approaches are not without fault and all these approaches have their shortcomings (Frisvoll 2014, 16-25). I will therefore acknowledge that ‘rural’ is a controversial conceptual term and that any endeavor of specification will be lacking; yet I will use rural as incorporating aspects from several of the above-mentioned approaches. Rural will be understood as pointing to demography, geography, economy and social representations associated with remote areas often denoted as villages or countryside.

‘Idyll’ is an abstract term and comes from Latin *idyllium*, from Greek *eidullion*, and is a diminutive form of ‘*eidos*' which means ‘picture' (Oxford English Dictionary). The Idyll has its root from the antiquity era with Virgil and Theocritus (Burchardt 2002, 26; Dirksmeier 2008, 159; Halse 2008, 384). From the idylls of Theocritus and Virgil, certain terms have been adopted and used synonymously for idyll, which I, furthermore, will employ in my analyses on *Cranford*. These terms include *carmina buccolia* or solely *buccolia* from Greek bukolos, which means shepherd. This idiom is used for idylls in rural settings. *Arcadia* is another example of a term which is often substituted for idyll. Raffaele describes this term as representing “the world discovered by Virgil” (Milani 2009, 128), which encapsulates what he further refers to as “the emanation of the spiritual Landscape” (Milani 2009, 128). Virgil’s

Arcadia has in the present day become known as a literary and artistic myth pertaining to pastoralism (Milani 2009,128), and 'pastoral' deriving from the Latin word for 'shepherd' is a term which is often used as a synonym for 'idyll' (Halse 2008, 385). Idyll has from the time of Theocritus and Virgil been closely connected to rurality (Halse 2008, 385; Milani 2009, 128), therefore what constitutes the 'rural idyll' is very similar to 'idyll' itself, and the two cannot neatly be separated.

If we combine 'rural' and 'idyll' in a straightforward manner, the rural idyll may be seen to denote idealized descriptions or illustrations of life pertaining to the countryside and village life. The focus may be on aesthetic scenery, which frames a space of peace and quiet in an atmosphere free from predicaments and hardships. Relationships thrive, and equality is at the forefront of the values in society.

The idyll from Virgil and Theocritus was originally a poetic narrative in hexameters, but has developed since then (Halse 2008, 384). Idyll as a literary form became particularly significant from the neoclassical movement in the 1700 and beginning of the 1800s with the revival of 'classical' literature and art forms from ancient Greece and Rome. The new interest for the idyll genre was accordingly symptomatic for the period (Hammarberg 2006, 44). By the end of Neoclassicism around the 1840s, the idyll genre developed to be more or less exclusively concerned with theme rather than form (Halse 2008, 384).[1] Accordingly, the idyll in its original form of a poetic narrative in hexameters has attained a separate classification, viz. metric idyll. Idyll has in time come to incorporate the themes which follow in the consequent discussion.

One of the primary features or themes of the idyll is that this genre does not aim to illustrate reality. Rather, an idyll is concerned with ideals and wishful states of existence. The idyll "seeks out our visions of happiness and couches them in a literary form" (Halse 2008, 384). Consequently, the idyll focuses on modes and states of life that are regarded as harmonious, yet which are unattainable in real life. The idyll seems in this regard to resemble utopia as a literary genre (Halse 2008, 384). Hammarberg provides a description of the prototypical idyll:

> In all types of idyll there is a tendency to demarcate an intimate living space. The grove or cave is made inhabitable by soft mosses or grasses, it is decorated by flowers and vines. Hedges, rivulets, an impenetrable forest, or an inaccessible mountain range

[1] Some critics operate with a distinction between 'idyllic' and 'idyll'. Where 'idyllic' is concerned with thematic aspects of an idyll, and 'idyll' is concerned with form. I will follow the more frequent approach where 'idyll' is concerned with theme and 'metric idyll' is the denotation when the poetic form is referred to.

> surround it, creating a kind of pleasant island where man lives a sheltered life tending the herds, tilling the fertile soil, fishing or creating simple artefacts (wooden jugs, flower wreaths, shepherds' staffs). He has ample time to contemplate the beauty of the setting be it a grove, a cave, a shepherd's hut, a country estate, or a drawing room. (Hammarberg 2006, 47)

The setting for literary figures in an idyll as Hammerberg here delineates, is one with aesthetic surroundings greatly enhanced by nature. Man is able to capture and to relish the beauty surrounding him while he exists in a protected environment free from worries. An idyll, moreover, features equality. There are no power relations, no strife, and humans understand one another without difficulty (Halse 2008, 384). It should further be mentioned that idylls often provide lengthy descriptions of the setting in listing form (Halse 2008, 401), which follows from the notion that the "idyllic landscape" is "one worked out in meticulous detail" (Bakhtin 1981, 103).

Moreover, Bell argues that "if we are to look at the rural idyll, we have to track it into the bourgeois imagery" (Bell 2006, 150). Bourgeois signifies middle or upper class, and it was foremost the middle class in England who propagated images and narratives pertaining to the countryside. Gaskell is considered a middle class writer, which makes her fit into Bell's description of bourgeois writers. Furthermore, for Bell, the rural idyll is a manufactured landscape. It is produced in the city; consequently he argues that the place to find the rural idyll is the city (Bell 2006, 150). The rural idyll of the 1800s is in many ways a symptom of escapist emotions pertaining to urban society. It would seem that a fear of an increasingly and possibly all-industrial England engendered glorified representations of the countryside (Booth 1998, 216). Burchardt explains that these romanticised portrayals of rural life are "especially apparent in the works of novelists who had only a limited knowledge of the countryside, such as Dickens" (Burchardt 2002, 8). He emphasises, however, that "it also affected some writers who had much greater familiarity with rural England than Dickens had – in particular Elisabeth Gaskell and George Eliot" (Burchardt 2002, 8). Gaskell then, as Burckhardt emphasises, was one of few writers portraying the countryside who actually had experience of living in the countryside herself. Typically, the writers or drawers were voyeurs who described or illustrated the countryside from an outside perspective.

Perhaps the most important argument that Bell makes, however, is that the rural idyll is closely connected to English or British national identity. The rural idyll is as Bell puts it "a receptacle for national identity – a symbolic site for shoring up what it means to be English"

(Bell 2006, 151). In this quotation Bell maintains that the rural idyll contains several elements of English national identity. This point is further made by Williams and Johnson, who argue that the rural idyll encompasses notions of whiteness and national identity: "the rural idyll, is not only notions of 'whiteness' but also to notions of British national identity" (Williams and Johnson 2010, 130). The rural idyll is thus essential for public perceptions of Englishness or Britishness, and of what are frequently considered characteristics of British citizens and their customs. As Williams and Johnson further remark, the rural idyll also harbours the idea that the rural citizen is a racially 'white' individual.

The bucolic idyll as Bell sees it is additionally a nostalgic memoir of the past. It points back to a 'golden age' when everything was better than at present time (Bell 2006, 151). The rural idyll is in this way associated with sentiments of longing for a foregone pastoral life, which is preferred to the present day situation. Mary Treble makes clear, however, how reality greatly differs from these picturesque portrayals and visions of a dreamlike countryside existence. While addressing Victorian painters' glorified illustrations of cottage life, Treble emphasises that this "prettily sentimental view of country life was almost as mythical to its contemporaries as it is to the twentieth century" (Treble 1989, 53). Predicaments of the poor of the countryside included miniscule crops, which meant that food supply was scarce. Severe shortages of food as a consequence made many resort to poaching, i.e. illegal hunting on a landowner's estate. Poaching was a desperate option for many, as it had a severe sentence for those who were caught. Cold winters were additionally a calamity. The countryside poor had few means to keep their cottages warm, and freezing became a common cause of death in peasant societies.

In spite of the incongruence between Victorian village life as it was and how it often still is presented, Lowe argues that it seems imprudent to denounce the picturesque view of the countryside and anti-urban tendencies in Victorian Britain as unreasonable (Lowe 1989, 116). He explains that most of the industrial areas were contaminated and unhygienic (Lowe 1989, 116). The pollution and unhealthy urban environment in consequence made the longing for places with natural surroundings and fresh air natural. He further points out that a positive aspect of an increased focus on nature and countryside lead to "the ecological consciousness and an understanding of the need to impose limits on the technological subjugation of the natural world" (Lowe 1989, 117). As a consequence of this new awareness, several organisations instigated initiatives to make the city more environmental. I will return to discuss in more detail the extent of the idealised descriptions of rural life in chapter 2.

I will include a final element to the rural idyll, the idyllic chronotope. This aspect is

more frequently addressed as an incorporate facet of the idyll, and not often specifically related to the rural idyll. Bakhtin coined the term 'chronotope'. This term literarily translates 'time-space' and is as such concerned with 'time' and 'space' (Bakhtin 1981, 97). Bakhtin argues that in the literary artistic chronotope "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" and that "[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 1981, 84). In consequence, "[t]his intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981, 84). By employing analysis of the chronotope to a literary work, one can identify a significant function of time and space in literature. In addition, the various ways that time and space work together in a literary work make out the very literary genres according to Bakhtin: "The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time" (Bakhtin 1981, 84). Bakhtin presents the different functions of 'time' and 'space' in literature depending on the genre. The genres he discusses include: the Greek romance, the adventure novel, the picaresque novel, the ancient novel, historical inversion and the folkloric chronotope, the chivalric romance, the Rabelaisian chronotope and the idyllic chronotope. My concern, however, is the idyllic chronotope; I will touch upon some of the other chronotopes in chapter 4, as a reference point with which to compare the idyllic chronotope with.

Idyll-time is a 'nearly' cyclical time. According to Bakhtin idyll-time is "a specific and cycled (but not, strictly speaking, cyclical)" time (Bakhtin 1981, 103). Generations pass in a continuous cycle, while society remains static. It is an isolated space, sufficient onto itself, where the cycle perpetually continues without outer influences:

> Idylic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live. This little spatial world is limited and sufficient onto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world. (Bakhtin 1981, 225)

In the idyllic chronotope, the relationship between time and space is inseparable. Idyll-time is static in that the outside society does not change or evolve. The unchanging society in the idyll "brings together as well childhood and old age (the same grove, stream, the same lime trees, the same house)" (Bakhtin 1981, 225) and the various generations live and breathe under the same conditions (Bakhtin 1981, 225). This continuation of life and culture from

generation to generation engenders the "cyclic rythmicalness of time so characteristic of the idyll" (Bakhtin 1981, 225). Bakhtin further classifies three 'pure idylls': "the love idyll (whose basic form is the pastoral); the idyll with a focus on agricultural labor; the idyll dealing with craft work; and the family" (Bakhtin 1981, 224) In addition to these pure types, the mixture of these types are perhaps even more frequent than the 'pure' types (Bakhtin 1981, 224). The love idyll, with possible mixtures, is the most relevant for the consequent analysis as this type is directly concerned with the pastoral and bucolic.

In this delineation I have incorporated what I consider to be the most fundamental features of the conceptual idea of the rural idyll. The features identified above as belonging to the arcadia will furthermore relate *Cranford* to the rural idyll and motivate the following analyses. These elements will be explored in relation to the economic, geographical and social representations of the rural and the idyll in *Cranford*.

Chapter 1**:**

The Atmospheric Idyll:
Setting, the Idyll Figure and Illustrations

> The aspect of the country was quiet and pastoral. Woodley stood among the fields; and there was an old-fashioned garden, where roses and current bushes touched each other, and where the feathery asparagus formed a pretty back-ground to the pinks and gilly-flowers; there was no drive up to the door: we got out at a little gate and walked up a straight box-edged path. (41)

The attractiveness of the rural idyll genre is to a great extent due to the picturesque settings of the idyll. The 'green and pleasant land' has according to John R. Short become the very "countervailing image of the rural idyll" (Short 1991, 86). The quotation above from *Cranford* captures the notion of England as a green and pleasant land and is a telling example of how the rural idyll setting often is described. Generic settings of the rural idyll may differ, whether they circle in on meadows, farmsteads, aesthetic flowers or leisure activities; but natural surroundings and other aspects of the country are typically described in a highly compelling manner. This chapter will be concerned with the idyllic atmosphere and frame of the novel. Essentially, settings and painted illustrations published along with a narrative both set a frame through which a story is read and interpreted. Correspondingly, this chapter will seek to elucidate the function and influence of both these aspects as related to *Cranford* and the idyll. The first part of this chapter will be concerned with natural setting, and the second part will focus on how Hugh Thomson's illustrations may have contributed to place *Cranford* in the idyll genre.

In relation to the atmospheric setting I will explore descriptions of the prototypical idyll persona: an individual with a pervasive reverence for natural scenery and contemplation (Hammarberg 2006, 47; Bell 2006, 151). It appears in particular that the character, Mr. Holbrook, serves a symbolic function as a prototypical idyll farmer/shepherd in line with Hammarberg and Bell's description of the idyll character. I will also address how Gaskell uses an interesting duality in her natural descriptions. On some occasions the depictions are highly idyllic and function merely to create a serene environment; while on other occasions Gaskell seems to play with a duality where a beautiful external setting creates a dissonance to a tumultuous and agonised psychological interior of some of the characters. Chapter 4, 'A

Visit to an Old Bachelor' is worth due attention on this subject matter and equally so chapter 6, 'Poor Peter'. These two chapters will therefore provide the main analytic material for this thesis chapter.

Criticism Pertaining to Gaskell's Depictions of Nature

When describing Gaskell's authorship Margareth Ganz explains that "an idyllic rural setting called upon powers over which the author had the greatest control: her ability to describe nature feelingly, her skill in recording with sympathy and imagination the homely details of simple but dedicated lives, and her insight into the basic emotions and secret yearnings fostered by a circumscribed existence" (Ganz 1969, 221). In this quotation Ganz points out that Gaskell's aptitude for describing nature with sensitivity contributes to *Cranford* being placed (in her opinion) in the rural idyll genre. Duthie emphasises similar arguments in her contention that within Gaskell's writing "[a]rcadia retains its essential qualities; the farmstead still stands guardian of peace and beauty" (Duthie 1980, 31). Here the farmstead is described as not only peaceful, but also fundamentally scenic and beautiful. Duthie further remarks that Gaskell "makes exquisite use of natural symbolism, as well as to take a Wordsworthian pleasure in the life which animates plants and animals and gives movement to the cosmos" (Duthie 1980, 31). Gaskell's natural descriptions according to Duthie then are marked by her aesthetic descriptions of an emancipated landscape with "Woordswortian" delight for nature.

While I agree with these critics that the delicacy in Gaskell's writing contributes to the picturesqueness of the countryside, I would not place *Cranford* entirely within the idyll as particularly Ganz does here. In this chapter, and consequent chapters, I aim to convey that Gaskell engages with the genre but she does not write within the rural idyll entirely.

The Prototypical Idyll Figure and the Idyll Setting

Idylls often feature topographies of flowers and beautiful elements from nature. For this chapter it is further worth revisiting Hammarberg's description of the prototypical idyll:

> In all types of idyll there is a tendency to demarcate an intimate living space. The grove or cave is made inhabitable by soft mosses or grasses, it is decorated by flowers and vines. Hedges, rivulets, an impenetrable forest, or an inaccessible mountain range surround it, creating a kind of pleasant island where man lives a sheltered life tending the herds, tilling the fertile soil, fishing or creating simple artifacts (wooden jugs, flower wreaths, shepherds' staffs). He has ample time to contemplate the beauty of the

> setting be it a grove, a cave, a shepherd's hut, a country estate, or a drawing room. (Hammarberg 2006, 47)

Since I have commented on this paragraph before, in the introduction, I will not comment on it extensively. However, I will make a few remarks, which will be particularly useful for this chapter. In this quotation the 'idyll character' is described: "man lives a sheltered life tending the herds, tilling the fertile soil, fishing or creating simple artefacts" The idyll character is then an individual who lives an isolated and protected life, he/she typically engages in agricultural work or with craft that is made without the help of industrial tools. The idyll character further "has ample time to contemplate the beauty of the setting": a setting which is surrounded by soft mosses, grasses, adorned by flowers and various plants, and is typically enclosed by hedges, rivulets, a forest and/or a mountain range.

Bell further describes that "the wild idyll offers a different bounty – the romantic opportunity to commune with nature" and that it is "a restorative resource, a place to go to touch nature (and maybe God), to find peace, to gaze and meditate" (Bell 2006, 151). A fictional character within an idyll is correspondingly often captivated by natural beauty to the extent that he/she starts to contemplate philosophically. Often these philosophical reflections are concerned with existential questions, and/or the divine as a consequence of awe-inspiring impressions in their natural surroundings. In this way nature and reflection often go hand in hand.

In the chapter "A Visit to an Old Bachelor", Miss Matty, Miss Pole, and Mary Smith visit Mr. Holbrook, a previous flame of Miss Matty's. Their romantic interest for each other reignites; however, the romance never amounts to a relationship as Mr. Holbrook falls ill and passes away. The first indicator of Mr. Holbrook as an idyll character is his cottage, which is described in a markedly romanticised and picturesque manner. In my opinion this appears to be the most idyllic scenery description in the novel:

> The aspect of the country was quiet and pastoral. Woodley stood among the fields; and there was an old-fashioned garden, where roses and current bushes touched each other, and where the feathery asparagus formed a pretty back-ground to the pinks and gilly-flowers; there was no drive up to the door: we got out at a little gate and walked up a straight box-edged path. (41)

Woodley, the place where Mr Holbrook's property is situated, is described as 'pastoral'. By employing the word pastoral it seems that Gaskell here knowingly applies characteristics of

the countryside idyll. In the introduction to the thesis, I mention that pastoral can refer to a rural and idyllic scene or picture. Such an idyllic picture is readily ascertainable in this extract. Flowers, current bushes and "feathery" asparagus adorn the cottage. In addition, the use of the word "feathery" makes the asparagus sound delicate and enhances the soft and meek characteristics of the cottage. Consequently, this description allows the cottage to appear highly picturesque. It is further interesting to note how the edible and functional are combined with mere decorative plants. First, the current bushes (berries) "touch" the roses. Secondly, the asparagus are set in the background of the pinks and gilly-flowers. That vegetables and plants are combined appears to be a continual theme in Gaskell's authorship. In *Mary Barton* (1848), Gaskell writes that the garden is "crowded with a medley of old fashioned herbs and flowers, planted" which are "allowed to grow in scrambling and wild luxuriance — roses, lavender, sage, balm (for tea) rosemary, pinks and wallflowers, onions and jessamine, in most republican and indiscriminate order" (Gaskell 2000, 33 — 34) Gaskell here calls the combination of flowers a mixture of "wild luxuriance" — a luxuriance that readily adds to an idyllic garden and landscape portrayal of the garden in *Mary Barton* and the small house of Mr. Hoolbrok in *Cranford*.

Apparently, the Woodley area and Mr. Holbrook's house are described in a way that makes the residence and area idyllic. But then how does Mr. Holbrook fit into the description of an idyll character? As I mention above, the prototypical idyll figure is a shepherd who pastures his sheep, tills his soil and reflects while he relishes in the beauty of nature. This is a category Mr. Holbrook arguably falls into. This is ascertainable when three of the Cranford women visit Mr Holbrook at Woodley. During this visit Mr. Holbrook and Miss Matty go for a walk in the surrounding area, and from Miss Matty's description of Mr Holbrook's behaviour, one can observe several traits of the generic idyll figure:

> He walked before me, with a stooping gait, his hands clasped behind him; and, as some tree or cloud, or glimpse of distant upland pastures, struck him, he quoted poetry to himself; saying it out loud in a grand sonorous voice, with just the emphasis that true feeling and appreciation give. (44)

This extract illustrates that when Mr. Holbrook is awestruck either by a tree, cloud or remote pastures his instantaneous reaction is to recite poetry. Hence, his awe for the pastures, the sky and the trees inspires him to contemplate philosophically. It is evident that nature makes him contemplate poetry and carries him into a contemplative mode in line with the prototypical

idyll character. Mr. Holbrook's adoration for outdoor scenery, and nature's influence on him are equally present in the following:

> As we went along, he surprised me occasionally by repeating apt and beautiful quotations from the poets, ranging easily from Shakespeare and George Herbert to those of our own day. He did this as naturally as if he were thinking aloud, that their true and beautiful words were the best expression he could find for what he was thinking or feeling. (41)

This extract conveys that while Holbrook engages in conversation with Miss Matty, "beautiful quotations" from poets are the most natural way for him to express his thoughts. The quotations range from poets such as Shakespeare and Herbert, which indicates that the themes of his recitations range widely. While Shakespeare's dramas famously feature a vast variety of themes ranging from humor, satire, love, betrayal and human existence, George Herbert's poems often contain a religious Christian theme, written in the form of the metaphysical poem: combining the metaphysical conceit with his Christian faith. The focus on poetry is, moreover, persistent. Mr. Holbrook and Miss Matty's conversation is in fact nearly exclusively concerned with nature and poetry. As reciting poetry is a contemplative task, walking and discussing poetry in nature corresponds to the idyll formula. A connection between nature and literature is additionally manifested when they discuss the Blackwood poems as related to the ash buds in March while contemplating their hue (44). On the whole, Mr. Holbrook's contemplative nature and love for the outdoors are pervasive aspects to his character and in congruence with the generic idyll figure.

Various characteristics of the idyll character, which are applicable to Mr. Holbrook, are accentuated even further by the way Mr. Holbrook describes himself, and by Miss Matty's statements of Mr. Holbrook's appreciation for the outdoor scenery. Mr. Holbrook admits to his literate passion: "'Ah' he said 'we farmers ought not have to have much time for reading; yet somehow, one can't help it'" (41). This quotation demonstrates that Mr. Holbrook is a self-confessed poetry enthusiast. Mr. Holbrook correspondingly espouses the poetic idyll tradition from antiquity with Virgil's 'Eclogues' (pastoral poems), which features shepherd-poets and herdsmen singers (see the introduction for more information on Virgil). Holbrook's esteem for the outdoors is as prevalent as his ardor for poetry. Miss Matty speaks of his fervor for nature, declaring that she "never met with a man before or after who had spent so long a time in a secluded and not impressive country, with ever-increasing delight in the daily yearly

change of season and beauty" (41). This devotion to the seasons and the landscape, combined with Mr. Holbrook's inclination to reflect and to cite poetry when nature entices him, makes him a prototypical idyll character. That he in addition is a farmer and a shepherd further adds to this epitome.

However, there appears to be a significant shift to his personality during the course of this chapter. Shortly after the three ladies' outing to Woodley, Mr. Holbrook decides to travel to Paris. After this excursion Mr. Holbrook's disposition alters, his health deteriorates and eventually he dies. Essentially, as a consequence of visiting Paris, the epitomic idyll figure Mr. Holbrook is symbolically eradicated by urban and foreign influence:

> His housekeeper has sent me word today that he hasn't long to live. Poor Thomas! That journey to Paris was quite too much for him. His housekeeper says he's hardly ever been round his fields since; but just sits with his hands on his knees in the counting-house, not reading or anything, but only saying, what a wonderful city Paris was! Paris has much to answer for, if it's killed my cousin Thomas**,** for a better man never lived. (48)

In this extract, Mr Holbrook's housekeeper points out that Mr. Holbrook stops taking the usual walks in the meadows. This is due to his urban visit. Simultaneously, his ardour for literature has diminished. He was merely repeating "what a wonderful city Paris was". There is little mention of Mr. Holbrook's death and its function in the novel by critics, but my contention is that this episode illustrates an emblematic function of the town/city contrast. Mr. Holbrook represents the agrarian ideal, which is vanquished by urban and foreign influence. Emanating ideals pertaining to modernity then symbolically subjugate previous aspects of the countryside. Mr. Holbrook's death then serves a similar function to the death of Captain Brown which I address in chapter 4. Critics more frequently note Captain Brown's death for various symbolic purposes.

The chapter 'Poor Peter' has some interesting uses of rural idyll setting, which I will look into. In this chapter Miss Matty recounts an event from her childhood, which had a shattering effect upon her entire family. Peter, Miss Matty's brother, is reprimanded/flogged by his father after dressing in women's clothes. As a consequence he elopes from home to enrol in the British army. Following his elopement his mother becomes severely depressed, and his father is filled with remorse after his chastisement. The entire family is left agonized after this event. In the following I will illustrate how Gaskell on one hand employs an idyllic

use of flowers, and on the other how flowers and landscape description also come to serve a very different function: reflecting the psychological interior of the characters in Miss Matty's family.

The first example which I will draw attention to is one use of setting which aligns with the Arcadia. Miss Matty's father regards blooming rhododendron flowers in his garden shortly before he discovers Peter in a women's dress. He then contemplates if he should prepare a sermon relating the rhododendron flowers with the lilies on the field:

> So he thought, at first, they were only looking at a new rhododendron that was full in bloom, and that he was very proud of, and he walked slower, that they might have more time to admire. And he wondered if he could make out a sermon from the occasion, and thought perhaps, there was some relation between the rhododendrons and the lilies of the field! (65)

In this quotation one can see that Miss Matty's father contemplates how he could exemplify theological creeds and religious instruction by a parallel to natural flowers. Thereby he connects the scenic beauty with contemplation and even with God and the divine, which is highly typical for the idyll (Bell 2006, 151).

However, in this chapter, flowers also serve a very different function: one that actually counters the idyllic existence. Gaskell employs the floral scenery to accentuate the inner emotional life of Miss Matty's family after Peter's elopement. Before this event she remarks that the lilacs are all in flower: a sign of spring: "Lilacs were all in flower, so I suppose it was spring" (61) However, after the event of Peter's elopement Miss Matty finds the smell of flowers nearly repulsive. This is clear from Miss Matty's description that she "cannot abide the wine now, nor the scent of the flowers; they turn me sick and faint, as they did that day" (66)**.** The character Miss Matty no longer tolerates the scent of flowers. The scent of flowers provokes associations to Peter's elopement, her family's deterioration – not to picturesque idyll features.

This association is further prevalent in several following reflections: "I remember a few days after I saw the poor withered cowslip-flowers thrown out to the leaf-heap, to decay and die there" (66). Here, the decay of the cowslip flowers parallels a psychological decay within the family. Like the cowslip flowers whither, so does the joy metaphorically wither within the family. Miss Matty furthermore underlines: "There was no making of cowslip-wine that year at the Rectory – nor, indeed, ever after" (66). From this quotation it appears that

there is no cause for celebrating in the time following the family's deterioration and correspondingly there was no longer a need for cowslip wine to indulge in. The novel makes the contrast between the scenery and the tragic course of events clear through repeated examples. The dissonance of the beautiful setting and the inner emotional life of Miss Matty and her family is perhaps nonetheless most prevalent in the following: "Oh it was like a thunderbolt on the still sunny day, when the lilacs were all in bloom" (69). The still sunny day, the lilacs and the thunderbolt encompass a contrast and disharmony where the thunderbolt, the psychological innermost emotions, is set in opposition to the beautiful weather and floral scenery.

The discussion above conveys how the novel manifests some very clear elements of the idyllic scenery. However, the scenery also serves a very non-idyllic function as it creates a surreal contrast to the heartfelt anguish ensuing Peter's elopement. The scenery has in this way a tangible duality where it engages quite palpably on some occasions; however, on other occasions the effect of the scenery is even the very opposite of enhancing the idyllic.

The Illustrations of Hugh Thomson

I will further address a second topic in relation to the narrative's atmospheric frame. While setting creates a literary frame for interpretation, illustrations printed alongside a story fashion their own lenses of interpretation. Essentially, this discussion could elucidate the central question: why was *Cranford* placed within the idyll genre to begin with?

Hugh Thomson's illustrations are often referred to as picturesque. Therefore his printed illustrations of *Cranford* have been blamed for making the novel seem more picturesque than it actually is. In consequence, these illustrations could have contributed to *Cranford* being placed within the rural idyll. The idyll genre is picturesque in its nature; therefore by making the novel seem more picturesque than it is through illustrations, the novel could appear more like an idyll than it would otherwise.

When *Cranford* was first published in the *Household Words* (1851-1853), the novel was printed without illustrations. The first to illustrate the novel was George Du Maurier in the 1864 *Cornhill Magazine* edition (Victorian Visual Culture). Du Maurier only illustrated four images: a title page, and three events all depicting the character, Miss Matty. Du Maurier was the only artist to illustrate *Cranford* within Gaskell's lifetime and it is worth remarking that there was no working relationship between Du Maurier and Gaskell (Victorian Visual Culture). Therefore De Maurier had the freedom to interpret the story in his own way. The paintings of De Maunier, which are still in use in some publications, are not particularly

idyllic. For instance his frontispiece is completely deprived of people and is essentially more gloomy than idyllic. Correspondingly, De Maunier had little to do with placing *Cranford* in the idyll genre.

However, several critics point to how Hugh Thomson often romanticised the novels he illustrated, amongst them also *Cranford.* Patten writes that "Hugh Thomson supplied for Macmillian's 1891 reprint process that, though blander then Gaskell's slyly sharp text, initiated a "Cranford" style of illustration quickly applied also to Jane Austen's novels" (Patten 2006, 238). Here, Thomson's illustrations are denoted as "blander" and less sly than Gaskells' narrative. Thereby Patten asserts that much of the meaning within Gaskell's text was flattened by the co-appearing illustrations. Moreover, this quotation also describes that a new style of illustration took form: the "Cranford style". The Cranford style was further one that Thomson applied to several novels, and Austen's novels were amongst them. Thomson's illustrations of Austen's work are known to deviate from the novels in a similar way as his illustrations of *Cranford.* For instance Johnson and Tuite explains that the illustrations that accompanied Austen's novels and novels by other authors had an impact on how the novel itself was read, and that it was particularly the illustrations by Thomson which diverged the most from the novels themselves:

> The serious effect of these illustrations, especially those by Hugh Thomson (E.M. Forster was to call him, with a derisive misspelling, "the lamentable Hugh Thomson"), was in occupying the public imagination and in some part shaping a picturesque and sentimental image of the novels and the novelist. (Johnson and Tuite, 2011)[2]

Johnson and Tuite addresses that Hugh Thomson's misrepresented the novels that he illustrated to the point that he was "occupying the public imagination" and that he formed an inaccurate perception of the novels he illustrated and of the novelists who wrote the respective works that he illustrated. In this quotation Johnson and Tuite additionally point to E.M. Forester and that he referred to Thomson as "the lamentable Hugh Thompson" due to the erroneous quality of his depictions when he illustrated stories. Keating captures much of the challenge with Thomson's illustrations in the following:

> Hugh Thomson, whose illustrations for the 1891 edition established, during the period of the book's greatest popularity, the image of the inhabitants of Cranford as being

[2] Page number not given.

> quaintly ridiculous. Mrs. Gaskell does, of course, constantly draw attention to the odd or ridiculous nature of her characters' behaviour, but she is always careful to reveal, at such moments, the human social reality which gives oddity a meaning beyond itself. Hugh Thomson's illustrations reflect little of this. (Keating 2004, 8)

Within this quotation Keating describes that Thomson has greatly contributed to a view of the characters in Cranford as "ridiculous" and peculiar, and that Thompson loses the depth of the characters in the story due to an emphasis on the peculiar traits of the characters. Keating further explains shortly after this extract that Thomson depicts the Cranford characters as "curiously static, the men and women frozen, the human element obliterated by exaggerated period costumes and gestures" while emphasising that "[n]othing could be further from the true spirit of Cranford, which develops out of Mrs. Gaskell's concern with the 'condition of England' question." (Keating 2004, 8) Thomson's illustrations then become a great contrast to Gaskell's larger concerns, some of which I will address in the next chapter.

Thomas Recchio further explains that Thomson's illustrated edition in 1891 was an "edition whose pictures shifted focus from *Cranford* itself to an emphasis on visual stereotypes of people and scenes that evoke a nostalgic sense of national identity" (Recchio 2009, 29). Recchio then argues that Thomson's illustrations were very independent from Gaskell's text and further that illustrations within various editions in literature including *Cranford*, have manifested cultural projections of the nation's landscape. These projections lead to cultural stereotypes and as a consequence landscape illustrations in literary books have come to influence collective symbolic images of the English landscape (Recchio 2009, 29). See more detailed accounts of the rural idyll in connection to the English national identity and *Cranford* in chapter 3.

Correspondingly, all these critics assert that that Thomson created an artistic re-representation of *Cranford* and other novels. One could perhaps even say that he romanticised the content of the novels. How, then do Thomson's illustrations deviate form *Cranford*?

The online resource *Victorian Visual Culture* addresses Thomson's illustrations in Cranford and states that:

> Many of the emotionally climatic scenes are passed over in favour of 'reaction shots'. Instead of depicting Miss Matty's reconciliation with Peter, one of the most dramatic moments of Gaskell's story, Thomson chooses instead to show one of the merely peripheral outcomes of his return. (Victorian Visual Culture)

The challenge with Thomson is then not that he painted incidents, which did not take place in the narrative. It seems instead that his focus is limited. However, he continuously chose not to illustrate incidents that were emotional or depressing. The 'reaction shot' this online resource points to is an image which portrays a group of children when Peter returns. Miss Matty and Peter's encounter is replaced by the portrayal of children assembled whilst spectating Peter throwing leftovers from Miss Matty's store through the window and on to the street. To illustrate Thomson's way to illustrate reactions I will point to the illustration which the website Victorian Visual Culture addresses.

Image 1: *Gleefully awaited the shower of confits and lozenges* (Thomson 1918, illustration 115).

In this image several children are shocked and exited as they gaze up toward Peter and Miss Matty. Miss Matty is able to close her shop when Peter gives her sufficient money to cover

her expenses. To celebrate, Peter throws merchandises from the shop in a “shower of confits and lozenges”. While the most central element to this event was Miss Matty and Peter’s emotional reencounter, Thomson’s illustration focuses instead on the reaction of the children.

Thompson often chose the comical elements of the story for his illustrations. An example of this is the illustration “With Bland Satisfaction”, which lends the wording from Gaskell’s text.

Image 3: *With bland satisfaction* (Thomson 1918, illustration 49)

Miss Matty is illustrated with two bonnets, sitting in a chair with an insipid facial expression. In this incident Miss Matty unintentionally wears two bonnets. She originally wore the bonnet of Miss Jenkyns as a remembrance of her after her death. However, she forgets after some time that she is wearing it, and in old routine she therefore additionally puts on her own bonnet on top of the initial one of Miss Jenkyns. This illustration is not dishonest in its representation when it is considered exclusively. It remains true to the incident it depicts. The problematic aspect to this image is the way Thomson habitually avoids to portray incidents of conflict. Both these illustrations were lent from the online resource. I will further demonstrate this problem with an example which is entirely my own.

From the incident of Poor Peter, recounted as a tragedy by Miss Matty, Thompson illustrates Miss Matty's statement that once when he came to visit after the tragedy, Peter and her father had an amiable tone. While he does not chose to illustrate the character's emotions of sadness, he does chose to illustrate the following image: 'He and my father were such friends':

Image 4: *He and my father were such friends* (Thomson 1918, illustration 46).

In this illustration the two men walk together on the avenue: presumably Peter and his father. Peter's father appears to hold Peter's arm and to regard Peter with an amiable expression. It is overall a picturesque and elated resolution to one of the most melancholy chapters in the novel.

From these examples I gather that the critics I mention above are right to focus on how Thomson's illustrations probably have made people read the novel as more picturesque and comical than they would if they were not influenced by the illustrations. Then in congruence with making the novel appear more picturesque, Thomson could have had a substantial influence on *Cranford* being placed within the idyll genre. Moreover, Thomson serves as an example of an individual who seeks out the happy parts of rural life and avoids focusing on less positive qualities. This is a fundamental part of what the idyll does in portraying universal visions of happiness. In the introduction to this thesis I assert how the rural idyll in nineteenth century Britain was a result of 'escapist' sentiments of urban inhabitants. Urban areas of the period were by many seen as filthy, murky and polluted. In consequence, these urban inhabitants sought out their visions of happiness in rural areas and ignored/glossed over less positive elements of provincial life. Accordingly, one can say that Thomson functions as an individual who exemplifies this tendency in the first publication of his illustrations of *Cranford* in 1891.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered atmospheric parts of the idyll. The setting creates an atmospheric frame for an idyll and printed illustrations equally create an atmospheric lens of interpretation. I have further looked at how the generic idyll character is influenced by the setting and the idyllic atmosphere. The prototypical idyll figure is influenced by the setting to further contemplate on mysteries of existence. In this chapter I have aimed to demonstrate that while Gaskell engages with idyllic scenery in certain scenery depictions, she additionally portrays a landscape which counters the idyll. She uses cowslip flowers, lilacs, the sun, and a thunderbolt to create vivid illustrations of inner emotional trauma which Miss Matty and her family experiences in the chapter 'Poor Peter'. In addition, I demonstrate how Mr. Holbrook agrees with the prototypical idyll persona. However, while Mr. Holbrook initially serves as a generic idyll character, his disposition alters and he no longer pertains to the idyll figure characteristics. This too essentially challenges the rural idyll in *Cranford.* The final discussion of Hugh Thomson's illustrations possibly elucidates to some extent why *Cranford* has been regarded as an idyll. Finally, I asserted that regardless of Thomson's influence on the critical

heritage of *Cranford,* he serves as an example of an individual who seeks out the happy parts of rural life and avoids focusing on less positive qualities. Consequently, he follows the tendency of the urban society who longed for a rural dreamlike existence.

Chapter 2:

Realism: Idealised Portrayals and *Cranford* as an Utopian Female Community.

"Death was as true and common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud in the streets. It was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite" (8).

An introduction to a Japanese edition of *Cranford* states that to understand *Cranford* one must read it "as a grown up fairy tale lying midway between the actual world we know and the dream world of its author's imagination" (qtd. in Recchio 2009, 175). In this quotation *Cranford* is described to be a fairy-tale for adults, a parallel which evokes connotations to an illusive fantasy existence and wishful dreaming for an unattainable world. The rural idyll existence likens a fairy-tale world. However, is this delightful way of life manifested in the novel? In the following, I will explore various ways that *Cranford* interacts with realism and the rural idyll. The focus of this chapter is twofold. On one hand I question whether the novel idealises rural life. Does the novel depict a problem-free existence in line with the idyll? Does it gloss over coarser truths of rural life? Could it do the very opposite and expose as false mythic and romanticised portrayals of peasant societies? Secondly, my focus is on how *Cranford* pertains to gender roles of the patriarchal rural idyll. It will further be clear that *Cranford's* portrayal of a feminine society is far from realistic. Do these unrealistic portrayals of the female community support the strongly gendered rural idyll, or do they perhaps challenge gender ideals of the bucolic idyll?

In order to make a statement regarding whether *Cranford* idealises rural life with romanticised portrayals, it seems necessary to first question: how were the actual conditions in peasant societies in relation to the rural idyll during the Victorian period?

Rural Conditions in Relation to The Rural Idyll

The rural idyll featured the Victorian countryside as an area where individuals lived lives without afflictions. However, the actual living conditions of the rural poor in the period far from matched these harmonious depictions of peasant societies. Mary Treble argues that the "prettily sentimental view of country life was almost as mythical to its contemporaries as it is to the twentieth century" (Treble 1989, 53). When addressing living conditions in the nineteenth century Susie Steinbach similarly emphasises that "[f]ast-growing nostalgia

notwithstanding, the homes of the rural poor were anything but idyllic" (Steinbach 2012, 81). While rural areas were considered outstanding in metropolitan areas of the nineteenth century, the rural village was "no longer a real place but a dream, a lost Eden in the sharpest contrast to the dirty streets and the wretched dwellings which the rural poor now inhabited" (Booth 1998, 216 – 217). The dreamlike qualities found in representations of the countryside in urban areas became a "lost Eden" and a polar opposite not only to the city, but also to real rural communities (Booth 1998, 217). It did not take long for the metropolitan inhabitants to forget that village life was a brutal reality. Instead it became "like no other village that ever existed or could exist; it was a village of shimmering sweetness, sentiment, nostalgia, and beauty" (Booth 1998, 217). Booth further explains that Victorian Londoners saw rural life "as the stage version of their own past – illusion, it is true, but with all the complex significance of illusion" (Booth 1998, 217). This image of the countryside, which the urban society had constructed, was in whole inaccurate.

The actual conditions varied across the country. There was, however, generally an extensive shortage of housing for rural inhabitants in the period (Sayer 2000, 5; Steinbach 2012, 81). The houses were in such bad shape that there are little traces of them left (Steinbach 2012, 81). The insubstantial dwellings many rural poor individuals lived in included barns adjusted for habitation, houses with thin walls or "properties thrown up by speculative builders" (Sayer 2000, 5). The residences were on the most part overcrowded, "damp, cold, draughty, dark and unsanitary" (Sayer 2000, 5). The lack of space further meant that a typical habitation had very little furniture and families often had to eat separately as they could not fit the entire family around the table (Steinbach p. 81). The water was often contaminated and there was a shortage of fuel in part as a result of high coal prices (Sayer 2000, 5).

Even more formative for the living conditions, was the fact that fresh food was brought from the countryside to the city, so that individuals who did not have an allotment, needed to bring the food back from the city to the countryside. Living conditions in the north were better than in the south, and in the north many labourers were given allotments as a payment; however, in the south they were in general only given money, and in consequence they had no way to harvest food themselves. With meagre means the peasants in the south without allotment depended entirely on obtaining food from merchants (Sayer 2000, 5). The produce was even harder to get a hold of during times when the crops yielded a poor harvest. Rural poor were particularly hard-pressed during the 1840s. Steinbach explains that in the 1840s approximately "1 million people living in the richest empire on earth died of starvation or

disease. Hardest hit were the rural poor, whose diet depended on the potato" (Steinbach 2012, 82). Cold winters and insubstantial residences further caused problems of freezing to death. These circumstances do not resemble the emblematic rose and vegetable garden, with ample supply of choice fruit. Neither do the picturesque and aesthetic small houses and cottages resemble the insubstantial quality of the houses/cottages.

Accordingly, one could ask: is the rural idyll a negative and destructive myth? Because if the living conditions were considerably worse than rural idyll portrayals, then the actual conditions would seem less severe. I will not make an absolute judgement on whether the rural idyll is entirely destructive. However, I will remark that it had some very negative consequences. Williams (1973) and Newby (1979) were among early scholars that expressed a concern for the implications of the rural idyll. Newby builds on William's research of the authentic rural lifestyle in contrast to the Arcadia and states: "there has been a refusal to recognize the problem of rural poverty in the midst of this splendidly bucolic existence" (Newby 1979, 12). Newby argues that bucolic representations of rural life in fiction and other cultural expressions have allowed the real conditions of rural labourers to be "alternatively ignored and caricatured in the public consciousness" (Newby 1979, 11). The glorified image of England as the 'green and pleasant land' has taken over and displaced ailments in the countryside from view in the period. Cloke similarly explains:

> The idea of idyllic rurality, with its own country voice with which to lobby for distinct rural futures, has tended to render invisible the seamier side of rural life. For example, the cultural constructions of rurality which associate rural England with some form of arcadian and pastoral idyll have exerted a pervasive yet obfuscatory influence over the ability of decision makers, urban residents and rural residents to recognize the existence of poverty in the midst of that idyll. Similar socio-cultural barriers exist to the recognition of homelessness in rural areas. (Cloke 2003, 3)

As is clear from this quotation, rural conditions were unknown in urban societies due to dreamlike portrayals of the rural idyll. The invisibility of rural conditions has consequently hindered a realisation that homelessness and poverty exist in the countryside. As I discuss above, the reality was far more brutal for rural citizens than the rural idyll suggests. It is likely that when nostalgic glorifications of the countryside gained a foothold in the urban society in the Victorian era, it also hindered the British population from working for the betterment of rural societies. It was in general merely the urban societies that were thought to need improvement (Lowe 1989, 117). Since it was the urban areas that were viewed as 'the

problem', several committees and actions were undertaken to better the urban lifestyle, while there was little focus on improving rural living conditions (Lowe 1989, 117). There were governmental laws, which were enacted in order to provide relief for poor, both urban and rural. However, these were highly inefficient. The Act for the Relief of the Poor 1601, which was the act preceding the Victorian amendment, had little effect (Hindle 1975, 3). The Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 was even worse as it was meant to curb financial reliefs. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act held that relief should only be given to those in workhouses, and secondly, that the workhouse conditions should be made worse and less attractive in order that most people would remain outside the workhouses (Crompton 1977, 228). It should be mentioned, however, that the new law was not followed entirely; therefore it was occasionally given relief outside the workhouses. How, then, are these rural conditions reflected in Gaskell's portrayal of the countryside?

Rural Conditions in Cranford

Several critics claim that *Cranford* portrays an unrealistically positive rural existence for the characters in the novel and that Gaskell idealised representations of rural life. The Japanese introduction mentioned above is one example. Eileen Gillooly further points to the fact that the "familiar yet peculiar world of the novel – its nostalgic, utopian community – is fashioned upon childhood memories viewed from a psychological distance" (Gillooly in Hughes and Lund 1999, 175). In this quotation Gillooly contends that *Cranford* depicts a utopian society and that Gaskell is blinded by time, and that this separation of time has enhanced her memories. In turn she argues that the community is unrealistically good or pleasant. In addition, Coblentz's recommendation to American students held that *Cranford* "must be seen as an effort to invent memory and thus to create nostalgia for something that never existed in the first place" (Coblentz in Reccio 2009, 171). The arguments by these critics maintain that Cranford portrays an unrealistically positive and pleasant existence.

Of critics who disagree with these statements one could mention Duthie, who contends that Gaskell "never distorted facts or allowed her country scenes to become blurred by a golden haze of unreality" (Duthie 1980, 18). Duthie explains that Gaskell's stories were mainly set in the northern part of England, which had better conditions than the southern part of England, where people suffered greatly during the depression following the end of the Napoleonic Wars (Duthie 1980, 18). Correspondingly, it could be that the differences between the regions have had an impact how *Cranford* is seen to idealise country life of nineteenth century Britain. Duthie suggests that since Gaskell had lived in the countryside

herself, in contrast to most other artists and writers, it would be natural for her to write with her hometown, Knutsford, as a primary inspiration, and presumably not the whole of the countryside in England. Duthie partially justifies Gaskell's praise of rural life on these grounds. However, she simultaneously acknowledges that unhappy events are rare in Gaskell's farmsteads (Duthie 1980, 17). It is a potent argument that Gaskell wrote with her own reference point of the rural society and not the English countryside in general. And the novel's depiction of life in the countryside should be read with an awareness of this.

Much of the above-mentioned criticism emphasises how *Cranford* embellishes reality in its depiction of the countryside. Does then, the novel agree with the idyll in that it portrays life as unrealistically good or pleasant? I will contend that the novel engages with this facet, but it does not adhere to this aspect of the rural idyll. In some ways it aligns with the idyll in depicting an unrealistically pleasant community; in other ways, however, the novel markedly counters the rural idyll 'Eden'. First, how does the novel glorify rural living conditions?

There are certainly some sides to the novel that are unrealistic and utopian. For instance the characters' bounteousness, their pervasive generosity and the small sacrificial services that the characters continuously undertake for one another arguably adhere to an idyllic experience. Several critics have noted that kindness is prevalent in the Cranford community. Henry Fothergill describes that "the beauty of the book lies in this, – that our author has vindicated the "soul of goodness"" (Fothergill in Easson 1991, 194), and Nina Auerbach claims that Cranford is "a homely little village ... a sadly withering root of English kindness and community" (Auerbach 1978, 77). Accordingly, in exhibiting a village marked by goodness, the Cranford society becomes representative of the kindness of the English people: a kindness that Auerbach contends has become increasingly rare.

The goodness and meekness of the Cranford community are observable when Miss Jessie utters "what a town Cranford is for kindness! …The poor people will leave their earliest vegetables at our door for her" (21). Miss Jessie compliments her neighbours' charity when her sister is ill. They are referred to as poor; however, their good hearts are altruistic and willing to give of their meagre means. It is interesting to note that Gaskell's focus is entirely directed towards the inner workings of the relationships in *Cranford* and on the bounteousness of the community. The poor are not addressed in light of their affliction but rather for their goodness. In addition, the focus is not on Miss Brown's situation and illness. Miss Brown's ailment is rendered less of a predicament in light of the generosity within the village. Gaskell's use of diction is, furthermore, useful to note here. In this extract the word "earliest" in "earliest vegetables" enhances the produce's freshness as a delicate feature and

adds to a delightful aspect of rural existence. The focus on benevolence is even more prominent in Mary Smith's observation:

> I had often occasion to notice the use that was made of fragments and small opportunities in Cranford; the rose-leaves that were gathered ere they fell, to make into a pot-pourri for someone who had no garden; the little bundles of lavender-flowers sent to strew the drawers of some town dweller, or to burn in the chamber of some invalid. (22)

From this extract one can ascertain that beautiful details of the surrounding nature are even applied to charity. The fictional community is not described to provide nourishments for the poor, which would meet the poor's physiological needs, e.g. bread or dairy products. The novel focuses instead on charity for the poor pertaining to their need for surrounding beauty. The people without gardens are cared for in that they are given aesthetic roseleaves to decorate their surroundings with. Since beautiful flower-ornamented gardens agree with the idyllic rural scenery, the charity Mary Smith observes greatly corresponds to the bucolic idyll. The unrealistic and utopian benevolence in this society is, moreover, evident in the response of the Cranford women in the central event when Miss Matty's bank notes are devalued (147).

When Miss Matty receives news that her bank has become insolvent, and in consequence, her bank deposits are devalued (147), a secret meeting is called for in the Cranford society. Several of the Cranford women gather to donate means to Miss Matty to cover her expenses. Miss Pole explains to Mary Smith: "it is not only a duty but a pleasure, – a true pleasure, Mary! …to give what we can to assist her – Miss Matilda Jenkyns" (161). The willingness of the women to donate funds is apparent in this quotation. The fact that Miss Matty's neighbours gather to donate a significant amount of funds to assist Miss Matty, despite having meager means themselves, seems in many ways idyllic and utopian. That they in addition donate funds anonymously adds to the altruism and makes this event even more utopian. Very few individuals in the Victorian society who became bankrupt would have experienced anything remotely similar. The sheer goodness of the community, then, appears highly idyllic and agrees with the rural idyll. However, I will also remark that even though the response of the characters to this incidence is idyllic. The fact that Miss Matty looses her money in the first place, not through carelessly dealing with her finances but through occurrences that are out of her control, counters the rural idyll, as the misfortune of sudden poverty does not seem to belong to the Arcadia.

The novel's other portrayals of poverty exemplifies its countering the idyllic experience. The depiction of poverty in *Cranford* is complex and many-layered. On the surface, poverty is described as a negligible circumstance; however, only later do we discover that appearances deceive. Addressing Gaskell's portrayal of poverty, Mary-Catherine Harrison remarks that "Gaskell in particular created vivid portraits of poverty in order to overcome the perspectival barriers that she critiqued within her fiction" (Harrison 2008, 99). Gaskell's critique of poverty is according to Harrison in the form of creative images. Even though the *Cranford* characters themselves are not victims of astute poverty to the point where they border on starvation and where they have to do hard manual labour, the novel still points to poverty as a serious predicament. Richard Gravil correspondingly argues: **"**Since she [Gaskell] was writing for the rich with a desire to engage their active sympathy for the poor, she constantly faces a diplomatic problem. How can she tell the truth – that extreme poverty is a result of an unjust and exploitative system without causing offence? (Gravil 2007, 5). To avoid offending her bourgeois readership, Gaskell turned to implicit rather than explicit critique of poverty in an endeavour to gain sympathy for the poor (Gravil 2007, 5). Even though Gravil addresses Gaskell's portrayal of poverty in the novel *Mary Barton*, I find that this comment is equally valid for Gaskell's portrayal of poverty in *Cranford.*

On the surface poverty is neglected by the characters. The characters themselves have social norms that govern how they should and how they should not address the subject of poverty. Ideally, they should avoid the topic altogether. That the subject matter of poverty should not be addressed is clear in the following:

> We none of us spoke of money because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic. The Cranfordians had that kindly *espirit de corps* which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some among them tried to conceal their poverty. (7)

The Cranfordians are described to have "*esprit de corps*"(7). This is a mutual spirit prevailing in the members of a group which inspires "enthusiasm, devotion, and strong honor" (Dunkelman 2004, 5) for the inner dynamics at work within the group. Accordingly, the "*esprit de corps*"(7) which this quotation addresses is manifested in the small town society in the novel as mutual endeavors to retain a sense of aristocracy amongst themselves. It seems that upholding aristocracy is the characters' attitude in response to poverty rather than self-pity. Correspondingly, Gaskell does not portray them as victims of poverty. The narrator further explains that "I imagine that a few of the gentlefolks of Cranford were poor, and had

difficulty in making both ends meet; but they were like the Spartans, and concealed their smart under a smiling face" (7). By likening the Cranford ladies to the Spartans, the narrator implies that they heroically pertain to a frugal lifestyle. To further emphasise the reluctance to address the topic of poverty, the narrator elucidates that even though poverty is a hindrance to them, they do not acknowledge it as a hindrance in their conversations. Instead they make excuses among themselves for their frugal lifestyle. For instance if they walked "it was because the night was *so* fine, or the air *so* refreshing; not because sedan-chairs were expensive" (8). Miss Smith concludes that they consequently blinded themselves "to the vulgar fact, that we were all of us, people of very moderate means" (8). The Cranford women's endeavour to conceal their poverty is ascertainable in these utterances. Poverty in *Cranford* is displayed with a sense of aristocracy in an enthusiastic 'espirit de corps'. Accordingly, poverty is not portrayed (on the surface) as a predicament. When poverty is made heroic and Spartan, then calamities of poverty are hardly presented in a realistic manner.

Is Gaskell then writing with an aim to relegate poverty from misfortune to bliss? If this is the case, she certainly does not berate the unjust situation of poverty which Harrison and Gravil argues that Gaskell in fact does. Above I mention that Harrison argues that Gaskell creates vivid portrayals in her fiction to criticise the social situation of poverty, and that Gravil ascertains that Gaskell implicitly berates the unjust situation of Victorian poverty. However, the analogy to the Spartans and their endeavours to avoid the subject of poverty could make it seem like Gaskell glosses over the afflictions of poverty. Furthermore, Gaskell almost appears to dismiss poverty in the following description of Captain Brown: "Why you see, unless Captain Brown has some reason for it, he never speaks about being poor; and he walked along by his lordship looking as happy and cheerful as a prince" (21). It is apparent in this statement that Captain Brown's poverty does not impede his uplifted mood. In addition it is worth noticing how Gaskell again applies aristocracy to poverty. Here the narrator uses the words "lordship" and "Prince" when addressing Captain Brown's public appearances. However, did Gaskell intend to project poverty as a negligible circumstance? If this is the case, she considerably idealises rural life. The following statement, however, suggests otherwise: "Death was as true and common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud in the streets. It was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite" (8). Here the narrator markedly counters the dialogue between the Cranford women, which kept poverty from discourse. Poverty is even paralleled with death, a parallel, which probes into the coarser sides of rural life. The novel, then, initially makes poverty appear romanticised by the

Cranfordians' unwillingness to address poverty, only later do we discover that appearances deceive as the narrator significantly counters the understanding that they have amongst themselves to hide poverty all together.

Why, then, would Gaskell depict a village where poverty is treated as a mere and insignificant part of her characters' lives and then comment that reality is far different? Could Gaskell imply a parallel to the contemporary situation where calamities of rural poor were subjugated from public debates in urban areas? Is she here berating society for not addressing poverties' true reality, which is significantly eradicated from the rural idyll? Her critique seems at least equally clear in the following statement: "Small pieces of butter grieve others. They cannot attend to conversation, because of the annoyance occasioned by the habit which some people have of invariably taking more butter than they want" (52). The provocation caused by some people taking more butter than they want/need seems to point to real conditions in England. The waste of butter presumably points to the scarcity of resources in contemporary England, as wealth was often unevenly divided and misused by the bourgeois classes while many poor grappled with hunger.

An allusion to unevenly divided resources is further ascertainable in the superficially comical visit at Lady Jamieson's residence. In the episode when the Cranford women visit Mrs. Jamieson, the women become considerably disappointed as they are served tea. They anticipate the cream put in front of them, which to them is a seldom luxury. However, the entire cream saucer is poured to the dog when Lady Glenmire explains "how intelligent and sensible the dear little fellow was; he knew cream quite well, and constantly refused tea with only milk in it" (93). The Cranford women are consequently left with milk. Mary smith describes that they did, however, wonder if they were not "quite as intelligent and sensible as Carlo, and felt as if an insult was added to [their] injury" (93). The Cranford women are instead "called upon to admire the gratitude evinced by his wagging his tail for cream, which should have been [theirs]" (93). Accordingly, one could question why the dog was prioritised over these women in the 'food chain'. It appears that this is a satirical image fully intended by Gaskell to allude to the contemporary situation and the unparalleled luxury by the upper classes at the expense of the lower classes. Here the division of resources is made absurd to the point that it is degrading. An animal is even prioritised before the Cranford women. Consequently, they "felt that an insult was being added to" them (93). This is an implicit image, which points to the condition of rural poverty. The novel portrays predicaments in more explicit terms and consequently counters the idyllic experience. This applies to death.

Interestingly, Gaskell provides a link between poverty and death and that both these

subjects were shunned from the discourses in the community. This is clear in the utterance mentioned above: "Death was as true and common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud in the streets. It was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite" (8). Gaskell addresses that poverty *and* death are elements that the society avoids to acknowledge as present but that both these aspects are in fact ever-present. The pervasiveness of deaths in the novel is accentuated further when the narrator utters: "As if by such unusual exertion he could escape the sure pursuer, Death" (112). Even if the Cranford women ignore death as a definite part of life, this quotation substantiates that the novel itself does not ignore it. The use of the capital 'D' in death casts into relief that Gaskell wants to draw attention the actuality of death. The many deaths that take place during the course of the narrative counter the idyll genre. These deaths include Captain Brown's death while he works on the railroads (22), the oldest daughter of Captain Brown who dies from an illness (26-27), Miss Jenkyns who dies from old age (31), Mr Holbrook who dies after his visit abroad (48), and Mrs. Brunoni tells of how all her six children passed away "like buds nipped ultimately" in India (129). All of these deaths are tragic apart from perhaps the cause of death of Miss Jenkyns who dies naturally from old age. Moreover, the insistence of deaths is hardly seen as belonging to the idyllic experience which one would expect from a rural idyll novel. Therefore the many deaths in the novel support the argument that this novel is not an idyll.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Gaskell herself experienced to loose two children. These losses made the death of children a recurring theme within her fiction (Lambert 2013, 51). In *Cranford* Mrs. Brunoni's account of the death of her children is an example. In addition, Mrs. Brunoni speaks to a woman on the train that had lost a child. In other novels by Gaskell, examples include the following: *Mary Barton* (1848) where two twin siblings die, 'Lizzie Laigh' (1850), where a young girl, Nanny, dies and in 'The Doom of the Griffiths' (1858) Owen Griffiths' baby dies. With the many deaths in *Cranford*, and the various allusions to poverty as a predicament, in addition to the unjust system of unevenly divided resources, one can ascertain that the novel does not fully adhere to the rural idyll existence of 'pure' bliss.

In the discussion above I ascertain that *Cranford* has some elements that seems idealised e.g. charity and generosity. The novel does, however, not idealise rural life in its portrayal of poverty and death; therefore, on the whole I contend that even though the novel may agree on some areas, the focus on hardships makes it impossible for this novel to adhere to this idyll trait. Gaskell's novel reveals that poverty is an unjust system and that death is to be expected; consequently, the novel does not idealise rural life in the way that the rural idyll

genre does. Like the novel's portrayals of poverty and death contest the rural idyll's unrealistically good and pleasant existence of 'pure' bliss, so does the novels' portrayal of women destabilize the Arcadia. The gender situation in the novel is, moreover, far from ordinary or realistic, and I will address manifestations of gender roles in the novel shortly. However, first it should be stated how the rural idyll pertains to gender.

The Rural Idyll and Gender

In the essay 'Uncovering rural others/other's rural' (2003) Keith Halfacree claims: "the rural idyll is strongly gendered" (Halfacree 2003, 144). He further elucidates that "[a]lthough the gendered dimension of the rural idyll reflects the more general patriarchal structure of society, such a structure makes its presence especially strongly felt within the rural sphere" (Halfacree 2003,145). Rural areas in particular adhere to patriarchal gender constructions and ideology. Kathryn Hunter and Pamela Riney-Kehrberg make similar statements: "Geographers and historians have argued that notions of agrarianism, or of the rural idyll, are gendered in their construction and in their impact" (Hunter and Kehrberg in Panelli et.al, 57). The rural idyll as patriarchal is fairly established. Jo Little and Patricia Austin are some of the most influential researchers of the correlation between the rural idyll and gender, and they capture the essence of the rural idyll as gendered in the following quotation:

> patriarchal gender relations are… fundamentally embedded in the creation of the rural idyll. The romantic vision of pastoral England is built on a particular interpretation of masculinity and femininity that sees women representing the innocence of the natural world which 'active masculinity must support, protect and oversee'…. The image of women encompassed in the rural idyll is one of virtue and morality. The so-called 'lynch-pin' of rural community, their actual activities are trivialized except where they are seen to relate directly to the provisioning of men and the sustenance of the male headed household. (Little and Austin 1996, 193)

The rural idyll is as Little and Austin here describe essentially patriarchal. Women represent virtue and need men to protect and safeguard them. They share an affiliation with nature and they serve the purpose of a 'domestic angel', taking care of the home and submitting to their husbands. This description is not unlike the general view of how women should behave in the Victorian period. Nead further contends that gender relations are pertinent in the rural idyll "with women naturally natural mothers" (Nead in Rose 1993, 95). Little and Austen similarly explain: "There can be no doubt that the woman of the rural idyll is the wife and mother"

(Little and Austin 1996, 106). In addition, it is worth noting Hughes' contention that "these 'natural' gender differences have become formalised within (dominant) rural discourses as the 'domestic idyll' has retained its importance in contemporary rural ideology" (Hughes 2005, 120). The 'rural idyll' with its appeal then propagates and stabilises these ideas of gender divisions in rural areas further. How, then, are gender relations depicted in *Cranford*?

Gender Roles in Cranford

Cranford is a society consisting mostly of women. Few men are present in the novel, and in addition most of the women are spinsters or widows. Correspondingly, Moran remarks: "Given that it contains a female narrator as well as (primarily) female subjects of narration, *Cranford* is an unusual example of Victorian fiction" (Moran 2006, 164). The narrator explains the peculiar inner-workings of Cranford as a practically wholly female society: "Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses above a certain rent, are women" (5). The nearly all-female society in the Cranford village is described to be like the Amazon society. The legendary myth of the Amazons is from ancient Greek mythology. The Amazon group is said to have been an exclusively female society of women considered savage warriors. They allegedly mated with foreign men to hinder that the female society would die out, but any male babies were discarded (Sacks 2009, 19). The analogy to the myth of the Amazon community demarcates the Cranford society as an area with forceful energy, in spite (or perhaps rather because) of the lack of men. The narrator further extends the analogy and explains that "[i]f a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentlemen disappears" (5). The reason for the men disappearing are varied, and a male who comes to Cranford "is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighboring town of Drumble" (5). The men mysteriously disappear in Cranford as they do in the Amazon myth. The narrator concludes that "[i]n short, whatever does become of the gentlemen, they are not in Cranford" (5). Thereby the narrator underlines the pervasiveness of this all-female society. The wholly female society that Gaskell depicts is then not natural or realistic; it is essentially utopian.

Gender roles in *Cranford* defy the gender roles pertaining to the rural idyll and equally so the pervasive views of women of the Victorian society in general.[3] There are, however, various views on how women and gender roles are depicted and function in the novel. One critic

[3] 'Women' views in Victorian England is a vast subject. I will not discuss opinions that relates to'fallen women' or women's saintliness. I will instead be concerned with women's position in the home and their domestic roles.

who addresses the topic of gender roles in *Cranford* is Eta Farmacelia Nurulhady in *Performance and Performativity in Elizabeth Gaskell's "Cranford" and "Ruth"* (2008). According to Nurulhady "Gaskell points out the way women learn and perform their gender appropriately for their class" and taking place in Victorian England the "narratives [*Cranford* and *Ruth]* show how crucial it was for women of that time to perform the gender roles prescribed for them by both their gender and their class position" (Nurulhady 2008, 7). Nurulhady thus contends that the women depicted in *Cranford* and *Ruth* behave according to accepted gender norms of Victorian Britain. Nurulhady further relates the Cranford women's behavior or gendered 'social performance' to the idea of Simone de Beauvior that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beaviour in Nurulhady 2008, 7). Similarly, she relates the Cranford women's behaviour to Richard Schechner's analogous idea that "[e]ach individual from an early age learns to perform gender-specific vocal inflections, facial displays, gestures, walks and erotic behavior as well as how to select, modify and use scents, body shapes and adornments, clothing and all other gender markings of a given society" (Schechner in Nurulhadi 2008, 7). Nurulhady adopts these views and argues that gender identities are socially constructed. Nuruhlady connects the idea of gender identities as socially constructed to the Cranford women's learned behavior as falling perfectly into the Victorian female ideal.

However, I do not wholly agree with Nuruhlhady's argument that the Cranford women take care to fulfill the gender roles expected of them by society. She is right in that they undoubtedly concern themselves with appearances and social norms; however, in several ways the Cranford society seems to contradict the gender norms of the period. To elucidate this it is beneficial to consider what Patricia Ingham writes in the introduction to Penguins' 2008 edition of *Cranford.* In this introduction Ingham writes that the most obvious concern which *Cranford* relates to is gender (Ingham 2008, xv) and that "by her treatment of Cranford society, Gaskell is engaging with the contemporary debate which raged in the mid-nineteenth century concerning, among other matters, that of the ability of women without men to form friendships with their own sex, or to thrive in an all-female community" (Ingham 2008, xv). Thus Gaskell's novel aimed to counter the general view that women were not able to form solid friendships. The view the novel seeks to counter "followed from a belief in the doctrine of separate spheres: domestic and nurturing for women (born for marriage and motherhood): and active and competitive in the outside world for men" (Ingham 2008, xv). Given that women were dependent upon men, many held that "those women who were without men were thus seen as lacking what was necessary to existence" (Ingham 2008, xv). Accordingly, "[t]here was much discussion for and against the

view that women were capable of creating friendships and living harmoniously with other women" (Ingham 2008, xv). It was believed that women could not thrive in an all-female society and that women could not form friendship in the way men could. It was a general opinion that women were essentially dependent upon male company. Then that implies that the Cranford society demonstrates anomalous gender roles of the nineteenth century. They do not appear to perfectly agree with the Victorian ideal of women, which Nurulhady suggests.

Not only do the close relationships between the women appear to be out of the norm, but the fact that most of them are spinsters and widows makes it impossible for them to pertain to the view that women were "born for marriage and motherhood" (Ingham 2008, xv). Miss Matty even chooses not to marry despite having the option to marry Mr. Holbrook in her younger years. Gaskell's views further reflects a contemporary debate related to a prominent campaign for marriage reform (Ponsonby 2013,148). This campaign caused the publication of many articles in the Unitarian journal, *The Repository,* featuring the views of the reform (Ponsonby 2013, 148). Since Gaskell was a Unitarian she would be exposed to these views and they "found their way into Gaskell's fiction" (Ponsonby 2013, 148). Ponsonby correspondingly remarks that: "Gaskell celebrated the independent state of the ladies of Cranford in subtle ways" (Ponsonby 2013, 148). Essentially, The gender roles of the women in Cranford do not seem to correspond with the female ideals of the Victorian society, nor the gender roles typically associated with the rural idyll as mothers and domestic housewives. In addition, it should be mentioned that the gender roles pertaining to men in the novel also challenge the patriarchal gender structure of the rural idyll. Auerbach states that Peter Jenkyns' liking (in his younger years) to dress in women's clothes made him abdicate "his manhood and [align] himself with the tender femininity of Matty and their frail mother" (Auerbach 1978, 88). As Auerbach explains, Peter dressing in women's clothes points to that he has feminine qualities, which in a sense emasculates him in the novel. While the women are described to be savage Amazon women, Peter is described to like feminine attires. Peter, like the women, correspondingly does not conform to the patriarchal gender ideology of the rural idyll and the Victorian society.

There are various opinions of feminism and Cranford. The criticism ranges from critics who see *Cranford* as a nearly militant feminist novel, to those who focus on the feminine empathy and kindness of the Cranford ladies. Patsy Stoneman remarks:

> Cranford, always the most popular of Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, reprinted more than once a year since its first publication, has until recently seemed unproblematically charming. The women's movement, however, has produced some startling rereading.

> Wheras Cecil, for instance, saw Miss Matty as a 'wistful figure' of 'fragile, flower-like grace' (Cecil 1994:220), Nina Auerbach sees her as a biblical avenger with a 'savage mission.' (Stoneman 2006, 57).

We see here that Auerbach and Cecil have very different opinions of Miss Matty's disposition. Stoneman further makes the claim that the women's movement has had an effect upon how the novel has been read. This argument aligns with Moran's assertion that earlier critics tended to compliment *Cranford* for "its "feminine" attributes: engaging, kind-hearted characters and gently amusing anecdotes loosely anchored in a narrative not overburdened with intellect, or, for that matter, plot" (Moran 2006, 159), while later critics "have begun to excavate the feminist potential in the text and especially in its unique narrative structure" (Moran 2006, 160). In my opinion the 'feminist approach' to reading *Cranford* often conveys very interesting and useful insights to the novel. However, simultaneously this reading can be taken too far, as some critics appear to have done. This approach should not be applied in a way where the rest of the content within the novel is flattened at the expense of this one reading. The many deaths in the novel, for instance, should not be reduced to only support a militant feminist society. I therefore take what I consider a middle ground where I acknowledge that the feminist reading has some very relevant points to make concerning *Cranford*, but I will also aim to demonstrate how some of the critics take this perspective to the extreme. How is the novel often read with a feminist viewpoint?

During the course of *Cranford's* narrative line there seems to be a pattern where central male characters are eliminated from the story one after another in line with the Amazon community. The first to point out this pattern was Martin Dodsworth in 'Women without Men at Cranford' (1963). In this article Dodsworth argues that the structure of the novel is divided in two parts of unequal length. The first part according to Dodsworth culminates in the death of Captain Brown and his masculine power and dominance in Cranford: "the later chapters of Cranford are an attempt to expiate the guilt of the Captain's death" (Dodsworth 1963, 139). Dodsworth believes that the second part of the novel seeks to compensate for eradicating the captain, and his masculine power. In Dodsworth's opinion it was the fact that Gaskell lived in a patriarchal society that made her atone for initially eliminating the Captain from the story. Dodsworth potently remarks that there is a peculiar pattern with the men disappearing in the novel. However, his contention that the rest of the novel atones for Captain Brown's death seems to be less coherent. If the novel continues to eliminate men, then the novel does not to appear atone for Captain Brown's death. For instance how is the death of Mr. Holbrook different from the death of the captain? Some critics denounce Dodsworth's reading entirely. Moran for

instance calls Dodsworth's critical essay a "disturbing article" (Moran 2006, 160) and Delafield criticises Dodsworth's views and claimes that he ignores "the commercial demands of the periodical and the cultivation of its readers by editor and author" (Delafield 2015, 100). I will not discredit Dodsworth entirely as Moran and Delafield do. The link to the Amazon community is in my opinion a valid and persuasive reading, but I find the argument that the novel atones for Captain Brown's death less substantial. As I mention above, there seems for instance to be little distinction between the death of Captain Brown and the death of Mr. Holbrook. In addition I would not support Dodsworth's speculation that Gaskell's portrayal of women reflects Gaskell's "unconscious hostility to the male" (Dodsworth p.138). Referring to Gaskell's unconscious views seems to me to be a very wage speculation and rather irrelevant. Nevertheless, following Dodsworth's article, several critics have read the novel through a perspective of the Cranford village as a place that resists male 'intrusion'.

Rae Rosenthal's critical essay 'Gaskell's Feminist Utopia' (1994) is one example of a piece of criticism, which interprets the novel through the lenses of a female community opposing male incursion. In this article Rosenthal makes the argument that Captain Brown's death was necessary for the Cranford ladies to regain their female equilibrium: "for the women of Cranford and for the future of their utopia, Brown's death is imperative" (Rosenthal 1994, 85). She further explains that Brown's death by the railroads "leads one to believe, as does Auerbach, that Cranford has an "unsettling power to obliterate men""(Rosenthal 1994, 85). Rosenthal further argues the following:

> Had Brown been a benign invasion, he would have been allowed to remain (as Peter Jenkyns will later); instead, Brown is eliminated and for good reason – he is dangerous, as Deborah Jenkyns knows instinctively. Accordingly, after his death, Deborah quickly assumes governance over Brown's daughters, conveniently burying one and marrying off another, so that Cranford is as though the Browns never existed. As a result, Cranford is once again "in possession of the Amazons" (39), and Deborah can now leave her sister, Matty, a legacy intact. (Rosenthal 1994, 85)

Brown is according to Rosenthal eradicated from the society as he poses a danger to the female society. Rosenthal further believes, like Dodsworth, that Deborah epitomizes the 'Cranfordian feminist'. Rosenthal then argues that Miss Jenkyns symbolically gains 'control' over Brown's daughters. She sees not only Captain Brown's death as a result of feminine supremacy, but also Miss Brown's burial and Miss Jessie's marriage to Major Gordon as a result of Miss Jenkins

'matriarchal' power, which accordingly leave Cranford back to being in "possession of the Amazons". I agree with the point that it is significant to remark that almost all of the men in the novel are eliminated, which Dodsworth also does. However, I find myself questioning if Gaskell intended for Miss Jenkyns to have all these purposes. Rosenthal seems to claim that Jenkyns leaves (or dies) because she has fulfilled her purpose, the feminine equilibrium is reached again, and she can leave her sister with "a legacy in tact" (Rosenthal 1994, 85), yet I find this to be a rather large assumption without enough rigorous evidence as to why she believes this. Furthermore, some of her arguments seem to me to be erroneous. She states for instance that had Captain Brown been a "benign invasion" (Rosenthal 1994, 85) or welcome in Cranford he would not have been killed. She further contrasts Captain Brown with Peter, and makes the claim that since Mr. Brown was unwelcome, and Peter Jenkyns was welcome, Captain Brown had to be eliminated through his death, while Peter was allowed to stay. However, Rosenthal must have overlooked that Captain Brown became much liked in the village. Even if he initially offends the ladies by 'ungeel manners', he remedies himself, by his kind disposition and "goodness of heart" (8). The ladies favour him to the extent that he is "even admitted in the tabooed hours before twelve" (9). The narrator accentuates his popularity after his initial disapproval in the following:

> He had been friendly, though the Cranford ladies had been cool; he had answered small sarcastic compliments in good faith... And at last, his excellent masculine common sense, and his facility in devising expedients to overcome domestic dilemmas, had gained him an extraordinary place as authority among the Cranford ladies. He himself went on in his course as unaware of his popularity. (9)

It is then obvious that Captain Brown was popular, and this can surely not account for why Peter was allowed to stay in the narrative line, and Captain Brown was cut which Rosenthal argues. That being said, I will further remark that this passage reveals that Gaskell took care to remark Brown's "masculinity" and that he had gained "authority" in the small town. Gaskell then clearly accentuates the single man's position in the 'Amazon' community of Cranford. Accordingly, I support Rosenthal's reading that Captain Brown's death supports the Amazon analogy, but I find her arguments concerning Miss Jenkyns, and also of Captain Brown's popularity, little convincing.

Signor Brunoni (Samuel Brown) is similarly seen as a male intrusion who is cut from the narrative. Dodworth claims that the town's fear of burglars "are merely a reflection of the unconscious fear aroused by Brunoni's demonstration of masculine power" (Dodsworth 1963,

141) and Wolfe argues that the "panic which follows this invasion [of Signor Brunoni] manifests the irrational fear of masculinity which characterizes the psychological condition of Miss Matty and the other Cranford ladies" (Wolfe 1968, 169). In Dodsworth and Wolfe's view, Signor Brunoni seems to illustrate the Cranford ladies' aversion or anxiety related to the male gender in general. I believe, however, that the novel makes it fairly clear that this passage reveals more skepticism towards Brunoni's foreign origin than to his gender. Miss Pole is the one who initially considers Mr. Brunoni as a threat. Her concern is expressed in the following: "Signor Brunoni spoke broken English like a Frenchman, and though he wore a turban like a Turk … there could be no doubt Signor Brunoni was a Frenchman – A French spy, come to discover the weak and undefended places in England" (109). Miss Pole's reason for accusing Brunoni for the burglary seems to have little to do with the "irrational fear of masculinity which characterizes the psychological condition of Miss Matty and the other Cranford ladies" which Wolfe argues. It has more to do with his ethnicity. I will address this incident more thoroughly in chapter 3. However, from the feminist perspective one could question why it was Mr. Brunoni the foreign male and not Mrs. Brunoni the foreign woman who became the scapegoat in the incident of the burglary.

My position on whether *Cranford* is a feminist novel is accordingly somewhere in the middle of the existing views. I believe that there is a pattern where Gaskell has intentionally cut several of the men in the narrative line to support the Amazon analogy. However, I believe that the novel has many equally important themes, which should not be overlooked or forced to coincide with this perspective. The death of Captain Brown and Mr. Holbrook does not only function to support the Amazon myth. I address in chapter 1 and 3 other functions of Mr. Holbrook's death. The incident of the burglary where the Cranford women accuse Signor Brunoni for the crime is not so much a reflection of the women's fear of the masculine, as it mirrors their skepticism for his foreign origin (see also chapter 3). In addition, I do not see how Miss Jessie in marrying Major Gordon has anything to do with Miss Jenkyns' alleged matriarchal power. Neither do I find that Captain Brown's daughter's burial supports Miss Jenkyns' opposition to men.

Conclusion

In essence this chapter has been concerned with two elements which relates to realism, the rural idyll and *Cranford.* Idealised portrayals of rural life are unrealistically good or pleasant depictions of peasant societies. *Cranford's* depiction of women deals with realism in that Cranford as a village constituted of mostly women is highly unrealistic. Furthermore, both these

aspects/themes of the novel challenge the rural idyll genre. First, I asserted that *Cranford* does not idealise rural life like the rural idyll genre does. The way that the novel displays poverty and death elucidates that this novel does in fact not idealise rural life like the rural idyll Eden where the countryside became "like no other village that ever existed or could exist" (Booth 1998, 217). It became "a village of shimmering sweetness, sentiment, nostalgia, and beauty" (Booth 1998, 217). I have demonstrated that the narrator points to the true reality of poverty. In addition, the many deaths in the novel reveal that this is not a wholly blissful town which neatly fits into the rural idyll problem-free existence. Secondly, I contended that the literary work's portrayal of women challenge the rural idyll as patriarchal. The parallel to the Amazon community supports the likelihood that Gaskell intentionally engaged in debates concerning the roles of women in society. The novel further defies the gender roles of the rural idyll and the Victorian period by depicting a society which thrives without male company, and with focusing on heroines who are childless and unmarried.

Chapter 3:

National Identity:
Notions of Englishness and Foreign "Others"

The Cranford people respected themselves too much, and were too grateful to the aristocracy who were so kind to live near the town, ever to disgrace their bringing up by being dishonest or immoral; therefore, we must believe that the robbers were strangers – if strangers, why not foreigners? (108)

The English national identity is a significant part of the rural idyll. Even though the majority of the English population lives in urban areas, to be English is associated more with picturesque countryside ideals than with an urban way of life. That the rural idyll is a part of the national identity is generally accepted, and this perception has been established in scholarly circles of rural studies since Raymond Williams's monumentally influential *The Country and the City* (1973). Jeremy Burchardt explains that "[f]ollowing Williams, it has become almost axiomatic that the countryside was fundamental to English national identity and a wide range of consequences have been attributed to this, ranging from alleged economic backwardness to political conservatism" (Burchardt 2007, 474). In his book *The Country and the City*, Williams assesses portrayals of the rural and the urban in literature from the sixteenth century until his contemporary period in the mid-1900s, and he contends that the rural idyll is embedded in the national identity of the British society.

This chapter is concerned with how *Cranford* portrays aspects of the British (mainly English) national identity[4] of the Victorian period that are simultaneously thought to be a part of the rural idyll. How exactly is the literature of the Victorian period depicting idyllic rural areas tied to the national identity? How is *Cranford*, so often denoted a rural idyll novel, related to representations of Englishness? Does it align with, or engage with, the representations of national identity that we would expect of a bucolic novel? Does it in some ways counter these representations?

In the two previous chapters I address how *Cranford* engages with aspects such as

[4] I will mainly be concerned with the English national identity; however, the British and English national identities are often used interchangeably by critics (Kumar 2003, 1). Therefore, when addressing points that other critics have made, I sometimes refer to the British national identity and at other times I refer to the English national identity. The British national identity encompasses the national identity of all the nations that are constituents of the British Isles, while the English national identity points merely to that which is particularly English.

the idyllic rural scenery with floral design, fields of emerald green, the tranquil existence which makes one ponder and reflect on the 'mysteries' of existence, wooden cottages and farmsteads. In addition, I investigate whether *Cranford* idealises rural societies, and I look into gender relations of the rural idyll. Some of these aspects are highly relevant to the English national identity. Perhaps in particular the rural aesthetic scenery would be relevant for a discussion of national identity; however, to avoid repetition I will limit the focus on these aspects of the rural idyll. In this chapter I will probe even deeper into the idyll and consider ideas of ethnicity, cultural hierarchies and the idyll as monocultural. One of my contentions is that Gaskell was ahead of her time in berating prejudiced viewpoints of foreign 'others'. In addition, I will include a discussion of the commodity, tea. This beverage is central to the small town civilization depicted in the novel. It is further frequently described as a part of the rural idyll experience, and it has been considered a part of the national identity since the nineteenth century.

To understand *Cranford'*s relationship to these rural elements of the national identity, it is helpful to get a clear perception of the idea/concept, national identity. For instance, what is the purpose of this concept? And why are there often warnings of the potential dangers with this term and of how it is used? The relationship between national identity and of resulting "rural others" are further topics which need to be addressed in some depth in order to make the grounds for an argument of how national representations are important for a reading of the rural idyll in Gaskell's *Cranford*.

The idea of national identity, its meaning and its purpose, is better understood if we trace its origin. Essentially, the concept of national identity is considered to hearken back to the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and his ideas of nationalism. Smith describes Herder's perception of nation states to be the following: "[f]or Herder every nation has its peculiar 'genius', its own ways of thinking, acting and communicating, and we must work to rediscover that unique genius and that peculiar identity, wherever it is submerged or lost"(Smith 1991, 75). Parekh further explains that "for Herder, a culture was an "extended family" representing one language, one culture, one people and "one national character", and should at all cost avoid dilution and loss of its internal coherence" (Parekh 2000, 71). After Herder's ideas of nationalism, the nation was treated as an anamorphic personality with its own particular identity or 'soul'. This identity is further according to Herder's treatment of nations in need of protection from outside influence, as this influence might weaken the existing character. The romantic nationalism movement further momentously established the concept of national identities in several European nations in the

1900s in order to create stability within and across national borders and to strengthen the people's allegiance to national governments.

When undertaking a literary analysis of national identity, the analysis needs to be treated with a consciousness of the ways that the term is often misunderstood and of the consequences of misapplication. In later political theory it has been stressed that the concept should be handled with care as the term national identity has contributed to considerable confusion in political theory. These considerations stem particularly from Benedict Anderson's work on nations as imagined communities and on national identities as malleable in *Imagined Communities* (1983). Since the publication and recognition of this book there has been a consensus that the concept of national identity needs to be addressed with an awareness of the fact that these identities are abstract and constructed as opposed to inherent facets or anamorphic qualities which need to be safeguarded within a border or tied to an imagined ethnic group (Beebeejaun 2004, 440; Parekh 2000, 4; Gilroy 2000, 106).

The danger of misapplying this term is explained by Gilroy: "[w]hen collective identities gain a solidity it signals a sorry state of affairs in which the distinctive rules that define modern political culture are consciously set aside in favor of the pursuit of primordial feelings and mythic varieties of kinship that are mistakenly believed to be more profound" (Gilroy 2000, 106). Gilroy then emphasises how these characteristics given to national identities are abstract and "mythic" and that this misperception can lead to the dangerous territory of essentialising ethnicity. This pursuit of "kinship and a primordial feeling" can in turn create a hierarchy between ethnic groups, and has often been used to justify racist ideologies and/or actions (Beebeejaun 2004, 440). National identity will accordingly be seen as constructed and to encompass merely abstract qualities appointed to a particular nation. There are *no* elements in the English or British national identity that are definite; we speak merely of what is generally perceived and thought to be characteristics of the nation.

National Identity in Relation to the Rural Idyll and the Novelists

The tie between the rural idyll and the national identity is perhaps best explained in that the rural idyll first rose through nostalgic longings in the city for the countryside. The new structures did not only leave the urban population in want of fresh air and the wild nature of the countryside. They also lacked roots. Simultaneously, there was an increasing focus on finding a national identity (Hewitt 2013, 167). As the urban society constantly evolved, the urban could not be this safe anchor for their roots. Therefore they saw a need to fasten their national identity in something more stable. The countryside became a safer receptacle for the

English identity, as the countryside was perceived to be unchanging.

English novelists were of great influence in placing the countryside in the centre of the English identity. Buzard explains that "Central to the effort to fill the void at the heart of Englishness were English novelists' increasing attempts to cultivate a nation-feeling (closer to what Herder meant by *Nationalismus*), rather than a jingoistic nationalism, among their readers" (Buzard 2011, 399). He further states that one can interpret "Victorian novels as attempts to comprehend and counteract the cultural emptiness in the category of 'English' that might result from British expansion – to confront, in other words, the 'Anywhere's Nowhere' conundrum that constituted the cost of British success. It permits us to give new force to that 'we' in the Trollope title that might name what the Victorian novel in general was aiming to show: The Way We Live Now (1874 -5)" (Buzard 2011, 399). Novelists were then filling the void of Englishness and helped shaping the nation's identity or 'nation-feeling' in their fictional writing of British societies. Their novels were in many ways a response to a need that was caused in part by the expansion of the empire and of the Industrial Revolution. There was now a new way of life, and the new structures evoked a conundrum of old versus new ideas of Englishness.

The idyll then began as a nostalgic longing for the rural and consequently became an emblem for British national identity. According to Mischi:

> Englishness, which is taken here simply as the set of representations associated with being English, is closely tied in with an imagined rural world. A feeling for country life is supposed to relate to a feeling for the Nation according to the dominant ideological schemas circulated particularly from the 19th century onwards (Mischi 2009, 1).

Here Mischi connects the rural idyll of the eighteen hundreds to the entire nation. Fisher further eloquently explains the connection of the rural idyll landscape as a part of national identity in the following: "The unique and incommunicable beauty of the English landscape constitutes for most Englishmen the strongest of all the ties which bind them to their country. However far they travel, they carry the English landscape in their hearts" (Fisher 1933, 15). Fisher describes how the British people virtually carry with them the English countryside in their hearts, and that the countryside connects them to the nation. The rural as tied to the British citizens' nation-feeling is established amongst scholars, and equally so English novelists' role in placing the rural idyll in the national identity. What then was Gaskell's role amongst these novelists?

Gaskell has been placed among the writers and artists who, by their portrayal of a rural idyll, came to influence the national identity**.** This is pointed out by Duncan, who asserts that it is essentially "the splendid zenith of mid-Victorian fiction, from *Cranford* to *Middlemarch*, in which "provincial life" assumes the burden of national representation" (Duncan 2008, 322). *Cranford* is here described as representing the entire nation in its depiction of rural life. Duncan additionally remarks that in "the great novels of Gaskell, Trollope and Eliot the provincial country town or parish becomes the generic and typical setting of a traditional England, responsive to the pressures of modernity (politics, debt, fashion, crime) that have overwhelmed metropolitan life, but resisting or absorbing them" (Duncan 2008, 332). The agrarian settings in the novels of Gaskell, Trollope and Eliot represent, in his opinion, prototypical English sceneries.

Moreover, Gaskell and other novelists' part in making the English countryside particularly English in consequence excluded the urban. According to Kumar "the 'rural-nostalgic vision' of England", which "was the creation of a small avant-garde ('or rather a derrière-garde') of writers and intellectuals", consequently "did not reflect the attitudes of the great mass of urbanized English" (Kumar 2003, 295). Writers and authors of the nineteenth century, who instigated the idyll through rural nostalgia fueling the Arcadia, thereby excluded the urban in their portrayals of England. When the rural is included as particularly British, then in a sense the urban becomes excluded from the national identity**.**

From the previous discussion, it is clear that the writers of the nineteenth century, with their writing of rural areas, had a considerable influence on forming the national identity, and of placing romanticised elements of the rural idyll in the national identity itself. Cranford has even been placed among these works of influence. While keeping in mind that the facets of the national identity are not absolute and specific (in accordance with Anderson's ideas of national communities), what are the traces of national identity in *Cranford*?

First of all, there are two topics that would be highly relevant to discuss here, which I will not elaborate on since I have discussed these elements of the rural idyll elsewhere in the thesis. A discussion of scenery would be relevant in relation to the national identity. In chapter 1, I describe the rural idyll setting/scenery, which captures England as a 'green and pleasant' land and that Gaskell employs some scenery depictions, which fall into the prototypical rural idyll landscape category. From this chapter it is apparent that some scenery depictions greatly correspond to the rural idyll and in consequence to this idea of England as a beautiful rural country. These scenery portrayals are, however, relatively rare, and some scenery depictions counters the rural idyll.

In chapter 2, I discuss another element, which would be highly relevant to discuss here but which I will exclude since I have already addressed this topic: the kindness of the Cranford community. Kindness and pleasantness are often described as English ideals. J.B. Priestley for instance, notes that the national character includes "the natural kindness and courtesy of the English people" (Priestly in Mandler 2006, 168). Moreover, describing the community in the Cranford village, Nina Auerbach explains that Cranford is "a homely little village … a sadly withering root of English kindness and community" (Auerbach 1978, 77). Thereby, Auerbach connects the English ideal of goodness to the fictional society in Cranford. In chapter 2 I discuss how the community exhibits exceptional generosity and kindness towards one another. In this regard the community agrees with this idea of the English character. The following discussion will be concerned with rural 'others', views of the foreign, ethnocentrism, and national commodities.

Cranford and the Foreign 'Other'

Gaskell implicitly debates perceptions of the foreign 'other' in *Cranford*. Accordingly, she was ahead of her time in making her novel criticise prejudiced viewpoints of foreigners. Extensive accounts have already been written on Victorian literature that portrays the imperial force's viewpoints of 'others': the orient, and the foreign in general. Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad are examples of authors who have been widely debated with this focus (see for instance Grebe 2003, (2), on imperialism and criticism pertaining to Kipling's literary work, and Peters 2013, (97) on Conrad's critical reception). There is, however, limited literary criticism directed towards attitudes of the 'other' in rural societies of the Victorian period. This appears to be the situation in spite of the fact that the field rural studies has considerable amounts of scholarly work which addresses how rural societies are particularly prone to be racist and sceptical of the foreign. In the consequent discussion I will demonstrate how Gaskell's *Cranford* in fact reveals and to some extent ridicules rural xenophobia.

I will stipulate an example from the novel. The chapter 'The Panic' features the occurrence of a burglary in the village, and in this episode it is evident that the women in Cranford, and Miss Pole in particular, have definite views on the trustworthiness of the typical Cranford citizen, the Englishman and the foreigner. From the fictional characters' perceptions it is ascertainable that foreigners are viewed as bucolic 'others'. In addition, the identity of the small town is ascertainable from how the narrator describes the Cranford characters' view of their own society. First, it will be beneficial to consider how the Cranfordians view themselves: "Cranford had so long piqued itself on being an honest and moral town, that it

had grown to fancy itself too well-bred to be otherwise" (108). The town characters themselves proudly uphold an agreed upon identity as a moral and honest community. This belief is rooted in the village society; therefore it is difficult for them to imagine the town to be any different. The peace and their belief in Cranford as a moral town is, however, threatened when there is a burglary in the village. In line with their belief of the Cranford inhabitants as just, Miss Smith explains that the women momentarily exclude all Cranford inhabitants from suspicion, and assume that the robber must be someone from the outside:

> But we comforted ourselves with the assurance we gave each other, the robberies could never have been committed by any Cranford person; it must have been a stranger or strangers who brought this disgrace upon the town, and occasioned as many precautions as if we were living among the Red Indians or French. (108)

From this extract it is obvious that within Cranford society, they see their neighbours as reliable. However, the narrator contrasts their society of reliable inhabitants with the Indians and French. While Indians and French who do not belong to this identity/characterization are viewed as undependable, to be English is to be an upright model citizen. Consequently, reliability is a part of the town identity and also of the English identity. Essentially, their view of foreigners (perhaps particularly the French and the Indians) is one of skepticism. It is additionally worth remarking the adjective "red", which is employed to designate the Indians. The term "Red Indians" was first applied to the Boethucks who formerly lived in Newfoundland, and to call the Indians "red Indians" was frequent in the 1800s (Howley 2014, xix). Moreover, the Victorian perceptions of Indians and other 'races' were often racist. I will discuss Victorian attitudes to race and other nations later in relation to the ethnocentric viewpoint in Victorian Britain as a part of the national identity later in this chapter.

The 'ethnic white' individual is, furthermore, often considered an embedded element of the national identity and the rural idyll. Mischi asserts that "as an instrument for legitimizing membership of a specific nation, representations of the English countryside rely on the symbolic staging of a socially pacified and ethnically pure place, that is a place without class conflict and without non-white populations"(Mischi 2009, 3). Hence the epitomic rural British individual is seen as 'ethnic' white, diplomatic and dependable as well as a rural citizen. Misci further explains that the "[r]ural scenery is mobilized as a symbol of English national identity: like whiteness or Anglo-Saxon character, they are part of the construction of

a legitimate order. Thus the predominant rural image is one of a place that is white, orderly, pacified, unchanging" (Mischi 2009, 3). Then non-white, multicultural individuals are in consequence excluded from the rural idyll and correspondingly the national identity. Williams and Johnson make the same statement when they argue that the countryside as an ethnic 'pure white' space is a part of the rural idyll and the national character: "deeply embedded constructions of the rural idyll are, not only to notions of 'whiteness' but also to notions of British national identity, and more specifically constructions of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish national identity" (Williams and Johnson 2012, 130). That the rural idyll is a space of white individuals, and that the ethnic white colour is thought to be a part of the national identity, is further present in Askins' appeal to reconsider these constructions: "To disrupt the dominant understanding that 'real Englishness is tied up with a 'rural idyll', and that both are white, involves not just an examination of racism in the countryside, but demands rethinking Englishness itself" (Askins 2006, 150). An examination of the rural idyll and ethinc colour is needed according to Askins. This is because there are many who do not adhere to the label of the white individual in the countryside idyll and national identity. The fact that not everyone fits the typical rural idyll citizen which has become embedded in the national identity aligns with Bell's argument that the rural idyll is a "monocultural idyll" which produces "*rural abject* – those people and things dispelled from the idyll, rendered other cast out (Kristeva, 1982)" (Bell 2006, 151). Based on the work of Julia Kristeva, Bell denotes the "rural others" for "rural abject". Ilbery similarily, points out the exclusionary character of the idyll and states that "(n)ot all people living in rural areas conform to the rural idyll of a white heterosexual, middle-class male who is able and of sound mind" (Ilbery 2014, 4).

Miss Poole's theories of the robbery accentuate a view of skepticism towards Indians and French; rendering them rural abject. A general suspicion towards foreigners (not only Indians and French) is further palpably present in the following: "The Cranford people respected themselves too much, and were too grateful to the aristocracy who were so kind to live near the town, ever to disgrace their bringing up by being dishonest or immoral; therefore, we must believe that the robbers were strangers – if strangers, why not foreigners?" (108). It is evident from Miss Pole's utterances that foreigners are seen as more likely to partake in dishonest conduct than a native English individual. Mrs. Poole's reasoning continues, and eventually her logic based on national origins makes Signor Brunoni the prime suspect of the burglary:

> Signor Brunoni spoke broken English like a Frenchman, and though he wore a turban like a Turk, Mrs. Forester had seen a print of Madame de Staël with a turban on, and another of Mr. Denon in just such a dress as that in which the conjuror had made his appearance; showing clearly that the French, as well as the Turks, wore turbans: there could be no doubt Signor Brunoni was a Frenchman – A French spy, come to discover the weak and undefended places in England. (109)

On the whole then, due to his foreign origin Signor Brunoni becomes the scapegoat in the incident of the burglary. It is further interesting to see how Miss Pole draws the conclusion that Signor Brunoni must be French due to a broken accent. She insists on his French origin in spite that he wears a "turban like a Turk"(109). Consequently, his appearance allegedly reveals "that the French, as well as the Turks, wore turbans" (109). However, it should be remarked that France has never been thought of as a nation where people wear turbans. If anything, the conclusion Miss Pole makes of Frenchman frequently wearing turbans, discloses how thoroughly preoccupied she is with perceiving Signor Brunoni as a threatening Frenchman. Gaskell wrote this novel before the *Entente cordiale* signed by the French and the United Kingdom in 1904. The *Entente cordiale* agreement marked the beginning of an alliance between the French and the English. Before this contract, the United Kingdom and the French engaged in a series of wars, most recently the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). This is presumably what she alludes to when she utters: "A French spy, come to discover the weak and undefended places in England" (109). In essence, in this incident of the burglary the Cranford women give their opinion – first on what it means to be Cranfordian – secondly on what it means to be English. Significantly, the town identity is one of moral citizens, while foreigners, and particularly Mr. Brunoni, becomes what Kristeva refers to as 'rural abject', and he is considered less moral than other Cranford citizens.

What we see in *Cranford* elucidates an important aspect of the construction of national identities, which is the consequent formation of 'others' to the national identity. Addressing the concept of national identity Kleiner-Liebau explains that "national identity is constructed defining itself explicitly or implicitly in contrast to an 'Other'" and that to call some characteristics unsuitable will **"**trigger the explicit or implicit reproduction of categories characteristic for national identity" (Kleiner-Liebau 2009, 34). This dynamic of exclusion and inclusion is manifested through the distinction of characteristics between nations. These exclusions are further seen in the construction of 'rural others'. When Bell addresses the rural idyll he poses the question: "If the idyll is a symbolic resource for shoring up national

identity, then that means it should be for everyone" (Bell 2006, 151). However, he writes that "the rural idyll is actually an exclusive and exclusionary place" (Bell 2006, 151), emphasising that these "exclusions are, moreover, *symbolic* as well as material" (Bell p. 151). Cloke similarly states: "a cultural concern for the 'other' has been drawn by the magnetism of the rural, where there is a rich tapestry of myth and symbolism capable of hiding or excluding othered identities" (Cloke 1997, 369). Bell and Cloke point out how romanticising the rural has lead to an exclusion of other identities. Even though the national identity should incorporate the entire nation, the national identity eliminates many of its own inhabitants. The national identity, then, is exclusionary within its country as the characteristics do not fathom all citizens, and it is exclusionary towards other countries. Even though the theme of national identity and constructions of the various 'others' are highly relevant to the topic of national identity itself, this thesis is only concerned with exclusions from the rural idyll and bucolic 'others' in the national identity. In *Cranford* these include culture and ethnicity.

Julian Wolfreys is among those who address the foreign aspect within Gaskell's fiction. He asserts that Gaskell writes in *Cranford* and *Cousin Phillis* of "a positive or fruitful "progression"; such movement may be "tainted" by a shallow appropriation of the foreign inimical to the health of Englishness. This does of course raise another problem: that of a resistance to the foreign simply because it is foreign" (Wolfreys 1994, 89). According to Wolfreys, Gaskell writes of the 'progression' of the period, and that this progression may lead to a fear or scepticism of the foreign and its influence on Englishness. This seems to me to be a valid argument. Even though the United Kingdom was a forerunner in the industrial era and modelled progression for other nations, they had much contact with other countries, and they too stood the 'risk' of being influenced by these countries. Aversion of foreign influence is for instance present in *Cranford* in the incident when Mr. Holbrook returns from Paris, which I also addressed in chapter 1. When Mr Holbrook returns from Paris his ardour for nature has diminished, he becomes sick and eventually dies. Miss Pole exclaims that "Paris has much to answer for, if its killed my cousin Thomas, for a better man never lived" (48). It is the foreign city Paris which is blamed for Mr. Holbrook's death. Thus the foreign (and urban) has a devastating effect upon the prototypical idyll figure with a reverence for the seasons and the natural surroundings – a setting which corresponds to the English landscape ideal as well as the rural idyll. See also chapter 1.

Wolfreys further seems to suggest that Gaskell does not write of the foreign influence as a 'problem' but rather addresses the more exotic aspects of new commodities, and differences in style of clothing and taste. According to Wolfreys, "Gaskell avoids the problem

– she does not actively avoid it but encounters it through desistance, knowing the problem to be unavoidable – focusing on the issue from another angle, moving to another situation not complicit with identity's sense of power over the foreign" (Wolfreys 1994, 89). Wolfreys continues: "Gaskell chooses to think through the relationship of the domestic self and the foreign other. She does not attempt to represent the foreign as *such* (such a mode being, of course, impossible without the violence of mastery). The author focuses instead on the appropriation of a certain style in clothing, taste and thought" (Wolfreys 1994, 89). Wolfreys thus seems to make the argument that Gaskell's angle of "desistance" when addressing the foreign is with a focus on the foreign manners of dressing, thinking and of differences in preferences, set in contrast to "the foreign as *such*". What exactly he means by "foreign *as such*" is not immediately clear. However, he asserts that she avoids addressing influence as problematic, through an angle of desistance. It seems, then, that Wolfreys argues that Gaskell avoids addressing foreign aspects that are negative or problematic. Of negative ways to regard the foreign, prejudiced perceptions of foreigners, such as xenophobia, are central.

Correspondingly, I do not fully agree with this reading of Gaskell's work. I agree with that there are several instances where the foreign is addressed with the focus he mentions, in for instance style of clothing. An example may be when Signor Brunoni is said to wear the "turban like a Turk" (108), and Miss Matty admits that she "should have liked something newer, I confess – something more like the turbans Miss Betty Barker tells me queen Adelaide wears" (98) when she is given a typical English bonnet. But the instance where Brunoni is accused for theft due to his foreign origin essentially reveals that several of the characters do not merely focus on foreign clothes or taste as exotic. Many of them are xenophobic, and regard the foreign as unwanted, problematic – even threatening.

Ethnocentrism is often related to xenophobia, and the ethnocentric viewpoint held by many in Victorian England is an important point to include in the general regard for 'foreigners'. It is also imperative in a discussion of Victorian national identity. Sumner, known for coining the term, describes that 'ethnocentrism' is "the technical name for the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (Sumner 1906, 13). This view is often a top-down view where one's own culture is placed above others, and where an individual or a group judges other cultures negatively through the reference of the perceiver's civilisation.

The Victorian hierarchy resulting from the ethnocentric perspective is largely explained by Bolt in the following: "Victorians' ethnocentrism allowed them to think in terms of a cultural hierarchy, in which Western civilisations occupied first place, followed by those

of the East, and with the stagnant, technologically backward cultures of Africa and the Pacific at the bottom" (Bolt 2013, 27). Western cultures were regarded as above other nations, and 'underdeveloped' countries within Africa and some areas belonging to the Pacific region were considered to be less 'valuable' cultures.

Additionally, often the British people viewed themselves as superior to other western countries and placed themselves at the very top of the hierarchy. Trollope declared in *The East Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859), "We [British] have risen so high that we may almost boast to have placed ourselves above national glory. The welfare of the coming world is now the proper care of the Anglo-Saxons" (Trollope 1859, 85). Trollope further praises the British nation's mission to "civilize countries, and instruct in truth and knowledge" (Trollope 1859, 84), however, he also argues that the British nation should be a helper to the world, rather than 'kings' and rulers over other nations (Trollope 1859, 84). British ethnocentrism permeates Trollope's argument of instructing other nations in truth and knowledge, but it should also be emphasised that his ethnocentric view made him want to provide help rather than dominate in line with imperialism. The ethnocentrism that fuelled the imperial forces did not have these concerns. Hence, the ethnocentric viewpoint of Victorian Britain was nuanced. For some ethnocentrism justified imperialism and trespasses towards other nationalities, while for others, like Trollope, ethnocentrism lead to a view that Britain had a responsibility to educate, which (in their opinion) was to render help to other nations.

The ethnocentric perspective is further known to be present in several British novels of the nineteenth century. Edward Said, renowned for coining the term 'orientalism', described how English Victorian novels paint a figurative image of England at the centre of a map where all nations are connected to England. According to Said, the novelists of the nineteenth century reflected this ideological map in their novels, it was "a slowly built up picture with England – socially, politically, morally charted and differentiated in immensely fine detail – at the centre and a series of overseas territories connected to it at the peripheries" (Said 1994, 88). This image was fuelled by the ethnocentric viewpoint in the imperial era, and writers established this viewpoint even further in their novels: "[t]he continuity of British imperial policy throughout the nineteenth century – in fact, a narrative is actively accompanied by this novelistic process, whose main purpose is not to raise more questions, not to disturb or otherwise preoccupy attention, but to keep the empire more or less in place" (Said 1994, 88). Said accentuates that these authors had no agenda to question the imperial forces, but to secure the empire.

In her work *Domesticity, Imperialism, and Emigration in the Victorian Novel* (2002),

Diana Archibald similarly describes how "Many Victorian novelists shared the assumption that England, regardless of its problems, was and somehow should be, the center of the world" (Archibald 2002, 183). She further accentuates that "[t]hough novelists such as Gaskell, Trollope, Butler, Dickens, Reade, and Thackeray differed in terms of their political ideologies and though they also chose a variety of genres as vehicles of expression, they all appear for the most part to have attempted to use their writing to support this imperial center" (Archibald 2002, 184). Amongst many authors, Gaskell is here noted to have supported the imperial force. Archibald further explains that Gaskell's "scathing critique of English industrialisation, too, is meant to spark not revolution but reform, and thus serve to improve the center" (Archibald 2002, 184). I will, however, question whether there is an apparent link between Gaskell's critique of industrialisation, and of writing that supports "the imperial center" (Archibald 2002, 184). Perhaps she means that Gaskell's critique of the industrial revolution is constructive, and thus Gaskell meant to improve the nation and the centre by her criticism. However, it seems to me that this would only support the centre/government's work within the country, not their external imperialism. Constructive criticism of internal politics does not immediately translate into the support of external politics (even if the imperial conduct relied on the economy of the industrial revolution). Nevertheless, it seems fair to suggest that ethnocentrism was a part of British national identity of the 1800s and that many novelists reflected this perspective and propagated it further in their writing.

If we then look at *Cranford*, I find that Gaskell does not seem to write with an agenda to promote an ethnocentric viewpoint in her novel; however, several of her characters reflects the ethnocentric view. In this sense she addresses the problem of xenophobia, but she does not support this prejudiced viewpoint herself. If anything I would say she ridicules it through dramatic personalities with histrionic gestures such as Miss Pole. For instance, this seems to be the case in the incident of the burglary, which I also discussed earlier in this chapter. The top-down ethnocentric perspective is ascertainable when the Cranford inhabitants see themselves and English citizens in general to be moral. The Cranfordians could never "disgrace their bringing up by being dishonest or immoral"(108) therefore they naturally assume "that the robbers were strangers – if strangers, why not foreigners?" (108). Their own culture and society is viewed as upright; however, foreigners are degraded when they are considered as immoral in comparison to the English people. As such this incident reflects the Cranford society's ethnocentric viewpoint.

Further, Gaskell appears to satirize this viewpoint by underlining the hysterical reactions in the village as excessive and unnecessary. Lady Glenmire is unconvinced of the

grounds for all the panic in this event, and consequently "broke in with a very strong expression of doubt as to whether this last story was not an entire fabrication founded upon the theft of a cat"(126), and that "two little boys had stolen some apples from Farmer Benson's orchard, and that some eggs had been missed on a market-day of Widow Hayward's stall" (126). This doubt is, however, not well received by the other women. The narrator explains how "that was expecting too much of us; we could not acknowledge that we had only this small foundation for all our panic" (126). The Cranford women could not recognise and admit that they overdramatized the rumors of the robbery. In particular "Miss pole drew herself up at this remark" (126). However, the narrator "was not surprised at Miss Pole's manner of bridling up, and [she was] certain, if Lady Glenmire had not been 'her ladyship', we should have had a more emphatic contradiction than the 'Well, to be sure!"(126). Through this event, Gaskell accordingly ridicules the ethnocentric viewpoint by depicting characters, which clearly overreact with their ethnocentric perspective and conviction of a malevolent foreign robber.

Before we leave the topic of the foreign, the relationship to India, 'Jewel of the Crown' of the British Empire, is of further importance. India is mentioned on several occasions in the novel. Peter Jenkyns enrols in the English army and lives in India for several years. When he returns to the village, he has numerous stories to tell from his time abroad. Peter soon becomes a favourite in Cranford because of his many accounts of the Asian continent: The "ladies vied with each other who should admire him most; and no wonder; for their quiet lives were astonishingly stirred up by their arrival from India – especially as the person arrived told more wonderful stories than Sindbad the Sailor; and, as Miss Pole said, was quite as good as an Arabian Night any evening" (180)[5]. His accounts are considered more exiting than the adventure stories of Sinbad the sailor. However, Mary Smith suspects that he is not entirely truthful in his representation, and that his enthusiasm made his stories sound more exuberant than they were in reality. But she contemplates that "I don't think the ladies in Cranford would have considered him such a wonderful traveller if they had only heard him talk in the quiet way he did to him. They liked him better, indeed, for being what they called "so very Oriental" (180). Peter is regarded as oriental, and to be oriental is evidently exciting in Cranford. Ingham describes this fascination with the oriental as "exotic" and "tinged with the magic and mystery of the orient" (Ingham p. 257).

The general regard for India as thrilling is further manifested in the conversation

[5] Gaskell was called the wonderful storyteller of the Arabian Nights by Charles Dickens (see Stoneman p. 63).

between Miss Smith and Mrs. Brunoni. Mrs. Smith enquires with excitement: "Have you been in India? Said I, rather astonished" (129), to which Mrs. Brunoni acknowledges that she indeed visits India on frequent occasions: "Oh yes! Many a year, ma'am." (129). However, Mrs. Brunoni herself does not look at India with excitement as the other Cranford ladies do. In fact she describes India with a negative connotation: "Six children died off, like buds nipped ultimately, in that cruel India" (129). For Mrs. Brunoni, who has lived in India, the country is not exciting; she rather considers it unkind, "cruel", and responsible for the death of her children. There is accordingly a contrast between the view of the women in Cranford, who had never been abroad, and Mrs. Brunoni, who had been in India herself.

The foreign as threatening is additionally addressed in relation to Mr. Holbrook's death. In chapter 1, I describe how Holbrook's love for nature is symbolically killed by the foreign/urban influence of Paris. Correspondingly, I find that the foreign is sometimes described as thrilling and sensational, while on other occasions the foreign is seen as threatening. Furthermore, Linda Colley contends the following: "we usually decide who we are by reference to who we are not" (Colley 1992, 311). Colley asserts that this applies to the classifications of national identity. Then if the foreign is considered dangerous, as is the case in *Cranford*, the mother country (England) is perceived to be safe, and if the foreign is seen as exciting and exotic, which is also seen in *Cranford,* then consequently one's own nation is (presumably) viewed as commonplace, and perhaps even dull to some degree. In this way, presumptions of the foreign reveal how the mother nation is perceived and what are considered included parts of the national identity.

The National Beverage in Cranford

Commodities are often embedded in national identities. The British identity is no exception. From the nineteenth century tea has frequently been viewed as particularly British, and we see aspects of how this plays out in Gaskell's novel. Furthermore, even though tea is not particularly rural or urban, it is still embedded in the rural idyll**.** This is ascertainable in Stewart's description of the arcadia: "an image of England as a rural idyll, an England where one has tea on the lawn, where gentlemen wear bowler hats and watch cricket" (Stewart 2012, 170). Drinking tea on the lawn, enjoying the serene beautiful nature and attending to leisure activities in the outdoors are associated with the bucolic idyll. The countryside is a place where sweet tea flows like water. The centrality of this beverage in the novel is reflected in the Oxford Classic editions of *Cranford* from 2011 and 2014, whose covers both show photos of elegant porcelain teacups. However, before I address what role tea has in *Cranford*, it is

reasonable to contemplate exactly how tea is a part of the English national identity. The Victorian writer George Gissing declared that "In nothing more is the English genius for domesticity more notably declared than in the institution of this festival – almost one may call it – of afternoon tea … The mere chink of cups and saucers tunes the mind to happy repose" (Gissing 1909, 237). Gissing refers to the "English genius for domesticity", thereby he makes the statement that of common characteristics of English households, the custom of afternoon tea is the most salient.

Furthermore, in her text "'A typically English Brew', Victorian Histories of Tea and Representations of English National Identity"(2008), Julie E. Fromer describes how "In the nineteenth century, tea became an icon of English domesticity and was associated with privacy, intimacy, and the nuclear family" (Fromer 2008, 26). She further contends that "[a]ccording to nineteenth-century tea histories and advertisements, tea helped to define English identity, character, and class values" (Fromer 2008, 26). Tea became a symbolic 'beverage – an icon of England, its values, and its identity. In addition, this drink had a unifying effect on various divisions, even on class distinctions. The upper, the middle, and the lower classes could all indulge in the new commodity. In this manner "[t]ea united the English people, temporarily erasing the boundaries between individuals to unify the nation into a coherent whole" (Fromer 2008, 26).

However, the process of tea becoming an emblem of the nation was not entirely unproblematic**.** English tea was imported from China and "perceiving China as the 'other' and depending on Asian tea to produce a sense of English national identity threatened to collapse the distinctions upon which that national identity was formulated" (Fromer 2008, 27). In consequence, various histories of tea in the nineteenth century "suggest the potential dangers of consuming the Orient – anxiety of ingestion, the threat of pollution, and frightingly permeable cultural boundaries" (Fromer 2008, 27). If tea was from China, could it be the national beverage? There was a fear that the cultural borders could be threatened. Therefore, there were various approaches to how one could perceive tea as a part of the national identity.

One strategy was to make individual packages for the tea, where the design signalled a tie to England rather than to China. Another approach was to revel "in the permeable boundaries created by globalism, taking pride in Britain's position as consumer of the world's goods" (Fromer 2008, 28). According to Fromer, both these approaches were seen as lacking and therefore "[a] third, more powerful strategy involved shifting the boundaries of nation – expanding the British Empire to include territories able to produce and manufacture tea, thus

creating a safe, British source of the national beverage" (Fromer 2008, 28). The new colonised areas became safer shores for the production of tea.

The first British tea plantation was in an already colonised area: Assam in India. The reasons for shifting their trade from China to Assam included the East Indian Company's loss of monopoly on importing tea from China, the inconveniences following the opium regulations and the opium wars (Cunliffe 2011, 31–33), and the significant discovery of the tea plant, *camellia sinensis,* in Assam: a discovery which enabled them to build their own plantation (Broomfield 2007, 63).

Tea first came in sale in England in 1658. It was then restricted to wealthier citizens. However, when Thomas Twinings saw potential in selling the beverage for cheaper prices and thus expanding the market, tea became a commodity for the everyday citizen. The traditions for tea developed continuously, and from the novel it is evident that the Cranfordians do not adhere to the (then) latest fashion of after noon tea, signalling that they, here as is the case with dress-fashion, do not follow the latest mode (see chapter 4 for a discussion of dressing). This is quite possibly a means for Gaskell to show that the latest fashion was a part of urban areas, while rural areas like Cranford were outmoded in comparison.

In her book *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History* (2007)*,* Broomfield asserts the following: "English gentlewomen had been drinking tea with friends and families in their homes for many decades prior to the Victorian era; however, no ritual had been established whereby people stopped their activities around four o´clock and convened for tea and cake"(Broomfield 2007, 65). Here she refers to the classic afternoon tea. Broomfield explains that "Instead, most well-to-do people had been taking tea and light refreshment after an afternoon or early evening dinner" (Broomfield 2007, 65). Before the 1840's and 1850's the middle and upper classes began to have dinner in the evening instead of the afternoon as they did before. When the custom for the English people was to have dinner in the afternoon, the norm was to indulge in an after dinner tea. However, in the early mid 1800s it became increasingly normal to eat dinner at evening times. With the move of dinner times the new custom was to have an afternoon tea alone, and not after dinner as they did previously. Broomfield further observes that in Cranford the characters have after dinner tea, not afternoon tea which was becoming increasingly fashionable. Broomfield explains:

> Elisabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853), set in the Victorian era but in a fictional village far removed from fashion and new trends, is replete with this type of scene as well. After dining in their homes in early evening, the Cranford ladies (many on tight

> budgets but genteel, nonetheless) gather for tea and paper thin slices of bread and butter afterwards at a hostess's home. (Broomfield 2007, 65)

The new trend of afternoon tea is, as Bromfield remarks, not depicted as a part of the Cranford fictional society. They pertain to the previous custom where when dinner was in the afternoon, the norm was to indulge in an after dinner tea. Broomfield does not give an example of this from the novel, but we can see that this plays out in the incident where the Cranford ladies dine at lady Jamieson's mansion.

At Mrs. Jamieson we see an unease in the Cranford ladies when the tea-tray is not brought directly after dinner, and they are made to wait for tea. The restlessness of the characters, while they await their after dinner tea, reveals how embedded the custom is of having tea at a particular time. Mr Mulliner, a servant, had forgotten to bring the tea-tray: "Mrs. Jamieson, meanwhile, was absorbed in wonder why Mr. Mulliner did not bring the tea; and, at length the wonder oozed out of her mouth"(92). Lady Glenmire then offers to ring the bell on Mulliner. They discuss the matter further and Mary Smith narrates: "[w]e should have liked our tea, for we dined at an earlier hour than Mrs. Jamieson" (93) signalling that since it was after dinner, tea would be natural to expect, she then also satirically contemplates that "I suspect Mr. Mulliner had to finish the 'St. James's Chronicle' before he chose to trouble himself about tea" (93). Eventually, "lady Glenmire at last grew quite impatient, but it was a pretty kind of impatience after all; and she rung the bell rather sharply, on receiving a half permission from her sister-in-law to do so" (93). Tea, already a part of the national identity in the Victorian era, proves to be a significant element of the novel characters' customs, and we see clearly that this novel adheres to the previous custom of teatime. They do not follow the latest fashion/custom of behaviour, nor do they adhere to the latest vogue of dressing, which Miss Smith accentuates in her many letters (see also chapter 4). The rural society follows the urban areas when it comes to new trends, but only after some time. In *Cranford* this is manifested among others things in the time of day to indulge in the national beverage.

The national beverage is an essential element of the story. It is not significant in that it drives the story forward, or that it has a pivotal impact on the plot (plot is perhaps a misleading term when addressing *Cranford,* as this novel is often described to be without a plotline). Tea is important for the backdrop of the Cranford society, and for the social activities in the novel. Furthermore, when Miss Matty is to start a business to find a new source of income after her bank became insolvent, she then turns her residence into a teahouse. The only commodity she sells is tea, and it seems worth remarking that while there

are not many commodities which can create a surplus, by merely selling that one product, the numerous teahouses which had been in England since the eighteenth and nineteenth century proved that this merchandise had the necessary demand for such single commodity stores. Gaskell's own choice to make Miss Matty chose tea as business manoeuvre also elucidates the centrality of tea in the period.

Furthermore, a view of green tea as less desirable than black was a normal perception in the Victorian society. This estimation of green tea as venomous is found in the novel, as Miss Matty's disregard for green tea makes her strongly advise against her customers buying it. That green tea was perceived to be venomous is seen in for instance *The Book of Health* printed in 1866. This book cautioned people from consuming green tea as it caused "such a disturbance of the nervous system that the patient suffers from hallucinations of vision and trembling of the muscles" (Colavito 2008, 184). In the nineteenth century it also became known that merchandisers 'corrupted' the tea blend before selling it. These measures included dying tea to make it look more appealing, as well as more drastic procedures of adding gunpowder to the mixture in order to diffuse the tealeaves and in consequence increase the amount. As Bromfield asserts, this adulteration did not end until laws of 1870s outlawed such corruption of tealeaves and by "then, Victorians' taste for green tea had diminished as cheaper black tea was less questioned; by avoiding Chinese tea and buying only black tea from British plantations in India and Ceylon, people were reasonably assured of an unadulterated product" (Broomfield 2007, 64). The conviction of green tea as tampered with and venomous is found in Miss Matty's aversion for green tea. Mary Smith describes that Miss Matty "so plaintively entreated some of her customers not to buy green tea – running it down as a slow poison, sure to destroy the nerves, and produce all manner of evil" (171). Moreover, Mary Smith explains that the customers' "pertinacity in taking it, in spite of all her warnings, distressed her [Miss Matty] so much that I really thought she would relinquish the sale of it, and so lose half her custom" (171).

However, after Mary Smith argues with Miss Matty about her distress of customers buying green tea in spite of all her endeavours of convincing the customers not to buy it, "the final argument, which settled the question, was a happy reference … to the train oil and tallow candles which the Esquimaux not only enjoy but digest" (171). After this remark, Miss Matty eventually comes to acknowledge that even if she would not consume it, "one man's meat might be another man's poison'"(171). Miss Matty then restrains herself from warning her customers of the product. However, she still had an "occasional remonstrance when she thought the purchaser was too young and innocent to be acquainted with the evil effects green

tea produced on some constitutions" (172). Miss Matty's conviction then apparently aligns with the general views of Chinese green tea that emanated up until the prohibition laws in the 1870s.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated various aspects of national identity in relation to the rural idyll and *Cranford*. More specifically, I have considered Gaskell's representations of the foreign 'other'. I have argued that Gaskell ridiculed ethnocentric perceptions of foreigners rendering them rural aject. Gaskell consequently challenges the rural idyll ideal of white ethnic colour. In addition, I have circled in on tea and its function in the novel. I argue that Gaskell demonstrates that the rural society is behind the metropolitan places as the Cranford women adhere to the previous custom of after dinner tea. Further, Gaskell reflects a contemporary social debate of green tea as an adulterated and venomous product.

Chapter 4:

Temporality in *Cranford:* Nostalgia and the Idyllic Chronotope

> "I never knew what sad work the reading of old letters was before that evening, though I could hardly tell why. The letters were as happy as letters could be – at least those early letters were. There was in them a vivid and intense sense of the present time, which seemed so strong and full, as if it could never pass away, and as if he warm living hearts that so expressed themselves could never die, and be as nothing to the sunny earth" (53).

The notion of time, whether it is passing, static or perhaps preserved in a period is central for this thesis chapter. This chapter will address two concepts which engage with temporality and the idyll, nostalgia and the chronotope. First, what is nostalgia and how is this conceptual idea related to the rural idyll?

Nostalgia is central for the existence of a rural idyll in that nostalgia fuelled the emergence of a rural idyll and further stabilised this genre and myth in the time after it first originated. Essentially, nostalgic desire is one of the main reasons that the rural idyll has remained generally unaffected and unaltered for centuries (Little and Austin 1996, 102). The meaning of the word 'nostalgia' initially comes from the Greek word, 'nostos', which denotes a desire to return home, or homesickness (Oxford English Dictionary). Today nostalgia is most often employed with a meaning of longing or desire for the past. In a sense one can regard it as a constructed memory where several negative aspects are eradicated while that which is considered positive remains. The positive fragments are furthermore often described or thought to be better than they were originally. The constructed memory can be the personal recollection of an individual, or it can be a collective memory contained in the consciousness of an entire people group.

The concept of nostalgia further deals with sentiments. This "emotional response to displacement occurs when an individual is separated either physically or emotionally from a specific time and place" (6). Nostalgia hinges on this separation in that it is essentially distance in time and/or space, which makes it possible for a period or event to transform into a romanticised version of reality, and thus to become a nostalgic memory or idea. Since nostalgia is not a historical and accurate evaluation of the past or a distant space, but a recollection or idea of mainly positive features of a period/situation, it is consequently "often

condemned for its inaccuracies, fantasies, biasness, populism, emotionality, and manipulative nature" (Padva p.229).

Davies explains this concept as "a positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstances" (Davis 1979, 18). In addition, he emphasizes that nostalgia is a "subjective state which harbours the largely unexamined belief that things were better (more beautiful) (healthier) (happier) (more civilized) (more exciting)" then the present (Davies 1979, 18). A period remembered better than it was, a period remembered nostalgically, is often called a 'golden age' or 'golden period'.

Even though nostalgia is most often described in relation to the past, this is not always the case. Svetlana Boym explains that "nostalgia has a utopian element, but is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes it is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways" (Boym 2008, xiv). For the population in Victorian urban societies, which longed nostalgically for the countryside, the nostalgic longings were in one way sideways for a distant place since rural areas were not entirely vanquished. In another sense the nostalgia of the Victorian urban population was to the past for a 'prenatal home' since a considerably larger part of the English population had lived in rural areas previously.

Nostalgia for Rural Areas

The Victorian society's nostalgia for the rural idyll is, then, in a sense a longing for a distant countryside, considered to be their 'prenatal home'. In chapter 3 I discuss how the rootlessness of the new urban structures lead to the need for a stable national identity, and that the countryside became a stable anchor to found their roots and identity on. This rootlessness further expressed itself in nostalgia for the rural. It was then particularly the structural changes that facilitated and stirred nostalgia in the Victorian population. This effect of rapid transformation is, moreover, common. Nickolas Dames elucidates that "[a] society for whom mobility and the possibility of rapid change is increasingly likely, nostalgia takes on an ever more central role" (Dames 2001, 14) Rapid changes often result in nostalgia and alter how we perceive our cultural identities.

Michael Bunce addresses nostalgia in relation to the rural idyll in the essay 'Reproducing Rural Idylls' (2003) and explains how the rural idyll relies on nostalgia:

> The values that sustain the rural idyll speak of a profound and universal human need for connection with land, nature and community, a psychology which, as people have

> become increasingly separated from these experiences, reflects the literal meaning of nostalgia; the sense of loss of home, of homesickness. (Bunce 2003, 15)

Humans have a universal need for nature, its origin. Humans also have a universal need for society, and when separated physically and emotionally people feel homesick for its natural origin and for community. This has in turn resulted in nostalgia for rural areas, sentiments that sustain the rural idyll.

Nostalgia for Rural Areas in the Novel

Cranford is often referred to as a nostalgic narrative. According to Schor, *Cranford* is "most often praised for its own quality of loving nostalgia," (Schor 1992, 118). However, while most critics treat *Cranford* as a nostalgic narrative, there are some who disagree. Richard Menke for example states that "Elisabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* exemplifies the conceptual and practical sense of tender comedy and nostalgia for a carefully rendered past. In fact, this tone misleads as *Cranford* is neither so gentle nor so backward looking" (Menke 2008, 251). Menke argues that *Cranford* is perhaps not entirely nostalgic, as it does not depict the past of its urban Victorian readership. Menke therefore choses to modify his first statement. This contention falls on how the term nostalgia can and cannot be used.

There are various discussions on how nostalgia is to be applied. In the discussion above I pointed to Boym, who asserts that nostalgia could be applied sideways. She accordingly describes how nostalgia is not necessarily related to the past. Holbrook further discusses several different views and ways to interpret nostalgia in the text 'On the New Nostalgia': "These Foolish Things" and Echoes from the Dear Departed Past' (1993). He explains how nostalgia can relate to a "prenatal home" (Holbrook 1993, 103). This sense of nostalgia corresponds to Bunce's explanation of nostalgia for the rural idyll, which I have commented above. I will therefore treat *Cranford* as nostalgic in this way. Furthermore, numerous critics who speak of rural nostalgia in the Victorian era use nostalgia when addressing the sentiments which fuelled a rural idyll (e.g. Bohem-Schnitker and Gruss 2014, 58; Steinbach 2012, 190; Treble 1989, 166). Whether or not these yearnings for the countryside qualify to be called nostalgic or not is only significant in determining what word to use when addressing this longing and fondness of the countryside. The phenomenon described remains equally important. However, this ambiguity is relevant to address as Menke's remark and the uses of for instance Treble, Steinbach and Bohem-Schnitker and Gruss are valid depending on the various uses of the term nostalgia.

Essentially, *Cranford* was written for the urban middle-class (Gravil 2007, 5) and since the urban middle-class had nostalgic longings for the increasingly disappearing countryside, *Cranford* becomes a nostalgic narrative in its depiction of a rural community. In this way *Cranford*, which features depictions of country life, appealed to the nostalgia for rural areas in the period. With a basis in the rural idyll, how does *Cranford* engage with nostalgia in the novel?

For one, I will point to the narrator's role as a mediator between town and city. Mary Smith frequently writes letters to the neighbouring city, Drumble. In these letters she describes life in the small town Cranford, to a fictional urban audience who are unfamiliar with rural life. Sometimes she humorously and kindly ridicules the ways of the rural society, as is the case when she writes of the Cranfordian manner of dressing. However, she generally praises it with great devotion. Hughes and Lund point to how Mary Smith is virtually "drawn to the odd little village of Amazons because it is a place where unusual stories can be entertained" (Hughes and Lund 1999, 70). Mary Smith is sentimentally drawn to the small town and she further recounts these unusual stories to her urban readers.

Susan Snaider Lanser explains how Mary Smith's urban background leaves her in a position to observe the inner workings of the village society from an outside perspective through the lenses of an urban citizen:

> Her [Miss Smith's] narrative purpose seems to be to articulate Cranford to Drumble (London?), to explain its "rules and regulations" (1.3), its values, its eccentricities. But unlike the male narrators of female utopias, this narrator comes to speak not only for the community but as the community, and in the process she herself becomes the ground on which the clash of cultures gets worked out. (Lanser 1992, 242)

In this extract Lanser clarifies how Mary Smith's perspective enables her to see the various sides of the Cranford community as eccentric. In this way she becomes a mediator between the city and the countryside. Her descriptions engage the middle-class urban readership, as they are able to relate to her perspectives as both a voyeur and a member of the provincial society in Cranford.

Some examples can be drawn from the narrative of how Mary Smith's letters depict the town life as exotic and thus appeal to nostalgic sentiments of the urban society. Smith describes to her urban audience that she "will answer for it, the last gigot, the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen in Cranford – and seen without a smile (6)". To

wear an old fashioned petticoat in Drumble is inconceivable; however, Miss Smith accentuates that in Cranford wearing a petticoat was not perceived as strange. This is, moreover, a satirical reference to the English poet Robert Southy's writing of English domestic life. In these accounts, Southy ridicules an aunt of his who wore gigot and petticoat after these attires were abolished in the 1830s (Ingham 2008, 233).

Another example where Miss Smith depicts the Cranford society as exotic in her accounts to her urban readership can be ascertained in the following: "I can testify to a magnificent family red silk umbrella, under which a gentle little spinster, left alone of many brothers and sisters, used to patter to church on rainy days. Have you any red silk umbrellas in London?" (6). Mary Smith rhetorically questions if this kind of umbrella could be found in London. This question thus underlines that the umbrella was an abnormal sight, and she explains that the small children mocked this umbrella and called it "a stick in petticoats"(6). This is then a further example of how Mary Smith describes Cranford as an 'exotic' place to those distant from rural communities. In these examples Mary Smith kindly ridicules the society.

However she often genuinely praises the society and the Cranford women. For instance Miss Smith addresses that Miss Matty's response to her bankruptcy "was an example to me, and I fancy it might be to many others" (151). Her admiration for Miss Matty is evident in this account. In addition, the following passage which I also addressed in chapter 2, reveals a general praise for the community: "I had often occasion to notice the use that was made of fragments and small opportunities in Cranford … the little bundles of lavender-flowers sent to strew the drawers of some town dweller, or to burn in the chamber of some invalid" (22) This account and observation of "small opportunities", bounteousness and goodness accentuates the pervasive generosity of the community, as such this passage equally reveals Miss Smith's praise of rural life in her letters. On the whole, Mary Smith's accounts of provincial life are presented as exotic, pleasant, charming and nostalgic.

It is further interesting to see how the episodes in the novel appeal to a dual urban audience with nostalgic longings for the countryside. While Mary Smith writes to a fictional urban audience of the distant rural small town in the novel, Gaskell herself writes to an actual urban audience, appealing to their nostalgic yearnings.

The nostalgia *Cranford* presents falls into nostalgia for the old and the rural/urban dichotomy. Nostalgia for the old rural society is applicable to several of the Cranford characters. They grieve the new structures that have come to bear an influence in the countryside and they favour the old structures. This corresponds with Hell and Schönle's

claim that "nostalgia is not merely antimodern but coeval with the modern project itself" (Boym 2010, 59). It further aligns with Killick's assertion that "the pastoral literature of any period in history draws upon a mythologised, prelapsarian, and idyllic past, where the way of life of the previous generation was comparatively exempt from the incursion of modernity" (Killick 2013, 98). Furthermore, I draw the conclusion that the novel is in opposition to the modern changes from the function that the character Captain Brown has in the narrative line.

Captain Brown is killed by the railroads: a symbol of industrialization. Alan Shelston elucidates that "Captain Brown's railway accident in Cranford written some ten years earlier embodies an element of prophecy", for as he discerns, since "Gaskell…wrote almost all her fiction when not only Britain but the continental countries as well were developing their railway systems – for her, perhaps more than for any other author of the period, the railway was a natural point of reference" (Shelston in Koustinaudi 2011, 72). Captain Brown is killed by railroads while he is engaged reading a number of Dicken's *The Pipwick Papers:* a choice of literature which seems to be far from arbitrary. In *The Pipwick Papers*, Pip and his friends travel in the English countryside by coach; the previous means of transportation, which was in the time of the novel's publication mainly replaced by trains. Railroads often symbolize the coming of industrialization and modernity. Congruently, Captain Brown's death seems to signal a change: the old era and ideals he represents are vanquished by the onslaught of modernity.

Brenda McKay correspondingly describes the function of the railways in Gaskell's fiction as "a visual trope for the encroaching modernity which literarily cuts its way into the pastoral landscape" (McKay 2014, 58). While McKay describes the function of the railroads in Gaskell's novel *The Moorland Cottage* (1850), I will contend that this point equally applies to *Cranford.* I will demonstrate that the industrial development is not portrayed as a positive transition, i.e. the modern development subjugates the provincial areas. This becomes clear in a closer analysis of how Gaskell depicts railroads in the narrative.

There are several examples where Gaskell describes the railroads with highly negative connotations. For instance when the narrator describes Captain Brown she writes that "[h]e was a half-pay captain, and had obtained some situation on a neighboring railroad, which had been vehemently petitioned against the little town" (8). The railroad is described to be "vehemently petitioned" against the village. Correspondingly, this description does not elucidate a relationship where the old applauds the new; rather it reveals a dichotomy where the new is vehement and destructive towards the former way of life. Captain Brown is further described to have a "connection with the obnoxious railroad" (8) Again the railroad is

described negatively, this time by the word "obnoxious". Finally, the same can be said of the following example: "Jenkyns, ma'am! Captain Brown is killed by them nasty cruel railroads! And she burst into tears. She along with many others, had experienced the poor Captain's kindness" (22). Jenny accentuates that the railroads are "nasty" and "cruel". In addition, we see here that the Cranford ladies mourn for his death. The old order is metaphorically killed by a new time, consequently the novel in a sense 'mourns' for the onslaught of industrialization.

It is further possible that Gaskell alluded to Capability Brown, when she chose the name Captain Brown. Capability Brown was an influential individual in the development of the English landscape garden. In fact, Malnar and Vodvarka assert that the name "Lancelot 'Capability' Brown has become synonymous with the eighteeth-century landscape garden" (Malnar and Vodvarka 2004, 90). The coming of the railroads would then emblematically destroy Capability Brown's ideals of landscape beauty. The metaphor of railroads is a forceful and pervasive illustration of how the new structures are seen as a threat, while the former way of life becomes nostalgically longed for – also in the countryside.

In the text 'Nostalgia and Material Culture: Presenting the Past in *Cranford*'(2014) Anne Enderwitz and Doris Feldmann make the argument that *Cranford* welcomes new industrial changes. This is essentially the opposite argument of my contention in the previous paragraphs. Enderwitz and Feldmann argue that the novel does not fall into the typical pattern where the old structure is depicted as a positive state, while in contrast modern development is put forth as a negative progression:

> *Cranford* tells its own nostalgic narrative of a past which successfully synthesizes tradition and progress and embodies the best of two worlds: the values of a romanticized community life before industrialization join up with social reform, modern medical techniques and the pleasures of shopping. The content of nostalgia which the series evokes is then not a traditional rural lifestyle destroyed by modernity but rather their imagined encounter as a success story. (Enderwitz and Feldmann 2014, 57)

According to Enderwitz and Feldmann, *Cranford* is a nostalgically imagined and romanticised retelling of the countryside. They further suggest that *Cranford* depicts the transition brought about by British industrialization as meritorious and successful. In their opinion *Cranford* both celebrates the old state, and welcomes new industrial changes. However, their argument does not correspond to my reading of the novel.

I do not counter their view that *Cranford* is a nostalgic novel and contains nostalgia for the 'old' or increasingly disappearing period. But I do not see that the Cranford society wholly embraces new industrial changes, which they suggest. In my analysis of the evidence something slightly different is going on. I draw this conclusion in part based on the way Gaskell repeatedly addresses the railroads as brutal and undesirable as I have illustrated above.

Enderwitz and Feldmann, moreover, add to their argument that the Cranford society is positively inclined toward several new changes. In their opinion the Cranford women take part in the "pleasures of shopping" (Enderwitz and Feldmann 2014, 57). They also write that the Cranford society "highlights the seemingly innocent pleasures of consumer culture" (Enderwitz and Feldmann 2014, 57). However, this appears to me to be equally questionable. There is a large emphasis on the reluctance of money spending in the novel (see also chapter 1). The narrator explains that "We none of us spoke of money because that subject savoured of commerce and trade" (7). This utterance discloses that the Cranford ladies are opposed to commerce and equally so of consumerism. This view is also prevalent in the following quotation from the novel:

> 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. (8)

To spend money is likened to a sour grape, and described to be "vulgar" (8). This is hardly a society which relishes in a consumer culture, which Enderwitz and Feldmann argue. It is true that the Cranford ladies talk a great deal about various clothes and dresses. However, the narrator makes it clear repeatedly that the dresses they wear are unfashionable and that they spend a minimal amount on their attires: "Their dress is very independent of fashion; as they observe, what does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us? … The materials of their clothes are, in general, good and plain, and most of them are nearly as scrupulous as Miss Tyler" (6).

Dressing in Cranford has received ample attention. This is, however, not because of their delight in consumerism, it is rather the opposite: their ancient manner of dressing i.e. they don't waste money on the newest fashions. For instance in the essay, "Fashion at Cranford"(2008), Ingham remarks that Mary Smith "immediately makes clear that their mode of dress is deliberately archaic, hearkening back to an earlier period" (Ingham 2008, 220). Then, just as they did not welcome the new structures of the railroads, so they also cling to the

old manners of dressing and refuse to be drawn into the consumerism of metropolitan spaces. The nostalgia which the Cranford society depicts is correspondingly nostalgia for the old, which is favored more than the new. Thus they further align with nostalgic sentiments typical for the rural idyll, where rural societies are regarded to be fundamentally superior to the new structures of urban societies. This is one of the few ways that *Cranford* actually corresponds to the rural idyll genre.

A final element should be added to the discussion of whether nostalgia for the old makes the novel consistently favor the old ways of life. In chapter 1 I discuss how Gaskell takes part in a debate concerning women's domestic roles in society. There I argue that the novel adheres to some very new feminist ideas. Ponsoby similarily addresses this point and states that "Although Gaskell is looking back with nostalgia for the quiet life of a country town, she is also presenting a relatively modern point of view. Gaskell held positive views on the single state for women that were expressed in her correspondence" (Prosonby 2013, 148). Here Ponsoby points to the fact that Gaskell herself looked back with nostalgia for the countryside when she wrote *Cranford* as she herself had grown up in the countryside. Furthermore, she points out how Gaskell made the Cranford society an avant-garde society in her portrayal of the utopian female space of the Amazons. Then, while the novel appears to support skepticism for industrialization, it also welcomes new feminist ideals.

The Idyllic Chronotope

It is time to revisit Bakhtin's ideas of the idyll, which I address in the introduction to the thesis. Bakhtin's concept of the idyllic cronotope distinguishes, in his opinion, what classifies the idyll genre. Bakhtin's ideas of the chronotope concerns novelistic 'time' and 'space' and how these aspects unfold and interact with each other in a narrative. Time is according to Bakhtin "the dominant principle in the chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981, 86). Therefore, I will devote more focus on 'time' than on 'space' in the consequent discussion.

Idyll time is cyclical. In cyclical time generations pass, but there is no forward movement in society. The patterns of life repeat themselves from one generation to the next in a cycle. This rhythmical cycle "limits the force and ideological productivity of this time" (Bakhtin 1981, 209) and there is no understanding of "becoming" (Bakhtin 1981, 209). There is no 'metamorphosis' where "an individual becomes other than what he was" (Bakhtin 1981, 115). Metamorphosis in Bakhtin's view signifies that a character experiences "a moment of crisis and rebirth" (Bakhtin 1981, 130) an awakening where the "seekers path" (Bakhtin 1981, 130) becomes clarified. The individual who experiences metamorphosis is

accordingly an individual who is changed through a significant event, or through new thoughts and viewpoints. The lack of metamorphosis in the idyll makes the individuals in an idyll static, as they do not develop psychologically.

This lack of 'becoming' is similarly seen in the characters of a Greek romance. In a Greek romance novel, Bakhtin denotes the time aspect 'adventure-time', and this time aspect involves that "there is a sharp hiatus between two moments of biographical time, a hiatus that leaves no *trace* in the life of the heroes or in their personalities" (90). In the idyll, and in the Greek romance characters do not undergo personality changes and develop psychologically. However, idyll-time is less static than adventure-time, as in adventure-time "the world remains as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change, their feelings do not change, people do not even age. This empty time leaves no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing" (Bakhtin 1981, 91). As is clear from this quotation, adventure-time is literarily 'frozen'. Time does not pass, and strikingly the characters do not even age. This contrasts with idyll-time where generations pass along with time. How, then, does *Cranford* relate to idyll-time?

Time passes in *Cranford*, it is not static as in adventure-time. When considering how the narrative indicates temporal progression, one could mention the various times that the characters look back and reminisce about the past. These recollections point to a society where the characters are in forward movement in time. The flux of time can be seen when Miss Matty describes the diary from her childhood filled with expectations for the future:

> My father once made us,' she began, 'keep a dairy in two columns: on one side we were to put down in the morning what we thought would be the course and events of the coming day, and at night we were to put down on the other side what really happened. It would be to some people rather a sad way of telling their lives'. – (a tear dropped upon my hands at these words) – 'I don't mean that mine has been sad, only so different from what I expected. (127)

The epistolary/diary points at the past; in this way the diary signifies how time has passed in Miss Matty's life. In the early years of Miss Matty's life, she had certain expectations for the future (expectations of marriage and motherhood). Her diary, however, reveals that her hopes earlier in life did not come to pass in the future. The letters, which Miss Matty and Mary Smith revisit in the novel, equally reveal aspects of Miss Matty's past. Miss Matty and Mary Smith read Miss Matty's old letters and place them into the fireplace. While reading the letters, Mary Smith contemplates:

> I never knew what sad work the reading of old letters was before that evening, though I could hardly tell why. The letters were as happy as letters could be – at least those early letters were. There was in them a vivid and intense sense of the present time, which seemed so strong and full, as if it could never pass away, and as if he warm living hearts that so expressed themselves could never die, and be as nothing to the sunny earth. (53).

When they read these letters, they revisit the past. However, the flux of time is slightly interrupted as the content of the letters seemed to bear an "intense sense of the present time" and since the content was almost eternal and could seemingly "never pass away". To this episode Menke remarks that one "subtle element of the text's modernity emerges during its most extended exercise in intratextual nostalgia. As *Cranford*'s narrator, Mary Smith, watches, the aging spinster Matty Jenkyns casts her old family letters into the fire" (Menke 2008, 251). When the letters "burn, the text achieves deft sublation, canceling their physical existence at the moment that it reveals their contents and incorporates those contents into Cranford's narrative itself; the long-frozen flow of manly passions onto paper becomes a new flow of tears from Matty and Mary as well as a flow of nostalgic particulars into the tale" (Menke 2008, 252). The letters are destroyed within the narrative, but the content is not destroyed. It becomes contained within the Cranford story. These letters further make Miss Matty reminisce about the past of her family, and makes her tell the story of Peter and his elopement. Accordingly, she draws the narrative line into an analepsis/ flashback, where the narrative goes back in time.

While we see that Miss Matty's past is elaborated on, making her a subject aging in time, it could be that Mary Smith has un-aging qualities. Ingham asserts that Miss Smith, the narrator, does not appear to age while time passes: The first chapter "is set in the 1830s; the rest of the work apparently in the 1840s and early 1850s; but the narrator, Mary Smith, continues to be treated as a young protégée" (Ingham, xiii). Ingham remarks that in her opinion Mary Smith appears to remain young throughout the story. Ingham further describes how the reader's "dominant impression is of a relatively recent past into which memories of early times infiltrate" (Ingham, xiii). While time appears recent, time passes as Miss Jenkyns dies of old age which agrees with the idyll-time where time moves forward.

However, there does not seem to be any generational focus, which is necessary in order for idyll-time to be cyclical. As mentioned above, in cyclical time history repeat itself and generations live under the same circumstances. Miss Matty's parents are described, but

we learn very little of the society and whether there are any similarities in their circumstances and in the conditions of the Cranford heroines. Then what about coming generations? One can ascertain that there are new emanating structures which counter the cyclical-time. For instance one could mention the new railroads, and the foreign influence of India, which if anything indicates that the society changes and that the following generation will not live under the same circumstances as the heroines of *Cranford.* In addition, I will remark that since the Cranford society is described to be constituted almost entirely of women, and most of them spinsters, the spinster society's lack of children further counters the generational aspect of the cyclical idyll-time. From the previous discussion we can, then, ascertain that the novel is not 'frozen in time' as adventure-time is, and time passes as it does in an idyll. However, the novel does not adhere to the generational aspect of the idyllic chronotope where time becomes a rhythmical cycle. The final time-aspect to be examined is whether the characters undergo Bakhtin's idea of metamorphosis, which means that the character's personality changes.

The inner life of the characters in *Cranford* has received little attention by critics. There are, however, some instances where one can ascertain growth/change that takes place in the fictional characters psychological interior. In the example given above of the diary, Miss Matty explains how she is disappointed at how things turned out during the progress of time. She had expectations for how her life would turn out, these expectations turned instead into regrets. Her youthful dreams have diminished into contemplations of what could have been but did not come to pass. This is not to say that Miss Matty's disposition has transformed completely; however, a sense of youthful hope and aspiration for the future has weakened. There are moreover, several other instances where a character changes psychologically.

In chapter 1, I addressed how the withering and decaying flowers metaphorically illustrate the psychological interior within the characters of Miss Matty's family. Within this narrative analepsis, there is a great shift in the family members. In this period Miss Matty and her family do not follow the static idyllic time without personal development. This is evident since Peter running away affects the entire family, and their internal emotions. The individual who is most affected besides Peter, is presumably Matty's mother, who becomes severely depressed, see also chapter 1.

Mr. Holbrook further undergoes a development in his personality, which I discuss in the same chapter. The urban visit causes a character change where he goes from being a man with vigour for nature and the outdoor scenery, to a man who has completely lost his interest for walking in the forest. Mr. Holbrook, then, further becomes an example of a character

whose disposition changes during the narrative and undergoes metamorphosis. Since some of the characters undergo processes in their personality, the static idyll-time is not followed. What, then, about idyll space?

Idyll space is confined. I will revisit a quotation form the introduction which captures the notion of idyll space as secluded:

> Idylic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live. This little spatial world is limited and sufficient onto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world. (Bakhtin 1981, 225)

The idyll community is separated from other areas; it is an insulated geographical space without outside influences and stimuli. Moretti refers to Gaskell's *Cranford* as a "projected idyll" (Moretti 2005, 25) and relates *Cranford* to Bahktins' idea of the idyll as an isolated space. According to Moretti "in order to keep the genre alive Gaskell must literally hibernate her village: Cranford is presented as a place under siege, hardly alive, where no one dares go anywhere" (Moretti 2005, 25). Moretti thereby makes the claim that in order to write within the genre of the Idyll, Gaskell isolates her village intentionally from other geographical areas.

Recchio does, however, not agree with Moretti's assertion and consequently argues that "to make such a claim applicable to *Cranford,* one would have to ignore Mary Smith's regular travel between Drumble (Manchester) and Cranford (Knutsford), the role of the railroad in enabling such travel, the emergence of the importance of the London road in the Signor Brunoni sequence, and the traffic from India" (Recchio 2009, 24) by several of the characters in the novel. Recchio further claims that "the accumulation of such details from the beginning through the end of *Cranford* demonstrates the consistent movement of human and material traffic in and out of Cranford, linking Cranford in a complex web of places national and international that can best be rendered as crossroads and intersections rather than as an isolated circle"(Recchio 2009, 24). Hence, Recchio demonstrates that there are numerous influences on the society from the spaces outside of Cranford including neighbouring areas and even abroad to the Asian continent. Recchio therefore argues that Moretti's argument depends on a vague set of assumptions.

I concur with Recchio's argument that *Cranford* does not correspond to Bakhtin's idea of the idyll society as an isolated space, which Moretti argues. Therefore, it is essentially my contention that the novel does not adhere entirely to either the space or time aspect of the idyllic chronotope. Since Bakhtin sees idyll-time and idyll-space to determine the very genre

idyll, one can accordingly ascertain that in Bakhtin's generic definition of the 'idyll' *Cranford* is not an idyll.

Conclusion to this Chapter

This chapter has been concerned with nostalgia and the chronotope. These elements engages with, and depend on the notion of temporality. To my discussion on nostalgia, I will conclude that nostalgia has some very interesting functions in relation to the rural idyll. On one hand the book itself was written in a way that appealed to an urban audience with nostalgic longings for countryside and rural themes and subjects. On the other hand these nostalgic longings for the countryside are reflected through the novel's narrator, Mary Smith, and her letters to the city. In these letters, she recounts the small town community's 'exotic' peculiarities with enthusiasm and fascination.

Nostalgic longings furthermore often lead to a disregard for the new or the present: "nostalgia is not merely antimodern but coeval with the modern project itself" (Boym 2008, 59). We see that the Cranford society reflects the disregard for the new and urban, which engendered nostalgia. This is observable in the way that the railroads, a symbol of industrialization, are depicted in the novel. This is also ascertainable in the way that the Cranford women prefer quaint fashion and resist being drawn into consumerism. In this dichotomy between old versus new, *Cranford* falls into the typical pattern where a high regard for the old makes the new seem threatening. The novel, then, adheres to this trait of the idyll. However, my argument in this thesis is still that the novel is not a rural idyll in the traditional sense. While this is one way that the novel engages with the genre, there are in my opinion far more ways that the novel counters the pastoral romance than where it aligns. One of the aspects where the novel counters the idyll is through its engagement with the chronotope.

In the discussion on the idyllic chronotope, I ascertained that *Cranford* does not correspond to this facet of the idyll. While time passes, the novelistic time aspect is not cyclical. The novel does not correspond to the generational aspect of idyll-time, where old and new generations live and breath under the same conditions. Further, the characters are not static as several of them undergo personality changes. I, moreover, pointed out how the novelistic space aspect of an idyll is not fulfilled. Recchio and Morretti have addressed this aspect as related to *Cranford.* While Moretti believes that Cranford pertains to the notion of idyll-space, Recchio challenges this view. I agree with Recchio's reading that *Cranford* does not correspond to Bakhtin's conceptual idea of idyll-space. On the whole, I argue that the

novel does not agree with either idyll-time as cyclical or idyll-space as an isolated circle. *Cranford* accordingly destabilizes the genre further in its relation to the idyllic chronotope.

Chapter 5

A Comparison to *Our Village*

"white blossoms of the sloe woven together with garlands of woodbines and wild briers; – what a fary land! Primroses, cowslips, pansies and the regular open-eyed white blossom of the wood anemone (or to use the more elegant Hampshire name, the windflower) were set under our feet as thick as daisies in a meadow" (97).

The analysis of the rural idyll in *Cranford* will benefit from a comparison to a literary work, which pertains more holistically to the genre, *Our Village- volume 1*. *Our Village* by Mary Russel Mitford was printed along with *Cranford* in *The Series of English Idylls* (1904) (see also my Introduction) and was written just over twenty years before *Cranford*. The two novels bear some general similarities and Gaskell's novel is even called a "rewriting of Our Village" (Moretti 2005, 62). Several critics place this novel in the pastoral idyll genre. Littell and Littell describe that "Miss Mitford's first book was that most charming idyll, 'Our Village' where the scent of the fresh-mown hay lingers on every page, and where the men and women are living rustics, yet with the idealizing sheen of the summer sun upon them" (Littell and Littell 1859, 678). Killick similarily accounts that *Our Village* pertains to "the role that pastoral literature had historically played in Britain by reinforcing those belief structures that asserted the importance of the morality of the countryside to the ethical and economic fabric of the nation" (Killick 2013, 95). As such Killick describes how *Our Village* is a part of the pastoral literature which fabricated a virtuous countryside ideal in England.

This criticism corresponds to the literary criticism often given to *Cranford* as a rural idyll narrative. However, the difference between the two literary works, in my opinion is that while *Our Village* is virtually entirely preoccupied with portraying an atmospheric landscape, *Cranford* incorporates some aspects of a glorified countryside experience, but it also probes deeper than the idyll genre and portrays deaths, emotional regret and mourning as well as implicit criticism of unevenly divided resources. See my discussion in chapter 1 and chapter 4. In consequence, *Cranford* unlike *Our Village* challenges the literary idyll genre.

Our Village traces picturesque aspects of the countryside, without much focus on story or of a progressing plotline. Moreover, this is not a substantial novel that goes deep. It does not provide psychological depth for the fictional subjects, nor does it assess hardships in a more than trivial manner. The lack of depth and the absence of a progressing storyline are

presumably due to the fact that Mitford's talent was first and foremost poetry – not prose writing. As Shelagh Hunter explains: "She was first a poet, secondly a poetic dramatist, lastly a prose-writer and never a good story-teller" (Hunter 1984, 59). Hunter further accentuates that her prose was marked by "extreme simplicity" (Hunter 1984, 59). This simplicity is also remarked by Sven Halse who describes that Mitford's narrative style in *Our Village* was to render "description of flowers, landscapes and the objects of human culture in a course of events that is structured and varied according to the changes of the seasons and the weather and the moods which these provoke in the narrator – moods that as a rule keep to the lighter end of the spectrum" (Halse 2008, 401). I find this criticism to be quite truthful to the novel and to what this novel achieves. While the novel's depth is limited by listing and the narrators' careful attention to details, her talent for creating an atmospheric setting is manifested on every page.

Even though Mitford peripherally touches upon difficulties, the temperament in *Our Village* continues in a light mode throughout the novel. Littell and Littell similarily write that her prose does not go deep or reflect the darker sides of rural life in the utterance: "Dear Miss Mitford's gentle heart and feminine hand could never have probed or traced the coarser truths of rural life" (Littell and Littell 1859, 678). In their remark "the coarser truths of rural life" Littell and Littell point to the actual living conditions of rural Britain, which was much harder than the pastoral idyllic portrayals common in this period as I describe in Chapter 2. Moreover, when it comes to Mitford's idyllic writing, Halse additionally remarks that "Mitford's narrative style is characterised by the listing that is well-known in the idyll tradition" (Halse 2008, 401) – a listing of beautiful and charming qualities of the rural space which further aligns with Bakhtin's description that the "idyllic landscape" is "one worked out in meticulous detail" (Bakhtin 1981, 103). I will investigate the listing in *Our Village,* along with several other idyll traits, while comparing these aspects to *Cranford.*

Our Village tells the story of the village in Three Miles Cross to the south of Reading. The narrator/protagonist is unnamed, possibly Mary Mitford herself, as Mitford writes of her own hometown. In *Our Village* the narrator is frequently followed by her dog, Mayflower, as they walk in the aesthetic rural scenery: "I and my white greyhound, Mayflower, set out for a walk into a very beautlful world, – a sort of silent fary-land, - a creation of that matchless magician the hoar-frost" (12). In addition, she is frequently followed by the child Lizzie. The narrator sees her as "exquisitely pretty" (12) and "queen of the village" (12). According to the protagonist she has "but one rival in her dominions, a certain white grey-hound" who "resembled her in beauty and strength, in playfulness, and almost in sagacity" (8).

The various country scenes that occur in this novel mainly appear while the narrator saunter in the outdoors. Accordingly, Hunter sees these walks to be the very backbone of the novel (Hunter 1984, 70). While *Cranford* has some occasional depictions of nature, the natural descriptions and praise for the country permeate *Our Village* entirely. The scenes that the narrator describes are thoroughly descriptive and continue in the same narrative mode as the opening itself:

> Of all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me most delightful is a little village far in the country; a small neighbourhood, not of fine mansions finely peopled, but of cottages and cottage-like houses, 'messuages or tennements' as a friend of mine calls such ignoble and nondescriptive dwellings, with inhabitants whose faces are as familiar to us as the flowers in our garden (3).

The loveliest space for the narrator is a rural village with rustic cottages, and a society where everyone is acquainted with one another. The narrator describes how they are as familiar with their neighbours as they are with the flowers surrounding their residents; thereby the narrator sets the atmosphere for what follows: a story where beautiful vegetation and aesthetic nature are what best describe the various aspects of country life.

The rustic cottage is central in Mitford's idyll. The cottage is an embedded part of the rural idyll, thus Mitford's many depictions of the cottage idyll become a contrast to *Cranford* which does not mention the word cottage on a single occasion. In English architecture the cottage has acquired its own designation as 'the rural cottage idyll' (Stevenson 2000, 8). This casts into relief the centrality of the cottage in the bucolic idyll. The cottage has further risen to become "a reproduction/ copy/repetition of the way the English have used/still use their past to sell themselves – with little distinction between memory, nostalgia (derived from 'homecoming') and history – national identity" (Sayer 2000, 1–2). The cottage is a great part of the rural idyll and accordingly the national identity. The image encompasses the "picture of the perfect village with its church, manor house, inn, smithy, a scatter of picturesque thatched cottages" (Rowley 2006, 218). On the whole, the "cottage became a utopian space, a Beau Ideal, for the middle class in the nineteenth century, formed through a peculiarly powerful mix of the discourses of Englishness and domesticity" (Sayer 2000, 2) In the English imagination the rural cottages became along with the other facets of the rural idyll "a Beau ideal" and are depicted as utmost charming and homely.

From my discussion on realism in chapter 2, I address how these cottages/houses were insubstantial, overcrowded "damp, cold, draughty, dark and unsanitary" (Sayer 2000, 5) and not nearly idyllic. However, the numerous cottages described in *Our Village* are picturesque, homely and charming. Mr. Welles's cottage is "snuggly hidden behind the elms" (198) while in the Loddon, there is "the picturesque, low-browed, irregular cottage, which stood with its light-pointed roof, its clustered chimneys, and its ever-open door, looking like a real abode of comfort and hospitality" (220). Moreover, amidst the green pastures "the white cottage of the keeper peeps from the opposite coppice; and the vine-covered dwelling of Hannah Bint rises from amidst the pretty garden, which lies bathed in the sunshine around it" (223). These examples demonstrate that the cottages in Mitford appear highly pleasant. The cottages are described as picturesque and welcoming, comfortable and enclosed by hedges, flowers, and surrounded by sunlight. There are several similar examples in the novel of picturesque cottages.

In comparison, in *Cranford*, the most idyllic space is Woodley where Mr. Holbrook's mansion is situated. While the area is idyllic and picturesque as I address in chapter 1, his interior hardly matches the homely rural cottage idyll. Mary Smith describes that the interior and the "room in which we were expected to sit in was a stiffly furnished, ugly apartment" (42) it was further "not at all pretty, or pleasant, or home-like" (42). In this way we see again that while *Cranford* depicts some aspects of the residence, its outside, as highly idyllic, the novel does not pertain to the typical idyll portrayals entirely. Here the interior becomes a scenic contrast to the exterior. In this way these interior descriptions subvert the bucolic idyll which features aesthetic and compelling qualities of a cottage/ residence.

The idyllic listing form is found in *Our Village.* The thorough praise of the countryside in the listing form and meticulous detail is typical for the idyll (Halse 2008, 401; and Bakhtin 1981, 103) and may be illustrated with the following passage. This passage is longwinded, but the length serves to illustrate how descriptive Mitford's writing actually is:

> What a piece of fary land! The tall elms overhead just bursting into tender vivid leaf, with here and there a hoary oak or a silver-barked beech, every twig swelling with the brown buds, and yet not quite stripped of the tawny foliage of autumn: tall hollies and hawthorn beneath, with their crisp brilliant leaves mixed white blossoms of the sloe woven together with garlands of woodbines and wild briers; – what a fary land! Primroses, cowslips, pansies and the regular open-eyed white blossom of the wood

> anemone (or to use the more elegant Hampshire name, the windflower) were set under our feet as thick as daisies in a meadow. (97)

Essentially, this description features delicate and gentle characteristics of a romanticised countryside idyll in listing form. The number of adjectives is pervasive and allows the scene to become an epitomic Arcadian space. This is further an animated depiction of nature where the elms are "bursting" into "vivid leaf" and the twigs swell. The various nature components are woven together into a "fairy-land". Overall, the aspects of nature are described in a highly compelling manner. Similar depictions infuse the entire novel. On the whole, I find that there is more space devoted in the novel to aesthetic descriptive details than to the characters combined, and to any actual action. The diminutive amount of action that occurs is comprised by descriptive stories or details given by the narrator.

In *Cranford* there are some scenic descriptions. However, the novel does not list extensively as *Our Village* where scene after scene appear on the pages. While in *Cranford* scenic depictions occasionally occur as a part of the narrative's backdrop, the scenic descriptions in *Our Village* establish the predominant component of the narrative. Harriet Martinau denoted Mitford's narrative mode 'graphic description' due to its descriptive character (Burwick 2012, 866) and Burwick further describes that "Mitford appropriated epistolary conventions to produce a casual and at times unceremonious style of writing that spared no details in relating the local characteristics, customs, and setting" (Burwick 2012, 866). This descriptive stylistic mode makes *Our Village* adhere to the listing format far more than *Cranford.*

During numerous walks, the narrator in *Our Village*, often accompanied by Mayflower and Lizzie, encounters various individuals of the peasant society. For instance the narrator encounters her friend Emily, with a "charming artless character" (145). In this encounter in the chapter 'The Old House at Aberleigh' it is further evident that the narrator is not the only character that relishes natural beauty. Emily and the protagonist sit in a boat "emptying [their] little basket of fruit and country cakes, till Emily was seized with a desire of viewing from the other side of the Loddon, the scenery which had so much enchanted her" (152). The narrator and Emily indulge in fruit and country cakes. They share a pleasant moment, which seems to fit right into a provincial idyll experience. While serenely enjoying each other's company in a beautiful fictional setting, the scenery inspires Emily to "take a sketch of the ivied boat-house, and of its sweet room, and this pleasant window" (152). The sketch is for Emily's grandmother who "talk so often about a musk rose tree that grew against one end of her

father's house"(151). Here it is evident that it is not merely the narrator who is preoccupied with the natural scenery. Emily and her grandmother seem to be equally concerned with nature (the beauty of the surrounding area mesmerizes Emily, and Emily's grandmother often talks about a "musk rose tree").

In comparison, in *Cranford* it seems as if the other characters do not share Mr. Holbrook's interest in nature. During the visit to Woodley, Miss Matty is the only one who has any interest in going out for a walk in the outdoors, and she describes that she "never met with a man before or after who had spent so long a time in a secluded and not impressive country, with ever-increasing delight in the daily yearly change of season and beauty" (41). Miss Matty describes the country as "not impressive" in spite of Mr. Holbrook's obvious delight and ardor for the various aspects of the country. Consequently, it appears that while in *Our Village* several of the characters share the protagonist's enthusiasm for countryside beauty, most of the characters in *Cranford* seem to be indifferent to it. Correspondingly, the characters in Our Village engage more with the rural idyll setting than the *Cranford* characters do. In addition, when the rural ideal of natural beauty is repeatedly addressed by the characters in *Our Village,* these fictional characters in turn lead the reader's attention to these idyllic details. In *Cranford* this function is seen considerably less since very few characters direct the reader's attention to the rural landscape.

Afflictions are not thought to be a part of an idyll (see the introduction and chapter 2). How does *Our Village* relate to this facet of the rural idyll? The chapter 'Hard Summer' in *Our Village* gives the impression that the narrator will address real predicaments, however, the 'hard summer' is not more grave then the lack of rain for the narrator's garden. The narrator exclaims: "my garden, my blooming garden, the joy of my eyes, was forced to go waterless like its neighbours, and became shrivelled, scorched, and sunburnt, like them. It really went to my heart to look at them" (158 –161). This affliction, of withered flowers, is markedly mundane when compared to the coarser aspects of rural life. Here the focus of flowers overshadows the narrator's concerns and focus during this season. Lack of water during the summer could surely bring other concerns. For instance the crops yielding a poor harvest in the coming year, a lack of drinking water for the animals, or even for themselves. The protagonist does not address any of these outcomes.

However, the narrator addresses some calamities of rural life. This may be illustrated by for instance the narrator's account of the farmer Allen who was "an excellent specimen", a "cheerful venerable old man with his long white hair, and his bright grey eye" (115–116). Like the farmer Mr. Holbrook in *Cranford*, Allen lives in an idyllic pastoral homestead. It is

situated “where on ledges like fairy terraces the orchises and arums grow”(114). The encounter is not elaborated on, as is typical for Mitford’s narrative mode, and her focus quickly passes from one scene to the next. Accordingly, we do not learn much of Mr. Allen. However, we learn that Mr. Allen and his wife had economic difficulties in the past and then stood the risk of losing their farmstead. Fortunately, their son acquired employment with high income in London and endowed means for his parents which “enabled them to overcome all the difficulties of these trying times, and they are now enjoying the peaceful evenings of a well-spent life as free from care and anxiety as their best friends could desire” (116). This episode thus evinces a cheerful resolution to a lightly touched upon difficulty and hard-pressed period.

This, moreover, seems to be a recurring pattern in *Our Village.* In another instance, the narrator describes her friend Hannah Bint, whose mother passed away at the age of twelve. Hanna was consequently responsible for the domestic household as the oldest child. Even though her childhood was less idyllic, she grew to be a fair and attractive woman, and the narrator’s brief account of Hannah concludes that she found love and that Hannah and her courter were in “blessed forgetfulness of all except each other; as happy a couple as ever trod the earth” (246). Hanna Bint, like Mr. and Mrs. Allen, became thoroughly contented in spite of previous hardships.

A final example will be given of how *Our Village* engages with predicaments. When the narrator passes a work parish with gloom and destitution (in chapter 2, I mention the condition of the work houses of the time), she quickly passes the scene in haste. This is due to the fact that she does not want to dwell in areas of marked poverty and illness. Therefore the narrator explains: “I always hurry past that place as if it were a prison” (63), she hurries past it because “the feeling, the prejudice will not be controlled” (64). The few lines that the narrator devotes to these circumstances illustrate that the novel, in congruence with the narrator, hastens to leave these passages and the topic of these predicaments.

Accordingly, it would be somewhat erroneous to state that the narrator never touches upon the topic of difficulties. As I have illustrated in the examples above, the novel does not omit these topics altogether. However, Mitford writes of afflictions in such an idealised and unrealistic way that the predicaments nearly become even more undermined than if she never had discussed them in the first place. When the narrator mentions a difficulty, it is either a problem of the past, which evolves into a profoundly happy resolution, or it is a brief digression abruptly passed and followed by a longwinded description of an aesthetic scene, which captures the attention of the narrator. As a new scene mesmerizes the narrator, she in

turn forgets about the misfortune. In addition, it should be remarked that the narrator devotes more space to address her flower's lack of rain, in the chapter 'Hard Summer', as a grievance to her, than she does to any other difficulty.

Accordingly, the overall portrayal in *Our Village* is a light and pleasant life for the protagonist and her neighbours. Halse therefore describes: "Mitford presents a light, positive picture of rural life that seems completely unthreatened by industrial development or other dangers" (Halse 2008, 402). Furthermore, the narrator has an unrealistically easy solution for her own periods of gloom: "I will go to the meadows, the beautiful meadows! And I will have my materials of happiness" (126). The meadows provide for the narrator's state of contentment, which adds to an idyllic problem-free existence. My impression is therefore that the novel quite readily falls into the agreeable and pleasant life, which is characteristic for the idyll.

In contrast *Cranford* has several instances where the story rests on a tragedy, rather than abruptly passing by a tragic event. In addition, the difficulties in *Cranford* often do not end happily e.g. Miss Matty's mother's depression, Peter's elopement, the epistolary/diary of unfulfilled hopes and the several deaths to name some (see chapter 1 and 4). The novel further addresses emotional aspects, and elucidates how the characters themselves experience predicaments. For instance the characters often cry when they experience misfortunes: the women cry after Captain Brown's death, Miss Matty's mother is described to cry bitterly in solitude, a tear drops from Miss Smith when Miss Matty speaks about her diary. Consequently, Gaskell's novel deals with hardships more thoroughly than *Our Village.* It is then essentially my contention that while the Cranford village is not a bad place to live, the novel also demonstrates that life is not merely positive in the small town. *Cranford* therefore renders a more nuanced portrayal of life, and is less applicable than *Our Village* to this aspect of the idyll. While *Our Village* pertains to the collection of rural idyll literature which renders invisible the seamier sides of rural life, *Cranford* gives a more truthful portrayal of rural life. Essentially, Our Village idealises rural life in line with the rural idyll, while Cranford does not correspond to this idyll facet.

Another feature of the idyll worth mentioning in a comparison between the two novels is national identity. Like *Cranford, Our Village* is said to have influenced English national identity. Elisabeth Helsinger explains that "many of Tennyson's English Idylls, as well as *Our Village* – is to put the realm of the personal, whether that is the rural scene or the family, to public use as a fantasy fundamental to class and to national identity" (Helsinger 2014, 132). The novel's representation of an English rural community is perceived to have influenced the

national identity. The novel further interacts with aspects of national identity in the novel. For example, the narrator provides a description of what she sees as the categorical English landscape:

> that peculiar charm of English scenery, a green common, divided by the road; the right side fringed by hedgerows and trees, with cottages and farmhouses irregularly placed, and terminated by a double avenue of noble oaks; the left prettier still, dappled by bright pools of water, and islands of cottages and cottage-gardens, and sinking gradually down to cornfields and meadows, and an old farmhouse. (23)

The "peculiar charm of English scenery" is described here in thorough detail encompassing "noble oaks", farmhouses, cottages and meadows. The national character and categorical English aspects are further ascertainable as the narrator draws a literary tableau of two children collecting apples from an apple tree. She then questions: "Is not that a pretty English picture?" (202). Gathering choice fruit from the garden is accordingly portrayed as a typical English leisure activity. *Our Village* and *Cranford* both engage with rural idyll elements of the national identity. However, *Cranford* further counters aspects of the rural idyll ideal as a 'white space', and views of the foreign. This is clear in Gaskell's ridicule of racial scepticism through the character Miss Pole in particular. *Our Village* describes a scenic idea of Englishness, and leisure activities such as harvesting apples. It further appears that *Our Village* is more concerned with the scenic parts of the national identity and the idyll, while *Cranford* engages with deeper questions of ethnicity, and social debates such as the commodity green tea as tampered with.

Our Village, like *Cranford* pertains to the nostalgic rural space that favours a rural past/distant space over urban modernisation. Killick writes that:

> Even in Mitford's bucolic utopia, the weight of the archetypical crisis of perspective to which Raymond Williams refers can be felt. The pastoral literature of any period in history draws upon a mythologised, prelapsarian, and idyllic past, where the way of life of the previous generation was comparatively exempt from the incursion of modernity, and *Our Village* is no exception. (Killick 2013, 98)

Killick describes how pastoral literature in general fronts a high esteem for agrarian areas and simultaneously fuels a disregard of new and modern structures. This corresponds with Boym's argument that nostalgia is coeval with modern progression (Boym 2008, 59). These sentiments of the countryside as pleasant and the urban or modern as appalling are present in

Cranford, which I discuss in chapter 4, and they are is equally present in *Our Village.* In *Our Village* the narrator finds her equilibrium of peace in the countryside. This is evident after a visit to London. The narrator is "newly arrived from the heat, the glare, the noise, and the fever of London, to plunge into the remotest labyrinths of the country, and regain the pose of mind, the calmness of heart, which has been lost in the great Babel" (59). The two novels, then, function in a similar way in relation to "the contrast already present in the idyll of antiquity between town and country" (Halse 2008, 402) and of industrialisation. The novels reveal nostalgia for the old increasingly disappearing rural societies and are opposed to new emanating urban structures. This type of nostalgia fuelled the rural idyll. Consequently, both novels engage with rural idyll nostalgia for rural societies. This is correspondingly one of the elements where *Cranford* does not challenge the genre; however, as I mention in chapter 4, there seems to be an overweight of elements which counter, rather than support the genre.

Mitford's novel is, moreover, more readily applicable to Bakhtin's conceptual ideas of idyll-time and idyll-space. *Our Village,* unlike *Cranford,* is described to be an isolated and protected space with little outer influence. The narrator describes how the village is "a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship" (3). As the village is described to be a hibernated and "insulated" area, the novel adheres to Bakhtin's model of idyll-space. In contrast, in *Cranford* several of the characters have been in India, the narrator frequently travel to the neighbouring city, the railroads have a central role in the narrative all of which make the village a space of communication rather than isolation.

Our Village is in the present tense throughout the entire novel, but the narrator on several occasions recounts episodes of the past. The characters have little if any psychological progression or development, which Bakhtin refers to as 'metamorphosis'. The narrator's disposition and reflections continue in the same mode throughout the entire story, and we are not given much insight into the other characters' psychological interior. In addition, there appears to be no indication of new structural changes emerging, which would alter the conditions of a coming generation and impede the cyclical time aspect of the idyllic chronotope. Consequently, *Our Village* unlike *Cranford* seems to adhere to Bakhtin's idyll-time. As the novel adheres to both idyll-space and idyll-time, then the novel also agrees with the idyllic chronotope.

Conclusion to this Comparison

This genre comparison serves to illustrate that *Cranford* pertains less to the generic traits of

the rural idyll than *Our Village.* Consequently, this comparison substantiates my contention that *Cranford* challenges the pastoral idyll. Both these novels relate to the dichotomy between town/city and old/modern where the old is favoured more than the new and the city is described to be destructive to provincial areas. However, in this comparison I find that while both novels are nostalgic for the old, they seem to differ on the other elements of the rural idyll which I have discussed here. Essentially, this comparison illustrates that *Our Village* aligns with significantly more genre traits than *Cranford.*

Perhaps one of the most significant findings is how *Our Village* serves as an example of a novel which idealises and romanticises rural life in its depiction of provincial England. This novel appears considerably less nuanced than *Cranford.* The characters of *Our Village* enjoy an elated existence, while *Cranford* thoroughly deals with various afflictions. Therefore one can conclude that while *Cranford* challenges the idyll effect of glossing over rural hardships, *Our Village* seems to pertain to the body of rural idyll literature which ignored the seamier sides of rural life in nineteenth century England, and portrayed the countryside as wonderful and dreamlike.

Conclusion

This project has been concerned with the rural idyll phenomenon/genre in *Cranford,* and I have examined whether *Cranford* pertains to this myth and genre in its depiction of provincial Victorian Britain. *Cranford* has been denoted a rural idyll novel by several critics, perhaps due to the fact that it was printed in *The Series of English Idylls* in 1904. There has, however, been little detailed descriptions or rigorous questioning as to why *Cranford* has been considered an idyll. In fact, I contend that this label is somewhat inaccurate. There are clearly some elements of the novel which correspond to the idyll genre; however, there are numerous examples of elements which further counter the idyll.

It is relevant to establish whether this novel is an idyll for several reasons. Essentially, I believe that if one concedes that *Cranford* is an idyll, the label will impede an understanding of the novel and of what this novel achieves. Regarding *Cranford* as a rural idyll will also hinder a full appreciation of Gaskell's authorial legacy. The rural idyll is in a sense accused of hindering the voices of the rural poor, who had numerous real adversities. As such, the rural idyll projected a mirror image and mimesis of provincial areas – one that was inaccurate and considerably romanticised. When *Cranford* is placed within the rural idyll genre, then, Gaskell as the author of *Cranford* is accused of hindering the voices of the rural poor in her period. Such an accusation is highly misplaced as Gaskell in fact gave rural poor a voice in this novel i.e. she berates undivided resources and points to the real predicaments of poverty – paralleling poverty with death.

The rural idyll has further been said to influence and to strengthen certain aspects of the countryside with its appeal, including ideas of ethnicity and femininity. The rural idyll has been said to render ethnically coloured individuals as rural 'others', and rural idyll portrayals of whiteness have been thought to propagate this ideal and to anchor it in the real rural sphere. Women are further thought to have certain roles in the rural idyll. The rural idyll is patriarchal in the sense that women are depicted as submissive to their men, innocent, vulnerable, domestic caretakers, wives and mothers. However, Gaskell does not adhere to these aspects of the bucolic idyll. Correspondingly, in order to do justice to Gaskell's heritage, it seems apposite to point out that Gaskell in fact challenges this myth and genre.

The various chapters in this thesis have sought to investigate the rural idyll in *Cranford*. These chapters aim to convey where the novel aligns with and where it differs from the idyll, in order to demonstrate that *Cranford* destabilises this genre and that the novel

largely does not follow our expectations of the Arcadia.

Chapter 1 has discussed the idyllic setting, the generic idyll figure, and Hugh Thomson's illustrations. In this chapter, I asserted that the setting in *Cranford* pertains to the idyll setting on some occasions. However, I also pointed out that the setting exhibits very non-idyllic functions. For instance, Gaskell uses descriptions of the flora to convey the psychological interior of Miss Matty's family. In the chapter 'Poor Peter' the lilacs and the sun become a surreal contrast to the tragic event: "Oh it was like a thunderbolt on the still sunny day, when the lilacs were all in bloom" (69). Moreover, the joy of the family withers along with the cowslip flowers.

In this chapter, I further investigated the prototypical idyll character, and I contended that Mr. Holbrook pertains quite readily to the prototypical idyll figure. His relish for nature and enthusiasm for poetry and contemplation make him adhere to the idyll persona which hearkens back to Virgil's 'eclogues'. This chapter also explored Hugh Thomson's illustrations. These illustrations are known to be picturesque and to gloss over emotional and negative episodes in the novel. Accordingly, Thomson may have contributed to make the novel appear more like an idyll than if these images were not printed alongside the story. Perhaps these images have contributed to *Cranford* being placed within the idyll genre. This could then elucidate the central question why Cranford was considered an idyll to begin with. Additionally, Thomson illustrates the tendency of choosing idyllic elements and the wish to ignore less compelling parts of rural life. He thus also serves as an example of an individual who embellishes rural life, which is what the rural idyll essentially does.

Chapter 2 has discussed realism, *Cranford* and the rural idyll. In this chapter, I examined how the actual conditions of rural societies were in the period in relation to the pastoral idyll. The actual conditions were on the whole considerably more brutal than the rural idyll 'Eden'. In my analysis of the novel I argued that *Cranford* does not idealise rural life in accordance with the Arcadia. *Cranford* is not a rural idyll "village of shimmering sweetness" (Booth p. 217). There are numerous deaths in *Cranford,* and Gaskell points to poverty as a predicament; she does not pretend that it does not exist. This is evident in the utterance: "Death was as true and common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud in the streets. It was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite" (8). However, there are some aspects which seem idyllic: for instance the bounteousness and generosity among the members of the society. Thereby, Gaskell engages with the rural idyll pleasant countryside, but ends up subverting it.

Furthermore, in this chapter I pointed to another way that the novel subverts the rural

idyll. I examined unrealistic notions of *Cranford* as an all-female society. *Cranford* is likened to the myth of the Amazons: a myth of an all-female community who are hostile to men. Accordingly, the female community in the Cranford village does not comply with the rural idyll as a patriarchal idyll, where women are weaker, submissive, domestic caretakers, wives and mothers. *Cranford*'s heroines are spinsters without children. Therefore, they cannot pertain to the rural idyll and Victorian ideal of women as wives and mothers. By portraying the women in *Cranford* as independent, self-sufficient spinsters, Gaskell engages with contemporary social debates concerning women's roles in society. She aimed to abdicate views that women could not form authentic friendships on the same level as men could. She also responded to a contemporary campaign for marriage reform. As such, *Cranford* defies rural idyll gender structures and simultaneously challenges the Victorian ideals of women's conduct and social responsibilities.

Chapter 3 featured English national identity in relation to the rural idyll. The rural idyll is a receptacle of national identity, and novelists played a significant role in establishing the countryside as particularly 'English'. This chapter has been concerned with the rural idyll as a monocultural idyll and with the national beverage, tea.

In this chapter, I contended that Gaskell was ahead of her time in criticising perceptions of a foreign 'other'. She critiqued the rural idyll ideal of the countryside as a 'pure', white space. In particular, Gaskell does this by ridiculing her own characters' xenophobia. Miss Pole's hysteric outpourings of Signor Brunoni are taken to the extreme. Accordingly, Gaskell seems to satirise prejudiced viewpoints similar to those of Mrs Pole. In consequence, it appears that the novel destabilises the rural idyll ethnic ideal.

Further, I examined the function of tea in the novel. Tea is a part of the rural idyll and has been considered the national beverage since the nineteenth century. In my discussion of tea, I demonstrated various functions of this beverage in the novel. For one, the new custom of afternoon tea has not yet reached the fictional rural village. Gaskell lived in an urban area, and was inevitably acquainted with this new trend. Consequently, it seems that Gaskell intentionally wanted to reflect that the rural society adhered to outmoded customs of behaviour. I additionally examined the depiction of green tea in the novel. I pointed out that Miss Matty considers green tea to be venomous. Accordingly, Miss Matty reflects the social concern of green tea in the contemporary period: a concern related to the fact that merchants tampered with the product by adding gunpowder to the mixture. Therefore, many people of the Victorian period saw green tea as poisonous, while black tea was considered the wholesome and 'pure' product.

In *Chapter 4,* I considered nostalgia and the chronotope in relation to the novel. Nostalgia is central to the rural idyll. The rural idyll originated with nostalgic sentiments for the rural, which was regarded to be better than the urban. In this chapter I pointed to how the narrator, Miss Smith, writes letters to a fictional urban audience in the city, Drumble. In these letters, Miss Smith renders various accounts of the Cranford society, depicting the society as quaint, charming, exotic and nostalgic. Correspondingly, Mary Smith obtains a similar function as Gaskell herself. While Gaskell appealed to a real urban society, which longed nostalgically for rural life, Miss Smith wrote to a fictional urban area with similar nostalgic yearnings.

The novel further features nostalgia for the old rural society, which stood in the risk of urban modernisation. The railroads serve as a symbol of the Industrial Revolution. These are further described with highly negative connotations e.g. "nasty" and "cruel". Accordingly, the novel demonstrates an aversion against new structures and the railroads which cut into the pastoral landscape. This theme is typical for a pastoral novel (Halse 2008, 402). Consequently, Cranford aligns with this feature, which is typical for the idyll. My contention is regardless that *Cranford* challenges the bucolic idyll in several other respects, which signifies that the novel does not adhere to the rural idyll genre in its entirety.

In this chapter, I further examined how *Cranford* pertains to Bakhtin's idyllic chronotope. I argued that Gaskell's novel does not agree with either the aspect of cyclical temporality, or with idyll-space as an isolated sphere. There seems to be little focus on previous generations in *Cranford.* In addition, the society changes, which means that the following generation will live under different conditions than the *Cranford* heroines.

Further, I look into whether the characters develop psychologically. In Bakhtin's view, characters in an idyll do not grow or mature psychologically. There is no sense of becoming /metamorphosis. However, in *Cranford* several characters undergo personality changes. Consequently, *Cranford* does not align with novelistic idyll-time.

Regarding idyll-space, I argue that *Cranford* does not correspond to this aspect. I refer to Moretti and Recchio, who have differing views, and I agree with Recchio's assertion that *Cranford* is not portrayed as a confined space. Accordingly, *Cranford* does not align with this aspect of the idyllic chronotope either. On the whole, Cranford does not correspond to Bakhtin's idyllic chronotope.

Chapter 5 has sought to substantiate my contention that *Cranford* is not a rural idyll narrative, through a comparison to another novel. In this chapter, I compared Gaskell's novel to *Our Village,* by Mary Russel Mitford. This novel corresponds more readily to the rural

idyll genre. I compare various facets of the pastoral idyll in an analysis of how the two novels engage with these generic features. While the two novels similarly fall into the common pattern for pastoral idyll novels to favour old structures over new, they practically differ on all other aspects in this comparison. Essentially, the comparison evinces that *Our Village* align far more with the rural idyll than *Cranford.* The effect of this is that while *Cranford* renders a nuanced portrayal of peasant societies and probes into coarser truths of rural life, *Our Village* embellishes provincial life in her period. This comparison accordingly casts into relief the various ways which *Cranford* destabilises the Arcadia.

Throughout this project, my contention has been that the body of literary criticism which maintains that *Cranford* should be considered a rural idyll novel has not provided rigorous evidence to support this viewpoint. This lack of evidence has called for a re-examination of this novel through a more sensitive understanding of genre and historical context. In fact, my findings in this project point to that *Cranford* is in fact not an idyll. This has several implications. These findings do not only affect our understanding of the novel, but also of Gaskell's literary heritage.

While Gaskell's portrayal of the industrial society has been known to berate and to censure unjust social structures of Victorian Britain, her novels and short stories set in rural areas have been referred to as quaint and charming rural idyll novels which idealise the rural sphere. Consequently, her novels have been known to fall into the well-known dichotomy between the Victorian town and city. This project, however, illustrates that *Cranford,* set in rural England, renders poor individuals a voice by pointing to the actuality of poverty and by paralleling poverty with death.

Accordingly, Gaskell's *Cranford* does not idealise the rural in the manner that the rural idyll genre does in its entirety. While rural idyll literature such as *Our Village* has contributed to the fabrication of the nineteenth century peasant societies, *Cranford* challenges this myth and genre by destabilising the idyll. Gaskell's legacy reaches beyond the pastoral. Therefore, for a truthful understanding of this novel and of Gaskell's authorship, it is of paramount importance to realise that *Cranford* is not a rural idyll narrative in the traditional sense.

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