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Single women navigating disenfranchised grief in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*

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Abstract

Written during the Victorian Era, Elizabeth Gaskell's Cranford *(1853) explores social issues related to gender. This study focuses on how the main characters of the novel, the Jenkyns sisters, navigate their loss resulting from being women and single. This qualitative research analyzes the narrative elements of the novel, especially its characters, conflicts and setting, and employs feminist literary criticism to scrutinize the gender relations and inequalities in the novel. Borrowing Kenneth J. Doka's theory of disenfranchised grief, this study asserts how the community of spinsters and widows in the novel challenges the imposition of women's identity as wives and mothers. However, while succeeding in managing lives outside of marriage and motherhood, the Jenkyn sisters struggle with grief that cannot be openly acknowledged nor socially validated. Such grief and efforts to conceal lead to psychosomatic symptoms. Remain unmarried, these middle-class women cannot escape social expectations of women in nineteenth-century England that the novel resolves their grief partly by making them a surrogate mother and wife.*

Keywords: *Cranford; disenfranchised grief; gender; loss; patriarchy*

INTRODUCTION

As she is reading letters from the inhabitants of the small-town Cranford, Mary Smith - the narrator who lives in the city of Drumble - introduces the reader to the female leader of Cranford, Deborah Jenkyns. Not only is Deborah "a strong-minded woman," but she also detests the so-called equality between man and woman, believing the opposite of the common conception of men's superiority: "Equal, indeed! she knew they were superior" (Gaskell, 1998, p.12). Such a remark is thought provoking because in nineteenth-century England, women faced striking legal and social inequalities. Women did not have the same opportunities as men in many social aspects. In the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century England, Mary Wollstonecraft may have advocated equality for women education in her famous protofeminist work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), yet since her focus was on creating housewives who were highly educated, the said education did not promote gender equality in

public spheres (Williams, 2019). Moving forward to the twenty-first century, gender inequalities in education and workplace are still common issues in different parts of the globe (Kleven & Landais, 2017; Michener & Brower, 2020; Nair, 2019). Considering the limitations imposed on women, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* is unique; the opening sentence of the novel declares the small town is owned by "the Amazons," the race of female warriors in Greek mythology, because "all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women" (Gaskell, 1998, p.1). In her next visit to Cranford, Mary notices: "There had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages …. Everybody lived in the same house, and wore pretty nearly the same well-preserved, old-fashioned clothes" (Gaskell, 1998, p.13). While pointing out no change in the demography of the small town, Mary also mentions the hardly changed clothing that implies limited resources, yet the ladies still own their houses. Since by law, a woman's property would become her husband's upon marriage, the Cranford ladies are better off being single or widowed even though they have to practice "elegant economy" due to financial constraint.

Critics vary in their opinion about these women who form a close-knit community presided over by the former Rector's daughters: Deborah and Matilda Jenkyns. (O'DONNELL, 2016) argues that *Cranford* offers an alternative feminine literary tradition that is different from novels written by men. Auerbach believes that the novel's author, Elizabeth Gaskell dares to delve into "an unchartered world" in her portrayal of "governing women whose self-definitions come from their freedom from family" (Auerbach, 1979, p.6). Auerbach celebrates this female-dominated society for challenging the ideology of separate spheres and the domination of men. However, other critics tend to have a more skeptical view, such as Stoneman who claims that what the Cranford ladies form is a "supportive sub-culture delimited by the dominant group" (Stoneman, 2006, p. 61). Managing lives in a patriarchal society is never easy for women, and *Cranford* portrays such challenges. What Auerbach and Stoneman do not discuss further about the dynamic within this community of unmarried women is the sense of loss experienced by these so-called independent and empowered women. While remaining single, both Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty aspire to marriage and motherhood, but social constraints prevent them from achieving their desire. How do Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty navigate the prescribed gender role imposed on them? How does the failure to conform to such a role contribute to their grieving? How does the narrative resolve their grief?

In addition to the discussion of the community of women mentioned above, other studies of *Cranford* discuss the elderly spinsters in the novel against the stereotypes of redundant women or the angel in the house (Croskery, 1997; Langland, 1992; Niles, 2005). Recent studies talk about the economic aspects and the middle class status of the Cranford ladies (Armstrong, 2019; Clarke, 2019b; Merte, 2020; Ramteke, 2021). Some others focus on the Gothic element of the novel, the adoption of Spanish culture in it, or the adoption of magic and apparition as a form of entertainment (Shubert, 2021; Vázquez, 2021; Werner, 2018). Disenfranchised grief is not the focus of those articles. This study aims to show that in *Cranford,* the intertwining of their gender and class identities results in the Jenkyns sisters experiencing disenfranchised grief

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in leading lives outside of marriage and motherhood, and the narrative resolves their grief by providing solutions that uphold their normative gender roles.

METHOD

In analyzing the representation of gender, class, and disenfranchised grief in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford,* this study employed feminist literary criticism. Kennedy and Gioia stated: "feminist critics carefully examine how the images of men and women in imaginative literature reflect or reject the social forces that have historically kept the sexes from achieving total equality" (Kennedy & Gioia, 1995, p. 1802). Similarly, Bressler claimed: "The core belief of feminist theory and criticism asserts that all people-women and men-are politically, socially, and economically equal" (Bressler, 2011, p. 159). In this qualitative research, the primary data are the narrative elements of the novel. In addition to performing close reading of the novel, this study utilized theories of disenfranchised grief to examine how the relations among characters in the novel represent and challenge normative gender.

Grief can be defined as emotional reaction when one loses the beloved or a loved one, usually through death and also from other forms of separation. This internal experience of loss is often differentiated from its public display which is usually called mourning. In 1987, Kenneth J. Doka proposed the concept of disenfranchised grief, a particular emotional response to loss defined as "the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (Doka, 1989, p. 4). Since the grief is not socially validated, the victim of disenfranchised grief is often denied social support in the attempts to deal with the loss. Addressing the social aspect of grief, Doka differentiates three types of disenfranchised grief: "lack of recognition of the relationship, lack of acknowledgment of the loss, and exclusion of the griever" (Doka, 2002, p.11). The most common relationships acknowledged by society are kin-based relationships. Therefore, when the deceased is not the spouse or immediate kin, the bereaved may not have the opportunity to grieve (De Vries, 2018). The second type of disenfranchised grief happens when the loss is not acknowledged or not deemed significant, such as in cases of perinatal death (Sawicka, 2017). The third type happens when the griever is not deemed as capable of grief, such as very young children, the mentally ill people, and the elderly (Statz, 2022). These types of disenfranchised grief may not be immediately visible in *Cranford* that further study is necessary to point them out.

Cranford is not a typical nineteenth century novel with the marriage plot as its main characters are unmarried. The lives of Cranford ladies - consisting primarily of the Jenkyns sisters, Miss Pole, Miss Jessie Brown who soon leaves Cranford after becoming Mrs Gordon, Mrs. Forrester, Lady Glenmire, Mrs. Fitz-Adam whose brother later marries Lady Glenmire, and Mrs. Jamieson - are presented by the ladies' visitor and friend Mary. While the main analysis focuses on the major female characters, Deborah and Matilda Jenkyns, the discussion inevitably touches on the other characters - both male and female - with conflicts among them. In addition to the element of place and time, William

Kenney claimed that setting is also composed of: "…the occupations and modes of day-to-day existence of the characters; … the religious, moral, intellectual, social, and emotional environment of the characters" (Kenney, 1966, p.40). Thus, the analysis of the novel's setting is crucial in showing how gender and class identities of the main characters reveal gender inequality which in turn influence and shape their sense of loss and their disenfranchised grief.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender and Disenfranchised Grief in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*

Cranford is different from Gaskell's other novels in at least two ways: its main characters are not young women and its primary setting is unlike that of Gaskell's industrial novels. The literary critic and cultural theorist Raymond William identified Elizabeth Gaskell's works to belong to the earlier English industrial novels together with those of other Victorian novelists such as the novelist and social critic Charles Dickens, the novelist, priest, and university professor Charles Kingsley, the writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, and the novelist and journalist George Eliot whose real name is Mary Ann Evans (Wilson & O'Brien, 2020). Eliot and Gaskell also write pastoral novels, and they are believed to have reciprocal influences in creating their realist novels with pastoral pieties (Billington, 2015). Gaskell's *The Moorland Cottage* (1850) is the prototype of Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). The heroine in each novel struggles against patriarchy that limits her intellectual and emotional growth. Unlike Gaskell's industrial novels such as *North and South* and *Mary Barton, Cranford* is not set in an industrial city but in a small town. Although no longer young, the Cranford ladies still have to deal with societal limitations.

Set in a small town, *Cranford* allows its female characters to live slow living and maintain their local wisdom. The small town Cranford is believed to be based on the small Cheshire town of Knutsford in which Elizabeth Gaskell grew up, and the city Drumble is based on Manchester. Previously publishing her work in anonymity, once married, Gaskell uses Mrs. Gaskell as her pen name, which "contributed to building up a feminized authorial image" (Jung, 2017, p. 775). Her marriage also provides her with a broader knowledge that enriches her writing. Getting married in Knutsford, Gaskell soon moved to Manchester following her husband William Gaskell who was a Unitarian minister. Of the changing circumstances from a small town to a big city, she said, "my lot now is to live in or rather on the borders of a great manufacturing town" (Burton & Duffy, 2020, p. 2). Her position as the Unitarian Minister's wife enables Gaskell to interact with diverse socioeconomic groups, which in turn broadens her perspectives on varying social conditions both of the distinguished people and the poor. Introducing the small town Cranford, the narrator humorously compares it with the big city London, asking the readers: "Have you any red silk umbrellas in London?" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 2) and "Do you ever see cows dressed in grey flannel in London?" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 5) In both instances, the subjects of the tease are spinsters. Both the red silk umbrella and the cow clad in flannel are spectacles unlikely to happen in a big city yet continue to exist in a small town.

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The first-person female narrator in *Cranford* allows the readers to dive into the lives of the gentlewoman in Cranford. Ramteke (2021), applying social feminist lens to analyze Cranford, comparing the town and the city, asserts "Cranford presents such a social structure that is devoid of a class system and constructed by women in a matrilineal society as against the capitalist patriarchal society of Drumble" (Ramteke, 2021, p. 45). Their middle class status requires the female inhabitants of Cranford not to be involved in any profession, and their duties involve "...keeping their neat maidservants in admirable order; … kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other," and they have "tradition ….rules and regulations" to follow (Gaskell, 1998, pp.12-13). The constraining and imposing code of conduct and rules are governed by the most respected members of Cranford society: the deceased Rector's daughters. The contrast between the small town Cranford and the city Drumble is presented from the point of view of Mary who provides insight into their societal distinctions and customs. As a narrator, Mary, according to Adler (2022), is "a liminal figure who can quietly claim the privileges of first-person narrators and third-person narrators alike" (Adler, 2022, p. 21). As a character, Mary can participate in the activities with the other characters, and as a narrator, she can comment and give insights. The present time in the novel is set in the 1840s or early 1850s, but the many events recalled in the narrative, such as the love letters between the Rector of Cranford and his wife, Mrs. Jenkyns may go back further to the 1770s. The flashback helps frame the narrative and provide necessary context.

Deborah Jenkyns's Disenfranchised Grief

Deborah Jenkyns performs her class and gender roles well. Deborah's intelligence has been apparent since her childhood. Her mother describes her as "a very 'forrard,' good child, but would ask questions her mother could not answer" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 45). Assisting her mother, the young Deborah performs her middle-class social duties as she "started the benefit society for the poor, and taught girls cooking and plain sewing," (Gaskell, 1998, p. 39). The Rector's daughter, she is intelligent and owns "the strength of a number of manuscript sermons, and a pretty good library of divinity" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 8). Everything in her letters, according to Mary, "was stately and grand, like herself" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 12). The matriarch of Cranford whom the ladies look up to and respect, Deborah is a social arbiter and *"a model of feminine decorum"* (Gaskell, 1998, p. 22). However, despite her excellent qualities, Deborah suffers from grief that goes socially unacknowledged nor validated.

As a daughter, no matter how intelligent and devoted, Deborah cannot compete with her brother who has the privilege of being a son to their father. One day, Peter dresses up as his elder sister, wearing the clothes Deborah "used to wear in Cranford, and was known by everywhere" and walks up and down the streets of Cranford carrying a pillow as a baby (Gaskell, 1998, p. 52). He continues his acts in the family garden, attracting a crowd of people who are peeping and watching him. Peter does not think that impersonating Deborah in such a way is in fact humiliating her sister - presenting her as a fallen woman. Carolyn Lambert argues that in his crossdressing, Peter "is giving women a voice through a performance that comments on proscribed topics (Lambert, 2018, p.

179). In Victorian England, fallen woman is a term designated for any woman regarded as having lost her reputation through having had sexual relations outside of marriage, thus fallen from God's grace. When his father finds out, he is furious by the performance that makes people think the honorable Rector's daughter has fallen, and that he has an illegitimate grandchild. He undresses and flogs Peter. The father's seemingly overreaction shows how a young woman's reputation and achievement can be annihilated simply by being unchaste. Hurt and humiliated, Peter runs away and joins the Navy. What was meant as a joke results in dire consequences of ruining the family. The absence of the only son makes their father remorseful and their mother dying of grief, and Deborah cannot amend the situation no matter what she does.

Being single and not having a formal employment, Deborah is denied the privilege of a wife and a son, leading to her first disenfranchised grief. Their mother soon dies of grief after Peter disappears. Deborah works her best to replace her mother, doing even more than her mother could have done. However, her father "missed [her] mother sorely" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 58). When Peter reappears, his father is said to be "so proud of him" and whenever he walks out, Peter is by his side lending his arm for his father to lean upon. Although smiling, Deborah said that "she was quite put in a corner" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 59).The absence of her mother and the presence of her brother seem to negate Deborah's importance for her father. Charlotte Mitchell explains: "Deborah, having identified herself totally with her father's interests, cannot complement him, can be neither his wife nor his son" (Gaskell, 1998, p. ix). Thus Deborah experiences disenfranchised grief, the type where the loss is not acknowledged. The loss of her mother through death is definitely socially acknowledged, but even the novel focuses on her father's loss of his wife. Losing her mother, Deborah also loses her father who becomes a different individual after his wife's death. While still physically around, he is no longer psychologically present for Deborah. Such a loss is not socially validated.

Unable to compete with her deceased mother to win his father's heart, Deborah's disenfranchised grief gets even worse when she also loses her place as his father's favorite daughter with Peter's brief return. The death of her mother and Peter's reappearance mark the decline of Deborah's prominence. Adela Pinch points out at "Peter's remorse at having run away from home" to exemplify remorse as central part of the plot (Pinch, 2025, p. 137), but it is Deborah who has to silently suffer from the running away and reappearance of her brother. Deborah used to be her father's favorite, and more so because "when Peter disappointed him, she became his pride" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 50). However, a son with a formal title is preferable to a stay at home daughter. Coming home as a Navy lieutenant, Peter is no longer a disappointment for his father. Peter has become his father's pride, replacing Deborah. Deborah's statement that "she was quite put in a corner" speaks to her loss that she has to keep for herself and is not socially acknowledged.

Deborah's decision not to get married so that she can take care of her father leads to another experience of disenfranchised grief resulting partly from being an old spinster. Deborah cannot replace her mother, and later down the line, her being single leads to her experiencing the first type of disenfranchised grief: "lack of recognition of the relationship" in respect of Captain Brown, a half-pay

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army captain. Captain Brown moves to Cranford with his two daughters, one of whom is terminally ill. His preference for Mr. Boz's writing style causes some friction within the community, especially with Deborah who believes Dr. Johnson (Samuel Johnson) to be more superior than Mr. Boz (the pseudonym used by Charles Dickens in his novel, *The Pickwick Papers*). However, their literary dispute does not prevent Deborah from performing social kindness to Captain Brown and his two daughters. Upon hearing the news of Captain Brown's sudden death, Deborah "looked very ill, as if she were going to faint" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 16). Deborah's response to the news shows that she is deeply affected by the death of Captain Brown. Mary tells the reader: "That afternoon Miss Jenkyns sent out for a yard of black crape, and employed herself busily in trimming the little black silk bonnet" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 18). The fact that they are not related by blood nor marriage makes Deborah's grief disenfranchised. The outspoken Deborah could have expressed her grief openly, but since she and Captain Brown are not kin, she cannot publicly express her grief. While she is not the only person who is grieving the loss of Captain Brown, Deborah is the only non-member of Captain Brown's family who is mentioned as preparing and wearing mourning attire.

Matilda Jenkyns's Disenfranchised Grief

Unlike her older sister, Miss Matty never has any intention not to marry. She tells Mary that she never thought that she "should have been only Miss Matty Jenkyns all [her] life" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 106). Since her social status depends on her father's or her husband's, a middle-class woman needs to marry well to prevent her from lowering her social status. That is the very reason Miss Matty is not allowed to marry her suitor, Thomas Holbrook. Listening to Miss Pole talking about the romance between the young Miss Matty and Mr. Holbrook, Mary enquires why they did not get married.

> 'Oh, I don't know. She was willing enough, I think; but you know Cousin Thomas would not have been enough of a gentleman for the Rector, and Miss Jenkyns.'
> *'Well! but they were not to marry him,' said I, impatiently.*
> *'No; but they did not like Miss Matty to marry below her rank. You know she was the Rector's daughter,'* (Gaskell, 1998, p. 29).

The conversation between Mary and Miss Pole exemplifies the intertwining of gender and class identities. As the Rector's daughter, Miss Matty ranks higher than the yeoman farmer Mr. Holbrook. She belongs to the upper-middle class while he, holding and cultivating only a small landed estate, is considered to be part of the lower class. If Miss Matty marries Mr. Holbrook, she will lose her gentility. Despites her feelings for Mr. Holbrook, Miss Maty rejects his proposal for marriage, and they only meet "after thirty or forty years' separation" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 29), both remain spinster and confirmed bachelor.

Losing the opportunity to marry and build a family, Miss Matty experiences disenfranchised grief. The unacknowledged grief starts not long after their chance meeting at a fabric shop. Mr. Holbrook is described as physically resembling Don Quixote with his "altruism, love for literature, and abstracted attitude" (Vázquez, 2021, p. 27). Mr Holbrook invites her cousin Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and Mary to come to his house, Woodley, which is located

outside of Cranford. Living on his own estate, Mr. Holbrook is in a much better financial situation than Miss Matty. Their meeting then becomes "an ironic reminder of how her long-ago refusal to marry Mr. Holbrook had reverberating consequences" (Merte, 2020, p. 278). On the way to Woodley, Mary notices Miss Matty's "silent agitation" and she is aware that Miss Matty is "in a tremor at the thought of seeing the place which might have been her home, and round which it is probable that many of her innocent girlish imaginations had clustered" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 31). The "silent agitation" is the first mark of Miss Matty's disenfranchised grief as she cannot openly express her grief of losing Mr. Holbrook. The phrase "might have been her home" highlights Miss Matty's lost opportunities in becoming the Victorian feminine ideal. If she had married Holbrook, not only would she become a wife and a mother but she would also preside over Woodley, the family home. Victorian doctrine of separate spheres dictates that men and women are innately different and consequently meant to do different things. Men occupy the public sphere, and women reside in the domestic sphere. The ideal woman is thus a wife and mother. Miss Matty's "innocent girlish imaginations" must have been related to her gender roles, which she unfortunately cannot achieve.

Miss Matty's disenfranchised grief in her relations with Mr. Holbrook is preceded by a number of signs of loss. After their first encounter, coming home Miss Matty goes straight to her room and appears later in the afternoon looking "as if she had been crying" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 30). Their meetings evoke painful memories, and Mary comments: "how faithful her poor heart had been in its sorrow and its silence" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 36). Mary's observation shows that Miss Matty has not moved on with her love for Mr. Holbrook. When Mr. Holbrook is leaving for a journey to Paris, Miss Matty worries about his well-being. Upon hearing of Mr. Holbrook's declining health after his trip to Paris, Miss Matty is falling ill for days. The biggest blow comes when Miss Pole arrives with the information of Mr. Holbrook's death. Upon hearing the news, Miss Matty is speechless and "trembling so nervously" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 39). While Miss Matty's physical response to Mr. Holbrook's death represents her spontaneous grief, her efforts to conceal her feelings highlight the nature of disenfranchised grief. She cannot openly express her grief.

Mr. Holbrook's passing and Miss Matty's response to it underscore the dynamics within disenfranchised grief. Miss Matty has not met Mr. Holbrook for more than thirty years, and their meetings rekindle her long not-forgotten love. She dreads Mr. Holbrook's trip to Paris because she sees it as a potential loss of her former lover. She tries to alleviate this by cherishing the fact that "he had given her a book, and he had called her Matty, just as he used to do thirty years ago" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 37). These little acts are seen as proof of their special relationships. In their previous meetings, Mr. Holbrook always addresses her formally, which may make Miss Matty feel he no longer has any special feelings for her. When Holbrook is ailing, Miss Matty spends one evening elaborating her sister's act of kindness

> *….as if to make up for some reproachful feeling against her late sister, Miss Jenkyns, which had been troubling her all the afternoon, and for which she now felt penitent, she kept telling me how good and how clever Deborah was in her youth* (Gaskell, 1998, p. 38).

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Miss Matty must have blamed her sister for her failed relationship with Mr. Holbrook, but she does not dare expressing her resentments openly. Instead of blaming her sister, Miss Matty talks about how Deborah nursed her through a long illness, which Mary concludes must have happened after the dismissal of Mr. Holbrook's suit. Miss Matty's grief that cannot be acknowledged results in psychosomatic illness.

Miss Matty's act of concealment becomes more intentional with Mr. Holbrook's death and it ensues other in psychosomatic symptoms. While Miss Matty never mentions Mr. Holbrook again, "the book he gave her lies with her Bible on the little table by her bedside" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 38). The positioning of the book represents the importance of Mr. Holbrook, yet since they are not in a relationship, Miss Matty's grief becomes disenfranchised. She has to prevent herself from mourning him by not mentioning him. However, Mary observes how Miss Matty wishes to mourn Mr. Holbrook. In the Victorian era, the mourning attire communicated a widow's sorrow (R. N. Mitchell, 2013). Miss Matty orders a particular kind of cap, which makes the hatmaker question her.

> *'But she wears widows' caps ma'am?'*
> *'Oh! I only meant something in that style; not widows', of course, but rather like Mrs. Jamieson's.*
> This effort at concealment was the beginning of the tremulous motion of head and hands which I have seen ever since in Miss Matty (Gaskell, 1998, p. 39).

Miss Matty must be wishing that she were Mr. Holbrook's wife so that she was entitled to mourn his death. The fact that she has to deny ordering such a cap and does not want Mary to know that she does so speaks to her understanding that her grief is not socially acknowledged. None of the other characters is said to express condolence to her loss. The inability to publicly mourn results in the psychosomatic symptoms noticed by others but may not be realized by Miss Matty herself.

Navigating Disenfranchised Grief

Deborah Jenkyns may have contributed to Miss Matty's disenfranchised grief, but she also has her own struggle with it. Recalling lost opportunities in marriage and motherhood, Miss Maty reminisces how she and her sister aspire to be a wife and mother. She tells Mary,

> *"we were planning our future lives—both of us were planning …. She said she should like to marry an archdeacon, and write his charges;" but Deborah in her entire life never speaks to "an unmarried archdeacon"* (Gaskell, 1998, p. 104).

Identifying herself with her father, Deborah's choice of a future husband is a senior priest, hence better than her father but also naturally must have been married by the time he achieves his position. Thus, Deborah has never been married.

Marriage can lower, maintain, or improve a woman's social status; and for that reason, Deborah discourages Miss Matty's marriage to Mr. Holbrook, but she promotes Miss Jessie Brown's marriage to Major Gordon. Miss Jessie's father, Captain Brown died after being hit by a train, one of the "representative

symbols of "progress," (Werner, 2018, p. 167). With her father's sudden death, Miss Jessie finds herself in a compromising situation. She does not have any means to support herself. Deborah steps in and takes over Captain Brown's roles in protecting his daughters, which exemplifies reassertion of female authority (Lambert, 2018). Deborah takes care of Captain Brown's funeral, coordinates the Cranford ladies in assisting Miss Jessie in taking care of her ailing sister until her death and funeral, and marries Miss Jessie to Major Gordon, for which Miss Jessie never forgets to show her gratitude. She keeps in touch with Cranford ladies, inviting them to visit her house, from which the ladies "returned with wonderful accounts of her house, her husband, her dress, and her looks' (Gaskell, 1998, p. 22), a series of evidence of her leading a great life. Encouraging Major Gordon's courtship, Deborah saves Miss Jessie from having to work for a living - which will strip her off her middle class status. Her marriage to Major Gordon secures her financial and social status.

Part of the marker of middle class status is the right to govern and direct the lower class. The novel shows how Deborah is very distinct in showing her authority. For example, when giving charity to a postman, she is described as *"standing over him like a bold dragoon"* - the similar position as when she forces Miss Jessie to eat for her health - enquiring him of his children and giving gifts to all of them while making sure each member of the postman's family receives the proportional amount: *"the shilling and the mince-pie"* for the children and *"half-a-crown in addition for both father and mother"* (Gaskell, 1998, p. 22). Miss Matty, on the other hand, does not see such a ceremony with the poor fit her, unlike her sister who sees it as *"a glorious opportunity for giving advice and benefiting her fellow-creatures"* (Gaskell, 1998, p. 119). Therefore, when giving money to the poor, Miss Matty chooses to give the money all at once instead of giving "each individual coin separate, with a "*There! that's for yourself; that's for Jenny," etc"* (Gaskell, 1998, p. 119). However, in another instance when the servant Fanny knows better about the cage as a new fashion trend, the Cranford ladies dismiss her knowledge. Clarke argues: *"Class consciousness for the ladies of Cranford abounds," and "it would, for Cranford ladies, be better to be wrong than to admit a servant is right"* (Clarke, 2019, p. 47). The privilege as the genteel helps the Jenkyn sisters to navigate their disenfranchised grief.

Denied the opportunity to build a family, her position as the middle class lady allows Miss Matty to promote the marriage of the lower class. Another example of exercising control aligns with how Miss Matty dutifully follows the rules set by her older sister, even after her sister's death, such as not allowing maids to have followers. In doing so, the middle class women do not necessarily control the maids' sexuality but more on preventing themselves from losing the paid labors due to marriage (Armstrong, 2019). Previously, Deborah does not allow her maid to have followers, and Miss Matty follows in her sister's steps. That the Cranford ladies do not allow their maids to have romantic suitors is frustrating for the maids because *"handsome young men—abounded in the lower classes"* (Clarke, 2019, p. 47). Miss Matty's previous maid, Fanny finds opportunities to defy the rule, while the next servant, Marta tries hard - even though not without complaint, to resist the temptations of having followers. However, Miss Matty decides to move in the opposite direction after experiencing the grief of losing her former lover. The lost opportunities from her youth makes her more empathetic, and she is determined not to "grieve any young hearts'" (Gaskell,

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1998, p. 40). She allows her maid, Marta, to have followers. Learning the hard way, Miss Matty helps make the marriage between Marta and her lover, Jem Hearn, happen.

Husbandless and childless themselves, the Jenkyns sisters navigate their disenfranchised grief partly by encouraging marriage among younger people. With the marriages, the narrative resolves part of the Jenkyns sisters' disenfranchised grief by allowing them to become surrogate mothers. Miss Jessie's daughter, Flora Gordon becomes a source of comfort for the elderly Deborah. With her failing eyesight, Deborah is no longer able to read. She tells Mary: "*If Flora were not here to read to me, I hardly know how I should get through the day*" (Gaskell, 1998, p. 22). Flora becomes the daughter that Deborah never has. Similarly, of Marta and Hearn, Mary says how Miss Matty is happy with the presence of *"her god-daughter Matilda"* and wishes that Martha and Hearn have more children (Gaskell, 1998, p. 156). By naming their daughter Matilda (after Miss Matty) and letting Miss Matty be the godmother, Marta and Hearn assist Miss Matty in navigating her disenfranchised grief.

The last two chapters of *Cranford* conclude the narrative with Peter's "happy return", which provides solutions to Miss Matty's financial problems and brings, as the title of the final chapter suggests, "peace to Cranford". When the bank where Miss Matty puts her investment goes bankrupt, Miss Matty sells tea in her parlour to earn a living. Tea scenes in novels are used by authors "to establish class status and pretension" because the upper class have different practices related to drinking tea from the lower class (Fisher, 2019, pp. 209-210). Dickson argues, "Tea drinking …. remain within the province of the wealthy" (Dickson, 2017, p. 80). Trading tea however marks a lower class status. Therefore, Peter provides financial and social security to Miss Matty; she can stop selling tea. Peter becomes "the reward of a patriarchal protector bestowed upon Cranford's heroine" (Fernandez, 2016, p. 42). The happy ending is especially true for Miss Matty: "The rewards of Miss Matty's humility include surrogate motherhood, surrogate wifehood, and a return to prosperity" (Mitchell, 1998, p. xxiv). In the previous three chapters, Miss Matty loses her investment with the bankruptcy of her bank, and she has to sell tea at her parlour. The return of the long lost brother restores Miss Matty's middle class social status, secures her finances, and makes her a surrogate wife for a husband that she never has.

CONCLUSION

In portraying the lives of unmarried women, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* shows how defying gender expectations may result in disenfranchised grief. As middle-class women whose social status depends on their father or husband, Deborah and Matilda Jenkyn's significant losses in their lives are often due to the lack of such male figures. As a daughter, women often fail to meet the expectation towards a son, and as a single woman, women fall short of the roles of a wife. While surviving the life outside of marriage and motherhood, the Jenkyns sisters fall victim to grief that cannot be socially acknowledged or validated. However, the novel also shows alternatives in conforming to gender norms to navigate

such grief. The Jenkyns sisters are provided with the roles of a surrogate mother and wife.

This study shows that single women are prone to suffer from disenfranchised grief for not meeting normative gender. While literally remaining unmarried, the novel offers a resolution that does not defy traditional gender roles for women: being a wife and a mother despite only being a surrogate. The main characters in *Cranford* are aging spinsters which naturally make it harder for them to start a family. Further research may yield different results when applied to younger female characters. The fact that in real life Gaskell was a happy wife and mother may also affect her choice of resolutions to her female characters. Future research can address these issues with other novels written by Gaskell or novels written by female authors who are spinster or not happily married.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Eta Farmacelia Nurulhady: conceptualization, resources, writing-original draft, writing-review and editing, corresponding author. **Juliati:** proofreading, editing, and refining manuscript.

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