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Nostalgia of Victorian Single Heroines: The Old Days and Resilience in *Cranford* and *Villette*❖

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Victorian female writers employed nostalgia in their fiction to represent social movements, status differences, and feminine development. Taking Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* as case studies, the paper explores the role of nostalgia in diverse contexts and its implications for women. This study presents nostalgia not only in terms of emotional longing for the past but also as a social and psychological coping mechanism that helped Victorian women adjust to a changing world. *Cranford* illustrates how collective nostalgia allowed the community to maintain social order and cultural identity. The individual nostalgia of unmarried female elders also played a significant role in achieving self-healing. *Villette*, by contrast, is about the ways that individual nostalgia creates self and identity. Lucy's longing for the Bretton family is a combination of her sweet childhood memories and her innate desire for a sense of belonging. Through the act of nostalgia, Lucy as a young single woman is not just searching for moments of her past but also for the possibility of personal growth and identity through these moments. Both novels go beyond nostalgia to incisively examine social changes, class conflict and self-help among women in the Victorian era with similar and different attitudes. They also demonstrate that nostalgia is not just an emotion, but a social and psychological survival tool that helps people locate a sense of belonging in themselves when confronting change.

KEYWORDS: nostalgia, class, single women, *Cranford*, *Villette*

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維多利亞時代單身女主角的鄉愁：《克蘭福德》與《維萊特》中的舊日情懷與韌性❖

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摘　要

這一份研究探討維多利亞時代女性作家，如何在小說中運用「鄉愁」(Nostalgia）的概念，來呈現社會變遷、階級差異及女性成長。本文以伊莉莎白·蓋斯凱爾（Elizabeth Gaskell）的《克蘭福德鎮》(*Cranford*）與夏綠蒂·勃朗特（Charlotte Brontë）的《維萊特》(*Villette*）為主要研究文本，探索鄉愁在不同語境下的功能以及對女性的意涵。研究指出，鄉愁不是單純地對過去的情感渴望，更是一種社會與心理的應對機制，用來協助維多利亞時代女性，適應劇變的世界。《克蘭福德鎮》展現出，集體鄉愁如何使社群得以維持社會秩序與文化認同，同時，未婚女性長者的個人鄉愁在實現自我療癒（self-healing）方面亦發揮了重要作用。相比之下，《維萊特》則聚焦於個人鄉愁建構自我與認同的方式。主角露西（Lucy）對布萊頓（Bretton）一家的渴望，交織了其甜蜜的童年記憶與內在對歸屬感的渴求。透過鄉愁的實踐，露西這位年輕單身女性不僅在追尋過去的片段，更是在這些片段中，尋求個人的成長與認同之可能性。這兩部小說皆超越了單純的鄉愁抒發，以相似卻又各異的態度，細膩地剖析維多利亞時代的社會變革、階級衝突以及女性間的互助與自立。這兩部小說的分析，證明鄉愁不是單純的一種情緒，更是一種社會與心理的生存工具，幫助個體在面對變遷時，在內心深處裡面，錨定歸屬感。

關鍵詞：鄉愁、階級、單身女性、《克蘭福德鎮》、《維萊特》

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The word "nostalgia" was first proposed in the 17th century, when Johannes Hofer used the term to describe what he believed to be a disease caused by a longing to return to one's hometown. By the end of the 18th century, nostalgia had developed from being viewed as a medical condition to being viewed as a phenomenon related to culture. By the 19th century, the focus in explorations of nostalgia had shifted from understanding disease symptoms of morbid longing to nostalgia's associated emotional states. Consequently, nostalgia was no longer regarded as a medical condition; rather, it was classified under other diagnostic categories, including depression. This transformation in thinking both demonstrates the change in the understanding of nostalgia as relating to emotions and spirituality rather than illness and also highlights cognitive problems underlying nostalgia which relate to the self, one's hometown, the past, and an inability to adapt and assimilate to a new place. Many stories in Victorian literature focus on people leaving home or reflecting on how their present is different from their past and present memories or longings for old things in the past. Such feelings regarding patterns of social and cultural change in the 19th century, as well as a continuing focus on the past, were frequent topics of Victorian literature. In novels written in 1853, Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë discussed the relationship between the nostalgia that unmarried women felt and cultural changes. The portrayal of nostalgia in the novels of these two authors reveals both shared thematic concerns and distinct approaches, particularly concerning the intersection of single women, social class, and temporal perception. To demonstrate this, this study traces the roots of nostalgia to medical terminology, so that nostalgia can be better understood as it has drifted in psychological and cultural realms. The study will then examine both novels to see how they employ their nostalgia to interrogate class life and gender issues for single women.

I. Nostalgia: From Medical Pathology to a Sentimental State

In 1688, Hofer wrote a research paper titled "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia or Homesickness," in which he discussed the physical symptoms of and treatment methods for nostalgia. Hofer created the word "nostalgia" from the Greek words *nostos*, meaning "return to a previous homeland," and *algos*,

meaning "discomfort or hardship" (Hofer 381; Dames 29);[1] a patient with "nostalgia" is "in a fervor or consumed by the 'Wasting Disease'" (Hofer 380), a disease that can originate in reality or in the imagination. When an individual is far from their home or has been isolated by their home, the resulting feelings travel "from the living spirits entirely by its own momentum along uncommon routes through the untouched courses of the channels of the brain to the body, and by revisiting the oval tubes of the center brain" (Hofer 381). This explanation indicates that Hofer viewed the triggering of nostalgia and the resulting physical changes from a pathological and physiological perspective. Hofer believed the pathology of nostalgia to be a longing for one's home and a desire to return to that home, both of which are triggered by external objects or environments, with these objects and environments being exaggerated by the imagination and with the resulting longing and desire leading to physical abnormalities. Doctors at the time believed that the most effective treatment for nostalgia was to send the patient back to their hometown—or at the very least, their home country—and that the second most effective treatment was to use deceptive promises or practices to satisfy the patient's wishes (Hofer 388; Austin, *Nostalgia* 4, 9). They believed that when experiencing nostalgia, a patient's physical or psychological state was subject to the influence of homesickness; more specifically, nostalgic individuals became fixated on a specific moment or object from their past and were thus unable to direct their attention toward activities of the present, with this phenomenon resulting in mal-adaptation to the external environment and indulgence in internalized emotions disconnected from the outside world.

While earlier instances of nostalgia predominantly featured men displaced from their homes, the late 18th and early 19th centuries witnessed a growing body of literature documenting cases of female nostalgia. Such feelings of homesickness were deemed significant insofar as they challenged the prevailing masculine ideals of military culture and the associated sense of propriety. John Gittins, who analyzed the culture of military troops in 1735, indicated that a "soldier ought not to let his heart sink under any disaster after whatsoever. And soldiers ought to be well disciplined, and . . . war-like discipline, and good-fortune, were the foundation of the Roman Empire" (Gittins xvi). Gittins

[1] Hofer believed that many doctors had discussed nostalgia as a disease that often occurs when a person is away from their home. It is referred to as "das Heimweh" in German and "la maladie du pays" in French.

believed that the rigorous imposition of military discipline would not only fortify a soldier's professional conduct but also consolidate a brand of masculinity resilient enough to withstand the debilitating effects of domestic longing. A similar concept of masculinity was also expressed by Adam Smith who thought that, even in a violent or unfair environment, a man must "maintain this control of his passive feelings upon all occasions, while [i]n success and in disappointment, in prosperity and in adversity, before friends and before enemies, he has often been under the necessity of supporting this manhood" (177). Gittins's and Smith's descriptions of expectations regarding the mid-18th century highlight that the nostalgia that men experienced in feeling homesick contradicted sociocultural expectations related to men; consequently, nostalgia was considered an atypical state of masculinity that needed to be cured or prevented in men, especially among soldiers.

Notably, in Robert Hamilton's records published in 1794 discussing homesickness, he did not solely present cases involving male patients; he also referred to cases of several female patients. In discussing the treatment of a young female patient in boarding school, Hamilton stated, "She was removed from school (where she never thought herself happy) to her great satisfaction, and soon recovered" (105). Beside the real cases of nostalgia, he also compared the symptoms of homesickness to the depressive symptoms experienced by the heroine of Samuel Richardson's 1748 novel *Clarissa*, believing that Clarissa and patients of homesickness exhibited similarities. Clarissa feels depressed because she has been unable to adapt to her new life, which leads to her struggling to eat, drink, and sleep. Hamilton stated that in *Clarissa*, Richardson "has well described the effects of this passion" (107). The descriptions of the influence of emotions in Hamilton's medical papers and in *Clarissa* demonstrate the physiological influence of strong emotions and suggest that the causes of many diseases are psychological rather than physical. From the medical records from 1688—1794, nostalgia grew to be considered an anxiety regarding social change rather than a disease specific to men only. Women can also experience nostalgia, and this phenomenon was more prevalent in Victorian society during the Victorian age.

Victorian nostalgia, which featured anxiety over one's surroundings along with reminiscences of one's hometown, "was regarded not so much as a disease but as a type of depression or melancholia" (Payne). The academic research regarding Victorian nostalgia had shifted from considering this phenomenon to

be a disease to considering it to be a cultural phenomenon, with researchers increasingly approaching the topic from the perspectives of desire, memory, aesthetics, and literary tradition (Santesso 12-13; Dames 36; Austin, *Nostalgia* 4; Ann Colley 3-4). The "dual meaning of nostalgia" contains "a homesickness that causes physical pining and a wistful regret of the past—at the same time capturing the nostalgic mood that pervades so much of Victorian literature that it has become notorious" (Wager). Nostalgia serves as a crucial and popular theme in Victorian literature, and Gaskell and Brontë explore the themes of nostalgia and the challenges of adapting to present realities from similar cultural perspectives of class and gender in their novels, *Cranford* and *Villette*, both published in 1853.

While writing *Cranford*, Gaskell traveled many times to her childhood home of Knutsford. Gaskell's personal letters she wrote during this period demonstrate the considerable influence that these trips had on her health and nostalgic writing. Brontë experienced the deaths of three of her siblings in 1848 and 1849, and consequently, during those years, she acutely felt the absence of these siblings in her home. This caused the writing of her novel *Villette* to be an extremely slow and emotional process. An analysis of nostalgia in *Cranford* and *Villette* can lead to an understanding of Gaskell's and Brontë's opinions regarding the genderedness and cultural awareness of beliefs regarding nostalgia at the time from the perspectives of single women. Also, 1850s Victorian society was marked by an increasing female population, in which "at least 42% of women aged twenty to forty years were unmarried and were therefore required to find a means of earning a living" (Lu 87). The two novels of the time illustrate the nostalgia that many Victorian single women experienced due to the loss of stability from the old, comfortable days of stable middle-class life, and the resilience that developed in response to these changes, helping them recover from the sorrow of nostalgia.

II. Nostalgia of the Old Days in Cranford

In the years before Elizabeth Gaskell published her novel *Cranford* in 1853, the majority of Gaskell's literary works were influenced by her memories of Knutsford and the area surrounding it in terms of both social observations and settings, and she consistently visited her former home after she married (Foster 43). For example, Gaskell traveled from Liverpool to Knutsford in

September 1851 before continuing on to Sandbach to visit friends and relatives and then returning to Knutsford in October (Foster 42; Handley 22). In Gaskell's letter to Harriet Carr on October 20, 1851, [2] she not only contemplates problems of maintaining friendship but also displays deep concerns over families affected by cholera in her hometown. Gaskell's return home had a notable influence on her literary creations. After returning to Manchester, she told her friend Anne Shane, "Knutsford makes me feel better, partly because of the air, partly because of the quietness. It's because I have some time alone every day" (Gaskell, *Letters* 168). Having a period of solitude may have enabled Gaskell to reflect nostalgically on the past and to recognize the potential of such reflections as material for a novel. In December 1851, she published the first part of a story titled "Our Society at Cranford," which would become a series in Charles Dickens's magazine *Household Words*. The series continued until May 1853. The story was subsequently published as a single volume in June 1853 under the title *Cranford* (Foster 43).

*Cranfor*d explores both communal and personal nostalgia. Memories of the past are a crucial theme in *Cranford*, with much of the narrative centering on nostalgia. My research on the novel *Cranford* emphasizes how the elderly, middle-class female stratum preserved and exhibited an elaborate and nostalgic economic mode, in order to understand how nostalgia and ritual function as a formative class and cultural force. In the novel, the female residents of the community of Cranford not only maintain rituals and objects from the past but also recall events from their past and tell stories of such events that reveal key information related to their lifestyles and values. Nostalgia serves as a means of reconciling differences between their expectations and their reality and also as a means of self-adjustment. As the narrative of *Cranford* unfolds, the characters' engagement with nostalgia manifests in a three-stage progression: collective nostalgia, individual nostalgia, and a return to collective nostalgia.

As the narrative of *Cranford* commences, a pronounced sense of collective nostalgia is immediately evident. This indulgence in nostalgia assists the community in adapting to the rapidly changing world and enables the elder residents to more easily adjust to the social changes brought about by capitalism. The community in Cranford is matriarchal, and the elder women of

[2] Harriet Carr was Gaskell's intimate friend and is frequently mentioned in her letters. Their intimate relationship is shown in Gaskell's five letters in J. A. V. Chapple's "Before 'Crutches and Changed Feelings': Five Early Letters by Elizabeth Gaskell (Nee Stevenson)".

Cranford are well-known in the small town for their elegant but economical lifestyle. The practice of elegant economy is part of the collective nostalgic memory of Cranford dwellers. For example, in *Cranford*, "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" (Gaskell, *Cranford* 3). This description reflects their desire to maintain social etiquette and avoid appearing miserly (Mulvihill 348). Their elegant economy enables the economically unproductive community of older women to maintain and demonstrate their enjoyment of their habits of the past and avoid directly facing or acknowledging their present financial difficulties and pressures. The women consider such practices to be vital to maintaining a lifestyle in line with their social status, which in turn enables them to maintain their self-esteem in the face of economic challenges. The female elders, by placing value on both frugality and social cohesion, create a manner of living that supports their needs and values. This elegant economy does not simply involve material frugality, however; it is also closely connected to a deeper social and moral economy (Mulvihill 347). Due to economic constraints, middle-class women, without mentioning work or income issues, opted to emphasize nostalgic rituals related to past modes of consumption in food, clothing, and dwelling, effectively mitigating new expenses of orderly living habits. This lifestyle, more than a financial strategy, reflects the town's values and social customs; it is a life philosophy rooted in the preservation of and nostalgia for an older way of life.

Beyond economic concerns, Cranfordians depict nostalgia as an active social undertaking, accenting not only a critique of the present but also a project of communal identity. Nostalgia is not merely a yearning for yesteryear but a strategy of agency for responding to social change as it manifests in rituals, material culture, and communal life. Cranfordians' nostalgia essentially manifests as class-based rituals and a critique of the status quo—an act of community and a critique of cogito. Through forming a community based on class, rituals in Cranford—visiting, dressing, and etiquette—act as a communal expression of nostalgia, both to reinforce a longing for former culture and act as a way to gratify the psyche. For example, the novel describes how "the inhabitants of Cranford kept early hours, and clattered home in their pattens, under the guidance of a lantern-bearer, about nine o'clock at night; and the whole town was abed and asleep by half-past ten" (Gaskell, *Cranford* 4). The daily existence of Cranford is gray with such ritualistic customs as the assigned

nightly curfew and games of cards. These seemingly mundane daily rituals not only uphold the town's social order but, more crucially, provide a channel for collective memory, strengthening emotional ties among the people. Such rigorous adherence to schedules and behavioral norms demonstrates the townspeople's strong commitment to their traditional way of life. By upholding traditional etiquette and class norms, the characters of Cranford resist the fast-pace of social change and the materialism of the modern era. Their resistance is also reflected in their acceptance of new members of the community. As new people come to Cranford, the town works actively to assimilate the new members, enforcing the shared rituals of the town's nostalgia to keep Cranford's community identity intact. For example, Jenkyns Deborah, an unmarried elder, attempted to assimilate Captain Brown who dared to speak openly about his poverty. The attention that the residents of Cranford give to ensuring that every detail of their lives adheres to social etiquette is a reflection of their values.

As they embody their shared identity, the residents also exert a reverence for material culture that is redolent of nostalgia. The book devotes a great deal of attention to the ways in which Cranford's residents gather, clasp, and exhibit material signs of the past. This has included, for example, the display of old English tea sets, dining utensils (Gaskell, *Cranford* 2, 6, 104, 109), and an insistence on proper etiquette regarding hats and attire (104-105). These details are not simply gestures of nostalgia toward former ways of living; they carry with them class implications, representing the middle-class quest for grace and propriety, and an emotional investment with the accumulation, cataloguing, and exhibition of class-specific memorabilia. The persistency and conspicuousness of nostalgia-coated artifacts allows the inhabitants to establish a shared history of an ideal previous class life and, similarly, form a unit of the place and its social class through which they consolidate their identity, thus reinforcing the feeling of belonging to a community. These objects are not merely remnants of an earlier time: they are extensions of their memories, allowing them to relive beloved moments from their lives and pass down this shared history to the next generation.

The phenomenon of nostalgia is not simply sentimental, but a form of resistance to modern abstract temporality. The female elders embody what is impossible to escape: a sort of defense mechanism taught through the class etiquette of the elders, through rituals of taste, in the face of a rapid acceleration

of the pace of life and tectonic shifts of history. As the townspeople experience rapid changes, loss, and uncertainty, nostalgia acts as a psychological buffer, assisting them in coping with these transformations brought by railroads and economic speculations (Gaskell, *Cranford* 33, 43, 97, 187).This collectively improvised nostalgic behavior manifesting through these females elders is, in itself, an outright defiance of modern beliefs in time—in particular linear time and the insistence on progress. The townspeople are not willing to surrender to the forward thrust of linear time, denying that the flow of time is irreversible. Over time, they moved toward a more linear conception of time, in which history had a telos, that the future must be better than the past. And yet Gaskell, writing to Tottie Fox in 1950, confesses an opposition to linear time and directly points out that "I long (weakly) for the old times where right and wrong did not seem such complicated matters; and I am sometimes coward enough to wish that we were back in the darkness where obedience was the only seen duty of women" (Gaskell, *Letters* 109). This reveals how Gaskell sometimes longed for the simpler life of earlier times and imagined the past as a time when right and wrong were black and white and the social order was stable.

This resistance to linear time also appears in the Cranford dwellers' challenge, through nostalgia, to outside society's unquestioning promotion of progress, and their struggle to achieve another sense of a world in time and value in the closed town. This peculiar perception of time allows the people who live within the world of *Cranford* to inhabit a temporal realm where time, relative to that of the outside world, is temporarily suspended, and by virtue of the constant acts of re-inhabiting the past, they develop a stable and coherent sense of community identity. Nostalgia becomes collective, no longer just a remembering of the past, but a social practice. Through a sense of nostalgia, the denizens of Cranford effectively fend off the pace of life and the inventions offered by modernity and create a distinct sense of time and values that are theirs in a relatively closed society.

Emotional nostalgia in *Cranford* is also depicted as a method for coping with loss and fear of death. The nostalgia of Matty Jenkyns, another unmarried elder, is especially pronounced, as she traverses the fears of getting older and losing family members by digging into the past and reading old letters and activates a therapy of convalescence. When Matty experiences the deaths of friends and relatives, she reads her family letters to revive her childhood memories and personal connection with herself, indulging in her own nostalgia

in order to achieve personal development. Consequently, she becomes deeply depressed to the point that her maid, Martha, notices her depression. Matty "could not restrain the tears which had long been silently flowing, but hid her face behind her handkerchief, and sobbed aloud" over the death of her sister (Gaskell, *Cranford* 33); she "could not speak, she was trembling so nervously . . . [and] made a strong effort to conceal her feelings" over the death of Holbrook (55). Therefore, Matty establishes a ritual of reading her family's old letters that she has kept and recollecting the past. This ritual, which is a key focus of Chapters 5 and 6 of *Cranford*, elicits feelings of nostalgia for her past life. By reading these letters, she is able to relive her past life through nostalgic reminiscence of her childhood. Matty's nostalgia is not a mere sentimentality toward times past but an individual process of healing. By reading old family letters, she revisits childhood and reacquaints herself with herself. Reading past family letters allows momentary relapses into childhood for Matty, a technique where time backtracks light years away from the present.

The two chapters function like the idea of convalescence in 19th-century society, a therapeutic measure for getting oneself out of the present moment. In Victorian conceptions of convalescence, it is not just a stage of recovery from illness, but, rather, a multi-dimensional process with a temporal aspect entailing shifts in physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual transformations. It meant something else—a slow, gradual recovery, a chance to ease into the pace of life, a time to ponder and be reincorporated into society. "In its temporality, convalescence could function something like a pause—an interlude in which one could demand to be taken out of the grasp of quotidian life, in which one could reflect on oneself" (Krienke 76). The recovery period serves as a time different from the present that patients experience in order to get energy back from their previous life. Matty's nostalgic feelings during the letter-reading process in *Cranford* are like a departure from her present environment where she is facing the deaths of loved ones. She enters the world of letters, which is like a convalescent home, and immerses herself in the memories of her childhood, allowing a slow process of self-healing to occur.

In *Cranford*, the reminiscence during convalescence helps Mary enhance her capacity for stress management and discover the meaning and nature of life to face the past that she had not dared to confront directly. Matty's practice of reading letters because of nostalgia serves as a form of reminiscence therapy for convalescence, with the practice enabling her to achieve greater self-

understanding, maintain her self-esteem, and minimize her sense of isolation in her old age. Her letters are a physical representation of her memories; that is, these tangible letters preserve her childhood memories. These recordings of the past lead Matty to feel nostalgic for her childhood and help her manage her feelings about the deaths of friends and relatives, her sadness over getting old, and her anxiety over facing death. The childhood memories evoked by the letters lead Matty to experience nostalgia for a past that she cannot return to. Matty's nostalgia is a longing for her orderly home of warmth that no longer exists. The personal lyricism of this nostalgia reflects the collective nostalgia of the community, and together they create the layered emotional landscape of the novel.

Yet for Matty, nostalgia is not just a pleasure trip back to yesteryear; it is also self-soothing. By looking back on a previous time, Matty can not only work through her grief but also know herself and her life better. The letters she reads from the past record her memories, but also become an important tool for her to conduct self-dialogue, and then redefine her self-worth through this process. Matty does not remain sentimental and nostalgic for long in the novel, possibly because Gaskell believed that one should not wallow in sadness. Gaskell does not allow Matty to remain immersed in nostalgia for an extended period, but rather uses an "uncanny shock" and the intervention of humor to guide her from past sentimentality towards the present life. This plot design likely stems from her own experience of longing for deceased loved ones. When Gaskell's son died of scarlet fever in 1845, Gaskell mentioned her grief regarding this death several times in letters (*Letters* 74-75). In a letter she wrote after moving from Upper Rumford Street to Plymouth Grove, she stated, "However I must not waste my strength or my time about the never ending sorrow; but wish hollows this house. I think that is one evil of this bustling life that one has never time calmly and bravely to face a great grief, to view it on every side as to bring the harmony out of it" (*Letters* 111). Although Gaskell's sorrow regarding her son's death was persistent, she believed that she should not continue to dwell on this sorrow. She had a busy life that prevented her from processing her overwhelming grief, and therefore, she was unable to come to terms with this grief. This statement in her letter reflects Gaskell's thoughts regarding the dilemmas of life and her emotions and demonstrates her courage and wisdom in the face of tragedy.

Gaskell's beliefs regarding limiting the amount of time spent in sadness over death is reflected in how Matty copes with her grief in *Cranford*. This perspective of disrupting grief is also reflected in the narrative techniques of Cranford. Gaskell repeatedly introduces sudden humor or shock in moments of sorrow to dilute the effect of grief. In *Cranford*, Gaskell often uses sudden digressive narrative techniques to make Matty reverse the dullness and nostalgia of facing death threats in life. For example, the narrator writes, "[t]he candles took it in turns; and, whatever we might be talking about or doing, Miss Matty's eyes were habitually fixed upon the candle, ready to jump up and extinguish it and to light the other before they had become too uneven in length to be restored to equality in the course of the evening" (Gaskell, *Cranford* 59). The tone of this narration is humorous, and the information it presents illustrates the class culture of the town. Immediately after this moment with the candles, Matty decides to burn her family letters. For Matty, burning these letters is akin to destroying a sweet and painful past that cannot be returned to. The letters represent the final traces of Matty's nostalgic memories; by burning the physical object with which her nostalgia is associated, Matty gains the courage to face the fact that what has passed cannot return.

Second, the sadness of facing the absence of past life evoked by Matty's nostalgic process of letter reading and burning disappears suddenly and unexpectedly when Matty, an unmarried older woman, tells the narrator that she heard the sound of a maid kissing her lover. The narrator notes that Matty seems uncomfortable and that her "eyes were round with affright." Matty hesitates to tell the narrator what she heard and saw; she finally says, "In the street—just outside—it sounded like . . . kissing" (Gaskell, *Cranford* 84). Gaskell devoted two chapters to exploring Matty's sentimental nostalgia. However, she did not wish for Matty to continue to dwell in the space between the past and the present. Instead, she quickly shifted the focus away from the fear of death and the sentimentality of nostalgia and toward kissing and gossip, thereby drawing Matty back to the present. This narrative technique is similar to the aforementioned distraction method employed by psychologists treating nostalgia, such as Hofer; Matty is distracted by gossip, and consequently, her nostalgia dissipates.

Gaskell's plan of distractive digression also leads to the reader feeling as though time has stopped in the small town, creating an impression that life in the town continues to move forward instead of remaining nostalgic and stuck

in the past. This "uncanny shock" interrupts not just Matty's nostalgic rituals but also helps lead her to focus on the issues of actual life. This dosing narrative technique parallels the psychological disorder treatment of nostalgia that uses distraction to unfurl/neutralize nostalgic negative emotions. For example, in a fashion reminiscent of the therapy suggested by Hofer, the attention of the patient is turned away to keep them from stewing in nostalgic emotions. Gaskell also employs a similar device in *Cranford* in which Matty can dwell in her personal nostalgic mourning through reading letters, then shift into some agency through public and household details and questions of the domestic and economic crises of single womanhood, in which female elders are usually considered neither productive in working environments nor potential mates in marriage markets. This indicates that time and energy are not meant to be squandered in ceaseless laments and in cowering from the adversities of life, but rather should be used to directly confront grief. In this way, nostalgia functions not just as a memory of the past but as a place to begin inspiring some form of action against single women who are viewed by others as unproductive economic dependents.

In *Cranford*, the complexity and adaptability of nostalgia is demonstrated by Gaskell. Nostalgia can be more than just a wistful recollection of former times, it is a lived response to change or loss or breakup. On the community level, nostalgia can serve to consolidate community identity, so that the rituals and objects of the old days can be deployed to enable the continuation of the conventional middle-class values. Nostalgia on a personal level is also a healing mechanism that helps man confront the anxiety created by grief and aging. That said, nostalgia is not a cure-all, and getting stuck in nostalgia is also bad in terms of personal development and adaptability. So the author employs the interventions of humor and "uncanny shocks" to pull characters, and readers, out of the embrace of nostalgia and into the moment. These "uncanny shocks" not only put an end to the nostalgic rituals but also puts into operation new undertakings, altering nostalgia from the opportunity to experience the past into the opportunity to face the new and promote a better future. Matty, no longer lost in nostalgia or humor, is addressing contemporary domestic and economic issues. This metamorphosis not only speaks to Gaskell's knowledge of nostalgia and its effects, but also of her optimism regarding life. While *Cranford* is a novel of nostalgia, it is also an in-depth examination of how nostalgia is a positive social force, how it is a bulwark against a rapidly

changing society, and how it forms a continuous communal identity. This book shows how nostalgia constitutes an attempt to defy the irreversibility of time, as well as a redoing of middle-class rituals and material culture. Gaskell does not linger in sentimental nostalgic reminiscences; instead, she engages the digression of the sudden shock of storytelling to reduce the sentimentalism of nostalgia. From communal and personal perspectives, she explores the class culture and fear of the elderly confronted with change, and this approach makes *Cranford* more than a nostalgic portrait of the past.

III. Resilience out of Nostalgia in *Villette*

Cranford shows the influences of nostalgia on a wider community, a publicly florid nostalgia. While there is evidently no wider communal nostalgia in Brontë's novel *Villette*, strong nostalgia is shown through the growth process of the protagonist Lucy and its impacts. This section mostly traces how nostalgia becomes a motor in Lucy's life for constructing class mobility rather than sentimentality or immersion in the past. The first part of the section investigates the author's nostalgia and homesickness before the writing of *Villette*. The second part explores how the unmarried character Lucy uses nostalgic memories of family, from childhood and adult life, in order to confront the emotional distance between past and present and between different classes. Lucy draws on the materialization of the emotional gap through her own labor to help reconstruct both the value and position of her self-identity.

Before Brontë created *Villette*, she had already experienced the intense nostalgia and homesickness of her relatives and herself. From 1824 to 1825, Brontë and her sister Emily Brontë were sent to attend the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. Emily Brontë became increasingly weak because of homesickness after she attended the school. At first, Brontë believed that Emily Brontë was feeling unwell because she was overworked and exhausted. Brontë described what she had observed in Emily Brontë every morning in a letter: The "vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well," and Brontë even firmly stated, "I felt in my heart she would die, if she did not go home" (Brontë, "Selections" 473). Brontë not only understood Emily Brontë's feelings and her longing for her hometown but also believed that the treatment Emily Brontë was receiving for homesickness would not be

successful and that Emily Brontë would eventually die. According to Linda Austin's study, Emily Brontë's symptoms and weakness at the time appear to be in line with 19th-century descriptions of homesickness ("Emily" 573).

In her letters, Brontë described witnessing her sister Emily Brontë's homesickness and also experiencing homesickness herself. Soon after Brontë joined her sisters at the Clerdy Daughters' School, her sisters Maria and Elizabeth died respectively in May and June 1825. Ellen Nussey, Brontë's close friend, once recalled seeing Brontë crying because she was feeling homesick which is recorded in Gaskell's discussion of Brontë (Gaskell, *Life* 132) and believed that Brontë had felt sad about the thought of being away from home (Brontë, *Letters* I: 140). In a letter to Nussey, Brontë indicated that a doctor had "enjoined me, as I valued my life, to go home" (Gaskell, *Life* 132) Brontë followed this doctor's advice and returned to her hometown, later stating that "the change has at once roused and soothed me" (Brontë, *Letters* I: 178). That is, Brontë had been able to recover from her homesickness by returning to her hometown. However, after returning home, she experienced the deaths of her brother and remaining two sisters, Branwell Brontë, Emily Brontë, and Anne Brontë (Margaret Smith 82). After experiencing the deaths of so many loved ones, Brontë wrote that being at home, which had originally made her happy, had become a source of unhappiness. "I felt that the house was all silent—the rooms were all empty—I remembered where the three were laid—in what narrow dark dwellings—never more were they to reappear on earth. So the sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me" (Brontë, *Letters* II: 222).

Brontë's diary entry indicates that the warmth and joy that her hometown had brought her had disappeared, and only the empty feeling of losing her loved ones remained. Her sadness also delayed her writing of *Villette* (Falconer 104), which she did not begin work on until November 1849. As she was working on *Villette* from 1849 to 1853, Brontë appeared to continue to feel sad over the deaths of her relatives and to feel nostalgic for the past. In a letter she wrote in 1852, she felt she had no one to talk to and was alone (Brontë, *Letters* II: 174). Brontë personally experienced depression due to nostalgia and homesickness and also witnessed her sister Emily Brontë physically and psychologically suffering from homesickness. In *Villette*, Brontë also explores nostalgic longing for one's home and past life, the discomfort of being a woman with employment far from one's home, the sadness and loneliness of not having a home, feelings

of absence and loss with respect to the object or objects of one's nostalgia, and the difficulty of self-adjustment and developing resilience.

Villette centers on its heroine's feelings of separation and alienation from and boredom with her native land.[3] The novel is often considered to be melancholy, with many scholars indicating that "an atmosphere of pain hangs about the whole [novel]" (Martineau, *The Critical Heritage* 172). The key themes in *Villette* include women's anxiety about leaving home and losing their home, as well as wishing to have a home (Lawson and Shakinovsky 932). In addition, *Villette* "presents return, and the identification of the home, in terms of memory" (Monica Cohen 52); the novel explores concerns over finding a sense of home and returning to the past through one's memories.

In *Villette*, nostalgia and homesickness are not merely personal emotional experiences but complex cultural and psychological phenomena that deeply influence the protagonist Lucy's self-awareness and life trajectory. Lucy is caregiver to an older woman named Miss Marchmont and later finds employment at Mrs. Beck's Rue Fossette school, a former medieval convent converted into a school. However, she is tasked with an excessive workload and provided with an insufficient salary, and she observes that "Madame raised my salary; but she got thrice the work out of me she had extracted from Mr. Wilson, at half the expense" (Brontë, *Villette* 81). So Lucy respond with resistance against the indifferent rules and order of the school which she cannot get used to.

Lucy is portrayed in the novel as an emotionally conservative character who expresses little of her inner feelings. Her life is one of restraint and self-restraint. Her self-repression reflects the Gothic medieval architecture she dwells within,[4] cloaked in shadows and caterwauling with suppressed

[3] Brontë presents no direct information with which to identify the town, with the French word *Villette* simply meaning "a small town," suggesting that the town in the novel could be any real, ideal, and abstract town anywhere (Anderson 46-62; McDonagh 411-12). But Brontë's experience in Brussels deeply influenced her later novels. While there, Brontë addressed issues that at all times preoccupied her — questions about her identity, about genius, about self-restraint and self-assertion, about survival in a hostile world — in her French essays (devoirs) at the Pensionnat Heger (Lonoff 387). As a cultural, linguistic, and religious outsider in Brussels (Lonoff 401), her feelings of alienation and internal struggle had intensified, providing the groundwork for the loneliness and identity issues experienced by her protagonists in subsequent texts, and particularly by Lucy in Villette.

[4] Gothic is a type of literature that appeared in the late 18th century and is recognized by its strange setting and literary style. It features haunting and horrifying locations, dilapidated buildings such as castles and ruins, paranormal components such as ghosts and omens, as well as in-depth explorations

emotions and needs. She begins to feel nostalgic for the past and desperately longs for company, stating that "a goad thrust me on, a fever forbade me to rest; a want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a mostly deadly famine" (Brontë, *Villette* 160). The school's environment and atmosphere deepen Lucy's feelings of melancholy and depression. The long corridors in the dormitory seem to enhance "the solitude and the stillness of" the school (Brontë, *Villette* 162). Lucy also describes "the ghastly white beds" as adding to the melancholy atmosphere, indicating that "the coronal of each became a death's head, huge and sun-bleached—dead dreams of an elder world and mightier race lay frozen in their wide gaping eye-holes" (Brontë, *Villette* 163). The long passageways and "ghastly white beds" of the school, adapted from a medieval convent, established a mournful atmosphere, which all bore a certain Gothic weight and sense of ghostliness. The sombre settings, the sense of randomness and powerlessness, and the opportunity for psychological discomfort exacerbated Lucy's dislocation and anxiety over her identity as a single woman, suggesting the social confinement and constraints that unmarried women experienced in the Victorian era. This intensified the longing for times of better yesterdays, adding nostalgia to the more intense psychological need for an escape from reality.

The ghost stories, after all, receive a prosaic, even mundane explanation: the "ghost" turns out to be just a girl from the school pretending to be a male suitor. "The gothic Middle Ages is the menace substrate to which Lucy's morbid state of mind is counterpointed – but in the end the Middle Ages is kept at a safe distance . . . [and] realism is finally recuperated" (Mathews 144). The gloominess of the medieval Gothic elements represents their instability and indefinability, challenging the boundaries of form and presenting the potential mutability and incoherence of identity (Smith and Hughes 1-2). Villette shows how Gothic elements can serve to reinforce the inner anxiety of single women when constructing their personal identity and why it is necessary for those women to seek nostalgic emotional comfort, and this Gothic anxiety is finally solved by a factual narrative of Victorian realism, indicating that nostalgia for

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of humanity's most wicked and illogical parts (Kincaid 8; Young 295). Victorian gothic is not simply a logical development of early Gothic traditions, but rather a multifaceted, mutable literary and cultural phenomenon (Wolfreys, "Preface" xvii). It raised various cultural issues and discourses concerning sexuality, class, the impact of scientific discoveries such as hypnotism, and imperial authority, and it influenced and was influenced by Victorian society (Wolfreys, "I Wants" 31).

home constitutes one of the driving forces for constructing single women's social mobility.

Her nostalgia for her Bretton life, a childhood home she frequently lived in, intensely takes its toll on Lucy's physical and psychological constitution, resulting in symptoms like constitutional nervousness, fevered wanderings, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite (Brontë, *Villette* 68, 188, 370). These bodily aches are not just external signs of her internal anxiety and stress, they also speak to current medical thinking about homesickness as a psychosomatic illness. This imposition highlights Lucy's feeling of discordance with the world around her and her desire for that which she does not actually possess. In contrast to the isolation and alienation she feels in her present life, Lucy's nostalgia for the Bretton house underscores her profound sense of loss and yearning for connection.

Lucy "had dreamed of" a letter and felt a "strong magnetism" towards it (Brontë, *Villette* 242). Later, when she sees a white envelope with a red wax seal in the middle, she immediately says, "I felt it to be the letter of my hope, the fruition of my wish, the release from my doubt, the ransom from my terror" **(**243). A treasured letter from Dr. John Graham Bretton from the Bretton family serves as a physical manifestation of Lucy's nostalgic childhood. It seems to encapsulate both her relationship to her own past with the Bretton family and her yearning for emotional comfort and recognition. When Lucy discovers the letter is missing, crying "the groveling, groping monomaniac" (251), her almost frantic anxiety and frustration reveals her attachment to this past, and her fear of emotional deprivation in her present life. This lost letter symbolizes the irreversibility of her past, exacerbating her inner unease and sense of loss. When the doctor personally delivers the letter, it not only reveals that the letter was not mailed earlier but also symbolizes that Lucy must step out from the illusions of the past and face the challenges of reality. The doctor explains that Lucy's symptoms stem from long-term stress rather than a physical ailment, suggesting the significance of homesickness in *Villette* shifting from the physical to the psychological level. Lucy's nostalgia is both a means of escaping her present life and a means of seeking her own identity.

Lucy's longing for the Bretton house stems from the lack of her own family. In the story, there is a deliberate ambiguity concerning the descriptions of Lucy's birth family and her early life. Lucy consistently longs for her home but is unable to clearly recall memories of it, stating that she has no home

(Brontë, *Villette* 366) and no place to which to return to overcome her nostalgia. Lucy's recollections of her childhood are quite vague. She says, "I too well remember a time—a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention" (36). Her birth family is never clearly described. Lucy experiences nostalgia without a concrete basis; that is, she feels homesick for a place that no longer exists and experiences melancholy because Lucy does not have a real home, only a substitute home. This lack of a stable sense of family belonging intensifies Lucy's nostalgia and renders the concept of 'home' fragmented and elusive throughout the novel, driving her constant search for a place where she truly belongs.

Contrarily, Lucy's descriptions of her nostalgic memories of her life with the Brettons are not as clear as Matty's descriptions of her childhood in *Cranford*. Lucy's inability to remember this period of her life indicates that she feels separated from her family. Lucy's nostalgia is eventually directed toward her substitute home, namely the Bretton house. This house—her godmother's house, which she visited twice per year during her childhood—is the only home where she feels that she can find solace. Lucy even falls unconscious on the steps of the church once, and she is later unable to describe the event, stating, "Where my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell . . . [and] she kept her own secret, never whispering a word to Memory, and baffling Imagination by an indissoluble silence. She may have gone upward, and come in sight of her eternal home, hoping for leave" (Brontë, *Villette* 167). This passage demonstrates that Lucy feels a painful division within herself: she feels nostalgia for the past and longs for home, and she also feels incongruence between her desires and the reality of her life. Immediately after noting this division within herself, Lucy found that she "had been carried . . . [into] the pensionnat in the Rue Fossette. Still half-dreaming, I tried hard to discover in what room they had put me" (167). Lucy's vague recollections of home and of the past, and her yearning for an eternal home, after she faints, resonate with the obsessions with mortality, belonging, and transcendence that a Gothic novel often explores. Set in a cloistered environment of repression and mystery, Lucy yearns for self and connection through her nostalgia for the past and for the Bretton family. The Gothic of *Villette*, in suggesting the inner anxiety of the single woman forming a personal identity, points to a need for nostalgic emotional consolation.

Lucy was sent back to the Bretton house to recuperate in a trance-like state after she fainted. During this long period of healing, Lucy is attended to by her careful godmother, and the recovery time devolved into a kind of convalescence under such circumstances. Lucy's gradual recovery resembles the desire of her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, for her to take a break and replenish, giving her the chance to reevaluate her existence and adapt to a new tempo of life, configuring an identification with herself during her convalescence at the Bretton house. In recalling her childhood time at the Bretton house, Lucy describes how she strove "to take each new discovery as quietly as I could" (Brontë, *Villette* 172). She recounts how each door in the house appeared to open to reveal yet another comfortable space, stating, "How pleasant it was in its air of perfect domestic comfort! How warm in its amber lamp-light and vermilion fire-flush!" (175). Although the Bretton house represents a substitute home rather than an actual home for Lucy, when she returns to this house, she clearly feels joy and nostalgia in encountering familiar objects.

On the one hand, in terms of emotional status, Lucy wants to belong somewhere. Mrs. Bretton serves as an essential maternal figure in Lucy's life, as she seeks to fill the gap that her biological mother left behind. Lucy's present "homeless" condition, juxtaposed with the family relationships of other characters in the text, highlights Lucy's desire for belonging and familial warmth. In a way, the Bretton family becomes a surrogate family for Lucy, taking the place of her biological family. She recalls the Bretton household with fondness; it was a time in her life when her world was safe and secure. Emotional comfort and safety are to be had within the Bretton household for Lucy. This yearning is not solely for a specific location, but rather for her attachment to an idealized past and a sense of self.

On the other hand, in terms of social status, Lucy does not have the material or financial backing of a nuclear home, she does not have a permanent home or extra income. She has to be financially independent, self-dependent, and carve her own path. So, upon arriving at the Bretton home, she is immediately fascinated by its imagery, its atmosphere. The Bretton house had a long history: "My godmother lived in the handsome house in the clean and ancient town of Bretton. Her husband's family had been there for generations, and bore, indeed, the name of their birthplace—Bretton of Bretton" (Brontë, *Villette* 7). The fact that the Bretton family shares a name with the town where they live indicates that the family has lived and owned land in the area for a

considerable amount of time. Lucy's narrative shows the long history and affluent stability of the Bretton family, which contrasts sharply with the instability and insecurity that she must face, implying a class issue. Lucy's descriptions of the Bretton house paint it as a place "where Sundays and holidays seemed always to abide" (7) and "night and tempest were excluded by walls, windows and ceiling" (167). Regardless of changes that occur in the outside world, the Bretton house remains constant inside, with no changes to its daily rituals and middle-class routines. The ritualistic consistency of the eating and living habits of the Bretton family indicates Lucy's desire for her own social position and her imaginative shaping of her identity.

Lucy's desire for the Bretton family conveys a desire for social status and class. The novel's narrative begins immediately by highlighting Lucy's profound impression of the Bretton family's ancient history, as seen in the passage: "the Bretton family had been residents there for generations, and bore, indeed, the name of their birthplace—Bretton of Bretton: whether by coincidence, or because some remote ancestor had been a personage of sufficient importance to leave his name to his neighborhood" (Brontë, *Villette* 7). This shows that the Bretton family have been settled in this area for a long time, and makes it sound like they are not a new family but an old-time upper- or middle-class family. When a family shares a name with the place in which they live it usually means that the family was among the first to inhabit it or own land there. Moreover, it suggests that they had a big impact on local history, providing stability and tradition, in contrast to newer or more mobile families.

The Bretton family embodies the genteel, aristocratic life of the Victorian period, with a focus on the nearness and danger of identity in the works that decorate their home, such as embroidery and monogrammed items. The house that Lucy visited often in childhood and that is filled with nostalgic objects, "the fire, hearth, and house, seem available only to nostalgic memory" (Süner 335).[5] Numerous nostalgic items help Lucy reconstruct the past and the present memory of her subject. Lucy describes the sense of community and furnishings within the Bretton house when she lived there during her childhood. Her

[5] Badowska interprets the descriptions of the interior settings of *Villette* from the perspective of things, believing these descriptions to be influenced by the Crystal Palace and fetish culture that were prevalent at the time (1511-12). Brontë's extensive descriptions of many objects inside of the interior spaces leads to the Bretton house seeming to resemble a beautiful museum full of seemingly unrelated objects symbolizing reality (Badowska 1514; Logan 9; Barthes 148; Schor 141).

detailed descriptions of the designs of objects in the house reveal the deep nostalgia that she feels for the time that she spent there during her youth. The rich description demonstrates how nostalgia can be attached to interior design and furnishings, "mounting a nostalgic defense of interiority" (Badowska 1519). Lucy's feelings are reflected in her appreciation of the decorations in the house, as indicated as follows: "to render the picture perfect, tea stood ready on the table—an English-tea, whereof the whole shining service glanced at me familiarly; from the solid silver urn, of antique pattern, and the massive pot of the same metal to the thin porcelain cups, dark with purple and gilding" (Brontë, *Villette* 175). The detailed descriptions of the Bretton home's interior decoration further underscore the Victorian era's emphasis on how interior design and domesticity were used to showcase a family's status and values. In summary, the narration provides detailed descriptions of the placement and appearance of objects within the house, with many of these objects representing class culture and nostalgia.

Within these, one specific set of female objects belonging to Lucy's godmother stands out. Lucy encounters an object that carried considerable meaning from her childhood, specifically a "pin-cushion [*sic*] made of crimson satin, ornamented with gold beads and frilled with thread-lace . . . formed in gold beads, and surrounded with an oval wreath embroidered in white silk" (Brontë, *Villette* 171). This pincushion bears the initials "L. L. B.," which are those of Lucy's godmother, Louisa Lucy Bretton. These initials also hold importance because one represents Lucy's own name and, therefore, Lucy's emotional connection with others, which is maintained in her visual and tactile memory (Badowska 1516). Lucy sharing a given name with her godmother demonstrates the importance of the connection between these two individuals: "She identifies her godmother's monogram on a cushion, but pleated into her godmother's name, Lucy's own appellation betrays itself as parenthetical at the same time as it is central: Louisa Lucy Bretton" (Cohen 53). Lucy's recognition of her own name in her godmother's constitutes a process of self-discovery and self-affirmation. She finds the pincushion in the Bretton house, with this action symbolizing her discovery of a sense of belonging and her security in returning home. Lucy's identification of her own name in her godmother's initials symbolizes her shift in perspective regarding the Bretton house; she no longer characterizes it as the home of her godmother but as a house with its own set of features that offers her a sense of belonging. The object serves not only as a

carrier of nostalgic memories but also as a symbol of her emotional attachment to the past middle-class life.

The godmother's initials on the embroidery, coinciding with Lucy's own initials, symbolize Lucy's desire to emulate her godmother's middle-class woman persona. Lucy's admiration and yearning for her godmother are intensified by the contrast with the aristocratic life of her childhood friend, Ginevra, of "good blood" (Brontë, *Villette* 85). Lucy describes Ginevra's habitual behavior of "begg[ing] boldly" for gifts from Mrs. Cholmondeley, and her dress bill being paid by her uncle, Count de Bassompierre, with sarcasm (88). Lucy angrily declares, "Ginevra, people may tell you you are very handsome in that ball-attire; but, in *my* eyes, you will never look so pretty as you did in the gingham gown and plain straw bonnet you wore when I first saw you" (89). Lucy considers Ginevra's conduct inconsistent with her aristocratic identity. Her argument also reveals a complex emotion she holds for Ginevra because her words convey a sense of nostalgia and regret as she recalls Ginevra's early innocence and expresses disappointment in Ginevra for sacrificing her inner beauty to outward adornment. On the one hand, Lucy is affirming her own values of simplicity. She does not pursue extravagance, nor is she blinded by vanity; she believes that true beauty stems from within. On the other hand, her comments reveal Lucy's distaste for the upper class's dependence on men for economic support, a trait that Ginevra embodies. Lucy rejects Ginevra's pursuit of the marriage market, which is regarded as a conventional and safe solution to obtain stable income, indicating that the expectation of Victorian society regarding women is that they should get married rather than become self-reliant. Lucy earns her own income, which is considered self-sufficient and successful by the middle class, which she identifies herself with. Her economic independence, as she strives to establish her identity in *Villette*, symbolizes her disruption of the fixed class limitations she was born into, thereby creating a sense of class fluidity. Through her own efforts, she reverses her difficult circumstances of neither having a supporting family nor getting married. By her own labor, she attempts to achieve the middle-class life of the Brettons she nostalgically yearns for.

Lucy's nostalgia for the Bretton house is not just a nostalgia for a happy past, then, but a nostalgia for a stable, comfortable family life and the cultured lifestyle of the gentry. This desire runs parallel with her contempt for Ginevra's aristocratic status, her ambition for economic independence, and her radical

embrace of middle-class self-help. Lucy's story turns into a commentary on traditional social class categories, and a deep dive into female independence. The Bretton house becomes the touchstone for her search for a sense of self and emotional belonging in a tumultuous world. Toward the end of the novel Lucy also turns her attention, no longer toward memories she has been fixated on in the past, but toward the future, speculating about her own worth. She questions, "is there nothing more for me in life—no true home—nothing to be dearer to me than myself and by its paramount preciousness to draw from me better things than I care to culture for myself only?" (Brontë, *Villette* 365). Through this question, one can sense her drive to move past nostalgia and start developing a life of her own without the hindrances of safety nets, much in the same vein of independence and self-actualization espoused by Brontë herself. The quest for personal growth demonstrates Lucy's capacity for making meaning and purpose beyond the conventions of society's expectations and her agency in pursuit of a satisfying life.

This forward-looking perspective can be found in Brontë's own life philosophy, as expressed in her letters written two years before *Villette*. In an 1851 letter that she wrote to James Taylor, the manager of Smith, Elder and Company which published *Jane Eyre*, Brontë indicated that she had been thinking about her sense of belonging and experiencing nostalgia. She told Taylor that when she had read information about her sisters in Westmoreland, she could not bear the sadness and felt as though she "had undergone some painful laceration" (Brontë, *Letters* II: 554). Brontë further told Taylor, "You will say that we ought to have power in ourselves either to bear circumstances or to bend them. True—we should do our best to this end—but sometimes our best is unavailing" (554). This passage indicates Brontë's belief that when one encounters difficulties, one should either attempt to change their situation or accept the circumstances, but that one should always attempt action, even with the knowledge that one's efforts may be in vain. The idea of persevering without surrender is echoed in Lucy's self-analysis at the end of *Villette*. Lucy's transformation is not only a kind of personal growth, but also reflects the courage and determination of Victorian single women to seek self-liberation and independence under social pressure. In *Villette*, nostalgia becomes a complex and multi-layered theme. It not only reveals the inner struggle of individuals and inspires them to face difficult situations, but also reflects the

time's profound contradictions of social class and issues regarding single women's self-reliance.

IV. Conclusion

Gaskell and Brontë, who employ different perspectives to explore the nostalgia of women in the mid-19th century, unveil the desire of the past middle class and the longing of less economically productive single women to pause time. Both *Cranford* and *Villette* present nostalgia from the perspectives of unmarried female characters and discuss nostalgia as an attachment to fragmented memories. Gaskell, through *Cranford*, emphasizes collective nostalgia, highlighting its role in maintaining community identity and class culture. She cautions against excessive indulgence in the past. Gaskell examines how the home and family spaces in Cranford are appropriated by the elderly women who live there to resist social change through retaining traditional rituals and pieces of material culture, clinging to their collective reminiscences of the past as a means of comfort and belonging. The re-emergence of this communal wistfulness is not just nostalgia, it is social action which gives the community room to breathe through change and find outlets to vent their emotion which inspires them to act in the present and future. She brings a levity and an "uncanny shock" to reading while exploring serious nostalgia after Matty' s convalescence. Gaskell's exploration of class culture demonstrates that nostalgia serves as a mechanism for keeping class order intact and emphasizes the place and role of single female elders within this process.

Brontë, in contrast, offers a more intimate tale of nostalgia through her heroine, Lucy, examining how nostalgia shapes selfhood and identity. Lucy's nostalgia is not for her country, but for lost affections and a previous self. Her alienation in her working life amplifies her nostalgic desire for a middle-class life with the Brettons and spurs her rejection of upper-class superficiality. Her nostalgic desire for mobility becomes her motivating mechanism of empowerment. The gothic elements of *Villette* contribute to the influence of individual nostalgic emotions as these are contrasted against the more mild, community supported nostalgia found in *Cranford*. The gothic overtones make Lucy's nostalgia in *Villette* a sign of escape and retreat from reality and a quest for psychological refuge more than an active initiation into a new world. Through Lucy's nostalgia and convalescence, Brontë shows how nostalgia can

be an extremely powerful tool of its own in existential struggles and self-actualization. Lucy's absence from the Bretton home forms a void in her emotional life, she comes to belong nowhere vital—she was born into a nameless family with little sense of herself, and now she is haunted by the image of an idealized family. When she thinks back on the Bretton home, nostalgia pervades her memories of a golden age when she knew safety and love. These emotional attachments reflect her fixation on an idealized past and her fear of emotional loss in the present. Brontë's Lucy thus serves to demonstrate how nostalgia can function as a mental defense for the economic independence of single, working-class women, whilst ultimately revealing the common goal of self-actualization and liberation of women.

These two novels don't just represent nostalgia but also are insightful meditations on the types of social change, class struggles, and female self-improvement of the Victorian age. Eventually, through the eyes of the female characters—and male characters such as Peter, who returns from the Indian colony with riches—Gaskell establishes the economic hardship experienced by the elderly, single, middle-class woman Matty, who has to rely on selling tea to survive. This represents how external colonial wealth allowed for the internment of class traditions within Britain, allowing female elders like Matty to maintain their nostalgic, petty-bourgeois lifestyle with the help of economic support from imperial colonies. In contrast, Brontë introduces Mr. Paul, a male character, as a support to the young, working-class, single woman Lucy, helping her open her institution and find students. Mr. Paul's death signifies Lucy's realization of her economically independent self-identity without entering the traditional marriage market to achieve self-reliance through a stable income. The absence of family enables Lucy to pass from employee to female employer and take on a stable, white upper-middle-class life—a representation of class mobility. These two nostalgic works focusing on class and gender truly give narrative accounts detailing much of what was so essential for understanding the social structure and gender structure during the Victorian time and inspire people to change and grow through times of adversity. Nostalgia consists in longing for an idealized past other than the present, but related to it.

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