

THE REFLECTIONS OF VICTORIAN CULTURE AND VICTORIAN GENDER ROLES ON ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *CRANFORD**

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Relying on Anthony Fletcher's book *Gender, Sex & Subordination*, it can be suggested that there is "a divinely inspired universal hierarchy ranking all forms of higher and lower life; [interestingly enough in this hierarchical structure] humans are represented by the male alone" ("The Great Chain of Being"). Similarly, in Victorian Britain, there was a patriarchal social hierarchy, in which God is at the top, and who is defined with the adverb of "He" in *the Bible*. Even, the preference of the adverb "He" for God shows the male-oriented structure of the Victorian society and Victorian culture since it suggests that something powerful like God cannot be a female, but a male. Within the patriarchal social hierarchical order, obedience and authority were given priority and accordingly, there were superiors to give orders and there were inferiors to obey. In other words, obedience was a key word to the Victorian era and was considered to be a virtue; especially in defining the roles of men and women. Within the frame work of binary oppositions of the Western culture, men are perceived as superior and women as their inferiors. Hence, women were the ones to obey their masters, that is, their fathers or husbands. To preserve the patriarchal social hierarchical order, women were denied the right to have a proper education and hence a proper profession and consequently, they were limited within the sphere of domestic duties. Therefore, as Anderson and Zinsser point out in *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, "education" was a term only applicable to men; even the very act of reading was seen as a "manly task". Eventually, women could only work as governesses, nurses and dressmakers. What is striking here is that all these occupations can be defined as an extension of women's domestic duties due to the prevalent Victorian assumption that working outside the home for women was corrupting. Furthermore, it meant an interference with the "natural" gender roles of women such as wifeness and motherhood. Accordingly occupationwise, women were excluded from the law and medicine due to the fact that they could not apply to medicine and law schools. Only towards the end of the 19th century, in 1874 the London School of Medicine for Women was opened ("The London School of Medicine for Women"). With the opening of this school, at least the right of women to enter the medical profession had been established. Then, finally in 1876, an act was passed from the Parliament to remove all the restrictions related to sex ("Timeline-Sex"). Moreover, new colleges began to be opened one after another such as Girton (1869), Newnham (1871), Somerville (1879) and the Royal Holloway College (1886) to provide higher education for women.

Apart from the problem of inequality in education, there were many other problems, for example the upbringing of children was regarded as one of the wife's major jobs and men were unlikely to take responsibility about baby-care. Thus, whatever a woman did, it was certain that she was merely regarded as a woman after all, and was forced to perform her role as a mother.

In the light of all the information given so far, it can be deduced that there was a battle of sexes in Victorian England because of the inequalities in the society. Therefore, in

this study, the above mentioned social and cultural aspects of the Victorian society will be illustrated through Gaskell's critical eye in her novel, *Cranford* (1851), and her suggestions for the improvement of the Victorian society and culture will be provided as a conclusion. That is, although battle of sexes in the Victorian society cannot be extinguished totally, it can be lessened or softened.

What is significant in *Cranford* is that in Cranford, there are many independent women. First of all, the world of Cranford is a world of women. The opening lines of *Cranford* demonstrates this very clearly: "In the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons;... If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears" (Gaskell, 15) and therefore men's absence is noticeable, "whatever does become of the gentlemen, they are not at Cranford. What could they do if they were there?" (Gaskell, 15). The Cranford ladies are "quite sufficient" (Gaskell, 16) for everything from keeping the gardens to making discussions about literature. Moreover, women have financial power since "all the holders of houses above a certain rent are women", "the wealthiest of the town's householders are women, which is an unusual situation under the patriarchal property customs of the day as Cranford ladies have enough money to have a say in their life. Even some of their entertainments such as playing cards are masculine entertainments and it is striking that only Miss Jessie, Captain's daughter could not play cards since she is an outsider and brought up with the prevalent Victorian education and culture and accordingly she sings songs to a piano while the Cranford ladies are playing cards. In other words, *Cranford* seems to be dominated by women due to the fact that a man in Cranford "is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble" (Gaskell, 15). For Cranford ladies, "a man is so in the way in the house!", that is a man is perceived as an impediment in a house. Therefore, men cannot live in such a hostile environment and as it is stated above, they are occupied with military duties, business arrangements and sea-trips. It is noticeable that these jobs are related to the outside world and regarded as masculine occupations in Victorian culture.

Furthermore, in the novel, Cranford ladies' belief that they are inherently superior to men recurs frequently: "A man," as one of them said once, "is so in the way in the house!" (Gaskell, 39) is the generally held view, and Miss Jenkyns, one of the residences in Cranford, "would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men. Equal, indeed! She knew they were superior" (Gaskell, 51). From these sentences, it can be inferred that Miss Jenkyns is one of the earlier Victorian feminists and believes in the power of women. On the other hand, paradoxically, Miss Jenkyns is an obedient and helpful daughter to her father, to the old rector. Miss Matty declares that "[Miss Jenkyns] was such a daughter to my father as I think there never was before or since. His eyes failed him, and she read book after book, and wrote, and copied, and was always at his service in any parish business". In addition to this, "Deborah said to [her], the day of [their] mother's funeral, that if she had a hundred offers she never would marry and leave my father" (Gaskell, 102). In the passage above, duties of a good Victorian daughter towards her father are also pointed out.

Meanwhile, about the issue of marriage, in *Cranford* it is revealed that men and women have different points of view. From the point of men's view, marriage is not a

very desirable thing. For instance, Martha's lover thinks that marriage is something to restrict man's actions and freedom. However, the same sex that is men expect women to see marriage as their only aim in life and accordingly expect them to be good wives and mothers. But when it is men's turn, they try to postpone it. Martha wants to marry quickly to have a family of her own. However, Jem, Martha's fiance expresses that although he is not against Martha's plans, he needs time to get ready for all these arrangements:

It's that you've taken me all on a sudden, and I didn't think for to get married so soon-and such quick words does flabbergast a man, It's not that I'm against it, ma'am (addressing Miss Matty), only Martha has such quick ways with her when once she takes a thing into her head; and marriage, ma'am-marriage nails a man, as one may say. I dare say I shan't mind it after it's once over"(Gaskell, 216) and adds "Nay, now! Martha, don't ee! don't ee! only a man likes to have breathing-time". (Gaskell, 217)

From the passage above, it can be concluded that marriage is not an attractive institution for men as it is also illustrated through Jem's words in the novel. However, after he has managed to overcome the committent issue, he and Martha begin to lead a happy marriage life and even have children.

Apart from their marriage, Mr and Mrs. Hoggins' marriage also goes well. In the novel, it is stated that "Mr and Mrs. Hoggins were very happy together, and, like most very happy people, quite ready to be friendly" (Gaskell, 239). Another good marriage which can be an example to the new generations of Cranford is Signor Brunoni's marriage. Although his wife, signora and he face many difficulties in their marriage, they still love each other and do not get apart. He is sent to India as a sergeant, and her wife wants to go there with him, "for it seemed as if it would only be a slow death to me to part from my husband", says she to Miss Matty and adds "To be sure, I've been able to comfort Sam, and to be with him; but madam, I've lost six children" (Gaskell, 177). At that moment, a strange look appears in her eyes which can be seen "in mothers of dead children-with a kind of wild look in them, as if seeking for what they never more might find (Gaskell, 177)" and after suffering from the lose of her six children, she has to leave Sam in order to save the life of Phoebe, who is about to be born, due to the fact that "if this baby dies too, [she] shall go mad; the madness is in [her] now". Here, Gaskell may refer to the image of "the mad woman in the attic" of the nineteen century writers and also to the feminists' claim that women are not hysterical or mad from birth but the patriarchal society makes them mad by restricting their freedom. And in the case of Signora, the hard conditions in the colonies cause her to suffer from the lose of her children and this disturbs her psychologically. However, she does not give up struggling and she goes to Calcutta "through the thick forests" (Gaskell, 178) and becomes a servant to an invalid lady. She does her best both for her baby¹ and her husband and therefore it is not to exaggerate to say that she is an ideal wife and mother. After two years have passed, with his discharge Sam also comes to Calcutta to see his wife and his baby. Like Signora, he is both a good husband and a good father. Both of them are ready to sacrificize themselves for their family. Most important of all, they do not divide occupations as masculine and feminine. They are self-sufficient and they are representatives of androgyny, for example not only Signor Brunoni, but also signora is

the breadwinner in the family and in the absence of her husband, she manages to supply the needs of her baby and she travels alone boldly. Later on, in *Cranford* it is stated that in Calcutta to make a living, Signor Brunoni “had to fix on a trade; but he knew of none; ... and he had learnt some tricks from an Indian juggler; so he set up conjuring, and it answered so well ...” (Gaskell, 178). Thus, he knows how to adapt himself to the changing conditions well, and at the end, he manages to hold his family under a roof by returning to England. It is also noticeable that although they are not rich, they are still happy. In *Cranford*, it is stated that “it was an encouragement to see how, through all their cares and sorrows, they thought of each other and not of themselves; and how keen were their joys, if they only passed through each other, or through the little Phoebe” (Gaskell, 176).

In addition to them, the marriage of Major Gordon with Miss Jessie goes well and its positive influences on Mrs. Gordon attract the attention of the Cranford ladies. Marry Smith, the narrator says, Mrs. Gordon had kept up a warm and affectionate intercourse with all at Cranford. Miss Jenkyns, Miss Matty and Miss Pole had all been to visit her, and returned with wonderful accounts of her house, her husband, her dress, and her looks. For, with happiness, something of her early bloom returned; she had been a year or two younger than we had taken her for. Her eyes were always lovely. (Gaskell, 47)

Through the depiction of the harmonious union of men and women in these marriages in *Cranford*, Gaskell may suggest androgyny, which can be explained best with Tennyson’s lines in *the Princess*, “the man be more of woman, she of man” (“*The Princess*”) instead of clear-cut gender patterns. In *Cranford*, men do works which are regarded as feminine occupations and women do the ones which are regarded as masculine occupations. To exemplify this, Captain Brown, one of the few males allowed to reside in Cranford, looks after his two daughters with a mother’s care, he “paid the most gallant attention to his daughters” (Gaskell, 23). Furthermore, at a card party, “[Captain Brown] immediately and quietly assumed the man’s place in the room; attended to every one’s wants, lessened the pretty maid-servant’s labour by waiting on empty cups, and bread-and-butterless ladies; and yet did it all in so easy and dignified a manner, and so much as if it were a matter of course for the strong to attend to the weak, that he was a true man throughout” (Gaskell, 25). His “manliness” is defined in terms of service to family and community - he is devoted to his daughters, helps his neighbours and dies on the railway saving a little girl. His act of saving a little girl may be taken symbolically and may stand for the coming of a better future for tomorrow’s women due to the fact that he tries to rescue a girl’s life and wants to make her live longer, just contrary to the Victorian norms which kill women’s liveliness and abilities by restricting them.

Apart from these feminine aspects of the men, Cranford ladies have masculine aspects such as managing their homes. Moreover, they can talk about literature and politics just like men. Above all, they also take part in business. Miss Matty can be a good example of the working women as she runs a tea-shop to survive.

On the other hand, in *Cranford* it is also observed that from time to time women perceive men as the other, as the evil. For instance, when the rumours of robbery come from Mardon, which is a small town about eight miles from Cranford, Miss Matty says,

“[w]hat was the use of locks and bolts, and bells to the windows, and going round the house every night? That last trick was fit for a conjurer. Now she believe that Signor Brunoni was at the bottom of it” (Gaskell, 151). In fact, this suspicions may come out of their fear of men. For example, Miss Matty’s fear of men is narrated below:

[S]he owned that, ever since she had been a girl, she had dreaded being caught by her last leg, just as she was getting into bed, by someone concealed under it... and yet it was very unpleasant to think of looking under a bed, and seeing a man concealed, with a great, fierce face staring out at you. (Gaskell, 161)

Her fears reflect the Victorian upbringing and show that a man is something to dread for Victorian women. Moreover, her fears may come out of the clashes between her id and the Victorian female decorum¹. Her id wants to have a sexual relationship with a man (her reference to a man under the bed has sexual connotations), whereas Victorian society dictates the suppression of the sexual desires. Her inner conflict comes to the surface in her fear of a man under the bed. And unconsciously, to avoid men she begins to associate every evil thing with men and therefore, she is happy that most of her customers in the tea-shop are women, not men. The tendency to blame men for evil things cause to some misunderstandings in Cranford and consequently women applies “the othering process” to men. As a result of the othering process, the other i.e. men become evil and unknown. And needless to say, when something is unknown, it causes to more fear.

On the other hand, sometimes, when the necessity arises, the Cranford ladies find it convenient to forget their superiority and accept the role of men in the society. For example, Miss Matty at least on two occasions accepts the man’s role in the society. In the first instance, she allows Martha to have a follower. Thus, she accepts the need of a woman for a male companionship. Her second concession is an admission that men are more practical:

I do not mean to deny that men are troublesome in a house. I do not judge from my own experience, for my father was neatness itself, and wiped his shoes on coming in as carefully as any woman; but still a man has a sort of knowledge of what should be done in difficulties, that it is very pleasant to have one at hand ready to lean upon. (Gaskell 180)

With reference to Miss Matty, in the novel, it is stated that after the death of Holbrook and Miss Jenkyns, Miss Matty is “left deserted in the world” (Gaskell, 49). However, she tries to compensate for the lack of her family by looking after Martha’s children and becomes a grandmother to them. Yet, she expresses her longing to be a mother in the passage below:

I am afraid I lost the knack, though I am just as fond of children as ever, and have a strange yearning at my heart whenever I see a mother with her baby in her arms... do you know I dream sometimes that I have a little child-always the same- a little girl of about two years old; she never grows older, though I have dreamt of her for many years. (Gaskell, 175)

Furthermore, she advises matrimony to the women around her:

Do not be frightened by Miss Pole from being married. I can fancy it may be a very happy state, and a little credulity helps one through life very smoothly-better than always doubting and doubting and seeing difficulties and disagreeables in everything". (Gaskell, 176)

Considering all the information given so far, it is not wrong to say that Miss Matty fits to the image of a spinster, yet she is not the only one in the novel. Miss Pole's previous remark that most of the Cranford ladies are spinsters is undeniable in the novel. Thus, *Cranford* is full of with "the images of spinsters". Generally, they are depicted as self-sufficient and independent such as Miss Matty. However, after going through a transformation, Miss Matty begins to take support from the males around her. For example, Mary Smith's father, a businessman with a knowledge of financial affairs, helps to Miss Matty in financial issues. Another male, she takes support is her brother Peter. He is expected in his youth to become a rector like his father. He instead leaves Cranford and goes to Liverpool by a ship. Later on, he leaves England as well to fight Napoleon. He writes in one of his letters to his mother: "Mother; we may go into battle. I hope we shall, and lick those French" (Gaskell, 99). His awareness of military duties and his enthusiasm for making Britain victorious reflect the Victorian patriotism which is dictated to the boys since their early childhood. Accordingly, being a good soldier is "a part of their gender identity" and therefore most of the boys construct their identity through these military images, just like Peter does. Unfortunately, he is wounded and afterwards settles as a landholder in India, where he becomes known as Aga Jenkyns. Thus, he takes the adventurous Victorian male type as the role model for himself in his life.

Peter's travellings reflect the prevalent tendency of the Victorian males to discover the world. It is noticeable that men take active part in these discoveries, whereas women remain only as spectators to these discoveries like Miss Matty and Miss Jenkyns who are at home in England and tell the stories of how Peter "survey mankind from to" (Gaskell, 183). Moreover, Miss Matty cannot understand how the earth moves around itself and this illustrates that how Victorian women are left ignorant to the new discoveries around them and the narrator confesses that they do not "read much, or walk much" (Gaskell, 50) and instead they do sewing and knitting. Likewise, Peter's cousin Major Jenkyns leaves England and lives in India. Hence, army and travelling in accordance with the norms of the Victorian society and culture seem to be male-dominated areas.

To conclude, as it is illustrated in Gaskell's many other works, in *Cranford* as well it is suggested that men and women cannot survive alone or even if they can be self-sufficient to live alone, at least they cannot be happy. To put it in Tennyson's words "the woman's cause is man's; they rise or sink/ Together" ("*The Princess*"). Therefore, the reconciliation of the sexes can be suggested as an alternative way. As a parallel to this, in *Cranford* (1851) it is observed that in the beginning of the novel, women refuse to submit to the control of patriarchy by creating an Amazon-like society, but towards the end, they begin to accept men into their own circles and into their society. In other words, both men and women are in need of each other and therefore, they should avoid applying the othering process to the members of the other sex. Instead, they should try to communicate with each other. This point is underlined again and again by Gaskell in *Cranford*. Consequently, the strength of *Cranford*

derives from Gaskell's critical attitude towards the oppressive and exclusive Victorian culture (as it is illustrated through the oppressive social and sexual codes in *Cranford*).

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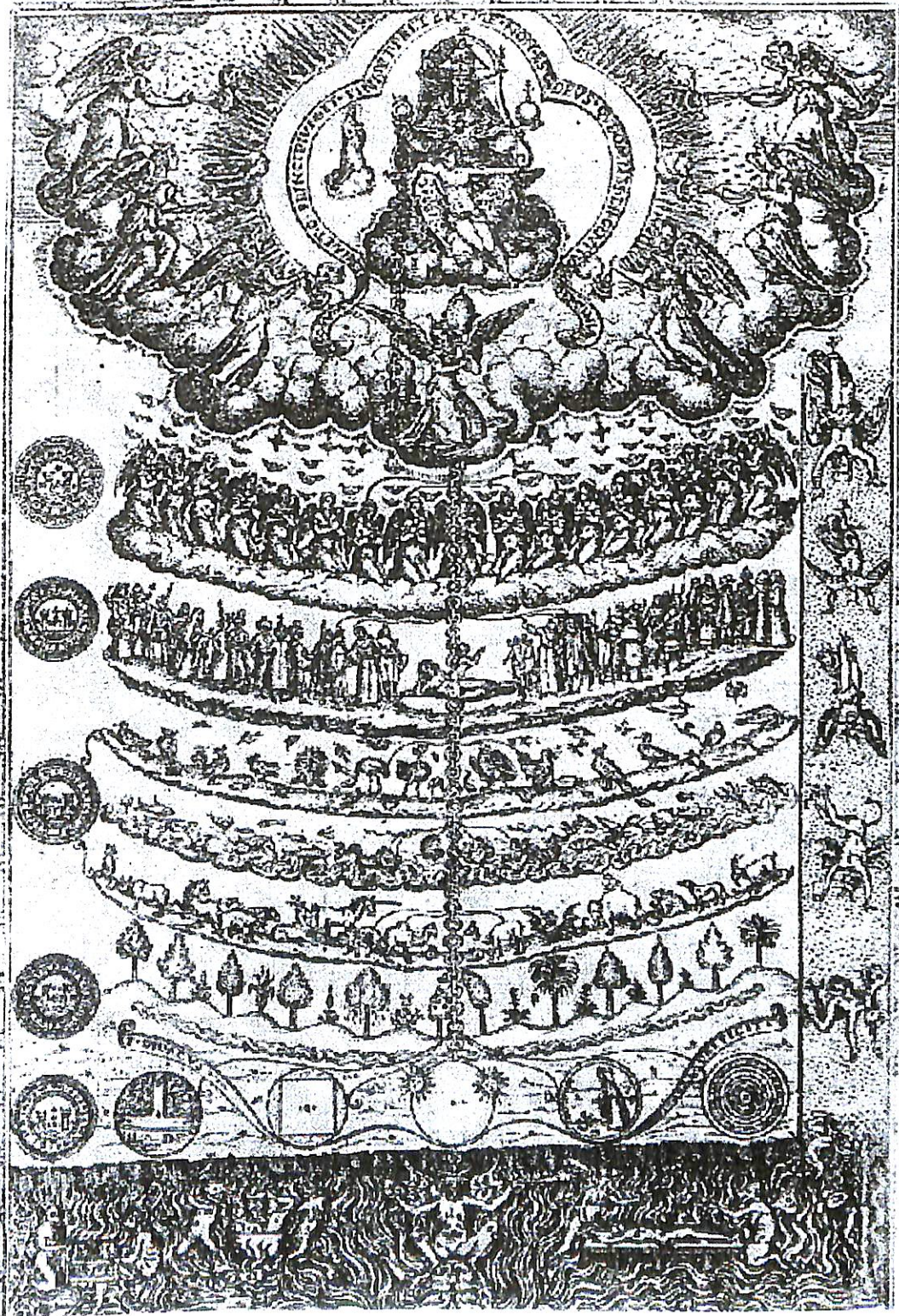
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Viktoryan kültürü, Viktoryan sosyal cinsel kimlik kalıpları, Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, Viktoryan İngilteresi

The Great Chain of Being



(<http://www.stanford.edu/class/engl174b/chain.html>)

Түйін

Мақалада қоғамдық жыныстық жеке мінез қалыптарының Викториян мәдениетінің Элизабет Гаскелдің *Cranford* атты романындағы көрінісі қарастырылады. XIX ғасырда Англияда әйелдердің ханшайым Викторияны үлгі тұтып үйде отыратыны күтілген. Элизабет Гаскел *Cranford* атты романында көптеген әйел кейіпкерлерді суреттеп, Викториян мәдениетінің және Викториян қоғамдық жыныстық жеке мінез қалыптарының басты ерекшеліктерін романында бейнелеген. *Cranford* атты романында Элизабет Гаскелдің жайбасарлықты және бағынушылықты үгіттеуге сын көзбен қарағаны байқалады.

Resume

This paper aims to analyse how the culture of Victorian England and Victorian gender roles are depicted in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Cranford*. Taking Queen Victoria as a role model, the English women are supposed to lead domestic lives in the 19th century England. Elizabeth Gaskell in her novel, *Cranford* draws many English women characters so as to show the main aspects of the Victorian culture and gender roles. In *Cranford*, it is observed that she adopts a questioning attitude towards the Victorian gender patterns, which are the cultural constructs of the time and which are preaching obedience and passivity for the women.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada Viktoryan sosyal cinsel kimlik kalıplarının ve Viktoryan kültürünün Elizabeth Gaskell'in *Cranford* adlı romanına yansımaları incelenecektir. 19. yüzyıl İngilteresi'nde, kadınların Kraliçe Viktorya'yı örnek alarak evcimen bir hayat sürmeleri bekleniyordu. Elizabeth Gaskell *Cranford* adlı romanında çok sayıda kadın karakter çizerek, Viktoryan kültürünün ve Viktoryan sosyal cinsel kimlik kalıplarının ana özelliklerini romanına yansıtmaktadır. *Cranford* adlı romanında, Elizabeth Gaskell'in pasifliği ve itaati öğreten Viktoryan sosyal cinsel kimlik kalıplarına ve Viktoryan kültürüne karşı eleştirel bir tutum takındığı gözlemlenmektedir.