



## Cranford / Cousin Phillis

*Elizabeth Gaskell , Peter J. Keating (Editor)*

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Here are two of Elizabeth Gaskell's classic novels. 'Cranford' depicts the lives and preoccupations of the inhabitants of a small village. 'Cousin Phillis' depicts a fleeting love affair in a rural community at a time when old values are being supplanted by the new.

### Cranford / Cousin Phillis Details

Date : Published 1986 by Penguin Books (first published 1864)

ISBN :

Author : Elizabeth Gaskell , Peter J. Keating (Editor)

Format : Paperback 362 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Historical, Victorian, Historical Fiction, Literature

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## From Reader Review Cranford / Cousin Phillis for online ebook

### AM says

Cranford is wonderful, Cousin Phillis is just ok...Cranford is a town inhabited and run by lovely, eccentric "Amazons." Don't go by the PBS version on Masterpiece Theater-- while Dame Judy Dench is amazing as usual, too much is added to an already busy and detailed story.

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### Sara says

I only read the "Cranford" half (couldn't get into "Cousin Phillis" - I'll try again later) and this story is pure sweetness! I could read it again and again. Elizabeth Gaskell has such a great sense of humor....

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### Lexy says

I love the way Elizabeth Gaskell captured the quirks of small town life in Cranford. I can just imagine the protagonist, Mary Smith, trying to keep a straight face during one of Miss Poles speeches or Miss Mattys nervous episodes. A really amusing book.

As for Cousin Phillis... I can't say I enjoyed it much at all. It would have gotten maybe 1 star from me on its own. The way this poor girl got sick pining for a guy she barely knew just made me roll my eyes. Perhaps I'm missing the point of the story, but there it is.

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### Rachel says

There was a lot I like about these stories. They were charming, funny, self contained, and the characters were reminiscent of some of the quaint characters inhabiting Jane Austen's books. It also had the same kind of humour. The stories aren't really connected, except for by Cranford, where they take place, and the people running throughout. The action surrounds several widows, spinsters and the various men who wander in and out of action. It tells about times changing and how people in a small town, and very set in their ways, deal with such change. The stories were very charming, but at times I lost the point of what was happening and why I was reading this collection. I am a huge fan of Elizabeth Gaskell, and this is not one of my favorites, though it may be one of her most well written.

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### Klay Kubiak says

Cousin Phillis is as good a short novel you'll ever read.

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### Caity says

Cranford- 2 stars  
Cousin Phillis - 3 stars

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### **Melinda says**

I watched the BBC "Cranford" DVD set with Judi Dench as Miss Matty. This got me interested in Elizabeth Gaskell, so I got this book from the library to read.

Elizabeth Gaskell wrote in the same time period as Jane Austen. She, like Austen, focuses on the tiny and small things that make up a community where everything is talked and gossiped about and little escapes the scrutiny of the town members. Cranford is a little English town with a high number of single women and widows residing there. After Napoleon, this condition was unfortunately very common because so many men had been killed in the wars.

The book is a sweet portrait of life with a group of women who have known each other their entire lives and have seen the community grow and develop in ways that they don't entirely approve of but nevertheless live with. Yet the stories are told with a real sweetness and love for the characters who have their strange idiosyncracies. In the hand of another author, the characterizations would have become cruel or demeaning. Elizabeth Gaskell manages to make them kind yet true to life.

There is no underlying depth in this book as I have seen in Jane Austen's books. There is little plot, mostly stories about different happenings in the town that happen over a period of time. Amusements, long lost romances that are examined and then set aside, deaths, marriages, and the return of a long lost and loved brother. These happenings are narrated by Mary Smith, the young friend of the elderly spinster sisters, Miss Matty and Miss Deborah, around whom most of the situations take place.

Amusing situations include the lace eaten by the cat, "the panic" in which Cranford is held in fear of robberies and possible spies from France, and in the many little details here and there of a quiet but full life in a small English town.

I recommend reading it, although I would not qualify it as literature as significant as Austen's books.

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### **Amy says**

The reason why I didn't finish this book is because I couldn't get into the book. I read I think at least 5 chapters and I still was bored! I wouldn't recommend this book. Unless you really like boring books! lol!

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### **Therese says**

Cranford - a bittersweet sort of read about a small town dominated by elderly ladies of the single variety. More anecdotal rather than plot-driven and set in a time where the class distinctions were slowly breaking down.

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## Ashley says

Cranford is a solid five star book. My rating is for Cousin Phillis, which is tedious.

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## Shoma Patnaik says

One of my favourite words is *saudade* and I could not help but think of it here. The two stories that make up this book are different in their subjects but both dwell on change and a longing for the past.

In *Cranford*, Elizabeth Gaskell, a generation later than Jane Austen writes of the things the latter does not, or could not: of the wars that left behind villages full of women, of poverty and of loss. Miss Matty might have been an Austen heroine who wasn't swept off her feet and carried off into the sunset; Mr. Holbrook her lost love. It is rather gloomy at times to read of a village full of aging women trying to hold onto a decaying elegance. However, the tragedies of every day life can be beautiful as well. The chapter where Miss Matty and Mary Smith read and burn old letters was one of the most moving scenes I have read in a long time.

I found it a little difficult to really like the characters. They are elderly, often narrow-minded women bound by strict guidelines and a somewhat outdated morality. And yet, they are generous in their kindness. They might look with disdain on Frenchmen and "Red Indians", they might kowtow to aristocracy, but they often go out of their way to help their neighbours whether it is Captain Brown who shocks the good ladies by openly discussing his poverty or the mysterious Signor Brunoni, or even the lame postman of Cranford. There are touches of gentle humour here and there: the literary contest between Miss Jenkyns and Captain Brown over Charles Dickens and Samuel Johnson, Mrs. Forrester's lace eating cat, Miss Pole's faltering bravado at facing a phantom.

*Cousin Phillis* is a short novella that subtly intertwines the changing country landscape with a short-lived romance. There isn't much by way of action here but both the Phillis of the title and her father Mr. Holman are engaging, well-drawn out characters: hard-working and rustic and yet well-read and thirsty for knowledge. One can see a slight similarity to the Goethe quoting Mr. Holbrook in *Cranford* with his alphabetically labeled cows. Phillis, with her love of Greek and her attempts to read *The Divine Comedy* in Italian is at the same time a naive, isolated country girl and her painful journey to emotional growth forms the crux of the story. Mrs. Gaskell paints a striking picture of the old way of life slowly giving way to the new with harvests and railways, farmer-priests and engineers.

I liked the down-to-earth, unpretentious tone of both stories and the clarity of Mrs. Gaskell's writing is a delight to read. She manages to convey tragedy without dragging down the tone of the book and her humour never escalates into farce. This is a simple, elegant book, like the times it longs for.

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## Dr.J.G. says

Cranford:-

Life in a small town or village in nineteenth century England described with Gaskell's skill at human lives and characters' description - human nature may be pretty much the same, hence the recognition and amusement for a reader, while material life has changed and hence the value of a detailed account by a skilled and observant author.

.....  
Cousin Phillis:-

A more beautiful, lyrical, calm and yet realistic description of a young woman and the travails she goes through - due to a thoughtless male who flits about - is hard to come across. The writing is more natural than Austen and so is the construction, with no forced happy ends or tragedies either.

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### **Maria Rosanna Ioannou says**

Loved these both. I don't like all of Gaskell's novels, but these are really good. I would have ended Cousin Phyllis differently

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### **Ranooshe says**

I think this is when I started getting fed up with classic literature. I had vowed to read as wide a range of writers and eras. I started in a chronological order; from the classic to the new, then zigzag as I choose. I guess I have reached the point of saturation with british classics. It's one main story; the old facing the new, and love stories bound by tradition. this book is one striking example of that!

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### **Denisa Dellinger says**

I loved visiting Cranford and Miss Mattie and Miss Deborah and Mary. This is a town run by women and tradition. I read this a while ago and watched the miniseries which is very different. The struggle of Miss Mattie upon losing her modest fortune and opening the tea shop stand out in my mind, the the humorous lace incident. The telling of the story was by Mary, if I remember correctly. I don't remember much about the story of Cousin Phillis only that it was very different.

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### **Andrea says**

Visiting Cranford is like taking a vacation in the past, a perfect antidote to the drama of the real world. I've had this book on my bedside table for re-reading ever since I watched the mini-series, and I'm glad I finally got around to it. I'm also glad to find that it held up well to my memory;the mini-series didn't seem to capture the wit and gentle spirit that bring this book to life. Mrs. Gaskell is definitely not Jane Austen, but this book is just as enjoyable in its own quiet way.

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### **Fiona Ingram says**

Cranford is one of the better-known novels of the 19th century English writer Elizabeth Gaskell. It was first published in 1851 as a serial in the magazine Household Words, which was edited by Charles Dickens. The fictional town of Cranford is closely modelled on Knutsford in Cheshire, which Mrs. Gaskell knew well. The

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book has little in the way of plot and is more a series of episodes in the lives of Mary Smith and her friends, Miss Matty and Miss Deborah, two spinster sisters.

But what is it about Cranford and its deceptively simple tales of country life that makes the work so appealing? It has been aptly described as 'a piece of exquisite social painting' ... 'tender' and 'delicate.' Narrated by Mary Smith, a friend of Miss Matty and frequent visitor to Cranford, the lives, loves, tragedies, and triumphs of the inhabitants of Cranford are woven together seamlessly to create a tapestry portraying timeless emotions and choices.

The petty social bickering, cold shouldering and jockeying for importance in the village's pecking order are outlined in a humorous yet pointed way—the author loves her characters, with all their faults, and is tolerant of their foibles while holding them up to gentle ridicule. In every community there is an arbiter of good taste, a setter of trends, a leader of public opinion, and all the other social whimsies that make up this colourful collection of characters. It is not easy to keep secrets in this closed environment, and as Mary Smith remarks, "It was impossible to live a month at Cranford, and not know the daily habits of each resident ...". Despite the squabbles and occasional 'no speaks,' the ladies of Cranford would rather die than see one of their own fall by the wayside. It is the community spirit that inspires Miss Matty's friends to decide to donate a portion of their annual income to sustain their beloved friend when an investment goes sour.

As a different kind of history book and one that very possibly the author did not set out to write as such, Cranford is actually an analysis of an early Victorian country town. The inhabitants are shaken and disturbed by inevitable changes such as industrialization, the advent of the railway and other events that force an inescapable transition into an increasingly modern world.

The appeal of Cranford cannot be better described than in the popularity of the BBC drama series. The teleplay by Heidi Thomas was adapted from three novellas by Elizabeth Gaskell published between 1849 and 1858: Cranford, My Lady Ludlow, and Mr. Harrison's Confessions. (The Last Generation in England was also used as a source.)

A gentle, charming read, Cranford has much more to offer the discerning reader than a unassuming look at country life.

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### **Amira says**

Even though Cousin Phillis is slow paced and the plot doesn't involve a lot of action I did the enjoy the societal issues it presents. I was also interested to observe that these feminist issues identified in the novel of the intimidation of female intelligence within a relationship, the disparity of height difference in couples (especially if the female is taller) somehow makes a man less adequate and the idea that female authorship is still looked upon differently compared to male authors. These issues are still (in a smaller degree) present in our contemporary society, regardless of how far we think we have progressed.

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### **Gerald Sinstadt says**

I came to Cranford without having seen the recent television adaptation but somewhat wary because it had been dismissed as "women gossiping." One might as well describe Romeo and Juliet as "families squabbling."

Perhaps no English village in the time of sedan chairs and candlelight was quite as idyllic as Cranford, but never mind. Elizabeth Gaskell creates a community true unto itself. We see it largely through the lives of its womenfolk, many of them spinsters. Cosy it may appear but it is touched by trouble - there is an early death, a loved brother disappears, a bank folds; the real world cannot be held entirely at bay. But in the main it is small events that loom large in this small world; such is the author's skill, the reader is involved.

If the observation is perceptive, it is also consistently amusing. Consider the acerbic Miss Pole on the subject of men: "If you will notice, they have always foreseen events, though they never tell one for one's warning before the events happen; my father was a man, and I know the sex pretty well."

There is more to Cranford than a theme park imagining of how Olde England might have been.

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## **Jen says**

Cranford is a sweet, well-paced narration of life in mid-19th century England. The narrator's voice is beautifully developed and warm with irony and love for the old women in the small town of Cranford and their faded glories.

I'm afraid I read most of Cousin Phillis with an expectation for Phillis to meet some gloomy, over-dramatic Victorian end, because of misinterpreting something in the introduction to the book. This may have taken away some of my enjoyment in the book. Perhaps I also found the young, earnest, male narrator and his view-point harder to sympathize with than Mary in Cranford.

Still, I enjoyed both stories and recommend them.

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