



Unsettling the Normative: Articulations of Masculinity in Victorian Literature and Culture

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the academic study of Victorian masculinity. It argues that the pioneering work of feminist and sexuality studies scholars in Victorian studies during the 1970s and 1980s made it possible to discuss manhood critically as a historical and cultural phenomenon. It then presents a reading of major works on Victorian masculinity from the 1990s, organized around two major themes: studies that brought to light and analyzed a suppressed history of masculinities that departed from cultural norms (especially homosexual masculinity), and studies devoted to the reassessment of mainstream Victorian manhood. It concludes by looking at a selection of work from the past decade in order to outline recent developments in the field. These studies, which have been able to take for granted that manhood is a valid and coherent subject of inquiry, have been able to integrate the study of masculinity into a variety of Victorian topics, even though there are now fewer works devoted exclusively to masculinity.

It is only relatively recently that the study of masculinity has become a distinct subfield in nineteenth-century studies. The scholarly analysis of men's gender roles in the Victorian era began in earnest during the 1980s, before flourishing throughout the 1990s. This is because these studies were a direct outgrowth of feminist and gay and lesbian studies, both of which made gender into a major focus of academic inquiry during the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1990s, studies of Victorian manhood productively engaged with this dual inheritance, particularly in their attempts to adumbrate distinctions between normative and non-normative forms of male sexuality.

This article begins with a discussion of the pioneering work of feminist and sexuality studies scholars in Victorian studies, who innovatively described masculinity as a historical phenomenon that changes over time in response to social, cultural, and economic conditions. It then presents a select overview of major works on Victorian manhood from the 1990s, organized around two major themes: studies that brought to light and analyzed a suppressed history of masculinities that departed from cultural norms (especially homosexual masculinity), and studies devoted to the reassessment of mainstream Victorian masculinity. It concludes by looking at a selection of work from the past decade (2000–2009) in order to outline recent developments in Victorian masculinity studies. With the exception of recent studies that have attempted to reassess assumptions regarding Victorian homosexual and lower class men, the integration of masculinity studies into the mainstream of literary and historical scholarship of the Victorian era has meant that fewer volumes isolate masculinity as their exclusive object of study.

The Beginnings of Victorian Masculinity Studies

It is telling that one of the first studies devoted to the analysis of Victorian masculinity appeared in Martha Vicinus' influential feminist anthology *A Widening Sphere: Changing*

Roles of Victorian Women (1977). Carol Christ's chapter on 'Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House' can be considered a paradigmatic example of how the insights of feminism could be used to uncover the historical conditions affecting mainstream representations of masculinity. Christ uses the idealized visions of femininity found in the works of Coventry Patmore, Alfred Lord Tennyson, John Ruskin, and Charles Dickens to discuss 'the pressures the age brought to bear upon the Victorian man [...]' (147). These authors valorized passivity and asexuality in women because they were deeply ambivalent about cultural imperatives stating that men were to be active and ambitious in the political and economic life of Victorian society, and the aggressiveness typically ascribed to male sexuality. These fantasies of feminine virtue represented the qualities that men wanted to embody, but from which they were definitively excluded according to Victorian gender ideology. In many ways, this innovative approach to studying men's representations of femininity followed necessarily from the insights of feminist criticism. Just as feminists had realized that gender itself has a history, Christ realized that men's ideas about women necessarily reflected the historical pressures affecting ideologies of masculinity as well as femininity.

At the same time Christ was analyzing mainstream Victorian masculinity, sociologist Jeffrey Weeks was interested in men who departed from those norms. In his study *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (1977), Weeks provided a history of British sexual reform movements. His volume represented a radical shift in sexual thinking that had far-reaching implications for the study of nineteenth-century masculinity. Instead of focusing exclusively on the emergence of sexual science ('sexology') in the late nineteenth century, and its use of institutional authority to create and impose sexual identities upon individuals, Weeks examines the emergence of 'homosexual consciousness' among British radicals during the late Victorian period. Weeks explores what he calls the emergence of 'homosexual self-definition', the ways in which same-sex desiring individuals constituted their own sense of identity and community through recourse to a wide variety of social and cultural discourses above and beyond the discourse of sexology, such as law, politics, and the arts. Weeks's study had two major effects on the study of Victorian masculinity: first, by calling attention to the nuanced and singular ways individuals and groups defined their sexual identities apart from sexological authority, he opened up new areas of inquiry for future scholars of sexuality in a variety of academic disciplines. Second, by exploring how same-sex desiring men crafted their self-definitions through various cultural discourses, Weeks demonstrated that artistic and cultural representations of sexuality could provide special insight into erotically non-normative aspects of male identity.

Soon after the publication of Weeks's book, Robert Hurley's English translation of Michael Foucault's *Introduction to the History of Sexuality* (1978) debuted.

Foucault argues against what he termed the 'repressive hypothesis' of Victorian sexual discourse, by which he means the popular notion that nineteenth-century culture actively prohibited the frank discussion of sexual matters. Instead, he maintains that the Victorian era saw the unprecedented proliferation of discourses around the topic of sexuality, elicited by burgeoning scientific and medical regulation of sexual activity (what Foucault terms the '*scientia sexualis*'). Indeed, Foucault goes so far as to assert that the very concept of 'sexuality' was the spurious invention of nineteenth-century medical discourse, an 'artificial unity' cobbled out of 'anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures' (154). The discourse of sexuality, he argues, covertly coaxed people into policing their own desires and impulses without coercion from outside forces. Foucault asserts that various nineteenth-century medical practices, such as the confessional

case study, where patients offered narrative accounts of their sexual history, worked not only to convince individuals to internalize the notion that they possessed a 'true' sexual identity, and also that their sexual practices constituted the fundamental and most authentic 'truth' about their identity. One of the most significant creations of this sexual discourse was the invention of 'the [implicitly male] homosexual' as a distinct sexual category.

In what would become one of the most famous statements made about sexuality in the late twentieth century, Foucault states

homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

Erotic contact between people of the same-sex was no longer merely an act one performed; instead, those contacts came to define the person in his very being. Yet Foucault also maintained that the late nineteenth century saw the beginnings of a 'reverse discourse' of homosexuality, where same-sex desiring individuals used the discourse of homosexuality for the purposes of winning political liberation, rather than defining a medical pathology. Although the immense influence of Foucault in Victorian studies has been contested in recent years, as I discuss briefly in the final section of this essay, the most important legacy of Foucault's *Introduction* for subsequent studies of Victorian masculinity was a heightened awareness of the ways in which nineteenth-century ideologies of masculinity enforced processes of sexual self-surveillance, self-policing, and self-regulation.

The insights of feminist scholars and historians of sexuality were brought together provocatively in the groundbreaking work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) Sedgwick frames her argument primarily as a theoretical intervention in feminist studies. She ingeniously argues that the role of women in society is largely determined by the structure of relations between men, arguing that this structure changes over time, and is shaped by historically situated social and cultural forces. Sedgwick uses the term 'homosocial' to describe these relations: while social scientists had often used this term in opposition to 'homosexual' to describe non-erotic social bonds between people of the same gender, Sedgwick asserts that relations between men take place on what she calls the 'homosocial continuum'. She maintains that homosocial relations are continuous with, rather than distinct from, homosexual relations, and that even the most homophobic bonds between men carry an erotic charge. Sedgwick thus uses her theory of homosociality to analyze the romantic triangles prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century fiction. She borrows from René Girard's theory of 'mimetic desire' to describe this triangular structure of desire, arguing that when two men vie for the same woman, it allows men to channel their potentially homoerotic desires through the woman, who is thus forced to become the mediator and token of a desire that exists 'between men'. In the latter half of her study, Sedgwick looks at canonical Victorian texts by authors such as Tennyson, Thackeray, Eliot, and Dickens in order to discuss the role of male homosociality within 'mainstream public ideologies', and to explore the complex relations among homophobia, class, and race in the context of British imperialism (119). In *Between Men*, Sedgwick established once and for all that a feminist analysis of gender roles in the nineteenth century must necessarily entail an examination of erotic relations between men encoded in mainstream ideologies of masculinity from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.

In her subsequent study, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick's study examines literary works from the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet Sedgwick's emphasis

in this volume is quite different: while the earlier volume places itself explicitly within a tradition of feminist criticism, this study is concerned exclusively with the advent of modern sexual identities described by historians of sexuality such as Weeks and Foucault. She focuses exclusively on male homoeroticism in an emphatically anti-homophobic critique of the emergence of sexual categories in the late Victorian era. Sedgwick argues that when 'indicatively male' notions of 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' identity came into being in the late nineteenth century, they engendered a 'chronic, now endemic crisis' within Western epistemology itself: not only was every person in the world now forced to conceive of their erotic identity in strictly binary terms, but those identities became 'full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence' (2). Because Sedgwick sees nearly every binary opposition structuring modern thought as inflected by this homo/hetero binary, her major goal in *Epistemology* is to open up a space for the investigation of sexuality *qua* sexuality that can stand apart from analysis of the relations between genders:

[T]he pressingly immediate fusion of feminist with gay male preoccupations and interrogations that *Between Men* sought to perform has seemed less available, analytically, for a twentieth-century culture in which at least some versions of a same-sex desire unmediated through heterosexual performance have become widely articulated. (15)

To this end, Sedgwick examines works by Herman Melville, Oscar Wilde, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henry James, and Marcel Proust in order to examine how fundamentally incoherent oppositions between supposedly binary terms (i.e. secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, etc) arose during the late nineteenth century as part of the project of defining the spurious opposition between the male homosexual and the male heterosexual, and how these binary oppositions continue to structure Western thought to this day.

Sedgwick's two studies fundamentally changed the way scholars understood nineteenth-century masculinity. She called attention to the impossibility of positing a coherent boundary between heterosexual and homosexual, or normative and non-normative masculinity. In the process, Sedgwick provided a sophisticated theoretical apparatus for discussing the idiosyncratic specificities of male erotic expression, and its nuanced relationship to historical particularities of social, cultural, and economic context. Subsequent studies of masculinity inherited from Sedgwick's work both a new vocabulary and a rigorous methodological self-consciousness. Even though most studies of Victorian masculinity appearing during the 1990s focused on either non-normative or normative versions of masculinity, critics were forced to acknowledge that these boundaries were, at best, porous and provisional. Consequently, the best of these studies demonstrated the complex, subtle, and unexpected ways that 'normal' and 'perverse' forms of masculinity interacted with each other during the Victorian era.

Victorian Masculinity in the 1990s

The accomplishments of feminist and sexuality studies scholars provided the intellectual resources that allowed the studies of Victorian masculinity to flourish during the 1990s. These works can be separated into two broad categories: studies devoted to unearthing a history of non-normative (and particularly homoerotic) masculinity, and studies devoted to understanding the historical pressures that conditioned normative Victorian masculinity. Yet all of these studies grappled productively with questions raised by earlier critics: what, precisely, distinguished perverse and mainstream forms of masculinity? Is such a distinction

even tenable? If not, how else might one adjudicate between the notably different styles of male gender behavior found throughout the nineteenth century?

Critics interested in exploring non-normative forms of masculinity often framed their studies as responses to historical accounts of the homosexual 'species' coming into existence during the late 1800s. As a result, many studies focused on the dramatic changes in gender discourses during the closing decades of the century. Richard Dellamora frames his study *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (1990) as a response to the work of Jeffrey Weeks, Michel Foucault, and Eve Sedgwick, characterizing his work as an examination of the 'micropractices that show how individual subjects respond at the very moments when codes of sexuality are being induced and/or imposed' (1). Specifically, he examines the 'implications of the question of the male as subject of desire – at times as both subject and object of desire – in androgynous language' which he claims had 'a long, complex development in the history of nineteenth-century poetry' (1). After brief examinations of Percy Shelley and Tennyson, however, Dellamora focuses primarily on one particular homosocial community: the men affiliated in some way with the 'esthetic movement' centered around Oxford University in the late nineteenth century. Dellamora's primary interest is in the poetic language developed by men who were acutely aware of their same-sex desires. He looks at the writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, A. C. Swinburne, Walter Pater, and John Ruskin, among others, in order to trace the ways these authors used the discourse of esthetics to fashion new forms masculinity in response to culturally instantiated homophobia. Yet Dellamora is also acutely aware of how often these new forms of masculine desire replicate the unequal gender relations found in the dominant cultural discourse, such as their exploration of the implications of anal sex in asymmetrical relations of power between men. Ultimately, he finds that the sexual politics of estheticism to be deeply ambivalent, both subversive and complicit with the mainstream sexual politics of the Victorian era.

The complex relationship between subversive and complicit forms of masculinity also defined the career of the nineteenth century's supreme esthete, Oscar Wilde. The figure of Wilde became a touchstone for Victorian masculinity studies in the 1990s, which often characterized him as the person from whom we can trace the origins of modern male homosexual identity. Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991) proposes that two competing notions of male same-sex desire arose during the late nineteenth century: one associated with Wilde, which embodied an understanding of homoerotic desire as mutable and subversive, and another associated with André Gide, who represented homosexual identity as essential and unthreatening. Similarly, Alan Sinfield proposes that Wilde is the original for our modern stereotype of the effeminate homosexual man in *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (1994). Sinfield's historical study ranges from the early modern period to the present day in order to make the case that effeminacy was not necessarily associated with same-sex desire before the 'queer moment' of Oscar Wilde's 1895 trials. Effeminacy, rather, is a social construct with a history of its own separate from the history of homosexuality. In the early modern period, for example, effeminate behavior with overindulgence, luxury, cowardice, and even an excessive desire for women. Sinfield characterizes Oscar Wilde as the definitive marker of a shift in the cultural discourse around homosexuality. Although Wilde had a scandalous reputation before the trials, Sinfield argues that his effete behavior was not suggestive of sodomical relations between men until after his trials and conviction. Forever after, however, effeminacy was indissolubly linked to homosexuality in the public imagination, creating a figure that persists in the cultural imagination even to this day.

Joseph Bristow's *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (1995) picks up where Sinfield's volume leaves off, examining literary works written between the passing of the Labouchere Amendment, which criminalized sex between men in public and in private, and the present day. Bristow's book explores how the discourse of effeminacy shifted from being merely associated with homosexuality to being the major stigma attached to same-sex desiring men, as well as an unavoidable topic for subsequent gay-affirmative writers in the twentieth century. Bristow follows Dellamora and Dowling in his insistence that this association needs to be examined not only in the context of the Wilde's trials, but also in the context of culture-wide changes gender ideology occurring in the late nineteenth century – the same changes that introduced the figure of the liberated 'new woman' and the lesbian. Bristow also follows Sinfield in his assertion that the figure of Wilde is largely responsible for forging the connection between homosexuality and effeminacy at the end of the nineteenth century. He goes on to assert, however, that the chief characteristic of Wilde's effeminacy is its fatalistic resignation. Bristow suggests that Wilde was complicit with the values of his upper-class audience, and hence willingly offered himself as a sacrifice to his self-created image as an effeminate esthete. Bristow also argues that subsequent male homosexual writers who valorized effeminacy were often *not* sexual radicals, but rather 'defined their pre-occupation with a dissident masculine style against an often aggressive and despicable contempt for women' (9). Beginning in the late nineteenth century, same-sex desiring authors attempted to recuperate male effeminacy as a force of resistance to the valorization of combative masculinity as a national ideal and the driving force of British imperialism. Femininity, however, threatened to dull the subversive edge of male effeminacy by enfolded it into culturally sanctioned feminine stereotypes of passivity and weakness. There thus arose competing strains of 'effemophilia' and 'effemophobia' in homoerotic writing post-Wilde, as gay-affirmative writers grappled with their ambivalence regarding the subversive yet potentially disabling image of the effeminate homosexual.

Christopher Lane's *The Ruling Passion: British Colonial Allegory and the Paradox of Homosexual Desire* (1995) also focused on homosexuality's ability to trouble the cultural ideologies of British imperialism. Lane's emphatically psychoanalytic study discusses how male homosexual desire operated as an allegory within narratives of British colonialism. He traces the origins of these allegories to the works of late Victorian authors such as Rudyard Kipling, H. Rider Haggard, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, and Max Beerbohm. Lane suggests that, while allegory can function as a rhetorical device in imperial narratives by bringing together disparate elements into an imaginary whole known as 'the nation', male homosexuality instead introduces into these narratives unassimilable and disruptive elements. These homosexual allegories introduce 'sexual ambivalence, political contention, self-antagonism, and national and racial disputes' into colonial narratives, thus complicating the fantasy of unity created by national allegory. These homosexual allegories are not, however, unequivocally subversive. Instead, same-sex desire is a paradox: authors of colonial narratives either flatten the erotic *frisson* of the homosocial elements in their texts, or they attempt to embrace their sexual desires by rejecting the norms of the dominant imperial culture. Yet in any case, these authors cannot either fully de-eroticize homosexual desire or reject completely the values of British colonial culture, which reveals the final impossibility of mastering the eroticism of either political or psychical existence.

Christopher Lane would continue his psychoanalytic theorization of non-normative masculinities in *The Burdens of Intimacy: Psychoanalysis and Victorian Masculinity* (1999). Here, Lane uses the theories of Jacques Lacan and his followers to articulate a theory of 'repression', which he presents as a psychic structure that is not historically contingent,

but is instead constitutive of human consciousness itself. By insisting that the unconscious destabilizes all subjective and erotic relations, Lane contrasts his method both to Foucauldian historicism, which he believes flattens out the workings of the subconscious in its emphasis on the social construction of subjectivity, and to queer theory, which he believes ignores historical specificity in a politicized attempt to project contemporary sexual categories back into pre-twentieth-century texts. Lane's innovative method thus attempts to deploy the timeless structure of repression in a historically rigorous manner, by looking at the nineteenth-century categories of 'virility' and 'effeminacy' as they appeared in Victorian and Edwardian works by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, A. C. Swinburne, Thomas Hardy, Olive Schreiner, Henry James, E. M. Forster, and George Santayana. In contrast to many of the studies of non-normative masculinity written during the 1990s, Lane is not interested in the origins of modern sexual identities. Instead, Lane's focuses on the fundamental incoherence of erotic desire itself, and its inevitable subversion of all attempts to establish coherent categories of personal identity.

The studies discussed above all shared a common interest in unearthing the buried history of non-normative masculinity. They did so by emphasizing the role of male homosexual identity in the tumultuous cultural changes that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, and their ambivalence toward (and, sometimes, their complicity with) mainstream sexual politics. Also during this decade, however, there arose a group of studies that attempted to complicate our understanding of normative, culturally sanctioned forms of masculinity. These works are characterized by their tendency to trace the origins of mainstream Victorian manhood to the radical changes in culture, society, and economics occurring at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and their tendency to focus on middle-class men as the embodiment of culturally normative masculine behavior.

Although the study of masculinity has largely been the province of literary scholars and critics, it is significant that the study of normative Victorian masculinity began with the work of historians. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's influential *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (1987), was one of the first historical studies to suggest that both women's and men's roles in domestic and public life changed significantly during the early nineteenth century, due to changing religious ideologies and the rapid shifts in the social and economic circumstances of the middle class. These insights were consolidated in the essay collection *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (1991), edited by Michael Roper and John Tosh. The polemical introduction to this influential volume asserts the following foundational claims: first, that masculinity changes with time, and thus has a history; second, that masculinity must be considered in the context of relations between men and women; third, that the study of masculinity must be conducted in tandem with consideration of men's power over women, minorities, homosexuals, et cetera. In practice, however, most of the pieces in *Manful Assertions* look at middle class, heterosexual masculinity. The volume includes four essays focused primarily on Victorian topics: Norma Clarke's study of Thomas Carlyle's construction of the male author as 'hero' and its relation to his family life, an essay by John Tosh on the domestic arrangements of the new middle class as exemplified by the family of Edward White Benson, Keith McClelland on the professional hierarchies of mid-nineteenth-century artisans, and Pamela J. Walter's study of men in the Salvation Army between 1865 and 1890. It is significant that, with the exception of Walter's analysis of the military ethos of the Salvation Army, these essays look to the early and mid-Victorian period to discuss the origins of a normative, middle class standard of masculine behavior.

One of the first literary studies to focus on normative Victorian manhood also examined the early to mid-nineteenth-century in order to discuss the origins of middle-class

masculinity. Herbert Sussman's *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (1995) follows upon the work of historians of normative masculinity by looking at the early Victorian era, and the changes to male behavior wrought by the rise of industrialism and changes in the class system. In the works of Thomas Carlyle, Robert Browning, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and Pater, Sussman finds a common drive to displace a coherent and unified form of masculinity onto an idealized historical past. This form of masculinity is embodied in the figure of the monk: an emblem of solitude, self-reflection, and rigorous erotic self-discipline. In contrast to this idealized historical figure, the works of these authors to be driven by contradiction, conflict, and anxiety, which Sussman suggests were hallmarks of the lived experience of men during the Victorian era. He declares that the Victorians did not understand masculinity to be an essential part of a man's identity, but rather a narrative: an achievement to be obtained and maintained over time. In distinction to the more familiar marriage plot, however, the Victorian 'masculine plot' is defined exclusively by its negativity, which is to say, its systematic exclusion of the erotic, the effeminate, and the feminine through narratives of extreme self-repression.

James Eli Adams's *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (1995) is also concerned with the rigorous self-regulation of the Victorian male. In contrast to Sussman, however, Adams understands the monastic male ascetic to be the double and brother of the dandified male esthete. Adams argues that the various 'styles' of Victorian masculinity found in early Victorian artistic brotherhoods, as well as in the writings of Tennyson, Charles Kingsley, Wilde, and Pater, all shared a concept of asceticism as an inner struggle to discipline the self. Yet Adams also argues that masculine self-discipline is not simply negative or exclusionary. Instead, men used self-control as a dynamic process that maintained personal autonomy and subjectivity against the oppressive forces of Victorian modernity. Yet this masculine self-regulation also had to contend with the paradox of 'inner worldly asceticism', which incorporates the outer world that it supposedly rejects, insofar as it needs that world as the theater in which to perform the act of its rejection. In effect, the Victorian man must absorb the very theatricality he denies. In other words, by conjoining discipline and performance, every Victorian man is in danger of becoming a dandy. According to Adams, Victorian masculinity is always a 'style', a rhetorical and performative transaction that is at once both personal and social.

Angus McLaren's *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870–1930* (1997) shares with Adams an interest in the social construction and lived practices of masculinity. His overarching thesis is that the 'boundaries of masculine comportment, normal sexual behavior, and male gender identity were constructed and maintained by law, medicine, politics, and popular ritual' (7). Yet McLaren, by focusing on the end of the nineteenth century, is able to make the innovative argument that the major motivation underlying the legal and medical regulation of masculinity was not the protection of women, but the shoring up of male power during a time of social, cultural, and economic upheaval – a claim that dovetails with the insights made by studies of non-normative masculinities at the turn of the century. McLaren's study is also notable for its transnational focus, which allows him to identify the large-scale historical pressures facing men in Britain, Canada, and France, as well as his use of court records of criminal prosecutions to discuss both working-class and middle-class masculinity.

In *Men of Letters, Writing Lives: Masculinity and Literary Auto/Biography in the Late Victorian Period* (1999), Trev Lynn Broughton also argues that one of the major imperatives of late nineteenth-century discourse around masculinity was shoring up the increasingly fragile structure of patriarchal authority. Broughton examines Leslie Stephens's autobiographical texts and J. A. Froude's writings on the life of Thomas Carlyle in order to show how the

figure of the 'Victorian sage' was a precarious textual construct, one that deployed biographical material in order to effect 'the regulation of literary masculinity' (84). Broughton follows a typically Foucauldian line of analysis by arguing that this masculine regulation was accomplished through an obsession with sexual matters articulated in the register of the 'confession', such as Stephens's intense focus on his adequacy as a husband, Froude's pre-occupation with Carlyle's supposed impotence, and their shared concern with the homoerotic possibilities latent within homosocial relations. Broughton also discovers that both authors were overwhelmingly concerned with the ambivalent position of the 'man of letters' within Victorian gender ideology, as individuals whose writings participated both in the 'manly' public sphere of literary discourse, but who actually worked within the 'womanly' domestic sphere of the middle-class home. Indeed, Broughton argues that the texts of Stephens and Froude actually share many of the concerns of nineteenth-century women's writings, such as dissatisfaction with the strictures of the normative Victorian marriage, and the burden of silence and repression that structured Victorian discourses of the self.

Much like Broughton, John Tosh's historical study *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class Home in Victorian England* (1999) argues that, just as much as women, Victorian men had to contend with the numerous contradictions inherent within various cultural imperatives regarding gender appropriate behavior. Tosh follows previous studies of Victorian masculinity in his assertion that the incoherence of Victorian masculinity stemmed from the radical social and economic transformations of the early nineteenth century. Using family record and advice books as his primary sources, Tosh presents seven case studies of individual men in order to sketch a broad narrative about English masculinity – its early nineteenth century pre-conditions, its climax between 1830 and 1880, and its subsequent thirty-year decline.

According to Tosh, what was most distinctive about Victorian masculinity was its attachment to domestic life and domestic ideologies. At no other point in history was middle-class masculinity defined so exclusively by its place within the family home. Tosh echoes *Manly Assertions* in his claim that masculinity cannot be understood apart from men's relationships with women. Thus, one of his major areas of inquiry is his investigation of the competing and contradictory claims of various styles of fatherhood. Tosh outlines four distinct ideologies of fatherhood: the absent father, the tyrannical father, the distant father, and the intimate father. His other major emphasis is on the ideologies of masculinity promoted by the public schools, which were becoming the province of sons of the upper middle class during the nineteenth century, rather than the exclusive province of the aristocracy. Tosh argues that these public schools resolved a fundamental ideological incoherence in Victorian fatherhood: they were charged with instilling in young boys the tough, hardened masculinity that the domestic ideology of masculinity prevented their own fathers from inflicting. This resulted in the complete ban and rejection of anything resembling femininity or feminine emotion in the public school context. Although Tosh's study is relatively short in length, it accomplishes the ambitious task of proving that normative Victorian masculinity was diverse and pluralistic both in theory and in practice.

The Mainstreaming of Masculinity

During the 1990s, scholars of Victorian masculinity were concerned with establishing a coherent field of inquiry, and outlining the boundaries and possibilities of such an inquiry. Studies written in the past decade, building upon this work, have been able to take for granted that masculinity was a valid and coherent subject of academic inquiry. As a result, many studies from the past decade have integrated the study of masculinity into

a variety of Victorian topics, even though there have been fewer works devoted to the subject of Victorian masculinity exclusively. As John Tosh has stated in his recent state-of-the-field monograph, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, this is perhaps a telling indication of the field's maturity. Works such as Catherine Robson's *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (2001) combines a feminist analysis of representations of girls in Victorian fiction to argue that nineteenth-century culture imagined perfect childhood to be gendered female, and that certain middle-class men (including canonical Victorian authors such as Dickens, Ruskin, and Lewis Carroll) fetishized particular little girls as emblems of their own lost childhood. Robson's study is exemplary in its integration of discussions of masculinity into an analysis of gender relations, framed by a particular thematic concern.

There are two types of studies, however, that have departed from this general tendency: works that have integrated the study of masculinity with class-based cultural analysis, and works that have revised the history of male homosexuality in the nineteenth century. In both of these cases, scholars have returned to the topic of masculinity in order to nuance or correct oversight embedded within earlier studies of Victorian masculinity. For example, in the historical study *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (2004), Seth Koven argues that, although modern readers are often eager to debunk Victorian middle-class philanthropy as a cover story for bourgeois sexual opportunism directed toward the urban poor, such acts can actually be understood as the self-conscious harnessing of erotic desire toward socially beneficial ends. Most significantly for masculinity studies, Koven examines the foundation of all-male urban settlement houses, and finds that they embodied an ideology of 'fraternalism', which suggested that the atomization of urban life for middle-class men would be healed through contact with impoverished urban men. This represents, for Koven, the supreme act of transforming erotic desire into moral passion, one that would 'bind the wounds of a class-divided society' and allow middle-class men 'to free themselves, at least for a time, of the manacles of bourgeois respectability' (273).

Similarly, in *The Imagination of Class: Masculinity and the Victorian Urban Poor* (2006), Dan Bivona and Roger B. Henkle examine writings about urban poverty by men of the middle class, such as Dickens, Henry Mayhew, George Gissing, H. G. Wells, and Jack London, among others. Bivona and Henkle build upon the insights of Adams and Tosh in their examination of these texts' reflection of the anxieties besetting middle-class men during the nineteenth century. For the Victorian gentleman-professional, the milieu of the urban poor was conjured as a sphere for 'manly' intellectual labor. Many middle-class authors conceived of their journeys to the slums as an opportunity for the act of writing itself to entail adventure, courage, and the exercise of masculine self-control. These writers construed the life of the urban poor as a sphere of immediacy, action, which served as a compensation for the placid domesticity of middle-class life. These writings also figure the urban poor both as emblems of emergent capitalism, and as capitalism's worst victims, thereby making the slums a site for middle-class men to work out their deep ambivalence about capitalist competition in the public sphere.

While Bivona and Henkle's study uses writings about urban poverty to discuss the class consciousness of middle-class male authors, Ying S. Lee's *Masculinity and the English Working Class: Studies in Victorian Autobiography and Fiction* (2007) discusses three working-class autobiographies in order to discover what working-class men thought about their own subjectivities. By pairing each autobiography with a canonical Victorian novel, Lee calls attention to the variety and distinctiveness of working-class identity. While this insight should, perhaps, appear self-evident, it has often been obscured by studies of middle-class

masculinity that have tended to project upon the working class a unified voice, and have suggested that middle-class men lived emphatically public lives, as opposed to the bourgeois interiority ascribed to middle-class existence. Lee uses autobiography to explore how social class affected the self-representations of working-class subjects: the formation of their identities through family and communal life, the labor they performed, and the social roles assigned to them. One of Lee's major insights is that the lived experience of working-class men emphatically did not support the middle-class ideology of the 'separate spheres'. On the contrary, working-class men understood all too well that the separate spheres were not separate in practice, and that home life was often not the domestic bliss embodied by popular sentiment. By focusing on working-class men's own experience of class, Lee describes the effects of social forces on individual psychology and the domestic activities of working men – a topic that has largely been ignored by mainstream academic discussions of nineteenth-century masculinity.

Another hidden discourse that has recently been brought to light is the lives of sexually non-normative men whose experiences do not fit comfortably into the theoretical paradigms elaborated by Weeks and Foucault. The past decade has seen an explosion of revisionary studies of nineteenth-century male homosexuality, including H. G. Cocks's *Nameless Offenses: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (2003), Matt Cook's *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914* (2003), Sean Brady's *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913* (2005), and Morris Kaplan's *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (2005). In an extensively researched review essay, Joseph Bristow has discussed the aforementioned studies under the grouping 'the new gay history' (120). Bristow points out that these scholars, who position their methodologies against those of Weeks and Foucault, have a tendency to oversimplify their critical forbearers as excessively naïve. Nevertheless, he maintains, these studies have successfully mapped out new terrain for studies of Victorian homosexuality. Cocks's study turns to the historical record to analyze patterns of arrest and the workings of the law for homosexual activity; Cook's and Kaplan's volumes examine the effect of sex scandals and the popular press on cultural understandings of homosexuality; and Brady's monograph analyzes the complex urban environments that enabled and organized gay erotic life during the nineteenth century. These works go beyond the 'reverse discourse' model proposed by Foucault, which suggested that same-sex desiring men appropriated the pathologizing language of sexological discourse for the purpose of political liberation. Instead, these new gay histories propose that male homosexual subcultures came to understand and speak for themselves in myriad ways, distinct from the disciplinary regimes of scientific discourse.

The insights of early LGBT studies and feminist scholars have played an important role throughout the development of Victorian masculinity studies, as well as a number of other influential scholarly discourses, such as discussions of sodomy in early modern period, the role of feminine and masculine sensibility in eighteenth century and Romantic writing, and the advent of masculine hysteria and mourning in the wake of WWI. These discourses have made it possible to view masculinity as an object of critical analysis, and have productively troubled the spurious boundary between normative and non-normative male behavior. However, recent studies have demonstrated the importance of addressing masculinity in contexts that might not, at first glance, necessarily lend themselves to gendered analysis, such as race, class, and imperialism. Now more than ever, it is evident that the analysis of masculinity as a constantly changing discourse that is embedded within historically, culturally, and socially embedded discourse is vital for the health and diversity not only of nineteenth-century studies, but of the academic study of literature and history altogether.

Short Biography

Dustin Friedman is a doctoral candidate in the English department at UCLA. His dissertation contends that late-Victorian aesthetes wielded the idealist concept of “the negative” to negotiate the interrelation between the theorization of aesthetic experience and the *frisson* of erotic response. His writings have appeared in *Studies in Romanticism*, *The Pater Newsletter*, and *Textual Practice*, among other venues.

Note

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