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THE VICISSITUDES OF VICTORIAN MASCULINITY: THE CASE OF THE BACHELOR

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Abstract

Victorian canonical realist fiction was presumably the means of representing dominant ideological conventions especially those related to gender roles and norms. This dissertation argues that fictional bachelor figures evaded the contemporary construction of normative manhood, veering away from traditional masculine prerogatives, thus disrupting the cultural ideal of bourgeois domesticity which was part of the imperialist and industrialist expansion of the Anglo-Saxon world. Contemporary theoretical research in psychoanalysis and gender theory deconstructs what patriarchal ideology had so carefully constructed in terms of normative concepts of gender roles and relations. In my dissertation I contend that from the point of view of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts and Judith Butler's insights into gender theory, Victorian bachelor figures are unrepresentable as masculine subjects within Victorian ideology as they do not fulfill their cultural gender objectives. In order to establish this thesis, I will deconstruct the representation of the figure of the bachelor as a masculine subject in the way/s he is "interpellated" both in dominant patriarchal ideology and in the realist texts which attempt to represent him. My analysis, then, aims to unravel the means by which the realist text can be read as subversive especially with regard to the representation of bachelor figures as transgressive masculine subjects functioning within the prescriptive politics of patriarchy. In this light, my reading of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, W.M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Henry James's *Roderick Hudson* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* will demonstrate that the representation of the bachelor heroes' subjectivities is elusive and undecidable because, a part of it, is never fully realized, expressed or articulated. As such, these subjectivities constitute a linguistic and thus representational gap, an omission which, in turn, reveals the inability of dominant ideology to represent what is deviant, different or incoherent.