



Anja Drautzburg

# *When is a Man a Man?*

Masculinities in Crisis in Victorian Women's Writing

**Tectum**

Anja Drautzburg

When is a Man a Man?

Masculinities in Crisis in Victorian Women's Writing

Umschlagabbildung: © wynnter | iStockpoto.de

© Tectum Verlag Marburg, 2010

ISBN 978-3-8288-5228-0

(Dieser Titel ist als gedrucktes Buch unter der  
ISBN 978-3-8288-2170-5 im Tectum Verlag erschienen.)

Besuchen Sie uns im Internet  
[www.tectum-verlag.de](http://www.tectum-verlag.de)

**Bibliografische Informationen der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der  
Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Angaben sind  
im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

## Table of Contents

<b>1 Writing About Men .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2 When is a Man a Man? – Masculinities in the Mid-Victorian Age.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3 Men in Public.....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 ‘My powers heard a call from Heaven’ – Clergymen.....	21
3.2 ‘It’s a hard world to live in’ – Self-Made Men .....	34
<b>4 Men in Private .....</b>	<b>43</b>
4.1 ‘He’s the flower of the flock’ – Mothers and Sons.....	43
4.2 ‘He showed far more depression than she did’ – Father and Daughter .....	47
4.3 ‘Has your endurance reached its climax?’ – Brothers .....	49
4.4 ‘I summon you as my wife’ – Marriages of Equals? .....	52
<b>5 Feminised Men .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>6 The Male versus the Female Gaze .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>7 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>8 Bibliography .....</b>	<b>87</b>



# 1 Writing About Men

At first sight, writing about men seems to be an easy task because one would assume that men are everywhere and so everything concerning typical men's topics must have already been examined. However, since the 1970s and especially since the publication of Kate Millett's feminist text *Sexual Politics* (1970), scholars have paid much more attention to feminism, feminist issues and the role of women in literature and society. As an equivalent to feminist literary criticism, the so-called Men's Studies also developed in the 1970s, but very often they were and still are regarded as part of Gender Studies or they increasingly deal with the issues of homosexuality or homosexual authorship. Besides, being part of Gender or even Feminist Studies at the universities often means that the general focus of attention has its basis in the aforementioned fields of studies. It is very difficult to find publications that exclusively deal with heterosexual masculinity or manliness as "social formations" that date from earlier than 1990 (cf. Sussman 367). That is hardly understandable, as it goes without saying that where there are women's issues, there are issues of heterosexual virility as well.

In the field of Victorian Studies the formation of manhood or the role of men in a patriarchal society has rather been neglected so far. Numerous essays and books have been dedicated to the role of women in the Victorian Age, yet only a few centre on men. When so, particular interest often lies in the homosexuality of Late-Victorian writers such as Oscar Wilde (cf. Sussman 368f). Even Herbert Sussman, who points out that there is a lack of material and studies concerning heterosexual masculinity, remarks that one should pay particular attention to "the conflicts between male-male desire and the normative formation of Victorian masculinity" (369). However, it can be argued that the formation of Victorian masculinities in itself is a field large enough to be examined, offering a sufficient amount of questions that need to be answered. Is there a model Victorian man? What kind of stereotypes about Victorian men existed and still exist? The aim of this paper is to show that there are indeed certain kinds of stereotypical Victorian men.

The four novels by Victorian women writers to be discussed in this paper were written between 1847 and 1855 so the examination of masculinities will only focus on the Mid-Victorian period. A socio-cultural contextualisation is a helpful basis to write about Victorian masculinities. John Ruskin's lectures *Sesame and Lilies* (1859), Samuel Smiles'

*Self-Help* (1865) and Thomas Hughes' novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) build the foundation for the following analysis of masculinities in women's writing. Although these three texts were published later than the four novels, they still reflect common Mid-Victorian ideas about manhood as opposed to womanhood, and also men's position in society and at home. Besides, they exclusively formulate men's opinions on these subjects, which sometimes puts them in an interesting contrast to the examined women's writing.

The primary texts were all written by women authors and each novel offers a different view point on men and common discourses on masculinity. Throughout the paper, the typology of the narratologist Gérard Genette will be used to examine narrators, space, perspective structures and other important narrative aspects to be found in the novels. Anne Brontë's *Bildungsroman Agnes Grey* (1847) is of particular interest because it features two very interesting clergymen, who embody the Victorian discourse on contrasting religious forces. Charlotte Brontë's first novel *The Professor* (1856) is a fictional autobiography with a male autodiegetic narrator, which makes it interesting to analyse in the context of women authorship. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), another fictional autobiography, but with a woman as narrator, is helpful in the analysis of masculinities because with Edward Rochester and St John Rivers it presents two of the most interesting Victorian men in literary history. Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel *North and South* (1855) differs from the three novels in various ways. Although it has often been analysed, most critics are concerned with its significance as a condition-of-England novel or its Marxist tendencies. But besides its importance as an industrial novel, it not only exemplifies the business career, but also the emotional development of the typical middle-class man John Thornton.

The structure of this paper is in a way modelled on Victorian thinking. After the socio-historical contextualisation, the focus will be on the different types of men in the four novels. The division between public and private men reflects the Victorian assumption that there was a so-called private and a public sphere. However, in this paper, the differentiation merely serves as a principle to acknowledge the fact that men had to fulfil different roles in their professional life and as members of their families. It will be seen that the women writers were indeed influenced by general discussions, but also by their individual, often rather limited, experience with men. Especially in the case of the Brontë sisters, it

is quite obvious that so many clergymen feature in their work because their father was parson in Haworth. So, the first part of the chapter on men in the public sphere deals with clergymen in women's writing. Using Marianne Thormählen's excellent publication *The Brontës and Religion* (1999) as a basis for the analysis, different types of clergymen will be presented. As in the Victorian period the rise of the middleclass continued, the next part of the chapter deals with Victorian business careers. On the one hand, there is *The Professor* William Crimsworth, who finally makes his living as a successful teacher. On the other hand, John Thornton in *North and South* will be examined more closely because he lives the typical 'from rags to riches' story. It will be seen that both seemingly different careers actually follow a similar structure.

In the private sphere men had to fulfil different functions within their families. Several mother-and-son relationships will be analysed to see in what way the upbringing influences a man's life. As there is no real father-son-relationship in the four novels to be found, the relationship between Mr Hale and Margaret in *North and South* will be discussed on the background of certain power relations that turn out to be different from the readers' expectations. The only male-male relationship between the two brothers Edward and William Crimsworth in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* is worth looking at because it also fuels discussions on power relations among family members. The most important relationship in this respect is surely marriage, which is why a whole chapter will be dedicated to the roles the male characters play as part of a couple. My aim is to show that the women writers do not really orientate on the idea that men have to be the stronger and superior part of a couple, but that it can sometimes be the other way round. This fact then leads to the next chapter, which deals with the so-called feminised men. Annette R. Federico uses this term in an essay on Brontë's novel *The Professor*. As the title might suggest, the chapter traces ways in which the male characters of the novels digress from Victorian gender expectations. In combination with that, finally, the question of women's authorship in the Victorian period will be discussed. Taking Laura Mulvey's influential essay on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1988) as a foundation, it will be argued that all women writers either let characters gaze on the plot level, or that they themselves more or less turn their female gazes on their male characters from an extratextual level. Why and in which ways this is possible will be examined, taking into account Ina Schabert's analysis of British literary history from the point of view of Gender Studies, as well as current

essays by Judith Wylie, Daniel Duffy and other literary critics. Ultimately, the aim of this paper is an approximation to Victorian masculinities and how they were perceived by Victorian women writers.



## 2 When is a Man a Man? –

### Masculinities in the Mid-Victorian Age

In the Victorian Age the prevalent notion was that it was possible to discuss manhood without reference to womanhood, but not the other way round (cf. Marsh 153). Generally, however, it was a lot easier to discuss “the woman question”, because masculinity “was not understood as an arguable issue” (ibid.). Besides, it can be said that Victorian masculinity was and still is a concept which is not static but under constant construction, which makes it difficult to grasp (cf. Poovey 3). Yet, in this chapter, an attempt is made to approach Victorian concepts of masculinity.

Two prime examples dealing with the formation of Victorian masculinity are Samuel Smiles’ praise of *Self-Help* (1859) and two of John Ruskin’s lectures published together under the title *Sesame and Lilies* (1865). A famous example focusing on boys’ education is Thomas Hughes’ novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857), which eulogises the upbringing of young boys in a public school. The novel might not be a particularly complex one, but it is culturally significant because it gives insight into the formation of masculinities in British public schools. On the basis of these three texts and with the aid of recent publications on Victorian masculinities, the concept of masculinity in the Mid-Victorian Age will be traced. It is crucial to mention that the Victorian texts are nowadays considered to be dealing with cultural myths to a certain extent (cf. Stevenson 11), which is why recent texts are integrated into this contextualisation. One can say that the three Victorian texts definitely show important aspects of the development of masculinities at that time.

The foundation for becoming a ‘real’ man is generally laid in early childhood. As a result, both Smiles and Ruskin offer interesting ideas about the field of education. The fundamental difference between the two approaches lies in the fact that Smiles concentrates exclusively on the education of men, whereas Ruskin in his second lecture *Lilies - Of Queen’s Gardens* discusses the correct form of education for boys *and* girls with a stress on the particularities of the education that should be given to girls, which was in itself a progressive venture in the Victorian period.