

Review: Jennifer Beauvais, *Domesticated Bachelors and Femininity in Victorian Novels* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020), 198pp. ISBN 978-0-7864-6036-6, \$49.95.

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IN THIS ENTERTAINING monograph, Jennifer Beauvais promises a re-evaluation of nineteenth-century masculinity, the concept of separate spheres, and gender performativity. Beauvais demonstrates how the domesticated bachelor achieves freedom by creating a domestic space that does not require a female presence: he reconfigures the private sphere through feminine discourse while maintaining a masculine image in public through his status as a man-about-town. The chosen texts for re-evaluation include Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*, Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, each of which provide excellent opportunities for interrogating nineteenth-century constructions of gender. In the tradition of John Tosh, Beauvais asks if the nature of the gentleman is natural or learned, and observes that living both inside and outside of social circles provides the bachelor figure with a unique perspective on society and social mores.¹ However, her unique contribution to the field is to identify such discursive categories as the 'gentleman actress', an original articulation of Victorian masculinity unexplored before this publication.

Beauvais's first chapter is entitled 'Male Models', and discusses 'performance and transformation' in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*.² Beauvais notes that the doubling of the female self onto male characters is common throughout both *Zofloya* and *Wuthering Heights*.

¹ See John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), and *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005).

² Jennifer Beauvais, *Domesticated Bachelors and Femininity in Victorian Novels* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020), p. 19.

Catherine Earnshaw's demonic double is Heathcliff, Victoria's is Zofloya. Beauvais observes that both female characters marry feminised men, but that the 'female demon cannot contain herself within the domestic realm and is unable to maintain her performance'. Therefore, both Victoria and Catherine return to their 'true natures' with the aid of their 'demonic doubles'.³ It is surprising that there is no mention of Angela Wright's seminal *Gothic Fiction* (2007), as Beauvais makes a point of separating the Male Gothic from the Female Gothic. Wright points out that to 'argue for a continuous "Female Gothic" tradition [...] is over-simplified in its neglect of different literary discourses and different contexts'.⁴ Beauvais's approach, restricting texts to the classification of 'male' or 'female' Gothic, seems somewhat reductive in light of Wright's study, as it ignores the 'multiplicity of possibilities in exploring gender in the Gothic'.⁵

'Between the Spheres' (Chapter Two) investigates the 'dual natures' of Robert and Louis Moore in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*. Beauvais argues that there is gender confusion among the characters throughout the novel due to women such as Shirley proposing 'masculine' perspectives on marriage. Additionally, Beauvais notes, Shirley engages with the public sphere while characters such as the three curates at the beginning of the novel are feminised through 'their participation in feminine discourse'.⁶ The position of these curates in society situates them as inhabiting the public sphere, yet as Beauvais observes, Brontë presents them as 'the unproductive, uninvited and rowdy visitors to the private sphere of the parlour'.⁷ She comments that these parlour-based activities are 'deemed non-active, futile, and without purpose or end-product, qualities that are in opposition to the concept of Victorian masculinity'.⁸ Beauvais links these activities with the well-known figure of the Victorian old maid – 'redundant, useless and parasitical'.⁹ A less convincing idea proposed by Beauvais in this chapter is

³ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴ Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 129.

⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

⁶ Beauvais, p. 38.

⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

that of the 'performance' of bourgeois masculinity by working class men. She relates how 'the working-man's tendency to over-perform in his role as middle-class man suggests a dangerous tendency to become a spectacle', and that performance and spectacle belong to the feminine.¹⁰ This statement would benefit from further elucidation.

In Chapter Three, 'The Domesticated Gentleman in *Lady Audley's Secret*', Beauvais notes that Robert Audley is 'an effeminate bachelor and struggling detective' in the mode of Wilkie Collins' heroines. However, curiously, she goes on to claim that Braddon is credited with founding the sensation genre despite Collins's *The Woman in White* being published three years earlier in 1859. Beauvais makes the superb point that Robert's refusal to conform to certain examples of manhood such as 'the aristocrat, the military man, or the sportsman, results in his alienation from the male community', and that aside from his 'intimate friendship with George, Robert is unable to perform his way into male circles, and eventually he no longer wishes to do so'.¹¹ She also notes how Robert's 'childlike inability to imagine himself or George married reveals a naïve effeminacy that lacks sexual prowess' - a factor all too obvious in Robert's dealings with the *femme fatale* Lucy Audley.¹² Another notable observation by Beauvais is that while Lucy's inherited insanity has been analysed in great depth, investigation into Robert's mental state, which is also brought into question during the novel, is lacking. This contribution illustrates the importance of including both masculinity and femininity when discussing social conventions of gender, for they cannot be treated exclusively of each other. While Beauvais's claim about the dandy, with reference to Robert Audley, is that it is an outdated model of masculinity at this time, sporting 'turned-down collars, French novels, laziness, and eccentric behaviour', she might also have considered how during this time both Charles Dickens and Benjamin Disraeli had each cultivated the figure of the dandy, and though perhaps eccentric, they were far from lazy.¹³

¹⁰ Beauvais, pp. 51-52.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 82.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

'Domesticated Theatricality' (Chapter Four) deals with Daniel Deronda's racial otherness, and what Beauvais terms 'the gentleman actress'.¹⁴ Daniel, Grandcourt and Klesmer all 'perform' in the capacity of 'gentleman actresses', a performance which links them with effeminacy. Beauvais claims that the male as 'spectacle or dandy' enters mid-Victorian literature specifically in *Daniel Deronda*, and that the use of 'the physical body as an artistic canvas is usually associated with the feminine', revealing 'a unique amalgamation of the actress and the gentleman'.¹⁵ Beauvais claims that 'Deronda positions himself in a variety of female roles as an act of sympathy', in effect becoming those females, means he is 'the quintessential actress even surpassing the female performers themselves'.¹⁶ An alternative reading could mean that Deronda is in fact imposing the very gender conventions he is seemingly seeking to liberate both Gwendolyn and Mirah from.

The final two chapters of Beauvais' monograph are by far the strongest. 'Men Gone Wild' makes interesting links between the figure of the author and the figure of the prostitute, as both sell pleasure to a consumer construed as non-selective and passive. In Beauvais's analysis, 'the delicate balance between the public and private spheres' is a path trodden by both parties. Beauvais also points out that the absence of female characters in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* emphasises the fluidity and mutability of the version of masculinity represented by male professionals who are all bachelors.¹⁷ What Beauvais perceives as Hyde's adaptability and his adeptness at performance are central tenets of this thesis as a whole. It must be remembered that any performance of gender by an individual is what grants that individual freedom of movement between the public and the private, with the adoption of both the masculine and the feminine allowing for the negotiation of a presence that is at once both attractive and repulsive, disrupting societal conventions in the pursuit of uninhibited pleasure. This is also evident in Wilde's treatise on aestheticism through the character of Dorian Gray which Beauvais discusses in chapter six. According to Beauvais Dorian represents the 'dandy in decline', a Victorian

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 123.

gentleman bachelor who is 'expected to follow his senses and indulge in pleasure', and she points out that Dorian's corruption and 'dark desires' have no place in the public sphere, they can only be 'played out in private', to the point where he 'can no longer distinguish life from art'.¹⁸ Beauvais notes that Lord Henry, too, is aware of 'the constant theatricality of life' and the 'roles that people play', and makes the salient point that Dorian in the figure of the dandy 'functions as commodity while rejecting conformity', for he is both spectator and performer, living 'inside and outside' the separate spheres.¹⁹

The bibliography does not list any publication later than 2008, leaving over a decade of publications on masculinities unaddressed, such as Todd Reeser's *Masculinities in Theory* (2010) and Stefan Horlacher (ed.) *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature From the Middle-Ages to the Present* (2011). However, through her identification of such unique articulations of masculinity as 'the male actress', and pointing to the fact that a lack of female characters in a novel can emphasise the fluidity and mutability of masculinities as experienced throughout the nineteenth century, Jennifer Beauvais has made an original contribution to the study of gender performativity. Her demonstration of Dorian Gray as Dandy, both spectator and performer, provides a particularly fruitful avenue for further research. Beauvais's book is a useful addition to masculinity studies, an area of research that is in need of expansion.



BIOGRAPHY: Tracy Hayes received her PhD in 2017 with a thesis investigating masculinity in the novels of Thomas Hardy. She is the Secretary and Website/Social Media Director for the Thomas Hardy Society and regularly organizes conferences and study days. Having presented papers on Hardy, M.R. James and Edgar Allan Poe at numerous conferences throughout the UK, Dr Hayes has also published in various journals including the DNHAS, Palgrave Communications, RRR, Merry Meet, Victorian Popular Fiction Association and Short Fiction Studies. Her current research centres around representations of Gothic masculinity in the short stories of Poe, Hardy and M.R. James.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 159-160.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 158, 167.

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