

37. A masculinist look at Meredith's *One of Our Conquerors*: Hegemonic, ethical and religious masculinity norms as determinant factors in the formation of male anxiety¹

Özlem YILMAZ²

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Abstract

The field of masculinity studies is a recent branch of research, which seeks answers to questions concerning the construction of masculinities and examines how the construction process differs in different societal, cultural, and historical contexts. Primarily aiming at investigating how male individuals respond to hegemonic masculinity norms either through their rejection or internalisation, the field emphasizes that the close analysis of the concept of masculinity is of great importance since it is impossible to find solutions to problems regarding to gender issues without understanding masculinities. Literary masculinity studies empower this close analysis by foregrounding the construction of masculinities in literary texts. George Meredith's *One of Our Conquerors*, which was written in 1891, at the beginning of the nineteenth century fin de siècle, is a successful example of literary texts which present a kind of critique of the prevailing patriarchal ideologies and of the damaging effects of hegemonic masculinity norms on psychologies of male individuals. Through its portrayal of a male protagonist who experiences a striking failure in conforming to the hegemonic masculinity expectations, the novel demonstrates the severe consequences of hegemonic gender expectations on non-hegemonic or alternative masculinities. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of hegemonic, ethical, and religious norms in the construction of masculine identities as well as in the occurrence of male anxiety through analysing masculinity portrayals in the novel.

Keywords: British novel, Meredith, hegemonic masculinity, male anxiety

Meredith'in *One of Our Conquerors* eserine maskülinist bir bakış: eril anksiyete oluşumunda hegemonik, etik ve dini normların rolü

Öz

Erkeklik çalışmaları, erkekliklerin inşası ile ilgili sorulara cevap arayan ve bu inşa sürecinin farklı sosyal, kültürel ve tarihsel kontekstlerde nasıl değişiklikler gösterdiğini inceleyen yeni bir araştırma alanıdır. Bu alan, öncelikle eril bireylerin reddetme ya da içselleştirme yoluyla hegemonik erkeklik normlarına verdikleri yanıtı incelemeyi amaçlamakta ve toplumsal cinsiyet sorunlarının çözümüne ancak erkekliklerin inşasını anlayarak kavuşulabileceği düşüncesiyle erkeklik kavramının detaylı olarak incelenmesinin hayati önemini vurgulamaktadır. Edebiyatta erkeklik çalışmaları ise bu analiz sürecini edebi metinlerdeki erkeklik inşalarını incelemek suretiyle destekler. George Meredith'in 1891 yılında, yani on dokuzuncu yüzyıl sonunun başlangıcında yazmış olduğu *One of Our Conquerors*

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² Dr. Arş. Gör., Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı (Manisa, Türkiye), ozlemyilmaz@hotmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6906-3825 [Araştırma makalesi, Makale kayıt tarihi: 29.05.2022-kabul tarihi: 20.06.2022; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1132598]

adlı eseri, hüküm sürmekte olan ataerkil düzeni eleştirmesi ve hegemonik erkeklik normlarının eril bireylerin psikolojileri üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini göstermesi açısından maskülinist metinlerin başarılı bir örneğidir. Okuyucuya hegemonik erkeklik normlarının idealize ettiği beklentileri karşılamakta başarısız bir erkek ana karakter betimlemesi sunan roman, aynı zamanda hegemonik cinsiyet normlarının hegemonik olmayan ya da alternatif erkeklikler üzerindeki ciddi etkilerini gözler önüne sererek bu normların eril anksiyetenin oluşumuna ne şekilde yol açtığını göstermektedir. Bu nedenle çalışmanın amacı Meredith'in *One of Our Conquerors* romanındaki erkeklik betimlemelerini analiz ederek gerek erkekliklerin inşa sürecinde gerekse eril anksiyete oluşumunda hegemonik, etik ve dini normların rolünü ortaya koymak ve gelişmekte olan edebiyatta erkeklik çalışmaları literatürüne katkı sağlamaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: İngiliz romanı, Meredith, hegemonik erkeklik, eril anksiyete

Introduction

With the recent influence of masculinist scholars who scrutinised the relationship between religion and masculinity – such as Frances Knight who claimed that religious doctrines have a significant role in the construction of masculinities and asserted that scholars should be “sensitive to questions of religious and denominational affiliation as well as of social status” (as cited in Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 2) – the effect of religious norms on masculinities was began to be analysed in masculinist and literary masculinity studies. In accordance with masculinist studies' aim of foregrounding the artificially constructed nature of masculinities, it is of vital significance to prove the effectivity of various discourses on masculine identity construction process, most effective one of which is undoubtedly the religious discourse. Hence, through his portrayal of a male character who cannot help but sacrifice his real love because of the hegemonic gender expectations imposed by his religion, Meredith serves this aim as early as 1891. Although an overview of Meredith's life reveals that he did not have a close and consistent relationship with religion, he was still aware of the role of religious doctrines imposed by leading men of religion on the construction of identities, and stated that he was “glad to see that there are men in religion who were advanced enough in [those] days to put that compassion into their discourse, and who opened their eyes with a truer and deeper recognition of things as they are” (as cited in Collins, 1912, p. 843). With this statement, Meredith revealed his hope that religion would soon be capable of imposing people the idea that they should recognize and embrace their real selves.

The male character chosen to be analysed in this study, Dudley Sowerby, unfortunately, fails in the process of embracing his real self, and he prefers to ignore his indigenous masculine identity. Rather than evaluating the opportunity of a lifelong happiness with his loved one, and following his sincere feelings, he lets his life to be shaped by hegemonic and religious masculinity norms. Nevertheless, since there are moments in which Dudley tries to ignore these norms and follow his heart – although the pre-determined gender norms prevent him from doing so eventually – he constitutes an appropriate target for analysis in the framework of literary masculinist studies. Through scrutinizing Dudley Sowerby with a masculinist perspective, it is aimed to realize one of the main purposes of masculinist theory, which is “to bring out positive models of masculinity in which masculinity operates in a non-hegemonic way, moments in which men break or attempt to break their own hold over power and ways in which purely critical views of masculinity can be supplemented by more positive ones” (Reeser, 2010, p. 8). Although Dudley cannot overcome the hegemonic gender codes buried in his unconscious through both religious doctrines and upper-class hegemonic gender ideology, his story exemplifies those moments in which men “attempt to break” the power of gender codes, because of his sincere efforts in marrying Nesta even

after learning about her illegitimate status. In spite of the fact that Dudley is a minor character in terms of the limited number of scenes he participates in throughout the novel, via his portrayal of this character, Meredith not only demonstrates the fact that religious discourse can be accepted as one of the shaping factors on the construction and experiencing of masculinities, but also underlines the devastating effects of hegemonic and religious gender norms on psychologies of male individuals, which result in a considerable level of anxiety, thus, ruining their lives.

Masculinity and literary masculinity studies litterateur

The most significant facts which masculinity studies try to demonstrate are that “masculinity is a changing phenomenon”, that “it is fluid”, and that we should “think about and study it as something ever changing and in movement” (Reeser, 2010, p. 4). As critic and anthropologist Vera Nunning expresses, “the problematic of constructing a masculine identity is less one of a biological or genetic nature but is instead primarily situated at the intersection of literary and cultural history” (as cited in Horlacher, 2011, p. 3). What masculinity studies mainly aim, therefore, is to demonstrate the fact that masculinity, just like femininity, is not a biological and natural construct but something acquired in time.

In parallel with this aim, masculinist theorists try “to bring out positive models of masculinity in which masculinity operates in a non-hegemonic way, moments in which men break or attempt to break their own hold over power, and ways in which purely critical views of masculinity can be supplemented by more positive ones” (Reeser, 2010, p. 8). Thereby, they give the message that it is possible to construct alternative or non-hegemonic masculinities since they can be acquired in time with the influence of extrinsic factors such as discourse, ideology, family, and role models. What most of the masculinist studies scholars coherently strive for is the exhibition of “the fluidity and instability of masculine identities by revealing their constructions as social processes, the outcomes of self-other interactions informed by historically situated discursive practices” (Smart and Yeats, 2008, p. 4). By “examining” the concept of masculinity in order to “destabilize stereotypes of masculinities” (Reeser, 2010, p. 15), the field mainly targets to pave the way for alternative masculinity models and to move away the pressure operated on men through societal values and expectations as well as the anxiety experienced by male individuals as a result of these pressures.

Literary masculinity studies, on the other hand, is a field of study in close connection with both men's studies and gender studies, and it aims to have a contribution in the solution of the problem regarding, as Horlacher states, “the understanding of masculinity” (2011, p. 12). Scholars of this field aim to “expose the damaging impact of patriarchy on men (as well as women)” and to “celebrate alternative masculinities over hegemonic ideals through an analysis of male protagonists” (Hobbs, 2013, p. 383). They also criticize the theoretical claim “that men are already adequately represented in literary theory” and dispute the universalization of masculinities by foregrounding “sub-categorisations of masculinity” such as “class, race, and sexuality” (383).

Religious belief as a determinant factor in the construction of masculinities

In spite of the fact that topics such as “class, race and sexual orientation” have been handled as focal points in masculinity studies with the purpose of raising an awareness of the existence of “multiple masculinities”; “religious belief” as a determinant factor and an “independent variable” has generally been ignored in the field (Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 5). Although the concept of Victorian manliness was closely related to the motto of “God made men to be men”, the suggestion made by Badenpowell

regarding the close relation between masculine identity and religion has only recently been drawing the attention of many critics and forming the basis for some contemporary arguments on Victorian masculinities (Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 1). The question “to what extent, if at all, were religious belief and practice were capable of generating alternative and less destructive identities” (Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 1) is a very rational one, which cannot be underestimated.

Victorian spirituality was one of the many shaping forces in the construction of masculinities. Undoubtedly, this fact counts for other historical periods too, including the current time. There has always been a close relation between religion and the construction of gender identities in any culture. The idea that “religious discourse could either sustain and reflect or rupture and transform existing gender norms and identities for both men and women” is also in parallel with Foucault’s suggestion that “discourse creates rather than describes biologically determined notions of gender” (Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 2).

Most of the arguments in contemporary scholarship concerning the construction of masculinities in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain fail to achieve a completeness since they are scattered (Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 2). Still, there are some common points in the studies written on the relationship between religion and Victorian masculinities. In those studies, focusing on “middle-class men, attention has often been focused on the impact of doubt and the loss of religious faith, whilst their working-class counterparts have been portrayed as overwhelmingly alienated from institutional religion” (Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 2). In any case, it is a widely known fact that for many Victorian people, religion was an effective force operating through minds all along the period. Therefore, effectiveness of religious doctrines demonstrated themselves in the construction of masculinities too in different respects.

In her outstanding study entitled “Victorian Masculinity and Virgin Mary”, Carol Marie Engelhardt dwells upon three Victorian men of religion, each of whom, in her view, had their own influences on the construction of Victorian masculine identities through their interpretations of Virgin Mary (2000, p. 44). Suggesting that Virgin Mary was a “controversial figure” in Britain during the Victorian Era, Engelhardt asserts that her idolatry was considered as the main error of the Roman Catholic Church by many British people (2000, p. 44). Explaining other errors of Roman Catholicism as being “pagan idolatry, superstition and wilful ignorance of the Bible”, Engelhardt states that all these errors “were summed up in a single word: Mariolatry” (2000, p. 44). What disturbed British people about the strong presence of Mary in the Roman Catholic tradition was probably the fact that she “usurped the power of her son” (Engelhardt, 2000, p. 44), which strongly clashed with British society’s strong emphasis on the idealistic concept of masculinity.

In the middle of the century, Bishop of Oxford clearly blamed the Roman Catholic tradition for having a “whole system which does place on the Mediator’s throne the Virgin Mother instead of the incarnate Son” (Wilberforce 22). Replacement of such a strong figure of masculinity as Jesus Christ with a mother figure meant the impairment and disempowerment of Victorian masculinities. Emasculation of such a sacred masculine figure, in the eyes of the opponents of Mariolatry (idolatry for Virgin Mary) could have devastating consequences such as the normalization of the superiority of women and even more significantly, of the probable feminization of men. While Mariolatry prevailed among some sects, some of the famous men of religion advocated their own beliefs on Virgin Mary and explained the results of her presence on masculinities.

The three clergymen that Engelhardt scrutinizes in her study in terms of having influences on the construction of masculine identities were "Charles Kingsley (1819-75), Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82) and Frederick W. Faber (1814-63)" who advocated three different types of Christianity and they represented various types of masculinities themselves (Engelhardt, 2000, p. 45). Therefore, each of these men had effects on the masculine identity construction of their followers in disparate directions. In Engelhardt's view, what these three clergymen had in common was their use of the concept of Virgin Mary to "define" their masculinities, in other words, "to describe an idealised image" of themselves as a man in relation to Mary which also "illuminates the role of the feminine in the construction of Victorian masculinity" (45-6). Among these three men, Kingsley was the one more closely associated with a "muscular Christianity which was largely defined in contrast to Pusey's ascetic, cerebral image" whereas the "homosexual elements in Faber's early friendships" were what differed him from Kingsley and Pusey (Chapman, 1961, p. 48).

The impact of religion and the ideas of the leading clergyman on the construction of masculinities can also be observed in the case of St Aelred of Riavault, who was clearly labelled to be a homosexual by John Boswell in his study entitled *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Roden, 2000, p. 85). Moreover, St Aelred was given a chapter in Newman's *Lives of the English Saints* as a saint who was apparently aware of the "same sex desire" (Roden, 2000, p. 85). In Frederick Roden's view, St Aelred's significance lies in his popularity among men of religion in both Catholic and Anglican Churches who adopted his name in 1800s and 1900s (2000, p. 98). As Roden underlines, with the effect of homosexual men of religion like St Aelred, "the monastery in nineteenth-century Britain particularly as it is seen in relation to models from the earlier Church may be deemed a Queer Space" (2000, p. 98).

Philip Healey also points out the homosexual tendency in monasteries by stating that: "[t]here is what I take to be an observable phenomenon in British culture: namely the attractiveness of the celibate Roman Catholic priesthood to certain male homosexuals at the end of the nineteenth century" (2000, p. 100). In his view, beginning from the late Victorian period, increasing in *fin de siècle*, and lasting till the first decades of the twentieth century, there can be observed an apparent "pattern of homosexual orientation, if not necessarily practice", which was "brought to mind by names such as J. H. Newman, F. W. Faber, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Frederick Rolfe, John Gray, R. H. Benson" (100). The connection between homoerotic desire and religion has been one of the frequently studied topics in studies on homosexuality. There is an apparent "awareness of same-sex desire present in the Victorian historiography of medieval monasticism and in the life of the late nineteenth-century monastic communities" (Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 5). However, the effect of religion most obviously demonstrated itself in its emphasis on the significance of work ethic as the defining feature of hegemonic masculinity. With this religious impact, which functioned through a

mutually reinforcing dynamic of theological doctrine, secular belief, and technological change, men were re-envisioned as individuals, isolated atoms within society driven by rational economic self-interest. In short, man as warrior or citizen or craftsman gave way to a new man: economic man. This redefinition of masculine identity sees the ideal man within a capitalist society as an essentially self-regarding individual looking only to his own personal well-being: a well-being defined solely in monetary terms. This radical redefinition of man as individual rather than as participant within an all-male community was reinforced by the theological shifts of the Protestant Reformation (Sussman, 2012, p. 89).

To sum up, religious belief and especially the ideas of important men of religion regarding gender roles in society were significant determinants in the construction process of the nineteenth-century British masculinities. Religionist male individuals who spent an effort to keep up with the necessities of their

religion also tried to conform into masculinity roles, which was defined by their belief. Therefore, especially conservative ideas regarding male-female relationships and domestic life constituted a reason for male anxiety especially for those who spent much effort to be a decent Christian. The type of masculinity that various sects of Christianity imposed on Victorian male individuals differed in some respects, nevertheless, what they imposed in common was a kind of masculinity which was thought to be superior to femininity, living on self-control, sense of duty and good morals.

The influence of religion, ethics and hegemonic ideology in the construction of masculinities and formation of male anxiety: Dudley Sowerby's case

Meredith introduces Dudley Sowerby to the reader in chapter nineteen, as a decent young man who tries to act in accordance with all the gentleman codes of behaviour in various contexts and states that “the young gentleman had a moral character, good citizen substance and station, rank, prospect of a title” (1891, p. 189). Dudley meets Nesta Radnor in a room-concert and immediately falls in love with her, which leads him to discover his sexual earnings probably for the first time in his life. Since he was grown up in a religious context as the son of a religious earl, these earnings cause a tension and anxiety in him because of the feeling of guilt regarding his “sinful feelings”. Nevertheless, as his love deepens, he cannot help himself but reveal his sexual interest in Nesta and begins to reconcile with his feelings:

He was at home with the girl's eyes, as he had never been. A song expressing in one of the combative and devotional, went to the springs of his blood; for he was of an old warrior race, beneath the thick crust of imposed peaceful maxims and commercial pursuits and habitual stiff correctness. As much as wine, will music bring out the native bent of the civilized man: endow him with language too. He was as if unlocked; he met Nesta's eyes and ran in a voluble interchange, that gave him flattering after-thoughts; and at the moment sensibly a new and assured, or to some extent assured, station beside a girl so vivid; by which the young lady would be helped to perceive his unvoiced solider gifts (Meredith, 1891, p. 160).

The kind of anxiety Dudley suffers from for a few months results from the conflict between his religious beliefs which require conservative relationships among man and woman, and his masculine desires which he recently discovers. This male-specific anxiety he suffers from because of not being able to overcome the hegemonic masculinity codes of Christianity which forbids extramarital intercourse is in accordance with Freud's claim that “the source of anxiety is the libido and when the libido is repressed, it becomes transformed into anxiety” (Morris, 1973, p. 195). In accordance with Freud's statements, some cases of male anxiety like Dudley's can be classified under the category of Freud's “anxiety neurosis” in which masculine libidinal desires are forced to be repressed and reveal themselves as anxiety symptoms. In order to get rid of this psychological and physiological burden, Dudley immediately considers marriage with Nesta without interrogating her family or analysing her character sufficiently. Therefore, he talks to his parents about his intention of proposing Nesta, and since he glorifies the Radnor family, Dudley's parents approve the marriage. However, shortly before proposing to Nesta and introducing her to his parents, Nataly tells him that Victor and she are not “legally married” and that Nesta is an illegitimate child. Dudley becomes devastated. Meredith portrays Dudley's atrophied state in this scene as follows: “Not legal! said he, with a catch at the word. He spun round in her sight, though his demeanour was manfully rigid. Have I understood, madam?” (Meredith, 1981, p. 286). Dudley immediately leaves Lakelands without saying anything else, but he becomes very angry since the situation of Radnor family is against his own moral, religious, and ethical values. Meredith portrays Dudley's disappointed and aggravated leaving scene as follows:

Dudley rode back to Cronidge with his thunderstroke. It filled him, as in those halls of political clamour, where explanatory speech is not accepted, because of a drowning tide of hot blood on both

sides. He sought to win attention by submitting a resolution, to the effect, that he would the next morning enter into the presence of Mr. Victor Radnor, bearing his family's feelings, for a discussion upon them. But the brutish tumult, in addition to surcharging, encased him: he could not rightly conceive the nature of feelings: he had lost hearing and touch of individual men, had become a house of angrily opposing parties (Meredith, 1891, p. 288).

After a while, Dudley's anger cools down, and even though he was grown up in a religious environment, he tries to reconsider the situation and forgive Radnor family sincerely since he is deeply in love with Nesta Radnor. Although Dudley's identity and his philosophy of life is shaped by the religious discourse which had been imposed upon him since his early childhood, he attempts to break those barriers standing in front of him and embrace his real self who wants to be Nesta's husband. Therefore, he primarily tries to justify Nesta in his mind, as the following quotation exhibits:

Dudley did not blame her for letting the lady be deceived in her – if she knew her position. She might be ignorant of it. And to strangers, to chance acquaintances, even to friends, the position, of the loathsome name, was not materially important. Marriage altered the view [...]. Who would have imagined Mr. Radnor a private sinner flaunting for one of the righteous? And she, the mother, a lady – quite a lady; having really a sense of duty, sense of honour! That she must be a lady, Dudley was convinced (Meredith, 1891, p. 289-90).

However, as it can be concluded from Meredith's statements in this quotation, even during his trial of reconciling with his love for Nesta to forgive her, Dudley cannot help but label Victor Radnor as a "private sinner", which demonstrates the fact that hegemonic masculinity codes of Christianity regarding marital fidelity and absolute morality are coded deep down in Dudley's brain. Therefore, he finds himself in a serious level of male-specific anxiety resulting from the vital struggle between hegemonic masculinity norms of his religion and his real desires. Frances Knight underlines the influence of religion on the construction of masculinities and asserts that scholars should be "sensitive to questions of religious and denominational affiliation as well as of social status" since different sects of religion may have different understandings of masculinity (as cited in Bradstock et al., 2000, p. 2). These understandings are generally vaccinated to the male child in his family household through a discourse concerning how a proper man should be. Remembering his family's discourse on morality and decency, Dudley falls into a state of anxiety resulting from his fear about his family's probable reaction, which Meredith depicts as follows:

There would be family consultations, abhorrent; his father's agonized amazement at the problem presented to a family of scrupulous principles and pecuniary requirements; his mother's blunt mention of the abominable name – mediævally vindicated in champions of certain princely families indeed, but morally condemned; always under condemnation of the Church: a blot: and handed down: Posterity, and it might be a titled posterity, crying out. A man in the situation of Dudley could not think solely of himself. The nobles of the land are bound in honour to their posterity (Meredith, 1891, p. 290).

The rooted ideas in Dudley's brain and his inability to overcome those ideas despite his love for Nesta demonstrates the fact that his masculine identity was constructed and shaped under the influence of the religious doctrines imposed by their Church. Therefore, the kind of male anxiety Dudley suffers from proves Edley's claim that "the concept of masculinity does not stand outside of discourse as an essential aspect or quality of men" (2006, p. 601). On the contrary, masculinities, like all the other gender identities are "constructed 'in' and 'through' discourse" (Edley, 2006, p. 601).

Religious discourse, in Dudley's case, is the most powerful shaping factor on his masculine identity and his understanding of gender norms. However, since masculine identities are flexibly constructed and

deployed in a variety of different contexts or settings” (601), and are shaped by multiple variants, Dudley's masculine identity is based on hegemonic masculine idealizations of not only his religious background but also his aristocratic social environment and family history, which results in his experiencing a severe level of male anxiety. Hence, Meredith explains Dudley's psychological burden in relation to the context he grew up as follows: “Dudley Sowerby, had to bear the sins of his class. [...], correct in costume, appearance, deportment, second son of a religious earl and no scandal to the parentage” (Meredith, 1891, p. 72). In relation to these reasons, Dudley suffers from male anxiety in accordance with McNelly's definition of anxiety as “a state triggered by the prospect of a future threat whose function is to motivate the person to take steps to prevent the threat from materialising” (2012, p. 16). In Dudley's case, this future threat is related not only to the possibility of being rejected by his family, but also to the possibility that the adulterous character of Nataly may be hiding inside her daughter – Nesta and reveal itself someday.

Despite his anxieties, Dudley still cannot put aside his love for Nesta completely and therefore finds himself in a dilemma, which Meredith presents the reader as follows: “Could innocence issue of the guilt? He asked it, hoping it might be possible: he had been educated in his family to believe, that the laws governing human institutions are divine. – History has altered them. They are altered, to present a fresh bulwark against the infidel. His conservative mind, retiring in good order, occupied the next rearward post of resistance” (Meredith, 1891, p. 291). Asking himself whether Nesta could still be an innocent child despite her parents' degenerated lifestyle, Dudley tries to convince himself about her purity since his love for Nesta urges him to do so. However, the possibility of her having internalised the degenerate and immoral lifestyle of her parents and the fear of being cheated by Nesta someday on one hand, and the anxiety of being excluded from society because of marrying the illegitimate daughter of an adulterous couple on the other, Dudley's anxiety intensifies day by day.

Dudley's anxiety resulting from the fear of being alienated from his social spheres and his family is related to his awareness of the possibility of losing his hegemonic masculinity position which promised him a wealthy, bright and admirable future. Therefore, knowing that choosing Nesta means giving up on his hegemonic masculine position, his psychology deteriorates increasingly. His anxious state resulting from this dilemma is a perfect example of Roberts's claim that during the Victorian era, most of the male individuals who experienced male-specific anxiety because of the social pressures did not dare to give up “exploiting the power and privileges that masculinity conferred to them” (1995, p. 273). Hence, Dudley's situation proves the claim of the masculinist theory that male privilege is adopted by most of the male individuals though they did not conform to the idealistic characteristics of the hegemonic form of masculinity.

In accordance with Sussman's assertion that men accepted the “social formations as a form of self-policing crucial to patriarchal domination” although “social formations of the masculine created conflict, anxiety [and] tension” in them (1995, p. 9), Dudley cannot dare to revolt against the patriarchal system and its ethical values since it grants him a brighter future although it is also the main reason of his anxiety. Therefore, he cannot help himself but think what the advantages of maintaining his hegemonic masculinity position would be, as the following quotation exhibits:

His mother would again propose her chosen bride for him: Edith Averst, with the dowry of a present one thousand pounds per annum, and prospect of six or so, excluding Sir John's estate, Carping, in Leicestershire; a fair estate, likely to fall to Edith; consumption seized her brothers as they ripened. A fair girl too; only Dudley did not love her; he wanted to love (Meredith, 1891, p. 290).

Despite his awareness of the material interests which he would have if he does not marry Nesta, Dudley is also aware of the significance of marrying the woman he loves for finding happiness. Although he suffers from a serious level of anxiety resulting from this conflict, eventually he chooses to act in accordance with the hegemonic masculinity norms on which his masculine identity was constructed, which Meredith portrays as follows: "He sided with his family. He sided, edging away, against his family. But a vision of the earldom coming to him, stirred reverential objections, composed of all which his unstained family could protest in religion, to repudiate an alliance with a stained house, and the guilty of a condonation of immorality" (1891, p. 289). Reminding Sussman's significant claim that "[o]ccupied with behaving as real men, men seldom step outside the socially given ideals to consider alternatives, to see themselves as living within a discourse of masculinity that is historically specific and yet emerges from the history of manliness" (2012, p. 1), Dudley cannot deal with the burden of male anxiety he suffers from, and fearing about losing his hegemonic position he leaves Nesta, thus exhibiting the fact that it takes great brevity to step outside the predetermined masculine roles for a man and build himself an alternative masculine identity, which only a limited number of male individuals prefer.

Conclusion

Keeping in mind the masculinist theoreticians' struggle for demonstrating the reality that "male identity is not a historical given, but the outcome of shifting cultural contest and debate, inflected by class, race, religion and sexual orientation" (Mallet 2015, p. vi), it can be concluded that Meredith realized this aim in 1891 through his portrayal of a male character – Dudley Sowerby – whose identity is shaped by hegemonic masculinity norms related to his class and religion. Exhibiting the significance of religious belief on the conception of gender roles in society and underlining its presence as a significant determinant in the construction process of masculinities, Meredith drew attention to the fact that religious male individuals such as Dudley Sowerby who spent an effort for keeping up with the necessities of their religion also tried to conform into masculinity roles, which resulted in serious levels of male anxiety in these individuals. For these men, conservative ideas regarding male-female relationships constituted a reason for male anxiety since they spent a considerable effort to be decent Christians. With his attempt to overcome the power of religious and hegemonic masculinity norms imposed on him, Dudley's presence in the novel gives the message that exceeding the limits of hegemonic masculinity and constituting an alternative masculine identity is only a matter of time if an individual shows the courage to act against the grain. Thereby, through Dudley's story Meredith implies that it is possible to construct alternative or non-hegemonic masculinities since they can be acquired in time with the influence of extrinsic factors such as discourse, ideology, family, and role models.

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