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The Unsuccessful Harvesting of Figs from Thistles and Other Failures of Idealized Masculinity in Ella D'Arcy's *The Bishop's Dilemma*

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The Unsuccessful Harvesting of Figs from Thistles and Other Failures

of Idealized Masculinity in Ella D'Arcy's

The Bishop's Dilemma

Elizabeth Watson Christianson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Unsuccessful Harvesting Figs from Thistles and Other Failures
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The Bishop's Dilemma

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Although confusion about the genre of New Woman Ella D'Arcy's only novella has resulted in a lack of scholarship, *The Bishop's Dilemma* can now be read as a social commentary that reaches beyond the New Woman subversion of the Victorian marriage plot, broadening the gender discussion at the fin-de-siècle. In this essay, I examine how D'Arcy uses Catholicism as a vehicle to create a unique space in the Catholic ritual of the confession that gives her reader privileged access to Victorian manhood. I argue that by placing her examination of masculinity in the context of the Catholic priesthood, D'Arcy renders her protagonist, Herbert Fayler, unable to use the convention of marriage as a means of subjugation or salvation of *Dilemma's* female characters, removing the marriage plot as a framework for the tension in the text and leaving Fayler's masculinity vulnerable to his own self-censure. I conclude that D'Arcy does not condemn Fayler any more than she blames the New Woman characters of her earlier short stories for their plight, but rather, D'Arcy constructs a figure of masculinity that exposes dangers present when men are groomed in a romanticized world with idealized notions of masculine life.

Keywords: New Woman, Ella D'Arcy, *The Bishop's Dilemma*, Catholicism, masculinity, priest, ideal, fin-de-siècle, marriage, confessional

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....1

The Bishop’s Dilemma and Fayler’s “Rose-coloured Outlines”.....4

The Re-education of Herbert Fayler—The Confessions.....11

The Failure of Masculinity—“As the Dead Bough Falls from the Tree”.....23

Notes.....29

Works Cited.....33

Introduction

For a work stamped as both New Woman fiction and fin-de-siècle literary realism, Ella D’Arcy’s only novella, *The Bishop’s Dilemma*, has essentially been overlooked—a few mere mentions as one of D’Arcy’s works and a single two-page nod comprise its entire bibliography.¹ Published in 1898, *Dilemma* follows a line of New Woman works published and promoted by John Lane including *The Yellow Book* and his Keynotes Series for which D’Arcy contributed her own short story collections, *Monochromes* and *Modern Instances*. Although D’Arcy is best remembered for her reminiscences chronicling the world of New Woman publications as the feisty sub-editor of *The Yellow Book*, by the time she wrote *Dilemma* she was also “one of the most significant writers” published in that journal with reviews that “place her in the forefront of new authors of her time” (Fisher, “Commentary” 179).² Despite this encouraging reception, D’Arcy, like many fin-de-siècle authors, became “lost in the shuffle” of literary eras and relegated to the past until the more recent reclamation of New Woman fiction (Ledger, “New Woman” 23).³ Today, D’Arcy has garnered a respectable (if quiet) reputation for her biting short stories dealing with women, marriage, and misalliances that illustrate, in the words of Talia Schaffer, “that the New Woman was devastatingly indecipherable for a traditional Englishman” (*Literature* 264).⁴

In light of D’Arcy’s association with the “indecipherable” New Woman, *Dilemma*’s neglect could be attributed to difficulties in identifying its genre for both D’Arcy’s contemporary critics and current scholars. Confusion stemming from the incorporation of Catholicism as part of the plot in a predominantly Protestant England erroneously led some of D’Arcy’s contemporaries to consider *Dilemma* a narrow reproach of Catholicism rather than a broader social commentary on the ideologies of Victorian England.⁵ Lack of interest today could also be

due to critical uncertainty about *Dilemma's* merits as a piece of New Woman fiction. For if, as Ann Heilmann suggests, the sub-genre of New Woman fiction should politically motivate the education, employment, and self-actualization of women (78), then *Dilemma's* re-education of a young Catholic priest can be viewed, at the very least, as problematic. D'Arcy seems to have put too little sex in a sexual revolution to have raised the picket posters so often associated with today's reclamation of New Woman fiction, essentially relegating *Dilemma* to a mere footnote in D'Arcy's résumé.

However, limiting *Dilemma* to a critique, either of Catholicism or of New Woman fiction, ignores D'Arcy's larger social commentary. This commentary reaches beyond the New Woman subversion of the Victorian marriage plot and broadens the discussion of the late eighteen-nineties literary rebellion that formed an opposing front to the reigning Victorian ideologies about the nature and roles of men and women.⁶ The ways in which women's construction of fictional men contributed to this rebellion has been increasingly scrutinized in literary circles over the last decade. The connection between a male character's masculinity and his identity exposes what Martin Danahay refers to as "the instabilities of masculine identity formation in relation to women" as written by women (1). This instability, John Beynon suggests, is not a place of insecurity but rather a reflection of the fluid nature of acceptable forms of masculinities (6). Recognizing this fluidity, Sarah Frantz and Katharina Rennhak present not one but a variety of ways that female authors "construct their own realities, imagining alternative masculinities that are desirable from a woman's perspective" (2).⁷ A common thread among female writers is a woman's desire to construct the "ideal" masculinity as one that embraces both reason and feeling. D'Arcy ordaining *Dilemma's* protagonist, Herbert Fayler, to the Catholic priesthood presents an unconventional Victorian man (a non-marrying, sexually "safe" man) as

acceptable while offering a masculinity that preserves a man's reason through his education, his authority through his priesthood, and his feeling through his obligations to succor his flock. In Fayler, D'Arcy seems to have created the ideal figure of masculinity.

However, D'Arcy does not construct Fayler as an answer to women's desires, but rather, she constructs a figure whose identity relies on his own perceptions of himself as a man.⁸ Placing her examination of masculinity in the context of the Catholic priesthood, D'Arcy renders Fayler unable to use the convention of marriage as a means of obtaining either the subjugation or salvation of *Dilemma's* female characters. This removes the marriage plot as a framework for the tension in the text, rendering Fayler's masculine identity vulnerable. Rather than a reproach of Catholicism, D'Arcy uses the Catholic Church and its rituals in *Dilemma* as a framework to represent the minutia of everyday Victorian life and how "life presented itself to them, an uneventful series of little duties, of little troubles, of little joys, exactly as it had done thirty years before" (*Dilemma* 45).⁹ By using Catholicism as a vehicle, D'Arcy creates a unique space in the ultimate Catholic ritual of the sacrament of reconciliation, the confession, that gives her reader privileged access to Victorian manhood through Fayler.

Thus, instead of writing a story that purports to construct "the ideal husband" as New Woman Sarah Grand proposes in her "Man of the Moment" (622), D'Arcy contributes to the gender discussion at the fin-de-siècle by creating a figure of manhood that illustrates the gap between a woman's construction of an ideal man and a man's ability to achieve that ideal within Victorian ideologies of masculinity.¹⁰ In *Dilemma*, D'Arcy portrays a man whose re-education through the vulnerability of the Catholic confessional exposes the romanticized world of his male ambitions and the utter failure of idealized models of masculinity.

The Bishop's Dilemma and Fayler's "Rose-coloured Outlines"

At the outset, *Dilemma's* plot seems to resemble a mid-Victorian bildungsroman wherein the narrative traces Fayler's rise in consciousness or awareness from his youthful naiveté to a more adult acceptance and adjustment to the realities of life. D'Arcy frames the *bildungsteil* (the learning part) of this journey with Catholic Bishop William Augustus Wise's actual dilemma, beginning and ending the novella with the pressing quandary of what should be done about the ever-vexing complaints about Herbert Fayler. Fayler, with an aristocratic air and supercilious personality, seems to grate on both his cohorts and his parishioners who ultimately find him too "delicate" for the "arduous" work of the very urban Hammersmith, London (4).

Within this outer frame, D'Arcy uses a limited third person narrator to reflect the Bishop's perspective and to convey a critique of Fayler's masculinity in the competitive world of his male community. In one letter, the Bishop's nephew complains about Fayler's lack of "grit," griping that Fayler "may be succinctly described as a person without a backbone" (4). The Bishop agrees, "He's [Fayler is] more fitted to sell ribbon by the yard than to undertake the care of souls" (5). By contrasting "the care of souls" with the more feminine selling of ribbon, D'Arcy clearly defines the "work" of priests as a manly performance and places priests on par with common "non-priests" in fin-de-siècle representations of men who must have "grit" and "backbone." Or, in other words, a man's man must be strong and determined, and priests are no exception. Here, D'Arcy demonstrates her awareness that, as Beynon argues, masculinity can be coded and adapted into the "concrete situations" of segregated groups such as priests (12). D'Arcy's open address of the priests' masculinity displays her insights into her readers' possible objections to a priest's "manliness," objections stemming from a priest's connection to the domestic sphere and to his vow of celibacy. D'Arcy complicates the brotherhood's harsh

rejection of Fayler's masculinity further by giving Fayler a "handsome face and aristocratic appearance" that foster not only jealousy but also competition with his fellow priests who like to be "cock of the walk" (5). In this way, D'Arcy locates Fayler within a male world wherein "masculinity was regarded as a matter of reputation; it had first to be earned from one's peers and then guarded jealously" (Tosh 72).

In an odd turn on the bildungsroman, the Bishop resolves his dilemma by sending Fayler out of London to a small parish in the sleepy village of Hattering. Fayler finds that this so-called easy parish is ruled by its patron Lady Welford, an over-bearing widow of the upper crust who at once abuses and neglects her young companion and charge, Miss Mary Deane. Appalled by Lady Welford's treatment of Mary Deane, Fayler takes a sympathetic interest in her plight with the hope of somehow offering a modicum of comfort and solace. Sadly, his sympathies are detected by the ruthless Lady Welford who immediately sends Mary Deane back to her former destitute conditions. Paralyzed by his inability to escape his class and sphere, Fayler is unable to fulfill his duty in what he sees as his masculine work of ministering protector and becomes lost in his failures, falling into a melancholy out of which he never recovers.

Initially, the reader is led to believe that Fayler, as a product of the city, is a perceptive flâneur of the countryside so often portrayed in late Victorian fiction¹¹ He makes his way through the quaint town and progresses along the fields up the long path to his new home, reporting the panorama within his gaze. He "caught glimpses through the belt of evergreen, of meadow and park-land, of Jersey cows, glass-houses, and velvet lawns, of ornamental groups of contrasting trees leading the eye up to a large white residence" (13). Although Fayler's gaze resembles that of the urban flâneur in style, his lists elevate the scene, ignoring the details a reader expects from a objective flâneur. Where Jersey cows graze, surely shoes must carefully

tread, yet no account of this or any other unpleasantness that certainly must be present along a rural path mars the soft touch of the “velvet lawns.” Fayler romanticizes the landscape as “his prospects mapped themselves out in rose-coloured outlines” (13). Instead of holding to the late-Victorian predilection for privileging the artificial aesthetics of urbanity, D’Arcy paints a bucolic scene worthy of a Wordsworthian poem, complete with a groomed version of nature’s breath of inspiration. In this way, D’Arcy alerts her readers to what will shortly become a major contribution to Fayler’s failure of masculinity: Fayler’s perception is seriously flawed; his naiveté reflects not only his youthful inexperience but also the “rose-coloured outlines” of the romanticized world in which he lives.

Although Fayler’s story begins in medias res—in the moment of the Bishop’s dilemma—the roots of his habit of seeing only a “rose-coloured” version of things can be sketched from bits and pieces found throughout the text, describing a childhood of aspirations and ambition. Born into an “obscure and illiterate family” in Shepherd’s Bush as the only son of a widowed shopkeeper, Fayler took the cloth at his mother’s behest (69). “Romantically inclined” herself, his mother had “aspirations” of class mobility for her son, knowing that “the priesthood is looked upon by the lower Catholic classes as a great rise in life” (69). D’Arcy indicates here that Fayler’s family has no social ties of note, no education before his own, and no ability to rise above their station outside of marriage. “Marrying” himself to the church creates the only avenue of upward mobility for Fayler in the confluence of English class ranks and Catholic culture. He enters the seminary at the impressionable age of fifteen, the very year his mother dies. Now, at twenty-six, Fayler’s ongoing connection to his mother’s ossified aspirations are illustrated as “he saw again the death-bed scene which had so horribly tortured his boy-heart” and sighs, “Poor mother, poor mother!” (97). Thus, his relationship to his mother is ensconced in the tragic

(romanticized) vision of her death, binding him to her dying wish and thrusting him into the gentrified priesthood as his only perceivable choice of vocation.

Fayler's "rose-coloured outlines" may begin with the adoption of his mother's aspirations; however, the "stifling atmosphere of the seminary" and his subsequent appointment to parish life fail to meet his idealized ambitions (69). In contrast to his peers' opinions, Fayler attributes his ineffectiveness in Hammersmith not to his lack of "grit," but to his increasing unhappiness with the impersonal mechanization of work. His direct superior requires "energetic, indefatigable labourers . . . fellow[s] who would give hard work and prompt obedience without argument" (4). This expectation of mindless work and unquestioning obedience disillusion young Fayler, who then becomes "troubled . . . by longings for other scenes and conditions" that might yield a more satisfying life (67). Despite his bitter disappointments with the work of his first parish, Fayler's longings reflect his confidence in his own abilities. He still hopes for the realization of his ambitions to save souls and rise further in the ranks of the Catholic priesthood in a different "scene," a romanticized vision of his future prospects outside of the city.

D'Arcy uses Fayler's keen hopes for the future to stabilize his perception of his own masculine identity: Hammersmith has not beaten him. Once Fayler leaves the oppression of his city parish, the narrator leaves the city as well, abandoning the Bishop's perspective and relating, instead, only Fayler's moods and point of view. This geographical move and shift in perspective frees Fayler from the scrutiny of his brotherhood, allowing him to renew his romanticized ideals and fantasize the realization of his ambitions. Soon after his arrival in Hattering, Fayler drifts into a moment of reflection. The allure of the lush countryside is enhanced in his mind by contrasting its clean green life with the confining filth of the city, creating a picture that acts like a balm to his disappointments. "He saw in memory the shabby thoroughfares; Broadway, with its

jostling crowds and crush of vehicles; the unlovely, undecorated church” (14). Through this reverie, D’Arcy exposes Fayler’s struggles with the pressures of urban life that lead to his wistful longing for a new location where “the thousand petty miseries of a distasteful life—the shabby . . . jostling . . . crush[ing] . . . chilled . . . miseries” of London are left behind with the overcrowded streets and replaced by the handsome scenes that stand before him (14). His arrival in Hattering fills Fayler with an admiration for the “earthly paradise” of his “new sphere” and inspires him to “bring to fruition all the great works at present germinating in his mind” (15, 19, 25). In Hattering, he muses, “his warm desire to do good would find scope for action” (14). Thus, in Hammersmith, Fayler believes his masculinity is fettered by unreasonable institutional demands; conversely, in Hattering, Fayler’s perception of himself is bolstered as he imagines the manifestation of his masculinity through his ability to “do good” and perform his work in a place that provides “scope” for his hopes and visions.

As Fayler’s ambitions to do good move to more exalted fantasies, the narrator’s rhetoric implies misgivings about Fayler’s ability to achieve such lofty aims. Lapsing into daydreams upon his arrival at his new home, Fayler “raised stately castles in the air . . . gathered a plentiful harvest of figs from thistles, and pictured in this mind’s eye stolid village damsels and clodhopping youths transformed by his contagious fervour into latterday Teresas and Loyolas” (21). We can infer here that Fayler’s castles were the cathedrals that he imagines “the Protestant population of Hattering, converted wholesale by his eloquence, flocked to inhabit” (21). The narrator’s translation of cathedrals to “stately castles in the air” alludes to empty rhetoric of grandiose ideals, confirming the reader’s suspicion that Fayler lacks a grounded perception.¹² Moreover, the biblical allusion to harvesting figs from thistles inverts its original meaning, implying that Fayler could only accomplish such a task by performing a genuine miracle.¹³

Fayler's visions of fruitful harvests reach the level of self-aggrandizement as he imagines "the letter which his lordship would write him, congratulating him on his success, and pressing on his acceptance the post of Episcopal chaplain" (22). Certainly, Fayler's daydreams could simply be revealing his character's immaturity and boyish enthusiasm for his charming new home. The narrator's rhetoric, however, implies that Fayler has not only romanticized his new location, but he has also cast himself squarely in the role of a masculine hero—a role that defines his masculinity in terms of productive labor as he successfully erects castles, saves damsels, and performs miracles.

Into Fayler's romanticized world, D'Arcy interpolates his ideals of nobility and womanhood, respectively, in the persons of Lady Welford and Miss Mary Deane to illustrate his complete entrenchment in his masculine fantasies. When he first arrives at his new home, Fayler asks his housekeeper, Mrs. Lucas, about the parish's noble patron, Lady Welford, "rolling the title off his tongue with a certain unctuousness" (19). Fayler's slow and exaggerated enunciation of Lady Welford's name displays his reverence for nobility while hinting at his anxiety about his own station. "While the cloth had raised him far above" his humble childhood, he remains "ashamed of it" (55-56). "It was simply impossible for him, as the son of a British shopkeeper, not to be impressed by it [Lady Welford's name]" (19). His delight in his proximity to nobility continues on his first visit to Welford House, where "a vision of an immense room with long vistas of polished floor" fills him with awe, and "unfolding his fine damask napkin, lifting his massive silver fork, [and] accepting the ministrations of assiduous servants" transports this awe to a state of "utmost inward trepidation"(34). Predictably, Fayler's awe of wealth obscures his perception of Lady Welford's faults and feeds his idealism, leading him mistakenly to believe that his new proximity to nobility will facilitate his rise in the Catholic ranks.

Although Fayler's observations of Lady Welford's sharp "determined manner" and her unkind treatment of Mary Deane should lead him to question the fallibility of nobility (34), he is inebriated by his "noble" ideals and intoxicated with a lifestyle to which he had long aspired. Each new display of wealth mesmerizes and delights him, for "never in his life had the young man tasted anything so delicious as the velvet-soft and ruby-colored liquid to which he now set his lips. . . . It was such wine, no doubt, which St. Paul recommended in discretion; an exquisite gift from God" (37). In his naiveté, Fayler associates the finer things in life, the immense rooms, polished floors, and velvet-soft wines, with gifts from God bestowed upon nobility—an ideal without substance.

To complete his romanticized *mise-en-scene*, Fayler idealizes the very embodiment of Victorian femininity in the character of Miss Mary Deane. For Fayler—"a tall, slight young man, with rounded shoulders, a contracted chest, and a handsome, delicate face"—Mary Deane represents his Victorian counterpart (11). He "noticed the girl's hands . . . long, white, and delicate-looking, like his own" and felt "as though everyone must be melted to kindness by her blue, appealing glances" (54, 104). Throughout the text, Fayler reveals that Mary Deane is not only *his* ideal but that she also fits the ideal Victorian model as well.¹⁴ She is a figure to behold. In one scene, Fayler describes Mary Deane:

framed in the gray wall, a brilliant and lovely picture. In the foreground was the girl, her arms full of the exquisite flowers; her broad-brimmed hat casting an illuminated shadow over her face; her figure mostly in shadow, too, though here and there splashes of sunshine flicked capriciously her cotton gown, or touched to a more burning gold the pistils of the lilies. (101)

It's tempting here to read Mary Deane and "the contrasted effects and the masses of color [that] would have delighted a painter's heart" (102) as "a beautiful object only when mediated through the aestheticizing connoisseur's gaze (Ledger, "Wilde" 20).¹⁵ However, even though Fayler describes Mary Deane as a painting, Fayler does not objectify Mary Deane herself; rather, he uses her image to complete his fantasized world. To objectify Mary Deane, Fayler would need to recognize a desire for her as a woman; instead, he desires a counterpart—a reflection—of his priestly ambitions that will bolster his male identity.

The image of Mary Deane, rather than the woman herself, is so idealized by Fayler that, at times, her "pensive" face "rose up unbidden before him, evolving itself out of the smoke of his pipe, or painting itself upon the blank wall of his chamber" (82). As the narrator paints this picture of desire and femininity, Mary Deane not only exemplifies the reigning Victorian "angel in the house," but in Fayler's fantasies, she also rises to the incredible status of saint. While watching the "gentle creature" reading a book, "he was fascinated by her rapt expression; he thought she looked like some young saint, a Cecilia or an Agnes, studying the Word of God" (61). Fayler, inculcated with Victorian ideals of womanhood, fantasizes Mary Deane's rise in station from a mortal angel to beatified saint as a parallel to his own self-aggrandizement as a maker of miracles, a harvester of "figs from thistles." She is the perfect romanticized heroine to match his own fantasy status as hero.

The Re-education of Herbert Fayler—The Confessions

Mary Deane, as the heroine, completes the *mise-en-scene* of Fayler's romanticized world: a bucolic countryside, a new flock, nobility at his doorstep, and a saint with "splashes of sunshine flicked" on her gown to match his own ambitions. Fayler believes that the move to Hattering will fortify his sense of masculinity, but his lack of awareness and inexperience place

him in the position of the naive New Woman heroine as a preface to his re-education.¹⁶ Fayler's formal education in the seminary and his experience as confessor in Hammersmith should have made the ritual of the Catholic confession his greatest position of competency, the sphere of action where he "harvests figs from thistles." However, his middle class education only provides a perspective through "the distorting glasses of the Fathers" (70), rendering him "intensely ignorant" of the "infinite complexities of the human soul" (69). D'Arcy uses the confessions of Mrs. Lucas, Mary Deane, and Lady Welford to re-educate Fayler, prompting a rise in his consciousness to a new awareness about both his idealized notions of others and his inability to achieve his masculine ambitions.

Fayler's lack of awareness is nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of his housekeeper, Mrs. Lucas. As Fayler approaches his new home in Hattering, Mrs. Lucas "appeared on the threshold; a tall, thin, elderly creature—the typical priest's housekeeper—whose dark, timid eyes were strangely at variance with the virility of a conspicuous dark moustache" (16). Although her age and appearance immediately manifest a lifetime of demanding work and difficulties discernable by "her thick red hands, cracked and crippled by hard work, [that] twitched nervously at her gown" (16), Fayler interprets and understands her presentation as "typical" for a priest's housekeeper—an acceptable state for a person of her class. Indeed, rather than seeing her clearly, Fayler prides himself on his ability to interact "with the lower classes," and he imagines that "his manner was everything that could be desired" (16). In reality, Fayler is oblivious to Mrs. Lucas's place in his fold and her claims on "his warm desire to do good" (14). Indeed, by stressing the housekeeper's wretched appearance, D'Arcy emphasizes that despite Fayler's lofty intentions, his "habits of thought" lend credence to class

distinctions, leaving him bereft of the kind of real compassion that would enable him to actualize his vocational ambitions (70).

D'Arcy illustrates Fayler's failure to sympathize with Mrs. Lucas as he returns home cold and wet after an enjoyable evening spent with Lady Welford and her companions at Welford House. Disappointed that the fire in the front room has not been kept stoked for his indeterminate return, Fayler "penetrated, for the first time, into the kitchen, and told himself that if the sitting room was cheerless, this apartment might be described as desolate" (41). There, in the kitchen, Fayler finds Mrs. Lucas asleep in a straight-backed chair. He touches her to wake her: "'Well, you're a sound sleeper!' said he, kindly. 'But I want you, please, to come and relight my fire. This wet weather makes me thoroughly chilly'" (42). Fayler approaches Mrs. Lucas with what he deems appropriate kindness and after waking her, consciously wonders about the "desolate" conditions of the room: the damp brick floor, the table strewn with soiled plates, the hard, cushionless chair, and the small window so high on the wall that it offers no view (41). Sadly, his observations produce more curiosity than compassion. The scene abruptly ends, leaving the cheerless "chill" in the air and allowing the irony of a young healthy priest requiring help from an old thin woman to stir his fire stand as a commentary about his lack of sympathy for Mrs. Lucas (41). Here, Fayler's palpable lack of "grit" undermines his masculinity, creating suspicion about his capability to perform his work.

The narrator continues to expose Fayler's ignorance and self-interest as Fayler becomes increasingly irritated with Mrs. Lucas's indecisiveness. Fayler describes Mrs. Lucas as his cross to bear that like "a good Catholic, [he] is expected to lift up and carry with something akin to holy pleasure" (83). As his personal cross, Mrs. Lucas paradoxically becomes a burden to Fayler and a validation of his Christianity as he bears his irritation as "holy pleasure" and yet, still does

not consider alleviating her pain. Although Fayler has received a middle-class education, the young priest “knew so little of life” that Mrs. Lucas remains an enigma to him while he is lost in his own fantasy of self-aggrandizement (69).

D’Arcy uses Mrs. Lucas to expose not only Fayler’s lack of life experience but also to emphasize the extent of his self-delusions about his interactions “among the lower classes” (16). These delusions are emphasized the night before Mrs. Lucas’s “confession.” As he walks up the stairs to go to bed, Fayler sees something dark blocking his way. “Was it a bundle, a heap of clothes?” he wonders. “No, it was Mrs. Lucas” (87). Feeling “both pity and repugnance,” Fayler realizes that Mrs. Lucas has passed out on the stairs—drunk (87). Predictably, he is unprepared to handle the unexpected. Perceiving his “first and obvious duty [is] to get her to her room,” Fayler then becomes conscious of his “duty to speak to her both as her master and her priest” (87). In this moment, a reader might expect a priest to wonder what would lead an elderly woman to become so inebriated that she passes out on the stairs, or whether she was, indeed, well at all. Fayler, however, through his narrow perception, thinks only of the reflection her behavior might have on his position and his duty to chastise such unseemly behavior.

On the following morning, Fayler enters the room that had once before discomfited him—the desolate kitchen where Mrs. Lucas “invariably took her meals standing, and they never seemed to consist of anything but bread and tea” (88). Uncomfortable but determined, Fayler speaks to Mrs. Lucas about her unacceptable drunkenness. In response to this perfunctory rebuke, D’Arcy supplies one of the more moving scenes in *Dilemma* as Mrs. Lucas “squeezed tight together her red and crippled hands” and pleads to speak (89):

“Look at me,” she continued, and struck her flat breast; “look at this room; think of my life. Here I live ’twixt these four walls as in a prison, from morning ter

night, from day ter day, from year ter year. I don't complain. . . . But what I do say is, that if now again I look for comfort where I shouldn't 't'isn't to be wondered at. Your Reverence is a gentleman, an' you have your high callin', an' your readin' an' writin', an all; but eve so, there be times when you find the parlour dull-like, and are glad to get over to the Park an' to have a bit o'company. But here I am, an'never a body ter exchange a word with, nor so much as a soul ter see, with the winder set that high an' the house itself buried down in the little holler behine the church, as though the sight of feller creeturs was sinful." (89-90)

Notably, Mrs. Lucas must ask Fayler to look at her. In fact, she demands it, striking her "flat chest." She has been so beneath his notice that she must delineate the details of her sad life, the dismal grind of everyday, to get his attention. It's significant that this demand takes place inside her kitchen and not in the neatly divided sturdy oak confessional of the chapel. The chapel confessional represents Fayler's sphere of influence. The fact that Mrs. Lucas's confession takes place inside the kitchen—her *only* sphere, her *only* place of authority and agency, slight as it may be—allows her the courage to speak her truths. More than truths, Mrs. Lucas asserts her agency to act for herself in the small gap of freedom she is allowed. In light of her wretched circumstances, she claims her right to "look for comfort" where she might find it.

After her confession, the narrator indicates a slight change in Fayler's consciousness by tracking his point of view quickly from his immediate observable surroundings to his inner state. He catalogs the kitchen, looking "about him at the dull, dirty room; at the battered pots and pans; the upright cushionless chairs," and then moves inward: "For the first time in his life, it struck him as strange that not one of those comforts should be considered necessary for the hard-worked servant in the kitchen which are quite indispensable to the often idle master in the sitting-

room” (90). The strangeness of Mrs. Lucas’s spartan quarters leads Fayler to question how a woman like Mrs. Lucas would be reduced to such miserable circumstances. He asks how long she has been in service: “Ever since I was a girl of thirteen,” and why she never married: “Because I was always plain an’ timid, an’ never had no money” (91).¹⁷ Fayler grasps “for the first time” that Mrs. Lucas is not his cross to bear but a prisoner shut up in a room without windows, without visitors, and without friends, whose only movements in life are in his service. Fayler is awakening: Mrs. Lucas’s cracked and crippled hands and her need for alcohol to dull her sorrows present harsh “brute facts” about a culture where a woman’s only chance to escape a life of hard, long labor is to be married and that escape only possible with at least some small degree of beauty and money.¹⁸

In a conventional Victorian plot, Fayler’s recognition would fuel a sudden transformation of character—a metamorphosis from naive youth to sophisticated adult. However, D’Arcy exposes the gap between the ideal figure that embodies a masculinity that embraces both reason and feeling and Fayler’s inability to achieve such an ideal with his inept address of Mrs. Lucas’s real life situations. Thus, “for the alleviation of . . . troubles, the poor young priest could only bring book formulas and time-honored recipes” (71). With a virtual pat on her head, Fayler reaches for the only consolation he can offer: “reverting to his professional manner,” he recites one of his many empty clichés, “It is just the knowledge we have of the life to come, that illuminates the darkness of our sojourn here” (91). Although Mrs. Lucas’s confession has elicited a small rise in Fayler’s consciousness as it fills him “full of commiseration” (90), the sudden recognition of his housekeeper as a feeling woman rather than a silent servant does not educe any transformation on his part. Nonetheless, this new awareness does penetrate his otherwise stable

identity, leaving his masculinity vulnerable to a new self-censure of which he has yet to become fully aware.

In contrast to his inability to see Mrs. Lucas, Fayler certainly sees Mary Deane from the time of their first meeting. His naiveté and misconceptions about women, however, lead him to misinterpret her character as radically as he misinterprets Mrs. Lucas's. On Fayler's first visit to Welford House, he forms "no very definite idea" of Mary Deane (33); nonetheless, he does take notice of her. During dinner, Lady Welford abruptly screams at Mary Deane for eating the superior cutlets instead of preparing them for Lady Welford's spaniels, Lulu and Bijou (35). Fayler is astounded as much by Lady Welford's outburst as he is by Mary Deane's reaction. Mary Deane's "pale cheeks scarcely flushed," her "gentle expression never varied, and she offered no word in self-defense" (35). In subsequent visits to Welford House, Fayler continues to observe Mary Deane, noticing repeatedly that she is "gentle and submissive" to all of Lady Welford's commands and remonstrations (60). Due to his inexperience, Fayler mistakenly interprets Mary Deane's quiet demeanor as proof that she is satisfied with her position as Lady Welford's companion.

D'Arcy's initial construction of Mary Deane through Fayler's eyes represents, as Sarah Maier explains, D'Arcy's interest "with the establishment of an ideal of femininity only in so far as she wants to subvert conventions in order to demonstrate the detrimental effects which the ideal had on the actual Victorian woman" (36). In other words, D'Arcy shows how Fayler's idealization of Mary Deane has detrimentally led him to believe that she is somehow happy in her unpleasant circumstances. Mary Deane, then, is deprived of her only hope for help; the mediation that should be performed by her clergyman. Such idealization, Maier suggests, dehumanizes women, for D'Arcy's real women "have flaws, needs, and desires which are not

acknowledged in the scope of male fantasies or idealized images” (36). In *Dilemma*, Fayler’s fantasy of Mary Deane dehumanizes her and relegates her to a passive image that only requires his admiration instead of his help as both her priest and friend.

Although Fayler is “amazed at the way Lady Welford spoke to this unlucky girl [Mary Deane]” (35), he makes allowances for “the polished cruelties that slipped so easily off the old lady’s tongue” because, as he explains, “Women expect, or at any rate understand, such amenities from one another” (100). Fayler’s skewed perception elucidates his earlier assumptions that Mary Deane’s quiet demeanor meant that she somehow accepted her ill treatment. It further explains Fayler’s “charitable” belief that Lady Welford’s sins must be “unconscious” (68). Fayler justifies his understanding (or lack thereof) of women by connecting Mary Deane’s quiet strength to an essential quality of women who were “strong, with a large fund of endurance, almost stoicism” (71). He rationalizes to himself that “this is a legacy often handed down from mother to daughter. Most women have to suffer and to suffer in silence; the power to do so becomes a portion of their inheritance” (71). The apparent incongruity in Fayler’s point of view, Mary Deane simultaneously embodying a “legacy” of strength while portraying a “weak and gentle creature,” corresponds with Fayler’s interior conflict and confusion about his own male role in relation to women. Fayler excuses his inaction on Mary Deane’s behalf because of her strength and yet still feels the inevitable weight of his masculine role as protector. Here, D’Arcy is able to emphasize the absurdity of a masculine model that requires him to respect the distance between himself as the more rational male and the “mysterious” woman while also standing close enough to protect her.

Interestingly, the Catholic confessional provides a unique space rendering both Mary Deane and Fayler vulnerable enough for his sympathetic development to transcend Victorian conventions. Inside the protection and privacy of the chapel confessional, Mary Deane begins:

At first speaking timidly and brokenly, her voice, as she went on, gained in steadiness . . . and at last, to her own astonishment, she laid bare before him her inmost soul. She discovered to him with a passionate candour all the longings, all the disappointments, all the griefs which long had brooded there, but which never before had found expression or relief. (63)

Rather than a timid angel in the house who is always gentle and agreeable, as Fayler idealizes her, Mary Deane is a fully-fleshed woman with all the passions of anger and grief and longing. D'Arcy uses her confession, then, to humanize her, to take her out of a fantasy world and show her as a woman with “flaws, needs, and desires” (Maier 36). With so little experience of life and a book-only education, Fayler is initially stunned by Mary Deane’s honesty: “Here is a case for which he had no precedent” (65). He has easily counseled and placated women from all walks of life, but Mary Deane is a new creature altogether who causes a shift in his personal paradigm. Fayler’s reaction to Mary Deane’s confession displays both his surprise to find “a woman, speaking not from the lips only” (65), and his sympathy for “the depths of a tortured heart; tortured by the vain endeavor to make the voice of elemental passion that cried so strongly within her, conform to the teachings she had received, and to her outward conditions of life” (65). Despite this reaction, Fayler’s education through the “distorting glasses of the Fathers” provides for him no words of comfort for Mary Deane.

In addition to criticizing of Fayler’s education, D’Arcy pushes her commentary further by constructing Mary Deane’s confession as one that not only challenges cultural constraints of

femininity but also crosses religious boundaries. Instead of a saint to match his self-image as a miracle-maker, Mary Deane remains mortal, revealing her “doubt[s about] the goodness of God, for He has set [her] quite alone in the world” (63). Fayler, whose misconceptions have left him emotionally vulnerable, experiences even greater discomfort when Mary Deane moves from first doubting God to questioning him and finally to judging him. “And then I [Mary Deane] . . . say to God that it was cruel to have created me a woman, and yet to have given me none of the means of really living; to have endowed me with all sorts of desires and longings, and then to have made their fulfillment an impossibility” (67). Here, in a matter of minutes, Fayler discovers not only that his idealized woman has actual desires and passions but also that she wants to pursue and fulfill them, calling a world that would give her such feelings while blocking any avenue to pursue them cruel, a judgment against both man and God. That a woman could judge God had never occurred to Fayler: “He was too unversed in human nature not to be surprised at discovering how little a quiet and submissive appearance may express the soul within” (64).

Thus, the confessional provides a space for Fayler’s re-education through Mary Deane’s confession. Her revelations leave him speechless and allow unique access to the Victorian mindset where usually “such thoughts, naturally, remained unexpressed” (46). “At first the young priest sat silent, then he found a few conventional words; but he felt how impotent they were as he uttered them” (65). In the literal face of this fleshed-out woman, Fayler can no longer conform to his hierarchal role: he can no longer offer the platitudes and/or sanctions that he so regularly dispenses like “time honored recipes” (71). In contrast to his ability to maintain his authority with Mrs. Lucas, Mary Deane’s confession leaves him vulnerable to self-examination. He begins to understand how “impotent” such banal clichés appear in the presence of honesty: “He dropped the role of omniscient director, and spoke to her simply as a friend” (65). By

dropping the role for which his education had prepared him, Fayler relinquishes his authority and speaks to Mary Deane as an equal. In the same way that the confessional offers Mary Deane the opportunity to drop the role of submissive companion and speak as herself, the confessional also allows Fayler to drop his priestly personae of “omniscient director” and simply speak to Mary Deane as a man, as a friend.

Although D’Arcy’s removal of the hierarchal barrier between Fayler and Mary Deane resonates with Sarah Grand’s argument that “the true ideal” of masculinity comes with “equality” (627), in this case, such equality exacts an unexpected price from Fayler, shaking his confidence:

How, then, was he fitted to give advice to husbands, wives, parents, children, or others who mixed in a world from which he was cut off both by habits of thought and miss-education [sic]? . . . His knowledge of life was even more limited than the girl’s; hers was at least accurate, so far as it went; his was strangely transfigured, or disfigured. (70, 73)

Here, the narrator conveys Fayler’s rise to consciousness by allowing the reader to see the stripping of his exterior role and the damaging effects of his “miseducation.” This may be D’Arcy’s indication that Fayler has finally been able to focus his “distorted” vision and see himself clearly. In her study of feminists’ obsession with consciousness, Molly Youngkin observes that through shifts in “internal perspective,” we are able “to identify moments of ‘awakening’ or ‘epiphany’” in late-Victorian literature (12). Fayler’s epiphany identifies a moment of awakening as he sees not only Mary Deane but himself as well, allowing him to recognize the “disfiguring” effects of his “inaccurate” point of view on his own life.

On the very heels of Mary Deane's confession, D'Arcy provides Fayler with another example of his distorted vision through the confession of Lady Welford. In contrast to the revelations about women provided by the confessions of Mrs. Lucas and Mary Deane, Lady Welford's blasé "examination of conscience" and her lack of contrition draw Fayler's attention to his mistaken idealization of nobility. A bewildered Fayler waits as Mary Deane exits the confessional, and Lady Welford "pushed past the girl" to take her turn (68). Lady Welford casually pleads guilty "of wandering attention during Tuesday's Mass, of a carnal desire to eat meat on the previous Friday, [and] of having once omitted her morning prayers" (68). In his state of "disfiguring" humility following Mary Deane's "sacrament of penance," Fayler finds he is incapable of listening to the inane banalities and lack of contrition in his overbearing patron: "he could scarcely endure it" (68). Although never indifferent to Lady Welford's callous treatment of Mary Deane in scenes leading up to their confessions, Fayler excuses Lady Welford's behavior, repeatedly, due to his reverence for the infallibility of nobility and his inexperience with "the weaker sex." Fayler's limited encounters with the intimate lives of women lead him to believe that "women are inexplicable in their dealing with one another" (136). This distorted belief in the inexplicable, even mysterious, nature of women allows Fayler to absolve himself of the situation or, at the very least, to offer excuses for his lack of interference in "the polished cruelties that slipped so easily off the old lady's tongue" (100).

Shifting from the confessional to Fayler's interiority, the narrator once more signals an "awakening" and a subsequent breach in Fayler's masculine identity. Angrily, Fayler recalls to himself Lady Welford's obvious omissions, "But of her arrogance, of her egotism, of her harshness towards those who depended on her, not one word" is spoken (68). Fayler's sudden open-eyed assessment of Lady Welford reflects his awareness of realities that he had previously

left unquestioned because of his idealization of the peerage and long-held belief that peers are the very makers of manners. Fayler can no longer idealize and, therefore, excuse Lady Welford. In one instance, Fayler has a visceral reaction to Lady Welford's cruel treatment of Mary Deane, finding that "each time [she demeans Mary Deane], he felt the blood rush to his face as though someone had struck him" (35). His body reacts to the situation even though his initial romanticization leads him to excuse such behavior. Mary Deane's humiliations are so frequently administered that Fayler becomes disenchanted with his patron. Acknowledging that he has been "an eye-witness" to Lady Welford's sins "every day of his life" (68), his "silent" censure of Lady Welford for her arrogance and egotism after her confession is a far cry from his earlier reverence and awe for her station, and reflects an awakening awareness that his romanticized world is not what it seems. Fayler is left with the knowledge that his education at the hands of the Church Fathers of the and the adoption of his mother's ambitions brings no real happiness: his model of masculinity is utterly flawed.

The Failure of Masculinity—"As the Dead Bough Falls from the Tree"

D'Arcy uses the confessions of Mrs. Lucas, Mary Deane, and Lady Welford to provide a social ritual that can overcome the typical Victorian reticence. Through this ritual, Fayler discovers that his romanticized world built on his education linked with the adoption of his mother's dying wish for his rise in class and rank significantly conflict with his personal model of masculinity. First, Mrs. Lucas's cracked and crippled hands along with her revelations about her need for alcohol, cause Fayler to sympathize with her and to question the harsh conditions of her life. He still, however, only offers priestly clichés instead of ameliorating her pain. Similarly, through Mary Deane's confession, Fayler discovers how "impotent" such banal clichés appear in the presence of her honest disclosures. By dropping the role for which his education had

prepared him, Fayler relinquishes his authority and treats Mary Deane as an equal. In a comparable way, Lady Welford's confession, slight as it is, clears his vision and dispels his awe for both her and her station, reducing his opinion of her to one of priestly charity. Although these confessions contradict and flesh out Fayler's ideals about women, they also educate him about his own lack as he fails to act on anyone's behalf. John Tosh argues that a man's sense of his own masculinity comes from "the inner consciousness of the individual" (73). Here, it is Fayler's inner consciousness of his own ignorance and inabilities that "strangely transfigured, or disfigured" him.

The accumulation of Fayler's re-education and corresponding consciousness of his failures spur a crisis of his masculine identity: a recognition that in his ironic position as a priest, he does not possess enough "grit" to perform properly his work of "the care of souls" and that this same position as a priest precludes him from pursuing his new ideal of home and family. This new ideal surprises Fayler. Educated in the seminary since he was fifteen years old, Fayler has no knowledge, expectations, or experience of female companionship. Nevertheless, his early fantasies of Mary Deane soon give way to his appreciation of her as a woman who "spoke with an authoritativeness which was new to her, [and] the young man did not know why it filled him with pleasure" (106). Fayler is unable to account for the inexplicable joy he feels while he is with Mary Deane: "as he walked by this girl's side, it was as though he and she were alone in the world (95). Fayler is shocked, then, when he learns of Mary Deane's dismissal as he returns the gloves that she had inadvertently left at chapel. And, unable to interpret his feelings, he puzzles about his "immense regret for not having retained [her] gloves as a remembrance" (117). These feelings of desire are foreign to him, and despite his formal education in the seminary and his re-

education in the confessional, “he understood himself so little, for here his ignorance was greatest of all” (73).

Fayler’s ignorance and romanticized view of himself as a miracle-making priest prevent him from entertaining a masculine desire for Mary Deane, but they also have a second effect. Fayler’s work is the only focal point of his masculinity, and his new knowledge handicaps his confidence in his ability to perform that work. Martin Danahay explains the connection between the masculine identity of the Victorian man and his ability to perform his work, arguing that the Victorian work ethic “idealized [the] image of masculine, self-disciplined labor” and insisting that both the real and fictional Victorian man believed that “work was a necessity for a healthy male identity” (9). Thus, a middle class Victorian man without meaningful work could no longer call himself a “man.” Fayler’s inability to ameliorate Mrs. Lucas’s suffering, to save Mary Deane from both her abuser and her misery, and to expose Lady Welford’s considerably corrupted soul, leads him to question his masculinity. As he realizes his utter impotence in the face of life’s realities, “an insuperable lassitude [began] to creep over him. He hated getting up in the morning to go through another useless day” (120). Useless days hardly stand up to the Victorian work ethic, and Fayler’s inability to perform his labors as a priest damages his “healthy male identity,” leaving him bereft of ambition.

Fayler’s total failure of masculinity becomes apparent in one of the novella’s final scenes, when he observes a happy laborer sitting down to dinner with his family. So strange, the narrator explains, that such an “ordinary sight [the cottage], the most commonplace incident [a family dinner], would precipitate the crisis” (120). Fayler’s stroll past the laborer’s cottage “on his way back to the presbytery” is reminiscent of his arrival in Hattering when he progressed through the fields up the long path to his new home “leading the eye up” to the grandeur of Welford House

(120, 13). In stark contrast to Lady Welford's "long vistas of polished floor" and "massive silver fork[s]" that had so impressed him on his first visit (34), Fayler's new desire is for the cottage with its "coarse, clean cloth; thick, greenish glass tumblers; [and] horn-handled forks and knives" (121). Fayler looks on the scene as the "strong, broad-shouldered, sunburnt young fellow" sits down "with the air of a person whose hunger, born of healthy toil, is on the point of being satisfied" (121). This scene represents for Fayler all he now hungers for; all that he had thought he would achieve by moving to Hattering, when he longed "for other scenes and conditions" that might yield a more satisfying life (67). He had imagined in those early days that he was "on the point of being satisfied," finding "healthy toil" and "scope" for his masculine work in Hattering (14). This new scene, the picture of the cottage, becomes "stamped ineffaceably upon his mind," complete with a "smiling young woman" standing in the doorway (121). In contrast to Mary Deane, whom Fayler framed in his own doorway holding flowers with "splashes of sunshine flicked" on her gown (101), the young woman of the cottage "came to the threshold with a saucepan of greens and a plate, with which she pressed them back while she poured away the water into the gutter" (121). The cottage life, so far removed from his unachievable romanticized ideal, offers instead a satisfying life complete with "black-eyed children" and "boiled bacon smoked in a dish" (121).

Here, instead of questioning Fayler's view of the scene, the narrator validates Fayler's perspective, remaining aloof, conveying the scene as if it were somehow holy and sacred—not to be intruded upon. Fayler stays at a distance as well, where he "contrasted them with his own barren existence, and lost his footing in overwhelming waters of bitterness" (121). As he gazes on his new reality, Fayler "seemed to understand the whole history of these happy, laborious lives, with their many duties, satisfied desires, and reciprocated affections" (121). Fayler

compares the laborer's duties and reciprocated affections with his own "useless" and lonely days. Instead of the bucolic countryside acting as a balm for his disappointments and a renewal of "his warm desire to do good" (14), the cottage scene emphasizes his lack and his failure: "He asked himself of what use he was to anyone in the world? Who was there to care for him? For whom might he care? He might neither give nor receive affection. He was cast out of the warm circle of life, thrown aside, unheeded, forgotten, as the dead bough fallen from the tree" (122). Fayler realizes his longing for a home and family that he can never have. His lament echoes that of Mary Deane's when she questions why God had "endowed [her] with all sorts of desires and longings, and then to have made their fulfillment an impossibility" (67). Likewise, Fayler is awakened to his new desires but is prevented from achieving them by his "marriage of misalliance" to the church.

Similar to the way that the confessional provides a space for Fayler's sympathetic development, the cottage serves him as place for interpretation of his new feelings. He can no longer revel naively in his romanticized world, nor can he cast himself as the hero who expects to harvest "figs from thistles." The education of both experience and the confessional has forever changed him—"disfigured him." This disfigurement, the twisting of his reality, leaves him without aspirations, ambition, or direction. He "was in a maze of painful emotion, of pity for the girl, of indignation with his companion, of contempt for himself" (110). Although D'Arcy's construction of Fayler may ostensibly portray a woman's ideal man who has both feeling and reason, his own awareness of his inability to act fills him with a contempt for himself that illustrates the failure of his masculinity.

At the end of *Dilemma*, D'Arcy's narrator leaves Fayler's point of view and returns once again to the Bishop's perspective, allowing a discussion of Fayler and the reasons for his failure.

When a servant suggests that “a wife would be just the making of a priest” (141), the Bishop retorts, “Tut, tut, my good man . . . we Catholics put before us a higher ideal than that” (142). D’Arcy uses this interchange between the servant and the Bishop to return to her discussion of the ideal model of masculinity. The servant wryly replies to the Bishop’s “higher ideal” by arguing, “Yes, so high an ideal that only a saint like yourself, my Lord, can reach up to it” (142). The servant, here, critiques a model of masculinity that only a saint could achieve—a model that condemns the rest of the priestly population to failure. D’Arcy uses Fayler to question this ideal model, elucidating the damaging effects of unachievable ideals of masculinity in the same way that she demonstrates her concern “with the detrimental effects which the ideal [femininity] had on the actual Victorian woman” in her other pieces of fiction (Maier 36).

D’Arcy does not condemn Fayler for his lack of “grit” any more than she blames the New Woman characters of her earlier short stories for their plights. In fact, Fayler can be read as a man unconsciously conforming to the constructs of Victorian masculinity in the same way that the tragic female figures in New Woman texts conform to the constructs of Victorian femininity. Like them, Fayler falters because he is just as uneducated, uninitiated, and inexperienced as the fin-de-siècle woman. D’Arcy’s construction of Fayler as one model of masculinity exposes the dangerous lack of perception present when men are groomed in a romanticized world with idealized notions of life.

Notes

¹ See Fisher, “Commentary” 180-81, 200-03; Fisher, “Christianity” 29-30.

² For D’Arcy’s reminiscences, see Fisher’s “Commentary,” “American,” and “Reminiscences.” See also D’Arcy’s *Ella D’Arcy: Some Letters to John Lane*. For excellent discussions of D’Arcy as subeditor of *The Yellow Book*, see Windholz and Mix. D’Arcy’s popular stories were first printed in *The Yellow Book* and then later re-published in her short story collections, *Monochromes* (1895) and *Modern Instances* (1898). Overall, her stories received both praise for the text and encouragement for the author. As one reviewer put it: “If D’Arcy can maintain this level [of writing], her future is secure” (“Successful” 3). London critic Zangwill offers D’Arcy his “heartiest of congratulations,” remarking on her development of “a new kind of unpleasant girl,” and exclaiming, “It is delightful to meet a Woman with a Future” (157-58). Despite these plentiful plaudits, other contemporaries criticized her work for impropriety of subject matter (“Monochromes-Rev.” 202) and for “taking license without having ability . . . by composing vulgar caricatures” (“Of Sex” 10). However, these rejections of her “caricatures” seem here to be more of an attack on the figure of the fictionalized New Woman than a critique of D’Arcy’s writing skill.

³ Along with shifting trends, the disappearance of New Woman writers in the twentieth century can be blamed on their own lack of a cohesive agenda (Ledger, “New Woman” 23-24), their link to the disgraced decadents like Oscar Wilde (Ledger, “New Woman” 28), and their dismissal by highbrow modernists (Ardis 115).

⁴ See Schaffer, *Literature* 264; Ledger, “Wilde” 19-20; Maier; and Stetz for discussions of D’Arcy’s most popular stories: “The Elegie” (1891), “Irremediable” (1894), “The Pleasure Pilgrim” (1895), and “An Engagement” (1896).

⁵ See Allen and also Fisher, “Commentary” 200-02.

⁶ See Ardis, Heilmann, Ledger’s “New Woman,” and Showalter for larger discussions about the literary rebellion of the late 1890s that challenged the boundaries between the roles of men and women.

⁷ Frantz and Rennhak’s book presents alternative models of masculinity as constructed by female authors that range from Ailwood’s account of Jane Austen’s “remarkable insight” into the characterization of men in fiction, “dispelling the myth that men and masculinities can be categorized by or simplified into stereotypes” (68, 71) to Pearson’s description of how Charlotte Brontë “would term her ‘ideal’ masculinity, one that has authority but also the capacity to serve” (87).

⁸ See Tosh.

⁹ Sutton argues that many misconceptions about Victorian Catholics can be reasonably attributed to “Victorian novels such as Charles Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* or Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, where Catholics are portrayed as superstitious fanatics following clergy who engage in diabolical rituals” (18). In *Dilemma*, D’Arcy (a Catholic herself) openly strikes at these prevailing English attitude towards Catholics as the protagonist, the young priest, enters his new parish: “Although the Catholic mission had been open at least twenty years, the stolid country prejudice was unable to divest itself of the idea that all priests were Jesuits and foreigners, engaged in secret machinations against the Church and state” (*Dilemma* 12). D’Arcy’s sarcasm quickly dispels any anxiety about the new priest and his flock as ridiculous. As Sutton explains, actual English Catholics “belonged primarily to the upper classes and were well educated . . . typically conservative and nationalistic . . . and assimilated these practices [rituals of the church] while retaining their reserved [English] character” (17).

¹⁰ See Beynon, Danahay, and Tosh for excellent discussions about “manliness” and “masculinities” in Victorian England.

¹¹ See Henderson for a discussion of the flâneur and the New Woman (185, 187-88, 190).

¹² See Knowles for typical examples of the phrase “stately castles in the air”—a phrase commonly found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poems, connoting empty ambitions (695).

¹³ “Harvesting figs from thistles” alludes to the “Sermon on the Mount” in the New Testament book of Matthew. In the biblical account, Jesus counsels, “Ye shall know them by their fruit” (*King James Bible*, Matt. 7.16). He then asks, “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” illustrating that “a corrupt tree [cannot] bring forth good fruit” (Matt. 7.16). Fayler’s daydream of harvesting figs from thistles implies that he thinks that good fruit (a Catholic) can be brought forth from a bad tree (Protestant England). Such an act, declared by Jesus to be impossible, would be a miracle.

¹⁴ See Sarah Stickney Ellis’s *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* for a description of the ideal Victorian woman—one who displays beauty, moralities, and charms, and above all, serves others while negating herself.

¹⁵ This quote refers to Ledger’s critique of D’Arcy’s protagonist, Lulie Thayer, in her short story, “The Pleasure Pilgrim” (Ledger, “Wilde” 20).

¹⁶ D’Arcy positions Fayler in a line of successive New Woman figures where Schaffer argues that “actual women disappear and the focus shifts to constructing an associative chain in which one text’s characteristic . . . can reverberate down the line of its successors” (“Foolscap” 47).

Thus, rather than working in isolation, New Woman writers wrote in conversation one with

another through their fictions, creating figures that would answer, object, and/or collaborate with their sister authors.

¹⁷ Although unmarried, because of Mrs. Lucas's age and her position as housekeeper, she uses the prefix Mrs.

¹⁸ Faylor's rise in awareness by his exposure to the "brute facts" in *Dilemma* can be read as his personal "return to the real" as he re-examines "a consensus of shared values" (Small 230).

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