

*Dinah Maria Mulock's Silence and Queer Representation*

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This paper attempts to be a summary of how my PhD dissertation seeks to reassess, in one of its first chapters, an often overlooked Victorian authoress, Dinah Maria Mulock (1826-1887), and how her life and work supposed a major contribution to the representation of homosexual men in literature.

It is important, to understand Mulock's pivotal role in my research, to consider the main aims and scope of my PhD dissertation. My main purpose is to create a chronological analysis of the representation of *queer* bodies in male homoerotic pieces of fiction. I shall argue that the way in which the male body is portrayed in this kind of fiction is important for two different reasons. First, its overwhelming presence in these texts, its almost obsessive appearance and descriptions, can be seen as a sort of connecting link that helps to identify an extremely ample corpus of fiction for which other identifying elements, such as the term "gay literature" may not be encompassing enough. Secondly, I believe that to look at the male body in homoerotic, gay, or other kind of literature that represents sexual desire or romance between men in different periods of history is to look at the way in which a specific culture understood homosexuality and a way to understand how different cultures have informed our own interpretation and representation of male homosexuality.

These reasons shall guide my analysis, through which I intend to demonstrate that contemporary "gay" fiction - and readers' attitudes to it - owes much to the representation of male bodies carried out by its ancestors. And, as contrary as this may seem considering pre-established ideas regarding Victorian fiction, one of the author to whom more

indebted this kind of fiction might be is a Victorian woman: Dinah Mulock Craik. My research project, indeed, spans more than a hundred and fifty years, from 1856 to 2016, and even if it approaches authors who have dealt in a more direct way with male homosexuality, such as Oscar Wilde or E.M. Forster, the reason why the starting year is 1856 is because it is the same in which Dinah Mulock Craik published *John Halifax, Gentleman*. This novel is the starting point of my dissertation because it poses several complex questions about homoeroticism in the Victorian era, while at the same time inaugurating a trend within male homosexual representation that is still relevant. To properly understand how Dinah Mulock managed to do this it is first important to consider her context and life. This consideration will be carried out through a methodological approach consisting on both contemporary and Victorian critical assessments of Mulock's life, and on the analysis of her novels and other cultural texts related to it.