



Review of Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer
(eds.), *Masculinity and the Other: Historical
Perspectives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars
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The concept of “otherness” has become a major theme of study within the humanities over the past half-century. As part of the influence of feminism and the prevalent appeal of poststructuralism, “otherness,” seen as socially constructed and contingent rather than natural and essential, has become widely used in explaining the construction of the self and the formation of self identity. Since its inception in the 1980s, masculinity studies has paid much attention to masculinity as a subjectivity and the ways in which it is constructed against certain “others.” While histories of masculinity have generally examined these constructions within frameworks that define them against the feminine, this book contains a collection of essays that move towards exploring historical instances of masculinity and male identity when defined as much by their relations to other men as by women. The editors astutely point out that a focus on the male-female binary can unnecessarily limit the usefulness of the “otherness” concept, which, in addition to reinforcing ideas about the essentialisms of gender, overlooks the influence of masculine alterity on the formation of both male self-identity and masculine social ideologies.

Consisting of thirteen essays from scholars working across the fields of art history, history, and literature, this collection examines some of the forms of “otherness” against which ideas of masculinity have been defined in different contexts. Organized into six sections, the essays cover masculine spaces such as the outdoors and the natural world, the gendering of sexual orientations, to various instances of masculine socialization including heroic adventuring in the twentieth century, militaristic influences on masculinity, and knighthood in the medieval period. This vast array of subject matter makes for an interesting assortment of approaches to the study of masculinity, but also illuminates the reoccurring themes of otherness and masculine alterity.

For the purposes of this review, I now provide a more detailed account of two particular chapters that deal specifically with masculine spirituality. While most of the essays intersect in some way or another with a broader definition of spirituality, I believe these two chapters will be of most interest to the current readership.

The first chapter, “‘A Canoe and a Tent and God’s Great Out-of-doors’: Muscular Christianity and the Flight from Domesticity, 1880s-1930s,” by David B. Marshall, focuses on the life of a Winnipeg-based Presbyterian minister and popular novelist, Reverend Charles W. Gordon. As a well-known exponent of imperial muscular Christianity, Gordon’s novels followed a successful formula of “the triumph of a muscular Christian missionary over the forces of evil” (p. 26). Marshall assesses Gordon against a tension apparent within histories of the period between men who

identified with the escape from their domestic responsibilities, and those who sought the warmth and security of home and family. Gordon, who himself frequented a cottage as a wilderness retreat, believed that time spent in the wilderness would ensure the development of character and vigor for young men. This required a delicate balance between domesticity and intimate family ties with the pursuit of adventure and other manly activities. As Marshall identifies, spending time at the cottage did not, for Gordon, mean fleeing domesticity. Rather, it involved both the practice of manly skills, whether canoeing or chopping wood, but also the strengthening of family relationships as these skills and activities were passed on.

Another contribution, "Making (Protestant) Men: *Alfred and Galba* and the East India Company Soldiers," by Susan Murphy, argues that the presence of a juvenile fictional book, *Alfred and Galba*, on the reading lists for soldiers in the East India Company during the 1820-30s is understandable given its promotion of a distinctly positive account of British masculine identity. In the story, two brothers begin reading the Bible and quickly deduce that Rome, as a human institution, is corrupt and in need of eradication. The brothers are subsequently banished to an uninhabited island by their rigidly Catholic parents and clergy. On the island they live in an idyllic setting, and, clearly modeled on Robinson Crusoe, view their circumstances as a result of God's providence for their faithfulness. They eventually establish a thriving colony of Protestant Christians upon the island, the foundation of which consumes a significant portion of the novel.

Murphy suggests that the narrative establishes a crucial link between masculinity and Protestantism; namely, that the protagonists achieve their masculinity through their discovery of the Protestant faith, in addition to their rejection of the Roman Catholic faith, which is implicitly constructed as emasculating. She then argues that the presence of *Alfred and Galba* in the libraries established for soldiers makes sense given that its narrative is concerned with the construction of a particular reader—that being a Protestant male—who understands that his faith elevates him above Roman Catholics and justifies a colonial relationship to "pagan" races. Such a message would have been seen as beneficial by the East India Company, who probably thought the fusion of a masculine identity with religious instruction would improve both the conditions and character of the soldiers and, by consequence, strengthen its colonial and imperial presence.

The essays are mostly focused on white Western constructions of masculinity situated within the Americas and Europe—as the editors put it "a cultural focus on Anglo-Saxon masculinities" (p. 10). Some essays, however, do assess the formation of the white self against the construction of the non-white "other." Andrew Wells, for instance, looks at masculinity and its other in eighteenth century racial thought, and Murphy, of course, mentions the interconnected relationship between the colonial soldier and the colonized other. Such readings help to break the trend of perceiving masculine subjects without appropriate consideration of liminal spaces. It was intriguing to view how the contributors dealt with their common assumption that any definition of masculinity draws on numerous definitions of normativity and alterity (such as sexuality, race, economic, or other social categories, and not just hegemonic masculinity) to construct complex forms of identity. In doing so, they avoid the trap of narrowly focusing on masculinity in isolation from other influences on the formation of a coherent self.

Because of the wide-ranging time-span covered by the essays, they demonstrate an ability to read history through a lens of masculinity in quite different contexts and across different disciplines. They are also successful at problematizing masculinity as a construction. The book will be of use to those who desire to see how particular case studies of history done from this perspective might be approached.

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