



Editorial: African Americans and Mormonism as a Case for the Consideration of Race, Class, Sexuality, and Gender in the Study of Religion

Stephen C. Finley

I recently returned from a research trip to Utah in which I spent considerable time in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections archives at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. The Charles Redd Center for Western Studies of Brigham Young University extended the invitation to me to study in-residence through a fellowship competition that is specifically intended to bring scholars to campus for work in their archives. I was particularly interested in their LDS Afro-American Oral History Project, which was a series of interviews that the Redd Center compiled with African American Latter-day Saints in the mid- to late-1980s. Alan Cherry, an African American Latter-day Saint, was instrumental given that he conducted all of the nearly 200 interviews with black Mormons throughout the United States.

My particular motivation was research for a book project tentatively entitled *Sojourners in a Strange Land: The Religious and Social Lives of African American Latter-day Saints*, and as always I am interested in gender and its intersections with class, sexuality, religion, and “race.” After study hours and on Sundays when the library was closed, I had the opportunity to travel the short distance to Salt Lake City for ethnographic interactions with African American members of the LDS community, including attending religious services, the Genesis annual picnic, the Genesis monthly meeting, and the play *I Am Jane*. The Genesis Group was formed by African American Latter-day Saints as a means of support, fellowship, and engagement with the LDS Church regarding African Americans and race relations. I should note that the Genesis Group was founded on July 8, 1971,¹ seven years to the day that Mormon President Spencer Kimball announced the “revelation” that “all worthy males” (Bringhurst & Smith, 2004, p. 1) were eligible to hold the Mormon Priesthood, which heretofore had been closed to black men. It has never been available to women. Therefore, the Genesis Group views its presence within the LDS Church as prophetic, as the harbinger of positive things to come in the future of the religious organization, especially regarding race. Consistent with the historic patriarchy of the Church whose ecclesiastical hierarchy is dominated by [white] men, however, the Genesis Group follows the same leadership structure and has very specifically defined positions for women that are delineated by the Church (Ostling & Ostling, 1999, pp. 147-58). So it is not surprising that the Genesis Group was founded by three black men: Ruffin Bridgeforth, Darius Gray, and Eugene Orr.

What this particular case-study demonstrates (or reminds us of) is the importance of paying close attention to significant indicators such as sexuality, class, race, dis[ability], and so on when engaging and theorizing about masculinity and gender in general. Patricia Hill-Collins (2000) was careful to point this out in her

groundbreaking *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* in which she advances the notion of a “matrix of domination” (pp. 18; 299) in which intersecting oppressions or the intersectionality of these indicators interact with gender at various times and in particular contexts that require scholars to give rigorous attention to factors acting in collusion with gender at given moments. Hence, for our purposes, masculinity may interact with class to produce a particular dynamic in one case and with race, sexuality, and class in other instances. Again, this reminds those of us who are interested in religion and masculinity of the enormous complexity within our fields of inquiry.

My travels also reminded me of my own male privilege and the necessity for reflexivity when conducting studies that are ethnographic, “textual,” or both. What made me most conscious of my own social location was observing gender dynamics among black Mormons. What was most intriguing was the manner in which African American women asserted their agency and leadership within the Genesis Group and indeed in other ecclesiastical settings. Of course, this leadership was often in unofficial capacities rather than official ones, but it was clear that while these women have to negotiate Church-influenced domestic responsibilities and carefully crafted and doctrinally supported Church roles, they were nonetheless leaders in their community. I witnessed this in the Genesis Group activities that I attended (though men were ostensibly in authority) and in one of the religious services in which I was present. But perhaps the greatest example of this was in the arts.

I had strategically planned my visit to Utah so that I could give the appropriate attention to the primary material that I was there to study at BYU but also because in addition to the Genesis activities, the play *I Am Jane* was premiering during my excursion. The play was about Jane Elizabeth Manning James, an early Mormon pioneer who was black. As the leader of her family, Ms. James traveled with them—mostly by foot—from Connecticut to Nauvoo, Illinois in 1843 to join the Mormon founder and prophet, Joseph Smith. Astounded by her commitment to travel hundreds of miles, Smith and his wife Emma embraced James as “family” (albeit some of her relationship with them was domestic) (Coleman, 2003). The play, about Jane’s religious and social life, was a great example of the intersection of gender, race, class, religion, and sexuality, and how they often act in tandem, but it also depicted the patriarchy of both the Mormon Church and American culture in a way that caused me to reflect on my own social location as a man and as a scholar.

Tamu Smith played the lead role of Jane, and this was most *a propos*, for Ms. Smith is a vocal leader for justice in the LDS Church. What was clear to me was that as she and other women such as Patricia Stringer, Adris Brunbidge, Ellie Mae Isaac, and Marguerite Cephias Driessen struggle against racism in the Church, they also (though often unspoken) seek to disrupt the reproduction of co-constitutive constrictions such as gender in which all men participate in maintaining to one extent or another and benefit from its privilege. The articles that are published in JMMS challenge us to (re)think about gender and masculinity in complex ways, and—like my recent ethnographic endeavors and *I Am Jane*—to embrace reflexive considerations about the ways in which masculinity and male privilege impact the work that we do. Black Latter-day Saints are as fascinating as they are unique, and I embrace the challenge that my exploration of their religious and social lives offer to

be self-critical about my social position and the importance of class, race, and sexuality when studying and theorizing gender and religion.

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Notes

¹ <http://www.ldsgenesisgroup.org/history.htm>. Accessed July 5, 2010.

Stephen C. Finley
Louisiana State University/USA
e: scfinley@lsu.edu



Inspire, Expire: Masculinity, Mortality and Meaning in Tim Winton's *Breath*

Roie Thomas

Tim Winton's latest novel and winner of the Miles Franklin award Breath (2009) is investigated here within a framework of theistic existentialism alongside a critique of masculinities in the Australian context. This novel presents a particular take on hegemonic masculinity and this dovetails neatly, I argue, with a continuum of spiritual consciousness and responsiveness drawn up by Danish creative writer and theological maverick, Søren Kierkegaard (1811-1855).

Tim Winton's latest novel and winner of the Miles Franklin award *Breath* (2009) is investigated here within a framework of theistic existentialism alongside a critique of masculinities in the Australian context. This novel presents a particular take on hegemonic masculinity and this dovetails neatly, I argue, with a continuum of spiritual consciousness and responsiveness drawn up by Danish creative writer and theological maverick, Søren Kierkegaard (1811-1855).

Representations of the spiritual in Winton's body of work have become increasingly eclectic and existentialist as he seeks to undermine "that pompousness that comes with the church becoming a multinational firm" (quoted in Hawley, 1991, p. 15). Here I will demonstrate a correlation between the lives of the characters in *Breath* and characteristics of people at Kierkegaard's three realms of existence: The Aesthetic, The Ethical and the Religious, otherwise known as *Stages on Life's Way* (1845). Kierkegaard's model seems fitting for Winton's work, in its inherent hope and possibility that characters will move along the continuum away from the Aesthetic realm.

The characters in *Breath* are, as with all Winton's characters, difficult to define in any one category of *Stages on Life's Way*. But they are, at any point, capable of transcendence, and a graduation from one stage to the next, or even of the incremental *stages within stages* that give all people the opportunity to be slightly better than they were yesterday. As this article will assert, the novel draws (some facets of) traditional masculine frameworks as (possible) impediments to transcendence, and more 'enlightened' masculine paradigms as being (possibly) conducive to it. Inevitably, some people/characters are lost along the way, never able to reconcile their sense of personhood and perceived imperatives of their gender with their spiritual potential.

Existentialism in its theistic form is characterized by manifestations of human despair (both conscious and unconscious) and the double bind in which such despair places humanity. Sitting comfortably alongside the Kierkegaardian personalized

man–God relational is the claim of existentialist theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) that the question of God arises out of an individual's awareness of his own finitude; some awareness of the infinite, otherwise called the ultimate or the absolute, is necessary for a personal appropriation to occur. Of course, 'false' ultimates present themselves in everyday life as alternatives to the true ultimate (read: God) in the form of success, affluence, status, nationalism, and so on, and this, Tillich asserts, is a form of idolatry.

Framework for Analysis

An extrapolation of the Kierkegaardian three-tiered (and hierarchical) doctrine follows.

The Aesthetic is the furthest stage from Kierkegaard's ideal and is that state wherein an individual lives a life purely for its acquisitive purposes with no aspiration towards a spiritual dimension. Necessarily in this state, a person is in the grip of "unconscious despair," unaware of the void in which he/she exists. Many individuals (and, as literary representations, characters in both Kierkegaard's and Winton's fiction) never graduate out of this state of being and live in temporality (that is, for the moment or for the life of the physical body), and can actually appear to live satisfactorily within this finite framework, making few conscious choices, rather being swept along by life in an attitude of detachment (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 29).

The Ethical for Kierkegaard is a natural progression out of the Aesthetic for people/characters who have (usually) experienced a turning point or epiphany of sorts, becoming aware of the finitude of earthly life and the ultimate meaninglessness of same, and who thus enter a state of "conscious despair." That is, they are cognisant of an instinct that there is something missing and of the necessity of rectifying this in some way. The key is choice here, a recognition of individual responsibility and of participating in one's own life. At this point there are still many *a*-theistic existentialists along for the ride since they would authenticate (or make meaning through positive action) somehow within the limits of ultimate absurdity (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 55). Often they are acutely aware that something is still missing in their lives, despite their individualized affirmative action. These characters are poised for epiphany, even if at first they do not recognize it. Grace is manifest in their lives in very personally realized ways and these characters usually accept this, if often after a long resistance.

Individuals (and their literary representations) can transcend despair and enter that which Kierkegaard calls the Religious state, wherein an individual comes into a personal relationship with God through a completely individual faith. This is achieved by way of a leap of faith, presupposing a conscious choice. Here, of course, the atheistic and theistic existentialists part company completely. God is that which Tillich (1957) labels the "Ultimate," that to which humanity (if it is not bound up with temporality and distracted by "false ultimates" (p. 65)) aspires, and that which gives meaning to the universe and the possibility of infinity; that is, life beyond the confines of earthly existence.

Each character in this category comes to an inductive connection, not a deductive, top-down rapport. It is a bond based on mutual love and respect, fashioned for each person, in full recognition that this state, while held aloft by

Kierkegaard as 'ideal' and superior to its forerunners, does not presuppose perfection in its subjects.

Underpinning the existentialist credo is despair. A biblical term for this sense is Vanity, that is, *Ecclesiastes'* vanity of knowledge, of pleasure, of work and riches: "for all is vanity and vexation of the spirit" (*The New English Bible*, Ecc. 2.17). At the moment when one effectively *chooses* one's despair, the self is validated for the first time; the self is made transparent to itself.

Breath's Characters Along Kierkegaard's Continuum

In the novel *Breath*, paramedic Bruce Pike is the narrator-protagonist and the novel opens with him responding to an emergency call-out that we later learn is a dead teenage boy who had been experimenting with auto-asphyxiation. The experience on this night sends him hurtling back forty years to his youth in the mill-town of Sawyer which he describes thus, "Like my parents, it was so drab and fixed that it became embarrassing" (p. 45). The town, a fictionalized replica of many such towns in south-west Western Australia (now mostly morphed into the trendy bed-and-breakfast gimmick for tourists with a penchant for the rustic) represents history and for Bruce Pike, flashing back to his turbulent adolescence, the reader sees that his past has haunted him for years. But, as Bruce comes to recognize, history must be "made present and lived" (Sire, 1997, p. 113) not repeated with all its destructive patterns, rather selectively appropriated for a greater purpose.

The story proper opens with Bruce Pike (known as Pikelet) and Ivan Loon (Loonie), both pre-adolescent boys at a loose end in the tiny, uninspiring hamlet until they hit upon the daredevil game of holding their breath under river water so long that it scares onlookers as well as themselves. They become so adept at this pastime that they seek out new adrenalin rushes and it is at this point Bill Sanderson steps into their lives. Sando is thirty-six, "a big, woolly-headed bloke" (p. 45), godlike to the boys, with international surfing credentials. He and his wife have escaped to a bush block on the south-west coast to get away from a frenetic life on the circuit. He still surfs the wildest waves around and, on meeting the boys on the beach, encourages them to stash their boards under his house, teaches them to *really* surf, egging them on to bigger and bigger waves, and revels in their worship of him, personifying the hegemonic model of the "iron-man surf-sports champion" identified by Connell (1990, cited in Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838) with little "masculine substance" (Donaldson, 1993, cited in Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838). Bruce Pike, in later years, acknowledges the political incorrectness and irresponsibility-verging-on-the-illegal relationship between Sando and the two boys, but counters this with some disdain at the 'cotton-balling' of children today, placing it within another anti-establishment—and decidedly *anti-traditional masculine*—perspective:

the sorts of activities that schools and governments sanctioned [made] Sando's excursions look like small beer. We could have been ... army cadets, learning to fire mortars and machine guns, to lay booby traps and to kill strangers in hand-to-hand combat. (p. 106)

Loonie's dysfunctional family life means he needs to prove himself, to have someone

think he's worthwhile. He becomes more and more reckless out on the water, facing down twenty-foot waves with contemptuous defiance. Sandó takes on a guru status for Loonie, much to the contempt of Sandó's wife, Eva, who screams at her husband, "Don't they get to touch your holy relics, read your scriptures? Deep down, didn't you secretly *want* me to reveal you to your disciples?" (p. 79). Certainly one wonders why the magazines glorifying Sandó's past exploits were not discarded long ago if he is so adamant that they are meaningless to him. This implies a predominantly masculine tendency to self-deification, where men's perceived command over nature and control of the elements is considered integral to being a real man. Clifton Evers expresses this psychology thus,

Surfers have complex codes and rules to determine their place in the hierarchy and to police localism. The infamous Bra Boys claim Maroubra Beach as theirs. They police the surf and the car parks with violence, and the threat of it. Famous Maroubra surfer Koby Abberton went so far as to say recently that his beach is the safest in Australia because they look after it ... our familiarity with the ocean gives us a sense of superiority. We feel like we "naturally" belong at the beach, while others detest it because they feel alien in it. (Evers, 2005, p. 1)

Individual surfers and surfing cultures, asserts Bron Taylor, "often reflect broader patterns of the society in which they are situated." Taylor cites Collen McGloin who collected empirical evidence to characterize Australian surf cultures as nationalistic, sexist if not misogynistic, and violent. Although McGloin acknowledges that not all surfers are this way, she asserts "sexism and misogyny are commonplace in surf culture" (quoted in Taylor, 2007, p. 925).

Bruce Pike loves surfing in a more aesthetic way than Sandó and Loonie (I use the word *aesthetic* here in a general, not Kierkegaardian sense) and quickly loses interest in gratuitous risk. Even so, having only really known men who work at the mill, Bruce comments "how strange it was to see men doing something beautiful, something pointless and elegant" (p. 28).

Sandó and his lifestyle become for the boys embodiments of Tillich's escapist "false ultimates." They bask in the older man's approval and in reflected glory at the beach, where other surfers bow to Sandó's "hellman" status and the boys are respected by association, embodying, as Connell and Messerschmidt describe the phenomenon, "the currently most honoured way of being a man, [requiring] all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (2005, p. 832). They are living inauthentic lives for the most part—chopping the couple's wood and overstaying their welcome simply to be in the 'presence'—yet at their age this kind of hero worship is hardly uncommon. The competitive nature of men in such contexts is shown to become increasingly destructive and—as Bruce comes to realize out on the surf—anathema to the very point of the exercise.

Such "egotism ... near-autistic narrowness" (p. 210) that Bruce identifies is expressed gloriously by Australian activist and gardening guru Peter Cundall who notes that some men, even when *flowers* are their obsession, will forfeit simple enjoyment for the need to win,

The chrysanthemum men ... they're deadly. And they all kind of loathe each other ... at shows, if you see a beautiful chrysanthemum or a dahlia and you say to one of them, 'That's not bad', he says, 'Just a minute', and he whips out this bloody instrument and starts measuring the petals. (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2005, p. 177)

Female Sentiments on the Archetypal Male

It is important to offer the female character in contrast here, since she is, in an almost perverse sense, a foil to the traditionally masculine in this novel. Sando's wife Eva, an American former champion freestyle skier with an irreversibly ruined knee from her last jump, feels herself to be nothing without the extreme thrill of her sport. "I miss being afraid ... That's the honest truth" (p. 220). She lives, since her accident, a bitter and unfulfilled life, experiencing some small, albeit resentful, gratification vicariously through Sando's – and later the two boys' – surfing exploits. Sando takes his "disciple" Loonie off to Indonesia and Thailand surfing. Loonie necessarily despises Eva as she gets in the way of his relationship with Sando, a misogynistic element characteristic of such masculinity. Eva knows this, "They have a way of looking at you ... Like you're some kind of ... abomination ... because I'm female" (p. 163). Eva, in her ennui, lures fifteen year-old Bruce into a sexual relationship to which he becomes addicted. At the same time he is consumed with self-loathing, convinced Eva holds him in contempt too, but he later concedes, "The disgust might have been reserved for herself" (p. 211). This further endorses the narrative sympathy for flawed people, and by extension, characters, even those with more than your average human failings.

Eva is an enigma, a woman who seduces a teenage boy and asks him to perform potentially lethal acts with and on her,

From the bottom of the wardrobe she brought out a strap and a pink cellophane bag. The strap had a collar and a sliding brass ring ... Eva handled these props with a reverence that brought a falling sensation to the pit of my stomach. (p. 222)

She uses her age and aggressive sexuality to exploit Bruce in vengeance for Sando's neglectful "guru shit and bad manners" (p. 160). She acts out a pseudo-masculine power play over one more vulnerable, a replication of the traditional man-woman dynamic. It is fitting that Eva is not the epitome of a feminine woman, but rather heavy, solid, all muscle. Yet for all this, she appears to possess some wisdom, an awareness of the hypocrisy of her wealthy Mormon upbringing. She is astute enough to see both institutional and individual deception and has zero tolerance for it. "[Sando had] taken another tack, a mystical path she now said was bullshit" (p. 210), redolent of Rachel Nilsam (again, significantly a *woman*) scoffing about the New Age movement and its charlatans in Winton's earlier *Dirt Music* (2002).

Bruce later wonders if, in fact, Eva ruined his life, acknowledging that she had no right to do what she did. This is redolent of the traditional theism that scapegoated Eve (and by extension, all women) for succumbing to the temptations in the Garden of Eden and for the godless chaos of the world since. Refreshingly, Bruce quickly rejects the idea that she is responsible, in keeping with the existentialist ideal that

we are accountable for our own choices, which also gives the truth to Bruce's later recognition that "People are fools, not monsters" (p. 211). This is characteristic of Winton's empathy for the moral dilemmas and struggles of ordinary people.

Honest Nihilism

Unlikely as it may seem, Eva's nihilism and bleak, cynical candor are shown to be morally superior to Sando's "bullshit" lack of self-awareness and pursuit of the meaningless. This implies the relativity of women's and men's worldviews generally, as she appears to act as Sando's moral foil, acutely ironic given her 'corruption' of Bruce *and* her being American, a (paternalistic) nation for which the narrative voice hardly bothers disguise its disdain.

The way Eva told it her countrymen were restless, nomadic, clogging freeways and airports in their fevered search for action ... driven by ambition in a way that no Australian could possibly understand ... She made her own people sound vicious. Yet God was in everything—all the talk, all the music, even on their money. Ambition ... Aspiration and mortal anxiety. (p. 168)

Eva tells the teenage Bruce that Sando is "scared of growing old. That's what this shit's about" (p. 207), characteristic of the denial of our own mortality that pervades modern culture, the quest for eternal youth and increased longevity: to be superhuman. Sando acknowledges the proximity of his sport to a *kind* of transcendence, "When you make it, when you're still alive and standin at the end, you get this tingly-electric rush. You feel *alive*, completely awake and in your body. *Man*, it's like you've felt the hand of God" (p. 94). The placement of "Man" and "God" in the same sentence and the emphasis on "Man" semantically underscores Sando's self-perception.

Eva straddles both a 'destroyer' as well as a nihilist facet of Kierkegaard's Aesthetic stage as she is injurious of herself and of Bruce, having to an extent caused him psychological trauma and an inability to sustain long-term relationships. Yet her capacity to create life and the fact that she ends the relationship with Bruce when she discovers she is pregnant, saying "I can't do this shit with a baby coming" (p. 236) is an acknowledgement of some meaning. Her nihilism is at least honest and "the form of consolation she preferred" (p. 211), no doubt indulged in the knowledge that death would eventually win, attests to this sincerity, since a nihilist's only genuinely sincere recourse is to suicide.

But Eva, too, has experienced revelation of a kind on the ski slopes, her freestyling accomplished with "more fuckoff elegance than anyone else in the world" (p. 210). Her awareness of her own despair further confirms Eva as an enigma (or maybe just an ordinary person), fluctuating back and forth on Kierkegaard's continuum. The "conscious despair" she articulates to Bruce places her at times on the cusp of the Ethical domain, where at any point transcendence over despair could occur if only she would be open to the opportunity. She is obviously aware of this potential in her past, as articulated in this metaphorical suggestion, "She wanted me to understand. Being airborne. Sky and snow the same colour. Her skis a defiant cross against the milky blur" (p. 220) but is hostile to it. Eva appears to associate God

with the hypocrisy of American culture, including its 'spiritualities', hence the "defiant cross"—so refuses to *choose* her despair, and remains in the Aesthetic realm until her premature death. This correlation is commonly articulated by people who cannot reconcile a benevolent God with society's prevailing duplicity. Again, though, such active antagonism as Eva's is dealt with more sympathetically by the narrative than Sando's avaricious self-interest.

So at least Eva rejects such a brutal, acquisitive (and mythically *male*) charade for a more existentialist life. But of course, even this attempt to authenticate is fraudulent, as she lives very comfortably off her father's trust fund which, Bruce incredulously comes to realize, is "just showing up in a bank account. Without work" (p. 200). There is, it seems, a level of astuteness in Eva (her name implying *all women* in its eponymic closeness to the Eve of Genesis), an honesty that seems to be lacking in the men around her. Perhaps she senses the possibility of something more in Bruce.

Inauthentic Life

It is with remorse that Bruce responds to Loonie's and Eva's deaths, both ostensibly through misadventure, but with a suggestion of suicide in both cases. It is as though for Loonie and Eva death *is* life, as though without the precipice, that up-close-and-personal encounter with what Hamlet calls the "undiscover'd country" (III, i) , life is bland and hardly worth bothering with. They actually contribute little of value to the world; Loonie, always "greedy about risk" (p. 38) eventually becoming a destroyer of others as well as himself through his drug trafficking.

Loonie's lostness craves love, stability and a positive male role-model as is evident in his hanging around Bruce's predictable, conservative parents. But although Mr Pike is a loving father, complete anathema to Loonie's, his natural passivity and inertia is shown to be not what either boy really needs. Winton has often commented on the (peculiarly male) Australian incapacity to express emotion, "People have terrible yearnings and feelings. They know what they think and they know what they want to say, but they just don't have the words ... the words are in their throat but they're not on their tongue" (quoted in Willbanks, 1991, p. 195). Bruce's father's Pommie fear of the ocean has him forbidding—in vain—Pikelet to go near it, but he does supply a safer alternative in the form of fishing from a little boat in the river. Mr Pike's gentle guidance in this area, although never touching upon anything beyond the temporal with his son, suggests that Pikelet's future will eventually be somewhat more positive, introspective and useful than Loonie's, as indeed it is. Mr Loon provides a role-model of unfettered despair and neglects every facet of positive fatherhood. His son never learns to break the pattern, or, a least, breaks it by removing himself from the gene-pool altogether. The vastly different but equally pathetic despondency of both men is portrayed as a form of emasculation and it is little wonder the boys are attracted to the image of Sando's machismo. Bruce's capacity for self-reflection recognizes it is *only* an image but it takes some time to sever his bondage to it.

Binaries

The binary of courting death simultaneous with a survival instinct is obvious in both characters. Bruce can see the attraction: even while living in terror of Eva passing out for good, he knows from his hi-jinks underwater what it feels like:

You feel exalted, invincible, angelic because you're totally fucking poisoned. Inside it's great, feels brilliant. But on the outside it's squalid beyond imagining ... each time I let go Eva's throat and ripped the slimy bag off her face I didn't see rapture. What I saw was death ringing her like a bell. (p. 234)

Loonie goes to suicidal lengths to dull his ennui and despair from an early age, and Bruce retrospectively confesses, "On the highway Loonie played chicken with log trucks, while I hid in the bracken ... willing him to desist and urging him on all at once" (p. 20). Such potential for positive or negative action almost at every turn is a distinctive feature of *Breath* and lies at the heart of the existentialist concept of choice and the *theistic* existentialist imperative to *choose one's despair* as a precursor to transcendence. Again, the binary nature of breath causing life or death and of water's potential for redemption or destruction (a pervasive motif in Winton's work) is evident, speaking to the *choice* at the heart of the existentialist credo.

I was interested in the limits of things ... that strange male thing in adolescence ...to test yourself and frighten yourself ... when you're in middle age, the kinds of things you're dealing with are almost mutated versions of the same things you were dealing with when you were a teenager ... And it comes back to you in a scary way. (Winton quoted in Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2005, p. 23)

Sando, just as Eva suspected he would, becomes an even more profound fraud, subscribing entirely to the Aesthetic life through his business interests, replacing one "false ultimate" for another. His rhetoric about being real and true to himself, of which he had once convinced the boys with statements such as, "All [the publicity's] just horseshit ... It's wallpaper" (p. 93) is shown as bogus in Sando's life. Bruce discovers later that "[Sando had] come to preside over quite an empire. Snowboards, alpine apparel—all dripping rebel chic ...There was much talk of risk in the financial sense" (p. 253). As such, he is the quintessential Aesthete, apparently existing in "unconscious despair," unaware of his own contradiction. This, I assert, is a post-modern malaise, depicted in several male characters in Winton's work, profoundly so in *Breath*: that hedonistic, obsessive pursuit of "false ultimates" that preclude any interface with an eternal dimension, even with the *possibility* of one. This is in keeping with Connell and Messerschmidt's assertion that hegemony means "ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions and persuasion" (2005, p. 832).

Bruce, at this point, still operates within Kierkegaard's Aesthetic stage, aimlessly seeking out Tillich's "false ultimates" in his ill-advised marriage, his self-imposed respite in a psychiatric ward and his "flirting with melancholy" (p. 262), experiencing, I suggest, Connell's (1990) notion of "gender vertigo" (p. 471) brought on by the

“loss of structure in demasculinization” (p. 472). But Bruce Pike comes to realize the innate vacuousness of all these pursuits and is thus poised for epiphany.

Traditional Masculinity's Foil

Late in the novel's time-frame, a defrocked priest living in a humpy near a salt-lake hides Bruce's car keys until he “climbed back into [his] own skin” (p. 258). This man personifies one of those devices of Winton's that seems so inconsequential the reader could almost miss it. Bruce comes across this man apparently by chance and stays with him for six months after he has got himself relatively together. In this, the ex-priest is a typically unlikely manifestation of grace in Bruce's life, a catalyst for his choice to become a better man and realize personal entelechy. The fact that the priest is “defrocked” (supposedly due to his being an alcoholic) is also characteristically anti-establishment, driving home the point that enlightenment and grace often materialize outside of the orthodox and the institutional. He is probably as close to a personification of the Religious stage on the Kierkegaardian continuum as this narrative will concede.

The defrocking concept also serves figuratively to *re-emasculate* the priest, as though he has thrown off the restraints of the ‘mother’ church to become truly personified. It is after Bruce's prolonged stay with this man (who brings to mind Henry Warburton in Winton's (1981) *That Eye the Sky*, a character Winton labeled “just another flawed messenger”) that Bruce is able to move into the Ethical level of Kierkegaard's continuum, where, as is suggested by his attacks of conscience throughout his younger years, he actually belongs. The two co-habit for the sake of healing, without too many words, endorsing a male bonding of more substance than superficial modern definitions imply. The priest's gentle, non-didactic *living example* to Bruce acts as a conduit for transformation—and stands as a metaphor for grace generally,

During the day we sat in the ragged shade of his verandah while things rose up off the salt before us. We laughed at every shimmering mirage in shared disbelief. The priest said he hadn't touched a drop in fifteen years, that he'd gotten beyond magical thinking. But the salt lake kept him on his toes. And I saw what he meant. It was full of surprises.” (p. 259)

An Authentic Life

Bruce still yearns for the intensity and adrenalin rush of the extreme, but wants to channel it constructively rather than destructively, discovering his niche in becoming “hell's own paramedic” (p. 259). His celibacy by the novel's close is a proactive decision, along with his perspicacity with regard to his daughters, as he expresses, “For them it's been important to know I'm not useless” (p. 265). He concedes that he must not be the subject of anyone else's sorrow, harm or disappointment. It is gratifying to him that people *in extremis* relax and feel relieved when they see his uniform, “When punters see the tunic and the resus bag they calm down a little and find faith and while I work, my faith meets theirs” (p. 262). Bruce understands the uniform is a façade, that the job is a role he plays to his own ends, but consoles

himself that at least it is helping others and it fulfils the existentialist imperative for positive action, for living the authentic life.

It is interesting to note that there are, apart from perhaps the self-exiled priest, no definitive members of Kierkegaard's Religious category in this novel, at least according to my reading. In fact, they are few and far between in Winton's entire body of work, perhaps reflecting the move away from the spiritual in today's world in favor of "false ultimates," the God-substitutes of sport, drugs and rampant consumerism—or, as Hugh MacKay (2008) deliciously puts it, "the endless quest for the perfect bathroom tile" (p. 3). But the opportunity to embrace the grace offered and the possibilities for transcendence out of despair are never closed off to characters, suggesting the bigger narrative of our own potential in the real world.

Bruce Pike, as the narrative voice and thus, it could be assumed, the indirect voice of authorial sympathy, comes as close as can perhaps be realistically depicted in the timeframe, having achieved, as he says, "my own share of happiness, for all the mess I've made" (p. 40) and some rejoicing of the potential inherent in subsequent generations: "Every time I see a kid pop to her feet, arms flailing, all milkteeth and shining skin, I'm there: I know her, and some spark of early promise returns to me like a moment of grace" (p. 30). Bruce has, by the novel's conclusion, come close to the heart of the matter, aligned with Winton's pared-back expression of his own spirituality, "No love, no friggin point" (quoted in Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2005, p. 26). It is, posits Veronica Brady,

"these brief moment of grace", his experience of the sacred, of a power beyond the self which transfigure all other relationship and yet is to be found in the midst of the most ordinary of lives and gives meaning and dignity to them. In such moments, out there on the ocean Bruce Pike is free and "never ashamed". Ordinary as his life may seem, he knows he is still 'a man who dances'. (Brady, 2008, p. 216)

It is part of the human situation to be suspended between two worlds, to be subject to the binaries inherent in all things, and Bruce Pike's life is no exception. Brady cites the metaphorical concept of the Carnival—that "utopian longing of the anti-structure" regarded as synonymous with "the ultimate good of man" where the "primal energy in man [resists] integration into the symbolic order" (Whitley, 2009, p. 4) leading inevitably to the decline of religion and the advent of totalitarianism—which is "often immensely riveting, but frequently also 'wild', up for grabs [and] capable of being taken over by a host of different moral vectors' which nevertheless may also crystallize on some deeply felt, commonly cherished good—as it finally does for Pikelet" (Brady, 2008, p. 3).

So, masculinity defined as abuse of power, self-aggrandizement and a lack of introspection (substituted by Tillich's "false ultimates") is depicted as a negative force by Winton, perhaps in his most confronting manifestations to date within the pages of *Breath*. The life offered by Sando, who Brady describes as "masterful in his own dangerous world of power and splendour" (2008, p. 3) is a metaphor for the malaise of the world generally, reflected by the literary fact of Winton creating fewer characters reaching (Kierkegaard's) Religious stage and more settling into the Aesthetic, presumably for longer. As well, it serves to pick away at the essentializing

that occurs when masculinity is considered a fixed entity. Rather, as Connell and Messerschmidt posit (and as protagonist Bruce Pike illustrates) "masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (2005, p. 836).

The imperative for personal choice central to the existentialist credo is replicated in some empirical masculinities research undertaken by Robert Connell (1990) which is optimistic about a move in Australia towards more self-aware, personally fashioned—and less limiting—masculinities. Connell found that a cross-section of Australian men active in environmental causes had discarded hegemonic masculinity after having spent much of their lives in pursuit of (or at least complicit in) the "project of ... the reproduction of patriarchy. The life histories showed such familiar features as competitiveness, career orientation, suppression of emotions, homophobia" (p. 459), but the men interviewed were now "committed to a real and far-reaching politics of personality" (p. 471).

Conclusion

Superficially, *Breath* could be considered a bleak novel since three of the four protagonists are situated within Kierkegaard's Aesthetic realm of existence, seemingly inextricable with a limiting masculinity lacking in introspection and heavy with hedonism. Yet, there are certainly states of grace even within this realm that render most characters redeemable, even if they choose to reject the opportunity for transcendence. The narrative treats with sympathy those characters such as Bruce Pike who come to consciously choose their despair and try to live authentically in the world, while deferential *at least to the possibility* of a dimension beyond themselves and a revised, more liberating take on what it means to be a man.

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Roie Thomas
Australian Catholic University/AUSTRALIA
e: rthomas@stpatricks.tas.edu.au



Dandy Discipleship: A Queering of Mark's Male Disciples

Robert J. Myles

While conventional readings of the Bible unambiguously presume the normativity of heterosexuality and binary categories of gender, this article challenges such modern assumptions by purposefully and strategically re-reading three Markan discipleship texts "sexually." By combining a socio-rhetorical approach with queer and gender criticism as informed primarily by the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid, the re-readings attempt to penetrate through existing homophobic and erotophobic interpretations. Particular attention is also given to the ways in which the gender and sexuality of the male disciples has been constructed and can be problematized in both the world behind the text and the world in front of the text.¹

The male disciples in Mark make an interesting case study for queer and gendered hermeneutics because of their ambiguous portrayal. What are we to make of the often flawed followers of Jesus who, within dominant imperial discourses regarding ancient Mediterranean gender, appear hopelessly short of achieving their masculinity? How too might we queer the text, so that in the production of meaning our interpretations are not constrained by oppressive constructions of gender and sexuality?

This article seeks the liberation of the Markan text: firstly, from homophobic and erotophobic² interpretations, both conscious and unconscious, that work within the unacknowledged assumptions of heteronormativity; and, secondly, from interpretations that assume, again usually unacknowledged, that gender and sexuality is binary and essential. These two presuppositions underlie most conventional readings of Mark; however, they limit the text in a number of ways. On the one hand, they are anachronistic with regards to ancient Mediterranean understandings of gender and sexuality, and, on the other, they ignore contemporary queer and gender theorists such as Butler (1990) who, for example, considers gender as a performance measured against a set of culturally determined norms. Such readings are, in fact, not only perpetuated by essentialist interpretations dominant within both "hardcore" traditional and conservative Christianity, but constitute social reality itself which can be further articulated as the heteronormative meta-narrative.

Internalized reading guided by the tradition of biblical interpretation is often unconscious to the point that readers of the Bible do not even notice they are constantly interpreting what they are reading. This article reads the male disciples attentive to issues of masculinity and masculine sexuality in both Western culture and the cultures that surrounded the text's production. This involves the identification of possible interpretative avenues previously obstructed or overlooked by the erotophobia and homophobia present within existing interpretive practices by purposefully reading the texts *sexually*. The interpretations that I offer are as much a challenge to the limitations and indeed the ethics of conventional reading strategies as they are a fruitful provision of meaning. The task at hand involves a re-reading of three selected texts concerning the male disciples as presented in the Gospel of Mark (1:16-20; 9:33-37; 14:43-52) by combining queer and gendered hermeneutics with socio-rhetorical criticism. The interpretations are not exhaustive in their exegesis, but rather seek to see what might emerge when approached from this particular hermeneutical perspective. First, however, I outline some insights regarding queer theory and the New Testament, and offer a brief description of how gender discourses functioned within the ancient Mediterranean. These discussions should assist in providing a foundation for the subsequent interpretations.

Situating an Ideological Position—Queering the New Testament

Of those biblical scholars who have explored the application of queer and gender theory, and more recently masculinity studies, many have begun to expose the strange relationship that exists between sex, the Bible, and its interpretation. Although there is a risk of domestication through its definition, Jagose (1997) writes that "queer theory describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire" (p. 3). In other words, queer theory locates and exploits the incoherencies that normalize heterosexuality, but moreover, by demonstrating the impossibility of any "natural" sexuality, it calls into question the apparently unproblematic terms of "man" and "woman." Moore (2007) notes that queer theory enables biblical scholarship to move beyond the increasingly tired debates on biblical texts that apparently deal with homosexuality into a totally different task of problematizing the concept of homosexuality itself. Similarly, Punt (2006) argues that a queering of New Testament texts goes beyond and even challenges homosexual liberationist readings that argue for gay and lesbian inclusion by focusing on the power dynamics of gendered and sexual constructions at work within the text and its reception.

While issues of normative gender and sexual behaviors have been intrinsically tied to biblical interpretation by conservatives and liberals alike, many interpreters feel uncomfortable about the deliberate queering of the text. Stone (2008), however, observes that substantive interpretations often serve a heteronormative function. Like many reading strategies that go against the grain of traditional interpretation, a queer hermeneutic expects to be met with suspicion and distrust. In analyzing the contemporary contestation of gender and sexuality with regards to the developments in hermeneutical theory (basically the shift from historical recovery/authorial intention to reader-oriented approaches), Martin (2006) argues that the Bible simply cannot be used to prohibit or prescribe particular

gender or sexual behaviors, for the text has no agency of its own and predominantly reflects the voice of the reader. Textual meaning, he suggests, is inseparable from hermeneutics and rhetoric. Martin encourages readers to forego the dominant practice of textual “foundationalism,” in which the Bible is used to justify our own points of view, and instead take responsibility for the ethical consequences of particular interpretive moves.

The following interpretations, therefore, are pragmatically based on the assumptions of queer theory that the emergence of modern categories of sexuality and gender have shaped us immensely as readers. Conventional readings of biblical texts are prone to lock subjects (both readers and characters within a text) into one category of sexual desire, presumably heterosexual. Dominant readings exclude “deviant” sexualities or masculinities as a result of unconsciously imposing modern filters of normative sexuality and gender onto ancient texts. Moreover, we tend not to recognize certain forms of intimacy within particular texts as we have already presumed their non-existence. These conditions suppress the possibility of erotic and other textures, distorting and reducing our interpretive capacity. What then are the possibilities for interpretation when we refuse to swallow the erotophobic and homophobic interpretations of traditional “hardcore” Christianity? Is there a way to redeem the text for a more subversive but ultimately positive construction of masculinity for contemporary readers?

One approach to redeeming the text is proposed by the queer theologian Althaus-Reid (2001; 2003; 2006), who challenges conventional Catholic understandings of gender, sexuality, and patriarchy through the assertion of often outrageous claims that both shock and laugh at normative gender and sexual stereotypes. The Western Christian tradition, she argues, has desexualized theology through regulating “decency hermeneutics” to the point where the body has been completely removed from such discussion. Her solution to erotophobia is to deconstruct and then reconstruct language indecently, in order to provoke our ingrained assumptions of decency.

Althaus-Reid also proposes that we read the Bible *sexually* in a way that exposes our oppressive patterns of decency. This involves “seeing” the text in a new light that might challenge existing sexual narratives. Through the telling of sexual stories, we open our eyes to different networking strategies and sources of empowerment by shifting our attention to the margins. Citing Plummer she writes: “Sexual stories perform some social ordering, register changes, tensions and have a political role to fulfill, apart from their narrative structures” (2001, p. 132). They involve liberating the text, and indeed ourselves, from constrictive prescriptions of gender and sexuality that work to undermine and oppress our identities. Even heterosexuality, like sex, is an unstable category, which as a compulsory system itself is abnormal. Althaus-Reid writes:

Sex may be perceived as potentially chaotic, as the field of ambiguities and unruly life and theology has to struggle to put sex into tidy compartments, each one with a name, a color, a function, and a positive or negative symbol at the door. If theology discovers that in reality there are more sexual behaviors than compartments, identities are essentialised. (Althaus-Reid, 2001, p. 132)

The re-reading task at hand, rather than merely tolerating difference, is an active attempt to transform our interpretations from constrictive notions of binary and essentialist portrayals of gender and sexuality. As a straight but not narrow reader of the Bible, I desire to move towards a way of reading that goes beyond the relatively impotent toleration of masculine and queer deviancy, to one that embraces it as a force for liberation.³ Althaus-Reid herself makes a point of circumventing the ethic of toleration; a category based on certain normative principles that decide what should or should not be tolerated. Toleration, she insists, merely works to reinforce abnormality. Only by dissolving the limits between tolerable and intolerable might we encounter positive transformation. This stresses the importance of telling and retelling queer interpretations rather than simply tolerating difference, and hence affirms the importance of this article.

The Socio-sexual Background

Because socio-rhetorical criticism investigates both inter-textual and social and cultural phenomena, it is necessary to indicate some of the overarching gender discourses that were present during the first-century against which the following texts will be read. As Robbins (1996) suggests, awareness of common social and cultural topics can assist the interpreter in avoiding ethnocentric and anachronistic interpretation (p. 75). How was masculinity and/or male sexuality constructed in the world of the Bible? Liew (2003) argues that an investigation into ancient masculinity, although influenced by contemporary interests, is not an anachronistic endeavor, primarily because masculinity was a major preoccupation within the ancient Mediterranean (pp. 93-97).⁴

Interest in the subject of masculinity has seen the recent publication of two significant books in New Testament studies, namely, a collection of essays in *New Testament Masculinities* (Moore & Anderson, 2003), and an exploration of Jesus' masculinity in *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Conway, 2008). Both books attempt to understand what masculinity meant at the time of the New Testament and then apply these insights to observe how various characters' masculinity is constructed. While there can be a tendency among some interpreters to assume that culture during the period of the composition of the New Testament was static and homogenous, Conway and the majority of contributors to *New Testament Masculinities (NTM)* seem aware of the polyphonic nature of cultural discourses and are at pains to resolve tensions between simplistic and multifaceted readings of culture. In the end, however, they are forced to simplify in order to say anything about masculinity at all (see, for example, Conway, 2008, pp. 9-10). Gleason stresses this point in his response chapter found at the end of *NTM*, in which he questions by whose standards are we to assess Jesus' masculinity? Borrowing from the work of classicists, the contributors tend to focus on Greek and Roman gender ideologies with little to say about the more culturally specific construction of gender in Aramaic-speaking Palestine (Gleason, 2003, pp. 325-327). This would also be true of Conway who places Jesus predominantly in dialogue with constructions of Roman imperial masculinity. Of course, the production and early consumption of Mark's gospel has traditionally been located among a gentile audience, and so I do not necessarily see this as a major setback for this kind of reading of the Markan text. Moreover, the investigations of both Boyarin (1992; 1993; 1995) and Satlow (1994;

1996; 1998), who have written at considerable length on ancient rabbinic constructions of masculinity, show considerable similarities to Greco-Roman constructions, at least as far as some of the overarching discourses are concerned.

Investigations into the dominant discourses of ancient masculinities often draw upon the insights of Laqueur (1990) who argues that before the emergence of modern society, to be a man or a woman was not a category of biology, but rather was to hold a social rank or to assume a cultural role. He observes in antiquity a “one-sex model” of sexual difference, in which women and men were both placed on the same sliding gender scale, with the most masculine man at the top and women at the bottom. It was possible for men to slide down into the feminine realm and women to move up into masculine space. As such, the boundaries between the sexes were highly political and rhetorical. Within the ancient Mediterranean “Roman imperialism aggressively imposed itself as a triumph of masculinity, dominating conquered nations as women or effeminate males” (Burrus, 2007, p. 8). Within the ideology of the elite class, perfect masculinity formed the apex of the social hierarchy, and so was intimately linked to status. Those considered “true men” were positioned above all others, including slaves, women, boys, foreigners, and men who assumed a passive role in sexual relations (Conway, 2008, p. 36).

Conway suggests that it was not enough to be born a male, even a free male Roman citizen. It was also required, in line with Butler, that one *act* the part of a man. This included assuming the active role in private sexual relations, as well as in public life (pp. 21-22). Williams (1999) writes that, with the exception of Western culture, very few cultures have offered blanket condemnations of sexual practices between men, although restrictions and qualifications usually exist. He observes that within Roman society, homosexual relations were acceptable within certain contexts and configurations, such as the active/passive distinction (p. 17). While the assertion of an active masculinity was valued, however, such a role required the careful display of control and restraint in regards to passions and the treatment of others. Acting as a man involved the avoidance of excess of any kind, notwithstanding opportunities for manly displays of courage (Conway, 2008, pp. 21-30).

It is worth noting that the more social-scientific approaches to ancient masculinity taken by Conway, the various contributors to *NTM*, and the scholars of ancient (rabbinic) Jewish masculinities, mostly only *describe* the ways in which gender is constructed, and tend not to provide appropriate critiques of such constructions. In a recent article, Moore (2007) admits that the current investigation into biblical masculinities has made little direct use of queer theory, instead drawing from scholarship in the classics that deal with codes and conventions. Although their research is crucial for an understanding of ancient masculinities, a narrow focus can potentially lead to the re-inscription of patriarchy and gender norms, particularly if coupled with textual “foundationalism.” Therefore, I would insist it is ethically necessary to combine the reading of socio-sexual textures with an ideological hermeneutic of liberation such as the queering of the text, in order to problematize the instability of masculinity and expose the ways in which conventional and dominant interpretations presuppose a heteronormative function.

Fishing for Men (1:16-20)

This foundational discipleship text traditionally referred to as “the call of the disciples,” which I have more erotically re-titled “fishing for men,” provokes the queer imagination in a number of different ways. First of all, it challenges conventional spiritualized interpretations that focus on the existential response to Jesus in a merely religious sense that neglect aspects concerned with the renegotiation of social identity. Many interpreters suggest that the text functions as some sort of universal paradigm in which the religious ideal is a total break from one’s former life in order to follow Jesus (see, for example, Healy, 2008, pp. 42-44). This emphasis not only filters out the inclusion of women who do not feature here, but also overlooks the counter-cultural and erotic textures that tear apart our ideas and ideals of appropriate spaces for masculine homosociality (Sedgwick, 1985). From the beginning, it should intrigue us that Jesus seems to be in favor of enticing and hanging out with a number of other men. What is it about the erect rods of the male fishermen that lures Jesus to them?⁵ Likewise, what is it about Jesus’ look and commanding voice that urges these men to immediately come for him? I start here with a queer retelling of the short text, before considering some of the justifications and implications.

While cruising the seashores of Galilee, Jesus began his ministry by fetching a number of seemingly attached men to join his cohort of male admirers. He saw Simon and his brother Andrew fishing in their boat, and as soon as Jesus invited them to accompany him in his quest to fish for more men, they dropped their rods and joined him. Shortly after, Jesus discovered James and John in their father’s boat mending their fishnets. Upon enticing them, they immediately left their father and their livelihood, to elope with the alluring Jesus.

Thanks to the work of liberation hermeneutics, this doublet has been read in light of its obvious counter-cultural rhetoric. According to Myers (1988), for example, Mark pays considerable attention to the social location of this episode; the fishing trade is accurately represented, and the disciples are shown to abandon all socio-economic responsibility. Such a paradigm for conversion, of course, is absurd in reality; the point, suggests Myers, is to illustrate that “discipleship involves a reordering of socio-economic relationships” (pp. 132-133). If Jesus’ call to discipleship is this radical, could we also take it to mean a reordering of socio-sexual relationships? As one’s livelihood is an integral component of one’s identity, Jesus’ instruction, according to Punt (2006), “is unexpected, singling out young men and encouraging them to leave their households (along with their livelihood, work and inheritance) which provided them with both a sense of being and social position and function” (p. 35). By eloping with Jesus, both pairs of disciples abandon the values of a dominant culture by acting against traditional familial relations and performing the construction of an alternative, better way of life—that is—the forming of a fawning group of male admirers.

Such thinking is not entirely unique. In discussing his construction of the historical Jesus, Moxnes (2003) argues that the calling to discipleship narratives should be read from a spatial perspective rather than a temporal perspective (pp. 97-98). From a temporal perspective, the pericope lends itself to interpretations centered on “conversion” which are influenced by a modern construction of history-

based progress and change (i.e., “before” and “after”). From a spatial perspective, however, the call involves a transition from conventional to unconventional space, thus exposing the queer but semi-inclusive nature of becoming part of Jesus’ group.

But more than this, by plunging into the group and thereby abandoning their families in such a counter-cultural way, the disciples relinquish a significant component of masculine performance. The male role in the household, according to Moxnes, was “identified with that of the householder as overseer, father, husband, supplier of resources, person responsible for his house and its inhabitants, and so on” (pp. 95-96). To be presented as lacking a house, therefore, deprives Jesus and his admirers of the role of either a householder, or as sons of the household. The disciples appear infatuated enough with Jesus to forego this part of their masculine identity. In other words, they leave their rods behind. The very act of moving away from secure familial attachments meant surrendering to widespread imperial discourses asserting the importance of male headship and the relative impotence of falling outside these conventional institutions.

To shift back to our world, we might like to think about how masculine space is constructed in contemporary society. Dominant culture would assert that sporting environments or perhaps male bonding in a fishing boat, are generally safe places for male homosociality. It’s not “gay” for men to be with other men so long as it’s in a safe space. The desire to contain male homosocial performance within a strict setting links to Butler’s (1990) observations regarding the discursive gendering within the architecture and space of a social environment. Why is it that the close proximity of men in some contexts is deemed acceptable or safe and in other contexts unsafe or even indecent? I think of the slang term “cockfest” used to describe a social gathering in which men far outnumber women. Homophobia manifests itself over men and society to designate even non-sexual and purely platonic groupings of men in certain spaces as potentially dangerous. However, Jesus challenges his admirers to leave their boats which have previously constrained them to a certain socio-economic and socio-sexual status. Their actions are thus transgressive of the dominant culture’s ideas about appropriate groupings of men. The immediate response to Jesus’ enticing invitation deliberately breaches these boundaries in a way that would have disrupted the cultural sensibilities of those around them. In order for the text to have a similar effect on us, we ought to read it *sexually* in a way that exposes this indecency.

It is worth noting that contrary to the insights of feminist biblical scholarship that has identified a number of examples of female discipleship within Mark’s gospel (Kinukawa, 1994, 2001), “hardcore” Christians involved in a conservative backlash against such inclusive moves often insist on the primacy of the twelve male disciples. It is also worth noting that gender inclusive versions of the Bible that render “fishers of men” (*halieīs anthrōpōn*) as the more bisexual “fishers of people” are sometimes accused of distorting the text’s “truer” meaning (see, for example, Poythress, 2000). By drawing greater attention to the maleness of the disciples and/or by excluding women as disciples entirely, however, these discourses accentuate the queer observation that Jesus calls his male admirers to forego a definite masculine space in favor of a counter-masculine, and even suggestively homoerotic, space. As Martin (2006) writes, “[Jesus] seems to enjoy the company of his male disciples a bit more than some would think ‘normal’” (p. 96).

If read *sexually*, the text not only challenges a biblical basis for so called “traditional family values,” but it suggestively undermines the presumed heterosexuality of both Jesus and his followers, thus exposing the limitations of our implicit heteronormative assumptions. This lends itself well to queer theory’s breaking apart of the supposed normalcy of compulsory heterosexuality. The irony, of course, is that within traditionally conservative interpretive communities these texts are seen as anything but queer. In fact, the likely response to such an “indecent perversion” would be one of repugnance and outrage. Yet, intriguingly lurking behind the patriarchal agenda of such communities, there exists a homoerotic undertone that favors the liberation of the text from a constrictive heterosexist bias.

Whose is the Greatest? Measuring Manhood (9:33-37)

This Markan text involves the retelling of an argument between the disciples over who is the greatest. Conventional interpretations tend to read along with the grain of the text: Jesus offers a corrective that reverses normalcy (namely, the first will be last and the last will be first). He then uses a child to illustrate this paradoxical logic; whoever welcomes the child is said to welcome Jesus. What conventional interpretations often miss is that while a reversal of values supposedly takes place, the hierarchical structure that measures manhood remains intact, thus allowing the dominant discourse that “greatness” is central to securing one’s masculinity to reassert itself.

I recall a scenario from when I was about seven that occurred in the boys changing room for the school community pool in which one boy was hassled for possessing an abnormally large penis. Peculiarly, as we were to grow immersed in Western society, subjected to dominant discourses concerning male bodies and a hegemonic masculinity reinforced by the popular media, pornography, and numerous “small penis” jokes, our preconceptions about penis size would be reversed. The contestation and negotiation of penis size is an obsession of modern society; disclosure of such affirms one’s (or one’s partner’s) “greatness” and “status” among other men. For these reasons, it seems fitting to re-read this Markan text *sexually* as a squabble among Jesus’ admirers over the size of their members. Again, I start with a queer retelling of the text before discussing some of the associated issues.

When they came to Capernaum Jesus asked his admirers, “What were you squabbling about on the way?” There was an embarrassing silence, for they had been comparing with one another to find out whose was the greatest. Jesus sat down, called his disciples, and said to them, “Whoever admires me the most will have the least, for truly I tell you, size doesn’t matter; it’s what you do with it that counts.” Taking a little one in his hand, he said to them, “Whoever is open to one such as this is also open to me, and whoever is open to me is open to the one who sent me.”

According to Liew (2003), competition was valuable within the ideals of ancient Mediterranean masculinity and Mark often employs language to reinforce a Jesus who aggressively asserts himself in public competition whether with the Jerusalem authorities or by way of rhetorical performances (pp. 105-106). In line with Butler’s proposal, gender is not simply established by having the correct genitals, but rather by the actions one takes to secure such a status. Therefore, it is

not surprising that the disciples initially compete for primacy in order to secure their place as “true men” on the hierarchical gender axis. Nor is it surprising that Jesus is forced to quickly dismiss their potentially threatening contest, given his role as maledom within this all male cohort. Indeed, the conduct Jesus often calls for in his admirers is that of submission and servitude. On Laqueuer’s (1990) gender axis, of course, this desire to emasculate his disciples is effectively a request for their transgressing; as Liew writes, “being ‘slavish’ was a synonym for being ‘womanish’ for all practical purposes” (p. 106). What, then, is the argumentative texture at play behind Jesus’ “preference for the small,” and what agenda does it seek to serve?

On the one hand, Jesus’ instruction works to bolster his authoritative control and masculine standing over the seemingly wayward disciples. Liew, for example, contends that the conflicts between Jesus and the disciples (in addition to conflicts between Jesus and the Jerusalem and Roman authorities) work to uphold Jesus’ masculinity. Because the protagonist will eventually suffer an emasculating death, the disciples have the upper-hand in achieving their masculinity. As such, Mark is at pains to bolster Jesus’ performance by repeatedly identifying the disciples’ failure always in comparison to Jesus’ corrective instruction or action in order that he is not upstaged (pp. 106-107). This view is strengthened by the observation that the measuring manhood text is placed next to one of the passion predictions (9:30-2) explaining the emasculating fate associated with the career and cause of the Messiah; namely, death at the hands of Roman imperial forces by means of a penetrative crucifixion.

On the other hand, the argumentative texture of the text seems to want to undermine prevailing imperial discourses that see “greatness” as central to the performance of any worthy masculine identity. Understood this way the text reads as subculture rhetoric that subverts the dominant Roman imperial culture through the re-appropriation of its hyper-masculine values. Conway (2008), for example, argues that much of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples, although using the language of submission, is intended to heighten their masculinity, perhaps through a redefinition of terms. Jesus begins by addressing those among his admirers who want to be great and those who want to be first. This use of subculture rhetoric, insists Conway, concerns those who want to win the masculinity contest of the Greco-Roman world to achieve supremacy over others. It links Jesus to popular discourses found in wider imperial culture that use the language of slavery and service to promote particular ideologies of kingship (see, for example, Seeley, 1993). Appropriating parts of established rhetoric of the literate elite is itself an effective means of resistance to the dominant ruling powers. Jesus’ statement calls attention to the ruling elites’ failure to live up to their own ideals (Conway, 2008, pp. 99-100). Rather than inverting the Roman ideology of leadership, Mark presents Jesus as a truer embodiment of imperial leadership, and as a result, masculinity.

The problem with both these agendas, however, is that they still assert the idea that hegemonic-masculinity, or at least Jesus’ masculinity, is something desirable that needs to remain intact. While the text might function as a critique of imperialism, it does not undermine the embedded belief that winning the masculinity contest is still a crucial task. Whether the criterion for greatness is flaccid or erect, it feeds from a subjection to widespread regulating discourses asserting that masculinity itself is an essential component of one’s identity. Dominant

discourses are so pervasive that attempts at redefinition often merely re-establish their dominance over us. For instance, while the phrase “size doesn’t matter” attempts to negotiate power away from a dominant discourse, McKee (2004) argues that its predominant embodiment within satire does not reverse but hardens the discourse that large penises are desirable. This text about measuring manhood functions in a similar way: in the process of negotiating power away from imperial might, it still affirms the discourse that hegemonic masculinity is of utmost importance.

The measures of masculinity are complex and often contradictory. Jesus’ supposed corrective to his admirers is itself a means of establishing control and power over his own destiny, which, as an expression of masculinity, silences and emasculates the disciples. Even if the text is read at a literal level in which a reversal of values actually takes place, the subtext that greatness and therefore hegemonic masculinity is something desirable is not rejected but in fact confirmed. From a queer perspective, this calls for a careful reading against the grain of the text, in order that oppressive androcentric and imperial ideals are not re-inscribed onto our own context.

The Pash of Judas and a Streaker’s Nuddie Run (14:43-52)

One does not have to go far to find erotic textures present in what is traditionally titled “the betrayal and arrest of Jesus.” Not only does it contain a scandalous kiss between two men, but it concludes with a young man whose entire body is exposed during the struggle to escape. The text begins with the arrival of Judas accompanied by a crowd that intends to arrest Jesus. The irony can be seen in the signal by which Jesus is identified, namely, an intimate embrace. While the entire text, including the disciples’ decision to flee, has implications for their masculinity, I focus here on the erotic texture of the betraying embrace and then consider the identity of the mysterious naked youth. Once again, I start with a queer retelling of the text before discussing its interpretive repercussions.

Immediately, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd of men with shackles and whips eager to restrain Jesus. The betrayer had said, “The one who I will kiss is the maledom; restrain him and lead him away.” When Judas came, he approached Jesus, said “master,” and pressed his lips up against him. Then the crowd laid their hands on Jesus and tied him down. After an initial struggle his admirers deserted him and fled. Shortly after, a boy escort wearing nothing but a cover of cloth was admiring Jesus. As the crowd of men tried to grapple him, however, he dropped it and streaked off naked.

The pash of betrayal by Judas is conventionally read as an “innocent” kiss of greeting, used by rabbis and their pupils as a sign of respect. Donahue (2002), for instance, writes:

The action was most likely a ‘peck’ on the cheeks, similar to greetings used in the Middle East today. The ‘holy kiss’ (*philēma*) became a customary greeting and sign of affection in the early church. Whether either of these practices illumines the kiss by Judas is debatable and really not important. The point is that Judas’ kiss is a cynical device to insure that the ‘crowd’ will arrest the right man: Jesus. (Donahue, 2002, pp. 414-415)

But is the kiss really not that important? Suppose it was not Judas who kisses Jesus, but was a female character, say Mary Magdalene. What kind of interpretive speculation might then occur? Would Donahue still consider it just a (harmless and therefore decent) peck on the cheek? Martin (2006) suggests that the popular imagination has often envisioned Jesus in a heterosexual relationship, but has seldom understood his sexuality as ambiguous even though the gospels are relatively silent about it. He notes that such interpretations fixate on Jesus' supposed celibacy, sexual temptations, or actual relationships, but are always dominated by assumptions of heterosexual normativity (pp. 93-94). Thus, it would seem, conventional interpreters are so locked into categories of heterosexual normativity that even the possibility of homosexual desire or eroticism within the text is completely disregarded. In this sense, the Judas kiss is a "text of terror" for men; the intimate act is so subversive that it can only be read through decency hermeneutics that completely desexualize it in order that it is made safe.

If we remove our erotophobic and homophobic "blinkers," however, and perceive the kiss as something fuller, perhaps conveying intimacy of considerable intensity, then Judas' choice of action to betray Jesus becomes that much more remarkable, and as a result, shocking. Indeed, Witherington (2001) writes that the verb *kataphileō* used in verse 45 means to kiss with *every show of affection*, thus making the betrayal that much more treacherous and inexplicable (p. 381). The anxiety caused by any suggestion of homoeroticism within the text, however, inhibits our appreciation of the irony behind such an intimate embrace and, therefore, reduces our appreciation for the scandal of such a betrayal.

The re-reading of this text *sexually* and therefore indecently should not really shock us as much as it probably does. By all measures, the text itself is inherently indecent as it describes what the Christian tradition has deemed one of the most scandalous events in human history. Judas, one of the twelve of Jesus' innermost male admirers, betrays not only the one he is supposed to love, but also the savior of humankind. If this is the case, then surely the more intimate the kiss the more treacherous and ironic the offense becomes. These evocative layers of meaning are lost within decency hermeneutics that, for fear of any suggestion of homoeroticism, presuppose that the peck was merely a peck.

Attached to the end of the betrayal pericope is mention of a young man (*neaniskos*) wearing nothing but a linen cloth (*sindona*), who, once caught by the crowd, loses his garment and runs away naked. Although not explicitly linked to the twelve, the youth is identified as a follower of Jesus, who resists the temptation to flee with the other disciples. The text is puzzling for conventional interpreters because it associates an unnamed and suggestively erotic youth very closely with Jesus. Moreover, the text only appears in Mark, which has led to the de-sexualized tradition that John Mark wrote himself into the text. Because this apologetic interpretation has been largely dismissed (Donahue, 2002, p. 417; Myers, 1988, p. 368), it leaves open suggestions as to the identity of the young man, especially given the erotically-charged texture surrounding his brief appearance.

Jennings (2003) describes the text as potentially homoerotic or at least of gay interest. He cites Bentham who suggests the young man was a boy prostitute (*cinēdus*). This is established through two cultural intertexts: firstly, the way the text draws attention to the nudity of the youth not only suggests he is the object of

homoerotic attention, but also places him in relation to the institution of prostitution; and, secondly, Bentham argues that the garment (*sindona*) is wrapped loosely around his body in order to entice those around him.⁶ The men who laid hands on him and the garment, suggests Jennings, regard both the boy and the cloth as a prize (pp. 109-110).

Jennings acknowledges the lack of evidence available to substantiate a link between wearing a *sindona* and being a prostitute. He does, however, offer another point of interest, namely that the Evangelist deliberately employs the term *gymnos* to talk about the naked body rather than *sōma* as found in Paul when talking about the naked baptized body (1 Cor 12:12-44). This, he argues, would have conveyed all kinds of additional homoerotic connotations for Mark's implied first-century gentile readers as the word is a derivative of gymnasium, known in classic antiquity for its links to pederasty. The social environment of the gymnasium promoted this cultural practice by offering men a place to meet young boys. Nissinen (1998), for example, notes that in gymnasiums boys performed their physical exercises naked which doubtlessly eroticized the atmosphere and induced a male gaze (p. 65).

Although the actions of the boy escort within his brief appearance seem favorable (he continues to follow [*akolouthein*] Jesus after the other admirers have fled), his social status according to Greco-Roman customs was likely marginal. Nissinen writes that the structures of sexual relationships were hierarchically regulated according to normative masculine ideals. As such, a homoerotic relationship with a slave or prostitute disgraced only the passive partner who would have enjoyed little social respect. Although the profession was tolerated within Roman imperial society, it was constructed in a way that supported the assertion of an active masculinity at the expense of emasculated individuals (pp. 72-73).

Again, the implications for re-reading this young man *sexually* should not really shock us as much as it probably does. When the crowd of "chief priests, scribes, and elders" (14:43) attempt to restrain him, he drops his cloth and flashes them. For the ancient Jews, exposure of the penis was an offense before God (Satlow, 1997, p. 431). Yet we seem blinded from recognizing such insults because the youth's nakedness gets covered up by safer scholarly discourses about eye-witness verification, angels, and ambiguous symbols for discipleship. The reign of homophobia and heteronormativity implicit within our hermeneutical filters inhibits the many possibilities of meaning-making with the biblical text. While most interpreters are quite content to believe that Jesus associated with female prostitutes and other disenfranchised members of Greco-Roman society, we seem to want to resist the idea that he might have also fraternized with male prostitutes. Intriguingly, however, if we identify this naked youth as a boy escort it seems to affirm the conventional notion that Jesus' group of followers included an unconventional assortment of individuals. Just as it was considered inappropriate for an honorable Jewish man to consort with tax-collectors and sinners, it was also indecent to be associated with prostitutes. Such a re-reading demonstrates that our interpretive imaginations are considerably obstructed by substantive heteronormative interpretations, that queer hermeneutics allows us to see the text in the different light, and consequently, take ethical responsibility for particular interpretive moves.

Conclusion

The above interpretations demonstrate that the selected texts are more than just “pure” narratives devoid of erotic content, and that they can be read in a way that is not only *sexual* but also convincing. Indecent hermeneutics challenge interpreters to explore new possibilities within a text. While there is no pretension that reading *sexually* is the only legitimate means of interpretation, such readings are important if we are to recognize the way texts function to construct reality. This is especially the case for the disciples in Mark’s gospel, who are often read by many interpreters as a manifesto for contemporary discipleship. The Markan disciples, just like the Bible itself, are sites for contestation in the contemporary church. Whether or not readers interpret the discipleship themes in a programmatic way, we must take seriously the context of the disciples, who themselves are subject to discourses from both their own socio-sexual culture, and values unconsciously imposed on them from today. Questions about the undeclared hermeneutical presuppositions of readers must be asked if we are to become more ethical readers. Consequently, the point of the above three interpretations is not to establish a new orthodoxy of meaning, but rather to challenge our underlying presuppositions regarding gender and sexuality; namely, that sexuality is predominantly understood in categories of heterosexual normativity, and that gender is assumed to be essential and binary rather than socially constructed.

Reading the text attentive to these issues can have tangible effects upon the target culture. Socially conservative political rhetoric, for instance, constantly conjures up images of the 1950’s nuclear family as a biblically supported ideal. Yet, my re-reading of the discipleship calling narratives (1:16-20) undermines such discourse by showing that Jesus and his disciples sought to leave behind conventional practices of familial and social identity. Moreover, discourses regarding greatness and humility become confused when read isolated from concerns of the cultural negotiation of masculine and imperial notions of endowment and status.

The queer imagination deliberately transgresses normalcy in order to destabilize. My interpretations are focused on uncovering conventional obscurities, but the ultimate goal is for the reconstruction of the biblical text in order that it is a redeeming text for all, rather than just redeeming for some. As the influence of identity politics becomes more difficult to ignore, we have the ethical responsibility to ask questions of power and control when it comes to biblical interpretation, no matter how transgressive it might seem. Normalcy, as an ideological means of control, obscures our perception of reality. Therefore, it is necessary that interpretations which disturb our sense of normalcy are continued in order that the biblical text is liberated and may also continue to liberate its readers.

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Notes

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² "Erotophobia," as employed by Jennings (2003), refers to a fear of physical and personal intimacy that has established itself in dominant reading strategies.

³ I should note that my reading strategy is a unique contribution in that the vast majority of queer interpretations of biblical texts have so far only been published by openly gay men. Krondorfer (2007a; 2007b) has noted the relative heterosexual silence in dialogue with and response to gay men's studies and religion; the issue is that gay theology and queer hermeneutics, now established as legitimate fields of inquiry, might become "ghettoized" as sub-disciplines for gay men only. As I will demonstrate, however, queer theory offers interpretive tools for anyone who seeks to seriously challenge the oppressive binary constructs of gender and sexuality.

⁴ Because of the limitations of article length and my desire to work more extensively with the Markan text, however, I restrain myself from engaging in a long-winded

discussion pertaining to ancient Roman and Jewish masculinities, and rather draw together some of the key observations.

⁵ While I am fully aware of the potential anachronisms with the idea of fishing rods in the first century, the imagery is too good to resist and graphically demonstrates my point made later that by leaving their rods behind the disciples abandon a significant component of their masculinity.

⁶ The garment, in fact, is not properly clothing at all, but rather a kind of sheet—the same used to wrap Jesus' body.

Robert J. Myles
School of Theology, The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre, Auckland 114/NEW ZEALAND
e: r.myles@auckland.ac.nz



Constructing Masculinity: *De Utero Patris* (from the Womb of the Father)

Paul M. Collins

This paper investigates possible (re-)constructions of masculinity in relation to feminist re-conceptualization of the Father–Son relationship in the classic formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. I will draw upon the work of Diana Neal who proposed a feminist reading of the relationality of father and son, building on the Council of Toledo’s reference to de utero Patris. This leads to a deconstruction of the binary definition of masculinity with divinity and femaleness with materiality. Neal argues with Irigaray that symbolic changes follow on from psychological changes. This proposal for the (re-)construction of masculinity will be compared with four recent image-based constructions of masculinity: Daniel Craig in Casino Royale and the film of The History Boys; the French national rugby team’s calendar Dieux du Stade, and David Beckham’s portrayal in the recent advertising campaign for Armani. Do these constructions of masculinity confirm Neal and Irigaray’s understanding of change?

Feminist critique of the male language and patriarchal implications of the classic formulation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in terms of a father–son relationship has elicited a variety of responses. This paper is framed within an analysis of the workings of the metaphorical and analogical ascription of language to the divine. What does the metaphorical and analogical description of the divine in terms of Fatherhood–Sonship mean? And how do metaphor and analogy work in this context?

I have chosen the phrase *de utero Patris* (from the womb of the father) as a point of departure to investigate possible constructions of masculinity in relation to a present-day reception of the Father–Son relationship found in the classic formulation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In undertaking this investigation I use a cross-disciplinary method in which the disciplines of theology, philosophy, psychology and social, cultural and media studies will be brought together in an analytical critique to address instances of the construction of masculinity in four contemporary representations. Such a method is particularly required for this enquiry, but I also want to defend this kind of method for all forms of contextual theological discourse. I will test an hypothesis which emerges from within the

discourse of feminist critique of the doctrine of the Trinity through an analysis of the reception of four contemporary examples of the construction of masculinity. The hypothesis emerges from Luce Irigaray's (1985, 1984) understanding that symbolic changes follow on from psychological changes, and is rooted in Lacan's schema of: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic (Miller, 1988, pp. 73-159), which is often used in the theorization of the media. I will assess the impact and reception of four examples of the construction of masculinity in an attempt to discern if the changes they may instantiate indicate the kind of psychological change which assist a new understanding of the Trinitarian Father–Son relationship. From the outset I want to suggest that reception of understandings of masculinity and the theorization of the intra-divine relations is a “two-way street.” That is to say there is a reciprocity in the reception of the theorization of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship and the impact of the construction of representations of masculinity.

The four examples are contemporary representations in the media and arts, and the evidence for the reception of them is taken from within the media (with particular reference to the UK newspaper *The Guardian*), and as such the evidence base for the analysis may be said to be “populist.” In undertaking this analysis of the reception of these representations, there needs to be an explicit recognition on the part of those receiving and interpreting the representations—as well as of myself—that in conducting the analysis there are overlapping gender constructs and stereotypes in use. There needs also to be a recognition that the categories used in the analysis of the representations are themselves constructs which are in constant need of re-evaluation and/or deconstruction: masculine, feminine; divine, material; gay, straight; heteronormative, homoerotic; being, having.

In addition to the above constructs and categories, I will appeal to the concepts of vulnerability and pathos. In making this appeal I am not wishing to suggest that vulnerability is a characteristic to be applied to one gender more than another. Rather I am suggesting that while each of the four constructions present masculinity in terms of physical strength and beauty they also suggest a susceptibility to the physical and emotional power of others. It is this combination of strength and susceptibility which intentionally evokes a complex emotional response from the audience. This I have understood in terms of pathos.

Finally there needs to be recognition of the particular limitations of this study. The examples used are of white European males, and thus what I am addressing is a “Western” paradigm of masculine stereotyping. Also, the age of the examples is relatively “young,” and this possibly colludes with the contemporary “obsession” with youth. However the four examples of the representation of masculinity have each been received in some sense as “iconic” in the popular media. The use of the term “icon” has become common place in the contemporary cultural/social milieu of “representation.” This appeal to icon and the iconic may be said to have some relationship to the understanding of “icon” within Christianity and Platonism. The usage of “icon” in popular contexts might possibly be seen as an equivalent of the Christian conceptuality of an “icon” pointing beyond itself, indeed of being “a window to heaven.”¹ In other words these four representations point to a psychological understanding of masculinity at a variety of levels, which may be related to a present-day reception of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship. Thus the appeal to the iconic status of the representations is a concrete instance of the

reciprocity between Trinitarian theorization and constructions of masculinity in the media.

The Hypothesis

The hypothesis is proposed in order to provide answers to the questions: What does the metaphorical and analogical description of the divine in terms of Fatherhood–Sonship mean? And how do metaphor and analogy work in this context? The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a renewal of interest in understanding the Father–Son relationship in the doctrine of the Trinity, which was mainly evoked by a feminist critique of a classic portrayal of patriarchy. Diana Neal (1996), building on the work of Jürgen Moltmann, sought to answer this feminist critique while defending the language of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship. A key component of Neal and Moltmann’s construal of the Father–Son relationship is based on a reference to the Council of Toledo in 675: “It must be held that the Son was created, neither out of nothingness, nor yet out of any substance, but that he was begotten or born out of the Father’s womb (*de utero Patris*), that is, out of his very essence” (cited in Moltmann, 1981a, p. 165).

The appeal to the notion of the divine father’s “womb” occurs in Early Church and Medieval texts, and has been construed by theologians in the twentieth century as indicating that the Christian understanding of God as “father” and “son” is to be distinguished from understandings of “patriarchal religion.” Paul Fiddes (2000) argues that the frequent use of “father” language in the four Gospels is to be contrasted with the infrequent use of use language in the Hebrew Bible (p. 92). Fiddes appeals to the work of Paul Ricoeur in order to suggest that Christ’s usage of “father” language in the Gospels may be interpreted to indicate a “non-oppressive” relationship (Ricoeur, 1974). Ricoeur argues that the revelation of God in the Hebrew Bible in terms of the “non-name” “I am who I am” (Exodus 3.14) “abolishes all ideas of a biological-father God,” which was to be found in religions of the contemporary era. This interpretation leads Fiddes to argue that “the cleansing of names and the death of the supreme biological father thus creates a space where God may be called ‘Father’ in a new way” (Fiddes, 2000, p. 93). This line of interpretation suggests that the way in which the language of “father” is used in the Gospels, endows this “father” with the qualities of tenderness, pity, nurturing and compassion, rather than oppression; qualities which may be associated with either fathers or mothers. Emerging from such an interpretation, Moltmann speaks of a “motherly father” (Moltmann, 1981b, p. 53), and Boff of “a fatherly mother” (Boff, 1988, p. 166).

There is support for this alternative understanding of fatherhood and for qualifying “father” language with “mother” language in the texts of authors from the Early Church and the Middle Ages, as well as from the Council of Toledo (675). In the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, a critique of patriarchal religion may be seen in the construal of the eternal generation of the Son from Father in terms of an image of birthing as well as begetting. This was often premised on an exegesis of Psalm 110 (109) verse 3 (4).² For example Hilary of Poitiers (*De Trinitate*, Book 6.16), Eusebius of Caesarea (*Demonstratio Evangelica*, Book 4.15), Athanasius (*Discourse 4 Against the Arians*, 27), Basil of Caesarea (*Against Eunomius*, 353), Ambrose (*De Fide ad Gratianum Augustum*, Book 4, 10.132), Augustine of Hippo (*Contra Maximinum*,

Book 1.7) all refer to Psalm 110.3, "I bore you from the womb before the morning star." This verse is interpreted as indicating the Father's generation of the Son, "from the womb" a means of emphasizing the reality of the begetting of the Son from the Father's being. This tradition of interpretation finds official recognition in the formula of the Council of Toledo (675) where the phrase "from the womb of Father" is used to reinforce the understanding of the "homoousion" relationship of Father and Son. Such an understanding is reiterated in the twelfth century by Peter Lombard in his commentary on the Psalms.³ On the basis of this kind of interpretation, Fiddes argues that "there is thus an undermining of gender in God at the heart of Trinitarian formulation" (2000, p. 94). This construal of the intra-divine relationship of the Father and the Son is echoed in the considerable variety and fluidity in the usage of metaphor and gendered imagery in relation to divine and human persons in Early Church texts.⁴ The construction of gender in the period of the Cappadocian Fathers is often seen in terms of the "transcending" of gender. However, Virginia Burrus has argued that at least in the hagiography of the time, "gender is (not) transcended. If anything, gender is intensified in its very queering; it is also intensely eroticized" (2006, p. 167).

On the basis of this approach to the interpretation of Early Church texts, twentieth century writers have argued that the motif of the "Father's womb" suggests, "a father who both begets and gives birth to his son is not a uniquely male father. He is a maternal father. He can no longer be defined as having only male sex, but must be as if bi- or transsexual" (Raming, 1999, pp. 47-57). God the Son proceeds from Father alone: this is both a begetting and a birth, both a male and female action, so it may be said that there is a motherly father of the child who comes forth. Luise Von Flotow-Evans goes so far as to argue that "The orthodox tradition speaks boldly of God's 'bi-sexuality'" (Flowton-Evans, 1997, p. 55). This line of argument had already been developed by Moltmann (1981b, p. 53) and continues to be expounded by Soskice (2007, p. 82). This suggests not so much the overcoming of the supreme biological father claimed above, as a transgressing or "queering" of biological fatherhood. However, not all are persuaded by such radical ascriptions of gender to the divine. Molnar (2002, p. 229) rejects any ascription of "bisexual images into the Godhead," on the basis that there is no need to add the metaphor of birth to that of begetting.

Those who accept the interpretation of the Father-Son relationship on the basis of a variety of metaphors, including begetting and birthing, draw out two further implications of such an approach. First, they argue that such an understanding of the intra-divine relations separates divine Fatherhood from association with being an utterly transcendent "Creator." Rather, in the classic exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, all three persons are "creators" and share the divine act of creating. Fiddes argues that the divine fatherhood is therefore prior to any creator-hood (2000, p. 95). Second, on the basis of the crucifixion of Christ there is not only a death of the Son, but also in some sense a death of the Father, because of the loss of the Son (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 105-6). Neal argues that a re-reading of the doctrine of the Trinity is possible through the lens of the crucifixion of Christ:

the Trinitarian event of the cross presents Christians with a symbolic framework which, far from being necessarily patriarchal in nature, subverts patriarchal relations of power between fathers and sons. This, in turn, would lead to a deconstruction of the binary definition of maleness with divinity and femaleness with materiality. (Neal, 1996, p. 19)

It is also relevant that the wound in the torso of the Crucified Christ as found in medieval representations was sometimes referred to as the entrance to Christ's "womb" (Bynum, 1992, p. 87). Neal herself seeks to interpret the ambiguities of symbol of the Father–Son relationship in the Christian tradition through an understanding that symbols are *polysemic*, an idea which is to be found in the works of Caroline Walker Bynum (1986) and Victor W. Turner (1999). In this understanding, symbols are multi-layered and have multiple meanings, enabling feminists and other interpreters of the Father–Son relationship to re-receive the Christian tradition (Neal, 1996, p. 16).

Turner's construal of symbols as polysemic rests on his understanding of human experience as "social dramas" (a subset of "processual units"), which are understood to move through four stages. In this scheme, social drama underlies both narrative and ritual. Human beings perform or enact certain formal, prescribed patterns, and in doing so express and also move into and elaborate shared values (Bynum, 1992, p. 29). The third stage is a moment of "liminality,"⁵ a suspension of normal, rules and roles, a crossing of boundaries and a violating of norms. In this moment, norms come to be understood in order either to go on using them or to reject them. At this liminal stage "dominant symbols" are understood to emerge: symbols that "condense" and "unify" disparate *significata* and bring together two poles of meaning, the normative and the emotional (Bynum, 1992, p. 30). In the present discussion it is the Father–Son relationship which is identified as the "dominant symbol," and it is seen by Neal as a violation of norms in terms of the mothering Father and the death of Fatherhood through the crucifixion of the Son (Neal, 1996, p. 17; Moltmann, 1974, p. 243). A present-day reception of an earlier interpretation of the Father–Son relationship allows the different metaphors to suggest different ways in which masculinity may be constructed and understood.

In pursuit of a re-adjusted symbolization of God, Neal suggests that Luce Irigaray is correct to argue that symbolic changes follow on from psychological changes. Irigaray's project for symbolic change is rooted in Lacan's concepts of the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary. Irigaray understands that the symbolic and the imaginary form a system, and the one cannot be understood without the other. While there may be an emphasis on "the imaginary" as regards the unconscious elements of the system, nonetheless she is clear that "change in the imaginary *must* bring about change in the symbolic and vice versa" (Whitford, 1991, p. 76). The questions which this paper seeks to pose: What does it take to effect a change in the symbolic and the imaginary? Do the four representations of masculinity suggest that a psychological change is occurring which informs "the symbolic order" which supports a present-day reception of the Father–Son relationship in the classic doctrine of the Trinity?

Four Recent Examples of the Construction of Masculinity

Irigaray's understanding of change in "the symbolic system" will be tested in relation to four recent representations of masculinity offered in the media. Of these four construals of masculinity, two are taken from fiction/film and two from promotional or advertising examples. The representations will be of: the French national rugby team's calendar *Dieux du Stade*, and David Beckham's portrayal in an advertising campaign for Armani; and Daniel Craig as James Bond in *Casino Royale* and the film of Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*. I will argue that these constructions of masculinity suggest the kind of change, which Neal and Irigaray seek in terms of the psychological and symbolic orders.

Dieux De Stade calendar

Neal's re-reception of the doctrine of the Trinity, which suggests that the masculine is not synonymous with the divine, is immediately confronted by the French rugby players' calendar *Dieux du Stade*. This is one example among many of a genre in which men's bodies are commodified as objects of beauty and desire for "consumption," but in this instance the title itself proclaims the archetypal identification of masculinity and divinity. Yet in this instance it is also evident that despite the strength and beauty of the bodies represented, the images suggest a vulnerability which is a clear use of pathos in relation to the audience. It has also been suggested that the portrayal of intimacy between players is deliberately designed to be homoerotic. So, who is this calendar for? Sales statistics suggest women and gay men. But does such construal of masculinity affect "straight" men? A report in *The Guardian* newspaper asked, "the *Dieux du Stade* calendar: Is it a pitch for the pink pound? A challenge to the prevailing culture? Just a bit of fun?" (Ronay, 2006).

That this construal does have a broader effect among males is suggested by the launch of a selection of skin care products for men *Dieux du Stade* in 2006, which carry names linked to rugby, such as the shower gel, *Retour au vestiaire* (back to the locker-room). That the rugby players allow themselves to be represented in this way suggests that there is a "playfulness" and fluidity in this construction, which in turn points to that stage in the polysemic understanding of symbols where norms are transgressed and/or deconstructed. In summary, it may be argued that the representation of masculinity in this instance is both an affirmation of and a challenge to heteronormativity, and that this emerges from what may be said to be a "queering" of the stereotypical "macho" image.

"Golden balls" strikes again...

The representation of David Beckham in an Armani underwear advert provoked much media response (for example, Ramchandani, 2007). Who is this image for? Do men seeing such images and construals of masculinity relate to these in a narcissistic way, or as a construct to emulate, to bask in, perhaps from a paternalistic stance? What makes this anything more than an elite form of hyper-masculinity? I want to argue that the image also suggests vulnerability in the exposure of Beckham, which facilitates a re-construction of masculinity. Perhaps the words of Armani himself serve to answer at least some of these questions:

David is truly a modern day icon in that his fame extends well beyond the realm of soccer. He is considered as one of the world's most talented soccer players and a former captain of his national team, but his image has come to stand for more than this. He represents a notion of modern masculinity: as a sports hero, husband and father. He is also a man with a great sense of style. There was a time when soccer players were not always considered to be fashion role models. David Beckham has helped to change that. (Armani, 2007)

For Armani Beckham represents "modern masculinity," but it was his role as a "fashion model" over the years that allowed Armani to employ Beckham in this way. This "liminal" image calls norms into question. Beckham has consciously sought to appeal to the gay as well as the straight community, so again this representation by Armani may be seen as a "new" stereotypical masculine image which also has "queer" connotations.

Daniel Craig: "The wet man"

Daniel Craig's portrayal of James Bond in *Casino Royale* elicited much media comment. As Bond emerges from the sea alone, some commentators have suggested this is an amalgamation of male and female roles. The construal of masculinity in Craig's depiction of Bond in *Casino Royale* is found in various primary images. Two moments in the film are useful for my argument: when Bond emerges from the sea alone, fulfilling the space for both genders. And second when a naked Bond has his genitals tortured. Following this scene Bond is seen in a wheelchair recovering from the violence. Unlike Cruise in *Mission Impossible III*, who after crashing into a Shanghai skyscraper apparently escapes without a bruise, Craig's portrayal of Bond evokes a construction of masculinity which combines a macho image with vulnerability. *The Guardian* article makes some interesting and pertinent points:

Craig ... is photographed more like a woman would be photographed. The female viewer is always invited to picture herself in the body of her female icon, that she may better imagine basking in the male gaze. Craig, here, is basking in the female gaze. He's wearing swimming trunks, for God's sake. You don't fight in trunks. You look for ladies in trunks, or more to the point, the ladies look for you. But at the same time, he really couldn't be more straight if he took a course—he's the most rugged Bond the franchise has ever seen. So we're seeing, if not the first signs of a tectonic shift, at least the first signs of that shift being reflected in mainstream culture. It is no longer feminising to be gaped at by the opposite sex. On the contrary, it is the apex of masculinity.

This is the third way, if you like—we endeavoured not to objectify women, but that was too hard. What say we objectify men as well? That way, we are all equal, and yet we all still get to, you know, enjoy ourselves. Broadly, I am right behind this, but I can't help noticing, it hasn't played entirely into female hands, since there are now no women in it at all. ... Well,

there are a few, but they have tiny wee parts and they all get killed. And this sets me to thinking that that's the drawback of triangulated gender relations—sure, you can objectify men, just as women are objectified. Women respond to it, gay men respond to it, and straight men aspire to it. But you can't objectify men and women in the same cultural space. (Williams and Flynn, 2006)

The commentator understands that this portrayal of Bond suggests signs of a shift, a “liminal” moment, a change to the psychological order through a triangulation of gender relations, which “plays” with a kind of androgyny. This reconstruction of masculinity does not necessarily work out in the kind of ways that Irigaray and Neal would wish. However, the victimization of Bond and the corresponding portrayal of his susceptibility to violence is a challenge to macho stereotyping which may be something of a counterpoint to the focus on Craig's body *per se*.

The History Boys

Alan Bennett's play (2004) was produced as a film in 2006. At the heart of the plot of *The History Boys* is the rivalry between the newly appointed history teacher Irwin and Hector the long-serving teacher: “Conflict ensues. Not least because Hector, the old idealist, and Irwin, the young pragmatist, represent opposite conceptions of what the study of history should be. Opposite, too, in other ways. They are also, it emerges, old and new-school homosexuals. Hector gropes genitals, Irwin wants relationships” (Sutherland, 2006). In *The History Boys* the exploration of masculinity and male sexuality between adolescent and adult males and between adolescents demonstrates the construction of a number of different masculinities. Questions of achievement and status as well as of love and relationships are explored and masculinity is construed (among other examples) in relation to the characters' vulnerability to each other, both physically and emotionally. This again is a clear use of pathos in relation to the audience. The plot itself of *The History Boys* is in some senses an exploration of “liminality” in terms of leaving school, becoming adult, of finding one's self, including how the self is understood in terms of the stereotypes of gender and sexuality. In subtle and not-so-subtle ways heteronormativity is challenged in the construal of masculinity in this film, and once again a “queering” occurs in the constructing of masculinities in the various representations among the adults and adolescents. This also suggests a change in the psychological order in the perception and reception of the construction of masculinity. At the very least, *The History Boys* leaves the audience in no doubt that there different ways of being a man, and of men relating to each other in contemporary western society.

Contextualizing the Four Representations of Masculinity

In order to test Irigaray's understanding that symbolic changes follow on from psychological changes I will situate the “populist” evidence surrounding the reception of these four recent representations of masculinity in relation to three areas of academic discourse: [a] modern male stereotyping; [b] the male gaze; and [c] theorization of contemporary media constructions of gender. In situating the four representations I will be working with the understanding that there is a reciprocity

between the reception of the theorization of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship and the constructions of masculinity.

Modern male stereotyping

The construal of modern male stereotyping will be explored in relation to an understanding of the male body as symbolic of an ideal masculinity. Mosse argues that the modern stereotype of masculinity emerges from the second half of the eighteenth century, when the so-called manly virtues of will, power, honor and courage, were wedded to the quest for symbols in a time of “bewildering change” (1996, p. 5). Through the desire to make the abstract apparent in symbols, the male human body took on symbolic meaning, which was interpreted/constructed in relation to notions of classical beauty. It came to be understood that manly beauty symbolized virtue and thus the notion of an ideal form of the male body emerged in both science and art. This led to a reinforcement of the idea that there is a direct connection between appearance and beauty. As the Greeks had identified human beauty and moral character there emerged an alignment of beauty and virtue, which implied that the ugly were less virtuous (Mosse, 1996, p. 25). What is of particular interest is the involvement of J. J. Winckelmann (1717-1768) in the evolution of this stereotyping.⁶ He posits an understanding of male strength and restraint in which he suggests that the male body becomes “deified,” an example of the association of masculinity with divinity. What is crucial in understanding the contribution of Winckelmann to the evolution of this stereotyping is his own sexual orientation. As a gay man he undoubtedly brought a homoerotic aesthetic to his construction of a modern stereotype of masculinity (Mosse, 1996, p. 32).

In my view, each of the four examples in different ways still depends on this “modern stereotype” of masculinity. They also bear the imprint of a homoerotic aesthetic, which in several instances is made more explicit through the queering of the stereotype in its contemporary representations. The recognition of this ambiguity in the modern masculine stereotype affects the psychological order in which both human masculinity and intra-divine relations are construed and received. It suggests that the appeal to the transsexual imagery of the “father’s womb” in the symbolic order has resonances in the psychological order in contemporary society.

The male gaze

Discourse concerning “the male gaze” focuses on issues surrounding the relation between a text or representation and the reader/viewer. The construction of the notion of the male gaze emerges from work in depth psychology as applied to both human beings and texts. From the perspective of depth psychology, the human individual is understood not in terms of a coherent entity, but rather as a layered reality of the unconscious, ego, and superego. The individual is understood to be made up of contradictory parts, which may “speak” at different times or simultaneously. A radical deconstruction of the unitary self has been advanced, where heterogeneity rather than homogeneity and contradiction rather than consistency are seen as normative for the individual (Horrocks, 1995, p. 35). A similar analysis has also been applied to texts, in which “conscious” and “unconscious” aspects of a text have been identified and where “surface” or “depth” are seen as

potentially pulling against each other. Thus the apparent coherence of a text is subverted by positing different “voices” within it.

In terms of cinema or the visual image: Who is watching the film or looking at the image? Horrocks argues that the film-watching experience may make me unsure of who I am: the numerous identifications may take me out of myself. In Lacan’s understanding, identification is the means whereby the ego discovers itself. In Lacan’s mirror-stage the subject identifies with a visual body-image (Lacan, 2002). Lacan turns the relation between subject and text through 180 degrees. For Lacan, text is prior to subject, so that the subject seeks to discover who he/she is by means of the text, and in some senses the text creates the subject. In cinema (as mirror stage) we discover that we have lost ourselves and part of the pleasure of film is a surrender to the text. Identification is not a luxurious hobby, but the means whereby “I” come to know that I exist. This suggests that the interplay between the viewer and the image is a crucial aspect of any change in the psychological order.

Horrocks argues on the basis of the deconstruction of the individual and of the relation of “I” to the text, that the male viewer may identify with the female body as well as male (and vice versa) so that gender identification is extremely fluid. This means that the classic iteration of male gaze/female object is brought into question. The process of deconstruction is reinforced when males are “spectacularized” or the male body is fetishized in cinema or through visual images, and is foregrounded as spectacle in sport and popular music. Horrocks argues that cross-gender identification is to be found in many cultural forms, providing excitement and pleasure. However he also argues that these are deep dangerous waters, in which we search for ourselves (Horrocks, 1995, p. 50). Human beings use various cultural forms in order to construct an image of him/herself in another: “the human being is compelled to fracture him/herself in order to acquire knowledge and to become an ‘I’, but in the process the fractured self yearns for images that will restore itself to itself, and take it back to Paradise, where all things are one” (Horrocks, 1995, p. 50). Men and the male body have become the objects of voyeuristic looking. The viewer is male and the object is male: there is a male/male nexus, which is at least potentially homoerotic. However in the tradition of Hollywood, men do not ravish each other, they usually kill each other!

The male/male nexus is also to be found in sport. In many sports the male body is openly exhibited as a locus of beauty, grace, brutality. So why do male audiences watch male sport? One answer might be that male sport helps to construct male dominance through the idealization of the super-strong male body. Horrocks suggests that there are other answers: “I also want to argue that male sport caters for that intense male desire to look at male bodies. Sport permits a considerable displacement of this desire: the spectator need not be aware that this is what he wants at all” (Horrocks, 1995, p. 55). The male gaze at males is hedged about with taboo, it has been mystified and camouflaged, but Horrocks would argue that “having” and “being” are perhaps being inverted. Men are said to look at women to “have” them and to look at men to “be” them; but maybe sometimes the male wants to “be” a woman and “have” a man.

This conceptualization of the relationship between “text” and “viewer” suggests that the four representations of masculinity produce profound effects on the male “viewer,” which may be said to contribute to changes in the psychological

order in contemporary society. The fluid dynamic of the relationship between viewer and text as well as the fluidity of gender construction itself suggests that the reception of the four representations is highly complex. Yet these understandings themselves confirm that the psychological order is not unchanging, and is susceptible to radical realignment. Such understanding of the reception of “texts” further establishes the possibility of a reciprocity between intra-divine theorization and contemporary representations. The ambiguity in the construal of masculinity can be held in parallel with the transgressing of norms in the appeal to the father’s womb and the death of fatherhood.

Interpreting contemporary media

There is a general recognition in media/cultural studies that the producing of gender in media representations and constructions involves a reflexive process. The construal of gender in the popular media connects with a variety of cultural “scripts” or discourses. Those who reflect upon the construction of masculinity in lifestyle magazines suggest that there is a good deal of instability and contingency involved in the processes of construction which leads to ambiguity, contradiction, negotiation and fissure within and between those construals.

In relation to the hypothesis of this paper, a number of questions emerge: what is the relationship between cultural representations of masculinity, “lived” male subjectivities and performances of masculinity? Is it possible to make such distinctions in the first place? The work of Judith Butler (1999) presents a performative account of gender: “Butler’s basic premise is that gender is neither something we have, nor is it something we are, rather, it is something that we, with variable degrees of volition do. Gender is a discourse we both inhabit and employ, and also a performance with all the connotations of non-essentialism, transience, versatility and masquerade that this implies.” The (re-)construction of “masculinity (has) brought men into a new type of gendered subjecthood which (is) open to self reflection, criticism, analysis and debate” (Benwell, 2003, p. 1).

A brief genealogy serves to exemplify this process of reflection. By the 1960s an historical disjunction had occurred in patrimony, i.e. the communication of meaning and roles from one generation of men to the next (from father to son) (Benwell, 2003, p. 2). By the 1970s (in metropolitan classes), being a good man was measured against traditional feminine virtues of care, empathy and relatedness. But by the 1990s the deconstruction of masculinity led to a sense of men becoming emotionally inarticulate, disoriented, demoralized, and insecure. At that time there was a return in the media to primal man/hero (for example *Fight Club*). Morality was seen as effeminate, the only value that counted was the male desire for authenticity. In answer to the question: What does it mean to be a man? The answer was construed against a background in which the prevailing culture values authenticity and self-fulfillment. This meant that each man was called upon to invent his own identity, to live in his own way, or be true to himself. One manifestation of this response may be seen in the magazine *Arena*, where cynicism about duty and obligation was combined with a hedonistic celebration of men’s bodies and heterosexuality.

The ambiguity associated with contemporary constructions of masculinity within the popular media suggests that the four examples are fairly typical of the

current “practice” of gender. This in turn confirms the sense that the psychological order is currently in great flux, while also indicating that the “privilege” of masculinity is neither forgotten nor relinquished easily. The ambiguity of contemporary constructions of masculinity provides a context within which to receive change in the psychological order, as well as to receive “transsexual” understandings of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship. Here the “two way street” provides the Christian tradition with the opportunity to offer a renewed understanding of masculinity, rooted in a present-day reception of the doctrine of the Trinity, and to effect change in the symbolic order.

Out of the Womb of the Father?

The conceptualization of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship around the metaphor of the “father’s womb” is a use of metaphor and analogy in terms of the transgression of the usual expectations of a gendered description of the divine. This provides an understanding of Fatherhood and Sonship beyond notions of transcendence and dominance. Together with a Trinitarian theology of the Cross, *de utero patris* provides the basis for a realignment of the symbolic order in which masculinity is understood. These concepts of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship also provide the theoretical framework in which a change in the psychological order can be received and interpreted.

The accumulated understandings of the analysis of the four constructions of masculinity in relation to discourse on the modern masculine stereotype, “the male gaze” and the “practice of gender” clearly demonstrate that there are changes in the psychological order in relation to the construal of masculinity. The examination of the construal of the modern masculine stereotype, which remains evident in the contemporary representations, suggests that from the outset that stereotype of idealized or hyper-masculinity was rooted in a homoerotic aesthetic. The analysis of the “male gaze” gives clear indications of the ways in which the representation of masculinity is construed and received is always going to be fluid and ambiguous. And the critique of the construction of masculinity in media studies reinforces these findings and suggests that the present day reception of constructs of masculinity is highly complex. The representation of the male (body) as an object of desire and of beauty opens up an understanding of masculinity which witnesses to ambiguous notions of strength and power, and vulnerability, and it calls into question the classic alignment of femininity and materiality. There is evidence in the reception of these examples that challenges a heteronormative understanding of masculinity, rooted in a “queering” of masculinity and masculine stereotypes. Hyper-masculinity in terms of beauty, strength and power is qualified by a clear representation of vulnerability in the four examples which is an evocation of pathos in relation to the audience. The contemporary commodification of the male offers a construal of masculinity which challenges men’s self-understanding. Thus the four representations demonstrate a construction of masculinity which suggests a change in the order of psychology, preliminary to a change in the symbolic order.

The re-alignment to be perceived in the order of psychology from the construction of masculinity in the contemporary media and arts provides the basis for a present-day reception of the intra-divine Father–Son relationship in the symbolic order. The re-alignment of the symbolic order in turn offers the possibility

of re-construing and re-receiving the father–son relationship within human relationships as well as within the divine communion of the Trinity, and of human masculinity as such. Change in the psychological order of the construal of masculinity which affects theological understandings of the divine persons of the Trinity can also be the impetus for further change in the symbolic order leading to a challenge of patriarchal relations and power systems in the Church and society. Metaphor and analogy are used not so much to describe the divine persons or to fix the notion of human masculinity, as to suggest that such understandings are illusive and transient.

Constructing Masculinity

The phraseology with which I began, *de utero patris* suggests that a wider use of imagery and metaphor may in itself assist in the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and stereotypical gendered language and the emergence of “dominant symbols” which may reconfigure human understanding in relation to a broad range of *significata*. The “queering” of the construal of masculinity leads to a deconstruction of the male experience of being a gendered human being. It confronts the male with levels of ambiguity and complexity concerning the construal of masculinity with which most men do not usually wish to work. Most men work with concrete “norms” about themselves which subvert the complex and ambiguous reality of gender and sexuality. The four representations of masculinity, alongside many others in contemporary culture, confront the male viewer with that ambiguous reality. The accumulative impact of these possibilities provides a beginning to the fulfillment of Neal and Irigaray’s desire for psychological change as a preliminary to symbolic change in relation to both the human and the divine.

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Notes

- ¹ See Marion (1991), where he deals with the distinction between idols and icons.
- ² The Septuagint text of Psalm 109.3: μετὰ σοῦ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ τῆς δυνάμεώς σου ἐν ταῖς λαμπρότησιν τῶν ἁγίων ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε. The Vulgate text of Psalm 109.3: *Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae in splendoribus sanctorum: ex utero ante luciferum genui te*.
- ³ Peter Lombard, *Totium Psalterium Commentarii*, (Psalm 109). In *Migne Patrologia Latina*, 191: 999-1000: see especially 1000bc.
- ⁴ For example, Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs 7* and *On Perfection*. See also Harrison (1990, 1993).
- ⁵ A term borrowed from Arnold van Gennep (1909).
- ⁶ For example Winckelmann (1755) and (1764).

Paul M. Collins
 University of Chichester
 College Lane, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 6PE/ENGLAND
 e: p.collins@chi.ac.uk



Review of Eric Magnuson, *Changing Men, Transforming Culture: Inside the Men's Movement* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007) xiv + 167 pp.

Nathan Hitchcock

The mythopoetic men's movement went underground again after a difficult season of national publicity in the early 1990s. "New men" were presented as those who flee to the woods, take their shirts off, drum, tell fairy tales, weep, howl, hug other men, and come home kinder—but basically the same. Twenty years later only a fraction of mythopoetic groups survive, and, understandably, they make pains to stay out of the limelight. Why, then, does this men's movement continue to anger and inspire and amuse and haunt us? Eric Magnuson gives a modest but compelling answer: mythopoetic work changes men from the inside-out. For all their political shortcomings, these spiritual-therapeutic groups have constituted a kind of "seed movement" that challenges hegemony and reconstructs a new social order from the bottom up.

In chapter one Magnuson gives an overview of the mythopoetic men's movement and evaluations of it. The problem with earlier critiques from Michael Kimmel, Kenneth Clatterbaugh, Judith Newton and the like, he says, was their unwillingness to engage with the movement from within, preferring to dismantle the popular texts. For all their theoretical insight, their criticism tended to miss the liberating reconstruction of masculinity that was happening at the most basic levels. To rectify this, Magnuson presents a longitudinal ethnographic study of one particular men's group, the Open Plain Men's Circle. He presents findings from his eight-year analysis of this one independent organization. Through 230 meetings, 55 hours of interviews and hundreds of informal conversations, the author concludes that mythopoetic men are in the process of rejecting the old masculine way of "being unreliable, overly rational, disempowered, emotionally closed off, deceitful, unloving, competitive, and oppressive," erecting in its place a masculinity that is "reliable, spiritual, open-minded, empowered, emotionally open, truthful, loving, cooperative, and liberational" (p. 18).

As a sociologist, Magnuson is very conscious about knitting together the macro- and the micro-. He therefore devotes his second chapter to various modern gender theories and argues for the superiority of the semiotic view (which understands gender as symbolic social constructions rather than essential traits inherent in the sexes). This purview aligns him more closely with profeminist critics than with the men's movement's major exponents. Magnuson's methodology assures the reader that the conclusions of his fairly narrow study are not arbitrary. While he succeeds on this score, the most serious shortcoming of *Changing Men, Transforming Culture* is Magnuson's claim that the Open Plain Men's Circle is

representative of the mythopoetic men's movement. It seems to me that his study glosses over the variegated expressions in the work of Joseph Jastrab, Robert Bly, Michael Meade, the ManKind Project, and the hundreds of groups throughout New England, the Northwoods and California. These groups ranged widely with regard to type of organization, programs, essentialistic language and spiritual tenor. On this level, the superior historico-sociological study remains Michael Schwalbe's *Unlocking the Iron Cage* (1996). Magnuson compensates for this historical lacuna with a persistent appeal to the theoretical macro-level.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the book comes in chapter three, in which Magnuson describes the function of the mythopoetic leader as an "organic intellectual." The leader is the practitioner and interpreter of the big ideas of the movement. Moreover, in bringing material and activities to the group, he is at the forefront of evoking cognitive, practical and even political change within the men. Magnuson details seven functions of the organic intellectual as he guides the group. This leader exerts tremendous influence on the shape of the group through suggestion and manipulation—though his authority is not beyond question. I sense this presentation sheds light even on leaders within (the more typical) democratic men's group, since one or two men in any given setting tend to become the *de facto* disseminators of ideas and the gatekeepers of the circle. I also found of interest the wide array of religious practices imported into Magnuson's own group. There is a pluralistic reconfiguration going on among these men as the leader tries to introduce, filter and harmonize disparate religious customs.

The last two chapters describe how mythopoets critique hegemonic masculinity and pull together something significantly different in its place. By and large made up of financially successful whites, these men go through the long process of unraveling the traditional values that got them there in the first place. They feel oppressed by the closed, rational, shaming, stoic and workaholic tendencies of a so-called "masculine" lifestyle. Such patterns, which the men associate with capitalism, begin to be identified as vapid and "unspiritual." In place of this masculinity, mythopoetic men imagine and enact a counter-hegemonic culture in which "the new man is coded as faithful, personal, attentive, communicative, spiritual, open-minded, easy-going, creative, adventurous, direct, and empowered" (p. 145). Magnuson provides a helpful appendix of mythopoetic liberational language which clearly shows how these men articulate a new binary between the old masculine code and a new, freer way of being a man.

Magnuson establishes quite effectively the first part of his title: these are indeed changing men. He gives example after example of changes the men of the group have made in their emotional lives, their personal interaction and their vocational arrangements. He shows how New Age men come to re-imagine their own world. Less convincing is Magnuson's second premise: transforming culture. "It is reasonable to conclude that the movement's successes in terms of changing gender ideology and the larger culture have had significant effects far beyond the one hundred thousand men who have been directly involved" (p. 146), the author claims, though the only real evidence he adduces is the testimony of the men themselves. He has good reason to hypothesize that wives, family, friends and coworkers will benefit from male psycho-social reconstructive work, I think, though

other, more targeted studies will have to be conducted in order to contradict the profeminist claim that mythopoets fail to bridge the personal and public spheres.

The personal is political. Mythopoetic men approach this phrase in a rather different way than second-wave feminists. Women have had to understand that their private lives are shaped by political realities. Granted. But can men (that is, privileged men) understand this also to mean that their own internal changes will shape society? Magnuson uses ethnography and gender theory to suggest that this very thing is happening. One way of looking at his hopeful study is simply to extend the holism of Magnuson's methodology: if the micro- and the macro- can go together, why not the personal and the political?

Nathan Hitchcock
New College, University of Edinburgh/SCOTLAND
e: nathan.hitchcock@lycos.com



**Review of Kenneth J. Doka, Terry L. Martin,
*Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the
Ways Men and Women Mourn*, rev. ed.
(New York: Routledge, 2010) 258 pp.**

Katharina von Kellenbach

The title of their previous book *Men Don't Cry...Women Do* (2000) aptly circumscribes the authors' concern: how to explain and validate male patterns of grief that fail to conform to therapeutic expectations of successful "ventilation" of emotions that accompany experiences of loss. Terry Martin, professor of psychology at Hood College, and Kenneth Doka, professor of gerontology, are well respected authorities in the field of thanatology and draw on many years of research and scholarship. They call for greater openness among counseling and bereavement professionals and more acceptance of the diversity of coping strategies and "dissonant" grief patterns among bereaved people. Martin and Doka criticize dominant counseling paradigms for privileging the expression of emotion in so far as that marginalizes "'masculine' patterns of grief...[which] are different, but no less effective than, (sic) more 'conventional' or 'feminine' was of dealing with loss" (p. 7). Men, they argue, are not "ineffectual grievers" but do it differently and just as successfully. The book then aims to describe and rehabilitate "masculine" coping strategies. Early on, Doka and Martin discard explicitly gendered nomenclature and introduce the terminology of "intuitive" and "instrumental patterns" of grief, which they consider as "typical" of and correlated with gender, but not determined by it. "Instrumental" grievers work through grief in a more cognitive manner and experience and express less emotion (except anger, p. 72); "Intuitive" grievers "go with" their feelings and require social support where their emotional needs can be expressed openly and freely. "Instrumental" grievers pour themselves into activities and attempt to "master their environment" (pp. 70-75). They think through and solve problems (p. 75) that arise from their changed life circumstance. "Intuitive grievers" reach out for help and benefit from counseling where they can "ventilate" their feelings. Neither strategy, the authors assert, is superior. They are just different and each deserves validation and support.

Beyond the book's concrete proposals to correct contemporary grief counseling practices, I want to examine some of the underlying assumptions about gender that I find troubling. My first concern involves certain slippages between descriptive and prescriptive gender definitions. Without a doubt, contemporary gender role socialization profoundly affects and shapes people's experiences and expression of emotions, including grief. But should such gendered role expectations be validated and considered "good" and "right"? The authors stress throughout the book that "gender influences patterns of grief, but gender does not determine patterns of grief" (pp. 4, 10, 141, 202), but they do not truly move "beyond gender," as the title promises. Instead of envisioning grieving beyond gender in a world of expanded gender fluidity, the authors reject what they call "androgynous

perspectives” (pp. 184-186). “Androgyny,” defined as “the perspective that one can learn much from both the feminine ability to recognize and to express feelings and the masculine ability to persevere in the midst of crisis” (p. 184), strikes Doka and Martin as “doubly incarcerating” because it threatens to force an “uncomfortable and unfamiliar approach” upon an individual in the middle of a crisis and vulnerability (p. 185). The authors’ use of the dated concept of “androgyny,” which derives from C. G. Jung’s theories developed in the 1920s, points towards their pre- or post-feminist perspectives on gender. They remain beholden to notions of masculinity (more recently advanced by Robert Bly [p. 135]) that are somewhat tempered by Jung’s idea that men should integrate their feminine sides (*anima*) while women may access their masculine *animus*. The concept of “androgyny” reaffirms the gendered division of the world. It is a world of weak emotional women and strong heroic men, a fiction that conveniently overlooks that women have persevered through each and every crisis weathered by men. While no one calls for the imposition of feminist reeducation campaigns in the midst of a life crisis, the opposite conclusion, namely to implement implicitly gendered counseling strategies seems equally problematic.

My second concern involves the authors’ contention that these patterns are “different but equal.” The specter of “separate but equal” raises alarm bells because masculinity and femininity are never just different but always mutually interdependent. Women’s emotional labor of care compensates for men’s lack of relational investment. The “instrumental” approach of “mastery” over “oneself,” the “environment” and “one’s feelings” (p. 85) is usually upheld by the invisible work of an “intuitive” partner. Men’s alleged “cognitive” approach to the world is sustained by emotional “care” performed by women. The authors acknowledge that “instrumental grievors tend to return to their jobs and their previous levels of performance sooner than intuitive grievors” (p. 117) but they fail to see the connection. It may just be that “instrumental grievors” benefit from the emotional labor of “intuitive grievors.” There is a reason why widowers remarry so much quicker than widows. Men know intuitively that the “thinking function” of mastery depends upon the “feeling function” of embodied care, usually though not always, delivered by women. “Masculinity” and “femininity” are not just different, they depend on and reinforce each other—usually in a manner that upholds the supremacy of men. Apart from the context of therapy, our (capitalist) society prizes and remunerates “mastery,” “thinking,” problem solving and control of emotion, while those who wallow in emotion and ventilate their feelings are considered weak, inefficient and useless. The costs and benefits of these two grieving styles are not distributed equally.

For readers of this journal it should be noted that spirituality receives only cursory mention as one of four “reactions” to the loss of a loved one (physical, affective, cognitive and spiritual). A rather functionalist approach to spirituality defined as the search for “meaning and purpose of life” (p. 23) is not particularly illuminating to scholars in the discipline of religious studies or theology.

Doka and Martin challenge grief support agencies and individuals to broaden their assistance strategies for male clients in grief counseling. They show persuasively that gender expectations shape the experience and expression of grief. Their conclusion that grief support should be tailored to the particular needs and

strengths of individuals' coping strategies is well taken. But their simplistic gender analysis makes this book less than helpful for scholars engaged in feminist and gender studies.

Katharina von Kellenbach
St. Mary's College of Maryland/USA
e: kvonkellenbach@smcm.edu



Review of Sven Glawion, Elahe Haschemi Yekani, and Jana Husmann-Kastein (eds.), *Erlöser: Figurationen männlicher Hegemonie* [Redeemer: Figurations of Male Hegemony] (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007) 218 pp. and

Susanne Lanwerd, and Márcia Elisa Moser (eds.), *Frau–Gender–Queer: Gendertheoretische Ansätze in der Religionswissenschaft* [Women–Gender–Queer: Gender Theory in Religious Studies] (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010) 291 pp.

Björn Krondorfer

To insert gender as an analytical category into the academic study of theology and religion has been met with resistance at German universities. For years feminist theologians have struggled to get a foot into theology departments, and the more recent gender and sexuality studies have not fared much better. Gender-conscious theologies are produced at the margins of the theological establishment and often are published in edited volumes, like the recent *Theologie und Geschlecht* by Walz and Plüss (2008). They are read by an interested public but generally ignored by the professoriate.

The separate discipline of *Religionswissenschaften* (religious sciences) at German universities, which has deliberately severed its ties from any theological and faith-based perspective, has also been reluctant to incorporate gender as a critical category. However, due to the fact that the fields of *Religionswissenschaften* and cultural studies conjoin in some places, gender and sexuality issues are beginning to find their way into the research. The two recently published volumes, *Erlöser* and *Frau–Gender–Queer*, speak to this trend. They illustrate the variety of scholarly approaches regarding the intersection of religion, culture and gender, in which religious phenomena are subjected to gender-conscious readings and where the genderedness of knowledge production itself gets queried in the *Religionswissenschaften*.

The two volumes consist of fourteen contributions each by mostly younger scholars who, at the time of publication, were in post-graduate, doctoral and master programs (*Frau–Gender–Queer*, however, also includes contributions of professors occupying chairs in *Religions-* and *Kulturwissenschaften*). Given the situation briefly sketched above, it does not come as a surprise that it is mainly a younger generation that is pushing for inclusion of gender and sexuality issues. In light of a competitive academic environment, in which critical gender approaches still need to find a solid footing, such efforts are commendable. There are, however, drawbacks. Too many of the contributors of the two volumes under review are caught up in summarizing the

secondary literature and in rehearsing already known theoretical debates rather than presenting fleshed-out case studies and innovative arguments that can stand on their own. Because a scent of incompleteness hovers over several chapters, readers might be left dissatisfied. *Erlöser* and *Frau–Gender–Queer* are, so to speak, setting the table for an intriguing menu but do not yet serve a meal.

Erlöser opens with the hypothesis that religious male redeemer figures appear in changed and transformed ways in secular contexts. This thesis is located within a larger context as described in the preface by Stefanie von Schnurbein. She states that “religion” is currently rediscovered by different disciplines as an influential and potent force in societal and discursive contexts. Hence, *Erlöser* understands itself as a contribution to gender analysis as it pertains to religious materials in its various (secular) guises. It follows in the footsteps of Christina von Braun—professor of cultural and gender studies in Berlin, who has built up a small following in Germany—who argues that “secularization” should be “understood as the transformation of the religious in modernity rather than its disappearance or marginalization” (p. 12). This framing permits inclusion of such divergent disciplines as cultural and gender studies, literature, American studies, communication theory, pedagogy, philosophy and art history.

Religious male redeemers, so claims the thesis, have been appropriated by different segments of modern culture because of their strong potential for generating and shaping discourses that inscribe “hegemonial masculinity” into the “symbolic order” (p. 14). “In the occidental tradition of redeemer figures, [men] innovate themselves as European knights and soldiers, white colonial rulers and missionaries, leaders of movements, doctors and scientists, *Überfathers* and father-killing sons as well as postmodern Hollywood heroes, all in the name of founding cultures and civilizations” (p. 15). Instances of such discursive reconfigurations are then traced in literary, filmic, political and artistic productions as well as analyzed within national, racialized and pedagogical contexts. The range of the appearances of the figure of male redeemers reaches from Kierkegaard and Strindberg to Bruce Springsteen and Mel Gibson, from Rudolf Steiner to C. G. Jung, from Robert Musil to Norman Mailer and James Baldwin, from the English gentleman-hero to romanticized versions of Polish nationalism in the writing of a transgendered Polish author. It includes the analysis of gendered nation-building in the work of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as interviews with male clients of prostitutes within a framework of sexual identity formation.

The diverse chapters reveal an uneven application and comprehension of religious phenomena. Religion frequently vanishes behind the conceptual language of particular disciplines or the specific case studies under discussion. Chapters that foreground more strongly a religious dimension are Simon Strick’s analysis of Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion of the Christ* (with particular emphasis on the interplay of the gaze and the spectacular of the body) and Swen Glawion’s critique of male spirituality in the writing of three German-speaking authors who have postulated an archetypal and mythopoetic understanding of gendered spirituality (C. G. Jung, Franz Alt, Anselm Grün). Glawion argues that behind the facade of an emancipatory agenda, revisionist Christian and German national ideals of masculinity are reinvigorated. Other chapters worth pointing to are: Daniela Hrzan’s creative investigation of “white masculinity” by comparing Bruce Springsteen’s album “The

Rising” with photographer Renée Cox’s “Yo Mama’s Last Supper,” which features a black, female, naked Jesus; Jana Husman-Kasten’s critique of the anthroposophic race and gender philosophy of Rudolf Steiner; and Ulrike Auga’s exploration of the confluence of South African nation-building and masculinity.

Generally, it appears that the editors of *Erlöser* must have provided strict guidelines about length, with the result that several chapters fail to provide sufficient context and background for those readers who are less familiar with a particular theme examined in this wide-ranging, interdisciplinary volume. *Erlöser* may have benefited from choosing fewer but more fully developed contributions.

Lanwerd’s and Moser’s *Frau–Gender–Queer* suffers from a similar problem. Here, too, one gets the impression that contributors were asked not to exceed a specific word count so as to make room for all the chapters. The quality, however, fluctuates heavily. Some chapters are of high scholarly prose while others, arguably, should not have been published at all (they recall decent work by graduate and undergraduate students that should be best kept in the files of their mentors rather than presented to the public). One is also irritated by the design flaws in the layout of the text, the number of typographical errors, and inconsistent bibliographic styles. A more rigorous editorial selection would have given *Frau–Gender–Queer* more consistency and avoided redundancy.

The three key terms are gender, sexuality and religion, and Lanwerd and Moser understand them as transdisciplinary categories that intersect, overlap and inform each other. Since most contributors come from an academic background in religious/cultural studies, theology and gender studies there is a shared common ground with regard to questions of religion. There is, however, a built-in redundancy due to the volume’s agenda to examine the theoretical underpinnings of gender in the *Religionswissenschaften*. Repeatedly, one learns about gender theoretical categories derived from the schools of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, with frequent references to the work of Christina von Braun. The recitations of theoretical positions are not varied enough to keep one’s attention.

Frau–Gender–Queer sets itself the task to question assumptions of standards of objectivity and value-neutrality in the conventional *Religionswissenschaften*, which has set itself apart from theology by replacing a faith-based hermeneutic with the scientific-secular study of religion. “The intention of the burgeoning *Religionswissenschaften* has been to come out of the shadows of theology and classical oriental philology,” writes Ulrike Auga. “This was accomplished only in the last decades by combining the historical and comparative dimensions in the history of religion with social sciences and philosophy. Ideally, the result would be a comparative *Religionswissenschaft* that is informed by the most current theoretical debates” (p. 230). What is needed, Birgit Heller writes elsewhere in the volume, is a “gender-conscious religious research [*Religionsforschung*],” where the subject position of the author is no longer “hidden behind claims of objectivity.” Is “religious indifference,” she asks, really the most beneficial position to occupy in the field of *Religionswissenschaften* (pp. 143-44)?

Unfortunately, the perspectives and positioning of the authors vis-à-vis religion remain largely unexplored in *Frau–Gender–Queer*. For example, Christina von Braun’s opening chapter on “Heteronormativity in the Three Religions of the Book” pulls together materials from well-known sources (for Judaism: David Biale,

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Susannah Heschel; for Islam: Leila Ahmed, W. M. Watt; for Christianity: Caroline Walker Bynum, Leo Steinberg, Peter Brown), but her own position remains undisclosed. She wants to reveal the structural differences in the symbolic order of gender in these religious traditions and admits that her prototypical (*idealtypisch*) construction may lead to simplifications. Indeed, the result is a mostly simplified sketch. Von Braun's conclusion that "all three religions of the Book possess a stern heteronormativity, but that the latter is very differently justified," (p. 34) does not surpass common sense.

Susanne Schröter's promising title on feminist reinterpretations of the Qur'an and Sunna is largely based on summaries, too—in her case on the work of scholars Riffat Hassan, Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi. Schröter writes a succinct overview of the current debate and incorporates important Islamic concepts, such as the distinction between the two hermeneutical modes of *ijtihad* and *taqlid*. Her piece is a helpful introduction but does not constitute new research. She positions herself in support of Islamic feminists, but her own religious commitment (or non-commitment) is not subject to self-reflection. With Birgit Heller we may ask: Why is Schröter "religiously indifferent" while simultaneously claiming the "feminist position" of the *other*, in her case, of Muslim women?

More innovative is the approach taken by Lydia Potts and Jan Kühnemund. They examine different masculine behaviors among Muslim migrants in Europe and how these young men negotiate culturally distinct, normative codes. Noteworthy is Stefanie Schnurbein's exploration of the figure of the shaman as a queer icon. She cautions against any easy appropriation of shamanism since the latter is often grounded in the gender essentialism and right-wing ideology of neopaganism. Michael Brinkschröder examines how same-sex love gets reinscribed into symbolic systems of religions in an underdetermined, yet erotically connoted way. He illustrates his argument by looking at the operations of the *logos* in Philo, Paul and select early Christologies. Susanne Lanwerd offers a brief essay on the photographic representation of veiled Muslim women in German newspapers, explaining how and why the juxtaposition of a veiled woman and white male soldiers resumes an Orientalist gaze that solidifies Western ideals of secularism. Again, her own perspective as a secular woman scholar is only presumed but not explicated.

I mentioned earlier that some contributions would have best been excised from *Frau–Gender–Queer*. One example is Eva Tolksdorf's "Homosexual Orientation and Christian Religiosity." Couched in heavy but undigested lingo, we find a narrative interpretation of an interview with a former Protestant minister who had his coming-out only after his retirement. In Tolksdorf's jargon, it reads thus: "Im Rahmen meines Forschungsprojektes wurde die qualitativ-empirische Datenerhebungsmethode eines leitfadengestützten biographisch-narrativen Interviews angewendet [within the confines of my research project, I used a qualitative-empirical method of data inquiry of a biographical-narrative interview based on a main connecting thread]" (p. 82). Her data basis, however, consist of only one (!) interview of 118 minutes. I would not accept this even as a senior paper from an undergraduate student! In cases like this, Lanwerd and Moser should have taken a more prudent and rigorous editorial stance or followed a peer-reviewed model of assessment.

Some repetition could have been avoided by opening *Frau–Gender–Queer* with a solid piece on the theoretical framework rather than having too many

contributors repeating these debates in their own words. Such a chapter—in a slightly expanded version—could have been Márcia Moser’s “The Gender of Religion,” in which she sketches the conceptual perimeters of the volume’s main focus on gender theory and religious studies. Although Moser focuses on the category of “woman,” she also briefly reviews the role of sexualities and queer studies that deconstruct the male–female binary. She delineates with clarity some of the important terminology, such as intersectionality and interdependence. Rather than being tucked away two thirds into the reading, her chapter might have been better placed at the front of *Frau–Gender–Queer*.

In conclusion: The two volumes show us the paths that need to be taken, and it is hoped that they inspire further work of more consistent quality to emerge in the future.

Björn Krondorfer
St. Mary’s College of Maryland/USA
e: bhkrondorfer@smcm.edu



Review of Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010) xvi + 376 pp.

Claire Clark

Academics are professional skeptics. Among other things, we have learned to be wary of the book introduction, burned too many times from single-digit page numbers that over-promise and under-deliver. Trysh Travis's recent monograph, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey*, is the rare book that more than lives up to its promises: the rich contents of this book far surpass the vague claim on the dust jacket, which tells us that Travis will argue that "what unites these varied cultures of recovery is their desire to offer spiritual solutions to problems of gender and power." Travis certainly takes gender seriously, but her cultural history is both more sweeping and more nuanced than a formulaic feminist Foucauldian analysis might allow. In Travis's introduction, she makes clear that the primary aim of her book is not to deconstruct facets of the recovery movement, but to lay the groundwork for establishing an "adequate sense" of what the term means (p. 3). Her second stated purpose is to "establish recovery—its history, its organizing principles, and its culture—as a legitimate subject for sustained scholarly analysis" (p. 8). She capably accomplishes both goals.

The first section of the book, "Addiction and Recovery," establishes a working definition of recovery culture(s) by making the crucial distinction between Alcoholics Anonymous and the professional treatment industry. Without ignoring the ways in which the theories put forth by associations were in concert (both in seeking public recognition and in developing a "distinctive rhetoric"), Travis begins with the implication that future studies of recovery would do well to make a primary distinction between voluntary associations like AA and the recovery industry based on 12-step principles or models. In this section, the "distinctive rhetoric" that would later become the "language of the heart" of the book's title, begins with a discussion of the "disease" concept of alcoholism. Rather than attempting to debunk this concept, Travis historicizes it, tracing its development as well as its uses, as it was alternately put forth by various actors throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. This genealogy of the disease concept of addiction is traced through: the language of Alcoholics Anonymous and its founders; the theories of the Yale School of Alcohol Studies and Marty Mann's National Committee for Education on Alcoholism; the policies of the federal government, beginning in 1963 with the Community Mental Health Centers Act; and the agendas of "process" addiction advocates, who expanded the "disease" concept to many aspects of modern life, including sex and food. After historicizing how "addictions" of various sorts came to

be understood as a “disease” on par with type one diabetes, Travis turns her attention to the “antidote” as offered by Alcoholics Anonymous: “surrender.”

The second chapter illustrates how AA’s concept of “surrender”—and AA itself—can be traced to AA’s theological roots in both New Thought mysticism and Protestant (Oxford Group) evangelism. It also traces its roots biographically, in the life stories of its founders, Bill Wilson, Bob Smith and the largely white, Protestant, middle-class men who formed the earliest AA groups. While much of the content of this section will be familiar to historians of addiction, Travis’s careful delineation between the various historical actors who contributed to the “diseasing” of America, and her introduction of a new conceptual framework from which to view the early AA paradigm of “surrender,” are worthy contributions to the available scholarship.

At the end of the first section, Travis coins the phrase “alcoholic equalitarianism,” situating it as a response to Victorian success ideology and an offshoot of Christian equalitarianism, a movement that held that salvation was available to “all who would seek it, irrespective of rank or station” (p. 92). This equalitarian “self-in-relation” cultivated by the AA group was supported by a gift economy, as articulated in one AA slogan: “You have to give it [sobriety] away in order to keep it” (p. 93).

In the second section of the book, Travis argues that AA developed its own print culture to support this ideology. Through the production of AA’s central text (the “Big Book”) and its approved literature, AA was able to protect and institutionalize the anti-capitalist ideology of alcoholic equalitarianism and the gift economy of AA. Those who have read Matthew J. Raphael or Susan Cheever’s accounts of how the Big Book came to be will not be surprised by Travis’s narrative, but her discussion of how books can both build and shield institutions will be of interest to historians of print culture and religious scholars, particularly those interested in the intersections between exegesis and power. The latter half of the section concentrates on the development of the book production of the nonprofit (but highly profitable) recovery center and publishing house, Hazelden. Hazelden’s expansion from a treatment center explicitly based on the AA model to a “multidisciplinary” center roughly coincided with its decision to begin publishing its own literature, beginning with the meditation book *Twenty Four Hours A Day*, which Alcoholics Anonymous previously refused to publish. When recovering academic Karen Casey crafted a companion meditation book for women in recovery, Hazelden found that marketing different versions of recovery to different demographics with different addictions was a highly profitable enterprise. While Travis argues for the centrality of the book market in recovery culture, one could also read her account of the explosion of the daily meditation book as a model case study for future scholars who wish to investigate how AA’s recovery culture began to evolve and proliferate in a variety of media and institutional settings.

The third section of the book, which brings us to the present day, finds it difficult to avoid addressing other forms of media. Travis divides the final section into two parts: the first deals with feminist and lesbian recovery movements, the second with the unavoidable recovery icon, Oprah Winfrey. Unlike critics of feminist recovery movements, who argue that the culture of recovery co-opted and deflated the politically profitable consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and 70s, Travis concludes that post-12 step recovery is not “feminism’s evil other,” but its offspring:

“a hybrid discourse of spiritual seeking and self-love, and a key tool through which average American women pondered questions of gender, self, and power” (p. 228). The hybridity and ubiquity of market recovery culture begin to cause some problems for Travis’s print-centric analysis, and if there is one quibble with the book, it is that the final section is a bit too tidy in its discussion of today’s admittedly messy and multiplatform marketplace of recovery. Identity categories established in earlier chapters, as men in early AA groups of the 1940s and lesbians in grassroots San Francisco recovery groups of the 80s negotiated their gender and sexuality, seem more overtly complicated as the book approaches the turn of the twenty-first century. I wondered what Travis would make of the 1990s books by transgender activist Kate Bornstein (such as *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely*).

In conclusion, Travis is neither a booster nor a detractor of the cultures of recovery she describes, and her willingness to seriously engage with the lay scholarship produced *by* AA members and feminist recovery groups and the critical body of scholarship produced *about* them, is the book’s greatest strength. While other academics have admirably historicized various portions of the American recovery movement, Travis’s examination is the best introductory survey published to date.

Claire Clark
Emory University/USA
e: cdclar4@emory.edu



Review of William Ming Liu, Derek Kenji Iwamoto, and Mark H. Chae (eds.), *Culturally Responsive Counseling with Asian American Men* (New York: Routledge, 2010) xxi + 346 pp.

Philip Culbertson

This is the fifth volume in a continuing series from Routledge devoted to issues of interest to scholars in Men's Studies, as well as to psychologists, counselors, psychotherapists, social workers, and clergy. I wrote a review of volume 3 in this series, which was published in JMMS 4(1). At least seven more volumes are projected in the series.

The 24 male and female contributors to the 16 chapters in this volume have done a consistently fine job. The writing is clear and lively, and well supported by academic references and standard counseling theory, especially cognitive behavioral practices. Each chapter is illustrated throughout with a specific case study. Some of the cases are real, and some are manufactured. The final chapter in the book, "On Becoming an Asian American Man" by Jeffrey Scott Mio (son of a pre-WWII Japanese immigrant who was interred during the war), is an autobiographical essay about growing through the confusion of hybridity into a comfortable and mature, self-valuing identity. Since one of the conventions that holds these essays together is the case studies associated with each chapter, to complete this book with such a strong autobiographical piece is most fitting.

Asian Americans, comprised of over 30 specific ethnic groups, presently number 14 million in the United States, a number that is expected to triple within the next five years. Similar proportional statistics hold true for England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Yet oddly, in my own ten years as a psychotherapist in private practice in New Zealand, I only saw two Asian clients, and only taught three Asian therapists-in-training. The Asian community is private (see the issue of "face" as discussed later) and is unfamiliar with the usefulness of counseling as it is defined in the West, and its members are often struggling to acculturate, assimilate, and even survive, to the point that there is little time to call on non-Asian professionals for help and support.

There is no overt discussion of spirituality in this book that would automatically qualify it for review in *Journal of Men, Masculinities, and Spiritualities*. But four chapters in particular lend themselves to themes often discussed within the domain of existential spiritualities, and it is to these four themes that I will devote the rest of this review. My "take" on existential spiritualities is very much informed by Irvin D. Yalom's *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980).

To begin his chapter on Meaninglessness, Yalom quotes an anonymous suicide note:

Imagine a happy group of morons who are engaged in work. They are carrying bricks in an open field. As soon as they have stacked all the bricks at one end of the field, they proceed to transport them to the opposite end. This continues without stop and everyday of every year they are busy doing the same thing. One day one of the morons stops long enough to ask himself what he is doing. He wonders what purpose there is in carrying the bricks. And from that instant on he is not quite as content with his occupation as he had been before.

I am the moron who wonders why he is carrying the bricks. (Yalom, 1980, p. 419, citing Cantril & Bumstead, 1960, p. 308)

Chapter 14 of *Counseling*, by Y. Joel Wong and Mai-Lin Poon, is entitled “Counseling Asian American Men Who Demonstrate Suicidal Behavior.” The case study exemplar is a 25-year-old Vietnamese American man in a midwestern city in the United States. Asian/Pacific Islander Americans of retirement age and older have the highest rate of completed suicides in the U.S., and American college students of the same ethnic grouping report more suicidal ideation than their Anglo counterparts. The four most common reasons given in the chapter for the suicidal activity among Asian American males is (a) family conflict, (b) racism, (c) masculinity concerns, and (d) the “model minority” stereotype, that is, that Asian Americans are the “foreigners among us” whom Anglos find the least offensive (p. 287). Repeated studies have shown that, in contrast to White American men, Asian American men are often stereotyped as being asexual, effeminate, nerdy, passive, and physically unattractive (p. 289). For some, it is only a small jump from there to suicidal ideation, particularly when they have not had the opportunity to construct and claim some sense of meaning and problem-resolution in their lives. The chapter ends with eight recommendations for specific ways of working with suicidal Asian American male clients.

The opposite of meaninglessness is meaning-making, a form of spirituality to which many people turn when the doctrines and dogmas of organized religion have lost their appeal. The process of making meaning within the relationship between counselor and client is the subject of Chapter 3, “A Domain- and Context-Specific View of Acculturation: Implications for Counseling Asian American Men,” by Matthew J. Miller and Robert H. Lim. The chapter focuses in particular on issues of “face”—one’s social standing or representation within social contexts. “Men are traditionally viewed as the primary leaders or figures representing [the collectivist family group] and, by default, are responsible for their and their group’s positive and negative actions” (p. 21, citing D. Sue, 1990). When an individual, a family, or even an extended family, suffers some form of shame that becomes known to the wider world, it is usually the male head-of-family who becomes the public carrier of that shame. The work of the therapist is to support the Asian American client to contain levels of loss of face so that constructive interpretations can be derived from the crisis, thus allowing the family to maintain a healthy cohesion, and the male client to structure a more satisfying sense of self-worth.

Within the wider field of Men’s Studies, the issue of “coming out” as gay, lesbian, or bisexual has often been described as one of the most important spiritual journeys in life. Chapter 11, “Sexual Orientation Identity Development and Mental Health Experiences of Gay and Bisexual Asian American Men: Implications for

Culturally Competent Counseling,” by Kevin L. Nadal, walks mental health workers through the complexities of being gay or bisexual within communities where homosexuality is unspoken of, and a whole family’s future is determined by children and grandchildren. The subject of the case study is a young Filipino American man who is in relationship with a White American man at the university where both are students. Before continuing the case study further, the author cautions that:

there is a presumed “universal” LGBT experience. Indeed, multicultural scholars have suggested that most LGBT research concentrates primarily on White American gay man... However, both of these models [Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989)] are based on research samples of gay White man and do not mention how race, ethnicity, or gender may affect one’s sexual orientation identity development processes. (pp. 215-216)

The author then summarizes “the very few studies” that have focused on LGBT Asian Americans, and speaks of the importance of a therapist understanding the intersection of sexual orientation identity, racial identity, and ethnic identity when working with gay or bisexual Asian American clients (p. 225). Much of the previous writing on gay identity development, and indeed, on “coming out” as a spiritual process, has limited relevance when viewed through the construction of Asian American cultural needs and values. A series of culturally responsive interventions are then offered.

The fourth category that makes this book useful for those interested in the spirituality of their clients is liminality. I first learned the term when reading *The Priest in Community*, by Urban T. Holmes, III (1978). Holmes defines one critical role of the religious priest, drawing on the history of shamanism, as being to go to the dangerous or unknown places “at the edge” (Greek: *limen*, meaning the place where the harbor meets the open sea) to discover how dangerous it is there, and how one can be there and remain safe. Asian Americans often stand at the limens of identity, not knowing whether they are safe, or how to be, and it is the counselor’s job to go there with them and teach them self-care in uncharted waters. This struggle to be safe at the limens is particularly apparent in Jeffrey Scott Mio’s closing autobiographical chapter.

For a long time, most of us in the counseling profession relied on the writings of David Sue and Derald Wing Sue for our knowledge of how to work with the identity journeys of Asian American clients, gained through reading their book *Counseling the Culturally Different*. Rarely did Sue and Sue adopt a specific hermeneutic of gender in their seminal texts. For that reason alone, *Culturally Responsive Counseling with Asian American Men* is a most welcome addition to the growing field of working therapeutically with men from many cultures.

Philip Culbertson
The University of Auckland/NEW ZEALAND
e: p.culbertson@auckland.ac.nz