



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

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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 γαστροῦ προῦ ἐωσφόρου 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).

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