



New Histories of Masculinity

Gert Hekma

University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Alan Bray, *The Friend*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2003; 392 pp.; 0226071804, \$40/£28 (hbk)

Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, eds, *Masculinities in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History*. Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2004; 325 pp.; 0719065208, £49.99 (hbk); 0719065216, £16.99 (pbk)

Katherine O'Donnell and Michael O'Rourke, eds, *Love, Sex, Intimacy and Friendship between Men, 1550–1800*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2003; 224 pp.; 0333997433, £45 (hbk)

Wolfgang Schmale, *Geschichte der Männlichkeit in Europa (1450–2000)*. Böhlau: Wien, Köln and Weimar, 2003; 328 pp; 3205771427, €29.90 (hbk)

Masculinities have become an area of growing historical interest in the wake of women's and gay and lesbian history: if there is a history of women, there must be one of men as well and where homosexuality has a history, so too must heterosexuality. What makes the field especially fascinating is that all these topics strongly overlap with each other and are, of course, closely connected to most other historical issues. Hence, the titles under review not only discuss histories of sexualities and gender, but also those of politics, war, friendship, family and emotions – to mention only the most obvious themes.

Wolfgang Schmale's recent work begins with a social-constructivist overview of the burgeoning field of the history of masculinities in his *Geschichte der Männlichkeit in Europa (1450–2000)* [A History of Masculinity in Europe, 1450–2000]. The study mainly discusses the formation of 'new men' at various periods

in history and takes an interdisciplinary approach, which includes history, sociology, gender studies and art history. Schmale relies heavily on some of the major works on gender and sexualities, such as those by Thomas Laqueur, George L. Mosse, Ute Frevert and others,¹ but he also makes use of the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini and a wide variety of other historical and contemporary sources. Schmale produces a series of diagrams which summarize what masculinity looked like at particular points in time. As with all such works of synthesis, this one has its advantages in that it offers new perspectives on topics with which the reader may not be acquainted. Equally, however, it has its disadvantages and specialists may find that it deals with particular periods in an unsatisfactory way. For example, it constitutes a strange lapse for there is little attention paid to the period 1850–1945, a time when German men and their definitions of masculinity left such a strong imprint on European history. The author passes over this fundamentally important epoch with brief references to the work of Klaus Theweleit, Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen, who have worked mainly on Nazi ideology.

Overall, Schmale displays a certain amount of ambivalence towards his subject. At various points in the text, he asks whether masculinity is – or has been – in crisis (one chapter, concerning the pre-Nazi era, even takes such a question for its title). The author suggests that ideas of masculinity are contested, especially in the modern period. He stresses the variety of modern masculinities, from the blue-collar worker to the dandy, gay man and ‘metrosexual’. Yet, while the conclusion rather celebrates this diversity and the greater elasticity of ‘gender’, only a few pages previously (259), Schmale offers a definition of what masculinity means nowadays, one which is rather different to the varieties with which he (perhaps over-optimistically) chooses to end. Schmale refers to the work of a number of sociologists who summarize key aspects of masculinity in the following way: men are oriented more towards the outside world and not towards their internal emotions; they are violent; they want to be functional; they lack self-reflexivity; they prefer autonomy; they are afraid of bodily intimacy; and lastly, they are rational and have a strong desire to control themselves and others. This is, to my eyes, a very traditional definition of masculinity – one which seemingly continues to be the dominant one. Even if we allow for the fact that traditional gender dichotomies may be weakening in specific situations and at certain times (e.g. in contemporary metropolitan cultures), this does not mean that a quite traditional form of masculinity cannot emerge in full force – arguably, more so in times of trouble such as the current ‘war on terrorism’. In short, this ambivalence regarding how to define masculinity should not be left for the reader alone to decide. Schmale’s conclusion would have been more forceful had he argued, for

example, that – notwithstanding the expanding diversity of masculinity – really quite traditional, historically deep-rooted models of masculinity still operate unbroken under the surface of all the contemporary innovation and transgressive changes that have occurred in gender styles and sexual practices.

If at least some of the weaknesses in Schmale's work are unavoidable given its format as an overview, the collection on *Masculinities in Politics and War*, edited by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, provides some of the details of male history that the former misses. The editors bring together a wide range of often very interesting articles, although the three introductory essays make for a slightly confusing start: seeing as they primarily discuss the contributions in the book, they might have served more usefully as concluding chapters, while also avoiding a degree of repetition. One of the main themes to emerge is that male citizens in the modern nation-state have been searching for new forms of masculinity. At the same time, the state – beginning with Napoleon – has created a special form of masculinity for its new weapon: the standing army, which is designed both to defend the country against external enemies and state institutions against the internal opposition of dissenting citizens (as occurred, for example, in European countries in 1830–1, 1848–9 and 1870–1).

The articles cover a broad terrain, comparing European masculinities with contributions on eighteenth-century North America and twentieth-century Brazil and South Africa. Carole Smith-Rosenberg begins with an article on the republican masculinity of European-Americans, which was complicated by its contradictory connections to their identity as capitalists, genteel men and white racist slaveholders. Similar problems of staunch, man-made masculinity and the effeminacy that continuously threatened the new male citizens are the topic of Dudink's own article on the new man of the Batavian Revolution, the Dutch version of its French predecessor. Joan Landes continues the theme in discussing the influence of the French Revolution on masculinity and vice-versa. She points to the importance of the 'depiction of the nation as an alluring female body [as a means] to bind male subjects to the nation-state' (112). In both these articles, we again see the influence of George Mosse, as well as of art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau.² Looking at the German states during the Wars of Liberation from Napoleonic rule, Hagemann's contribution describes the male citizen's transformation into a soldier who is ready to sacrifice his life for the fatherland.

The next two articles discuss Iranian men and modernity and Afrikaner masculinity and nationalism. The following article discusses British masculinity in the Second World War. Regrettably, however, the collection has only one article on the mass slaughter of young men in the trenches of the First World War and what it meant for competing ideals of masculinity.³ The piece in question, by

Michael Roper, examines the letters that British soldiers wrote home, mainly to their mothers. Roper indicates that, because they were not able to write about the atrocities they faced, the men sublimated their fears by redirecting feelings of care towards the mother, as was appropriate for their role as future family heads. According to Sonya Rose, the British men of the next war combined soldierly heroism with a temperate masculinity, which stood in opposition to the brutal, hyper-masculinity of Nazism. This was a difficult mix for a nation at war to maintain, but it did allow for the existence of (effeminized) conscientious objectors. In her contribution, Glenda Sluga points to discourses of peace-making after the First World War that may have contributed to women's emancipation, although they strongly favoured masculine concepts of the nation. Other articles move away from the theme of war and soldiers into the realm of politics, with discussions of maleness among German social democrats and in Brazilian and North American labour organizations. Here, Alice Kessler-Harris makes an interesting remark to the effect that in the US during the 1930s, the concept of manliness as an ethical code was replaced by notions of masculinity conceived in terms of male power over women.

In their introduction, Dudink and Hagemann stress the new constellation of masculinity, politics and war as being central to the gender structure of modern western society since the late eighteenth century. Significantly, as John Tosh argues in his introductory essay, this system is not polyvalent or contingent, contrary to claims made from postmodern perspectives. For Tosh, the current absence of patriarchy from the scholarly agenda represents a disconcerting shift away from the interest that power differences between men and women began to attract in the 1970s and 1980s. This stance makes Tosh something of an exception, because the authors of the two other introductions do not highlight this power difference. Instead, Dudink and Hagemann stress the polyvalence of masculinity, while in his introductory piece John Horne emphasizes the novelty and importance of masculinity for gender studies. This initial emphasis on polyvalence shows in a different manner the ambivalence displayed by Schmale regarding men's history: have men become the postmodern 'metrosexuals' and queers that the 1990s celebrated, or do most of them remain firmly stuck in the modern model of masculinity, oriented around war and the nation, as Tosh believes and as this collection tries to disentangle? After the events of 9/11, it seems that the male 'softies' are once more on the losing side, while self-proclaimed 'tough' discourses – the 'war on terrorism', again – have achieved precedence. Put another way, it may be fun to think postmodern, but social reality looks rather different and remains stubbornly modern. For those pursuing a postmodern agenda of contingency and polyvalence, the question remains as to how to make that agenda

politically effective. That question is not answered either by this collection or Schmale's book, notwithstanding all the intelligent and valuable analyses of modern masculinity contained therein.

Where the above two books concentrate essentially on men in the external world and larger gender structures, the remaining two examine spheres of intimacy. This is the path followed in *The Friend* by the late Alan Bray, who has written a truly fascinating work. An independent scholar from London, who worked in the Inland Revenue Office, Bray has made a major impact on the field, above all with his *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982), which was one of the first books on early modern gay history. *The Friend* offers historical research while also illuminating the tensions between the author's academic pursuits, his gay political activism and the Roman Catholic faith to which he converted in the 1980s (incidentally, as so many gay men did before him). The main topic of Bray's book is male friendship and pseudo-familial relations. His most important sources are burial monuments devoted to male friends and he provides some splendid examples from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. These men were buried together and their descendants placed sometimes very impressive memorials on their graves. This acted as a form of acknowledgement towards the significance of friendships which surpassed the love of women. What Bray does with these same-sex relationships is to state that there is a history beyond the family which has already received so much attention from historians. He also makes it clear that intimate friendships, such as those between King Edward II and Piers Gaveston, or between Francis Bacon and Tobie Matthew were not marginal, but actually very central to the politics of their time.

Some of the friends buried together also had wives, but made a choice in favour of their male companions in death. This too suggests the potential historical importance of such relationships, although they have long been neglected by present-day historians. It could be argued, for example, that the focus of historians of the family on certain issues – such as the nuclear versus the larger family – has led to an abundance of non-familial and non-heterosexual intimate relationships being overlooked. If pointing out the extent of that neglect is what makes Bray's book so valuable, it is also true that restoring these male bonds for the past and indicating their importance for political and social cohesion is another way of promoting them for the present. Bray himself pursued such an agenda in various ways, even advising the cardinal of England on the burial place of his predecessor John Newman, who is buried with two of his male friends. What should the Catholic Church do with this combined grave once Newman is sanctified and reburied in a more prominent location?

Like his predecessor John Boswell, another gay Catholic, who wrote a work on

Same-sex Unions (1994) as an intervention in the debate on gay marriage, Bray also seems to want to promote intimate relations between same-sex partners as a long-established English tradition (Boswell argued that there was a long tradition of friendship rituals in the Christian churches). On balance, however, it is somewhat disappointing that both historians have become so Catholic that they rather overlook the sexual content of modern gay relations and seem to be satisfied merely with making loving friendships acceptable. In short, they start to defend something few people contest and neglect the queer sexualities that are the main targets of masculine attack. For example, Bray says of Newman's love for Ambrose St John in both his book and the Catholic journal, *The Tablet* (4 August 2001), that 'their love was no less intense for being spiritual; perhaps more so.'

Notwithstanding this chaste line of defence, Bray has written a marvellous and important book.⁴ His major achievement is to revitalize the history of non-heterosexual and non-marital intimate relationships between men. Boswell wanted gay marriage, Bray homoerotic friendship. The former is a copy (of conventional marriage), but the latter constitutes something more original. This is what defines the historic and contemporary value of Bray's work. He draws connections to the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and many of their followers, taking up the concepts developed by them such as friendship, care for the self and philosophies of life or alternative lifestyles that were able to find spaces of relative freedom away from the all-encompassing power so much stressed by Foucault. Bray researched into the past, but at the same time pointed to the possibilities for intimacy in the future. In short, more consciously than the other historians under discussion here, Bray engaged fully with what Foucault called 'the history of the present', using the past to better understand – and perhaps change – the present.

The collection by O'Donnell and O'Rourke, *Love, Sex, Intimacy and Friendship between Men, 1550–1800*, pursues many of Bray's themes and indeed includes a chapter from Bray's book on friendship and an obituary for him. Most of the articles discuss, in one form or another, the question as to what should be the main subject matter of gay history, although with rather mixed results. David Halperin wrote the introduction to the collection in which he defends his earlier – and much contested – article, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', in which he delineates five historical forms of same-sex relationships.⁵ Halperin fears that pluralizing the history of homosexuality, with its celebration of same-sex friendship and love, will lead to the disappearance of interest in same-sex sexuality. In what develops as a vivid debate, George Haggerty's article criticizes Halperin for employing overly rigid categories which seem to be mutually exclusive of each other. For convincing reasons, in my view, Haggerty maintains that

love and friendship have not always excluded sexuality, contrary to what Halperin's model suggests. Haggerty makes clear that the various categories, such as effeminacy, sodomy and friendship, sometimes merge. Halperin's essay denies such criticisms vehemently, taking two pages of notes to refute Haggerty's critique.

A similar critique of conceptual rigidity can be directed at Randolph Trumbach, whose contribution strictly adheres to his theory – first developed fifteen years ago – of the birth of the molly, the effeminate homosexual, in the early part of the eighteenth century. There is no doubt that the theory was highly innovative for its time and it also inspired Bray very much, but it has since become problematic in certain respects. Thus, while Haggerty typifies the British aristocrat Lord Hervey as an effeminate sodomite who slept with men and women, Trumbach does not hesitate to see him as a modern molly, notwithstanding this 'traditional' attribute. He then reprimands literary scholars, who have found proof of egalitarian same-sex relations in the early seventeenth century, for their alleged 'misreadings' of the evidence. Yet, Trumbach's only justification for this criticism seems to be his dogmatic insistence that such relationships could only exist after the rise of the molly. In actual fact, the even earlier case of the friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie can be convincingly read as another example of egalitarian love. What these men were lacking, was a word other than friendship for their love. They could not satisfactorily employ contemporary sexual terminology, such as pederasty or sodomy, because those concepts denoted both sin and inequality. That was clearly not how Montaigne saw the relationship in which he was involved.⁶ From a different perspective, it should be noted that, among the enormous speculation surrounding the gender of the Chevalier d'Eon, French ambassador at the English court in the late eighteenth century, there was no discussion of him as a molly, although according to Trumbach, effeminacy in men at that time would be considered similar to being a molly.⁷ In this respect, one eagerly awaits the completion of Trumbach's long-announced book on the English molly, in the hope that he will engage seriously with the critiques of his work that have emerged since his theory was first promulgated.

Of the other contributions in the volume, rather too many dabble too much in literary history, with its specific terminologies and jargon. In a more general collection catering to other disciplines, where it cannot be assumed that readers will be familiar with the relevant secondary literature, these come across as overly specialized and, unfortunately, they add little to the collection's quality. However, one essay that does stand out as particularly noteworthy is that by George Rousseau. He proposes to enlarge the terminology for same-sex experiences by using words which indicate the tragic and negative desires for male

friendship. He suggests terms such as 'homodepressed', 'homomorbid' and 'homoplatic'. Rousseau produces an interesting discussion of the unpleasant consequences that same-sex desires may have for the individual affected by them, just as homophobia can have for those who deny having such desires. Thus, he claims that 'homodepression' differs from other forms of depression. In practice, it is relatively easy to create further neologisms, denoting societal attitudes towards homosexuality – for example, 'homonegative' and 'homopositive', gay or queer unfriendly – or for the lovers of various queer types. Any language will have a variety of terms for people who transgress sexual boundaries, although it is significant that the 'normal' people who nevertheless love or desire these types are rarely given a specific name. Men who had sex with mollies in early modern England, with transsexuals and transgenders nowadays, with the *waria* of Indonesia, the *zemel* of Morocco or the *hijra* of India, remain unnamed, although they obviously occupy a specific position in the sexual system. The project of naming that Rousseau engages in is most productive when it refers to something solid, or creates possibilities for new and interesting kinds of analysis. Thus, his term 'homodepressed' certainly refers to something very real, as his essay makes clear. In the case of 'homoplatic', however, he runs into a series of problems as to whether being platonic is not more about sublimation, rather than about friendship. Hence, 'Montaignard' might be a better word for this variation, or why not simply 'friendship', as Bray uses?

Here, it seems that we have moved almost full circle, from the history of masculinity back to gay history, from where much of the former's inspiration originally came. Indeed, though this is admittedly a field I work in myself, my own view is that the best historical work on masculinity still seems to be produced from the angle of queer studies and politics. Similarly, much of the best sociological work on masculinities reflects this background.⁸ The most heated debates and the most interesting studies stem for the most part from queer contemporary issues: how does society view queer sexuality and non-familial or non-heterosexual intimate relationships in the past and present? How is it possible to change dominant masculinities and what has already changed with regard to gender and sexualities? Certainly, there are no easy answers to such questions, but it still appears at the moment that the work done by Bray and that being pursued by Haggerty offers valuable and exciting new insights into these issues. The exploration of same-sex intimacies and queer sexualities in past, present and future arguably still provides the best way into the question of how gender is structured at the societal level.

Notes

1. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge MA and London 1990); George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York and Oxford 1996); see also his *Nationalism and Sexuality* (New York 1985); Ute Frevert, *Men of Honour. A Social and Cultural History of the Duel* (Cambridge 1995).
2. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble. A Crisis in Representation* (London 1997).
3. See the classic works by Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford 1975) and Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land. Combat and Identity in World War I.* (Cambridge 1979).
4. *GLQ. A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 10, No. 3 (2004) is a special issue: *The Work of Friendship: In Memoriam Alan Bray*, edited by Jody Greene. It includes a marvellous critical essay on Bray's work by Valerie Traub, who elaborates some of the points I raise here, as well as some other issues, such as the question of gender and the notion of the *longue durée* – a concept which has not been sufficiently discussed for gay history, mainly because of the latter's reliance on Foucauldian epistemic breaks.
5. Republished from Halperin's *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago 2002).
6. Marc D. Schachter, "'That Friendship Which Possesses the Soul". Montaigne Loves La Boétie,' in Jeffrey Merrick and Michael Sibalis, eds, *Homosexuality in French History and Culture* (New York, 2001), 5–22; also published in *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol. 41, Nos. 3–4 (2001), 5–22.
7. Gary Kates, *Monsieur d'Eon Is a Woman. A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (New York 1995).
8. Compare R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge 1995). The same point could be made for Latin-American gay history. See, for example, Pete Sigal, ed., *Infamous Desire. Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America* (Chicago 2003), in which the authors give very different perspectives on Latino masculinities and queer desires.

GERT HEKMA is Assistant Professor of Gay and Lesbian Studies at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Amsterdam. He is editor of several books on gay history and sociology, including (with Kent Gerard) *The Pursuit of Sodomy. Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe* (Binghamton, NY 1989); (with Harry Oosterhuis and James D. Steakley) *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left* (Binghamton, NY 1995); and (with Franz X. Eder and Lesley Hall) *Sexual Cultures in Europe. Vol. 1: National Histories; Vol. 2: Themes in Sexuality* (Manchester 1999). He recently completed *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland van 1730 tot de moderne tijd* (Amsterdam 2004).

