Welcome to the second issue of JMMS. In the past year the JMMS website has received approximately 8000 visitors, which I believe is a reasonable number for a new online publication with a niche audience. In that time visibility and legitimacy of online, open access journals in the academic environment has increased, and this is set to continue. Anyone interested in reading more about the development of open access should consult Peter Suber’s excellent Open Access News [http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html] which is usually updated on a daily basis, reflecting the subject’s rapid expansion. Recently we have been listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals [http://www.doaj.org] from which many university libraries draw information, so we are beginning to filter through to a number of library databases, taking our place alongside other established journals. My point here is that JMMS’s method of delivery is here to stay, a fact recognized by a good number of researchers who are keen to maximize their readership. I urge any potential JMMS contributors who are unsure of the open access publishing model to read up on it and then send us your work. The next general issue of JMMS is currently underway and a special edition edited by Yasemin Besen focused on youth masculinities and spirituality is being finalized and is scheduled for publication in August.

This issue contains four main articles and six book reviews. Stefan Horlacher’s From a Metaphysics of Presence to the Blessings of Absence: The Medial Construction of Masculine Identity in Thomas Hardy’s Novel Jude the Obscure, offers a psychoanalytically inspired reading of the intersection of masculine identity, language and meaning in Hardy’s protagonist, of “his desperate clinging to the illusion of a transcendental signified.” Elizabeth Ruchti’s The Performance of Normativity: Mormons and the Construction of an American Masculinity argues that despite being firmly on the margins of American society, Mormon masculinity is in fact an exemplar of ideal American masculinity: “a performance of normativity staged from a position of abjection.” Lisa Tyler’s “He was pretty good in there today”: Reviving the Macho Christ in Ernest Hemingway’s “Today is Friday” and Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ argues that both Hemingway and Gibson’s bouts of emotional volatility were eased by identifying with a muscular, yet suffering Christ in their work. Brendan Smyth’s To Love the Orientalist: Masculinity in Leila Aboulela’s The Translator shows how the novel offers a model of progressive, socially engaged Islamic masculinity.

In our review section we look at, among other books, John Ibsen’s Picturing Men, which offers a photographic account of the decline in intimacy among American men between 1850 and 1950, from “hugs and kisses to empty seats.
between men in theatres.” Ibson highlights an issue that many men would no doubt identify with, but once in a while a piece of cultural production comes along that counters the norm, such as the recent DVD Old Joy (dir. Kelly Reichardt, 2006).

Not a lot happens in Old Joy, which simply follows a couple of buddies, Kurt and Mark, on a camping trip to visit some hot springs in the Cascade mountains east of Portland, Oregon. Such is the lack of genuine intimacy among men that various moments leap out of the movie.

First, it is interesting to note that intimacy among men often brings with it an unwarranted expectation of homoeroticism. After setting up camp for the night, Kurt suddenly blurts out that he’s worried about their relationship. “I miss you, I miss you really really bad. I want us to be real friends again.” Mark claims that everything is all right between them but Kurt still appears troubled. We almost expect him to offer some confessional statement about unrequited love, but it’s simply a concern for their friendship, which is subject to the passing of time and Mark’s impending entry into fatherhood.

The next morning Mark mentions how he’s been involved in doing some woodwork with local kids and building a community garden. Kurt says, “I’m so proud of you Mark, I’m serious. You’ve really done something. You’ve really given something back to the community.” Again, these aren’t the kind of words we usually hear among friends: such achievements are often given a grudging respect following Gore Vidal’s words, “Every time a friend succeeds, I die a little.”

Later, at the hot springs even Mark gets on edge about a fear of sexuality in their intimacy. While he is lying naked in the hot springs, Kurt comes up behind him and begins to give him a shoulder rub. Mark is tense and says, “Hey, what’s going on?” Kurt says, “Just relax man, just settle in” and literally lays his hands on Mark’s head like a spiritual healing. The camera cuts to a close-up of Mark’s tense hand, noticeably wearing a wedding ring. The hand quickly loosens under Kurt’s massage and drifts down into the water. When the two friends arrive back in town Mark holds Kurt’s shoulder and says, “That was awesome Kurt.” Kurt says, “I’ll call you soon, man.” And the temporary autonomous zone of their trip is over, but with a new security that their intimacy is still intact, albeit different than it once was. Old Joy is a delightful, meditative little movie that offers a time-out from the usual presentations of men.

Joseph Gelfer, Department of Religious Studies
Victoria University of Wellington/NEW ZEALAND
e: joseph@gelfer.net
From a Metaphysics of Presence to the Blessings of Absence: The Medial Construction of Masculine Identity in Thomas Hardy's Novel Jude the Obscure

Stefan Horlacher

Jude the Obscure is not only Thomas Hardy's last but probably also his bleakest novel. Already its epigram on the frontispiece – namely "The letter killeth [but the spirit giveth life]" – can be read as having negative forebodings; it can, however, also be interpreted as a commentary on the 'nature' of language and on the absolute necessity of understanding its founding mechanisms such as absence, difference and deferral if one is to lead a happy and meaningful life and if one endeavors to claim the freedom and the responsibility to construct one's own identity. The subject of this paper thus centers on the extent to which Hardy's protagonist Jude Fawley, a man who desperately clings to the illusion of a transcendental signified, is able to understand and put into practice Hardy's epigram, which does no less than set forth a 'medial', i.e. linguistic, program for the novel in general as well as for its protagonist in particular. In this sense, the focus of inquiry will be the up to now largely neglected discursive construction of an ill-fated male identity in a discursive universe where "nobody did come, because nobody does" (J, p. 31) and where taking words literally has lethal consequences.

It is certainly surprising that a closer look at the hundreds of articles, essays and monographs about Jude the Obscure reveals that most of these publications tend to ignore the eponymous hero of the novel and concentrate instead on Sue Bridehead, "perhaps the most remarkable feminine portrait in the English novel" (Southerington, 1971, p. 145). One eminent critic, Mary Jacobus, even speaks of "Sue the Obscure" (Jacobus, 1975, p. 305), and in a letter Thomas Hardy himself called his novel "the Sue story" (Boumelha, 1982, p. 138). Given this evident neglect of, or even discrimination against, the male protagonist in Hardy studies, it seems appropriate to shift the focus of critical attention. Not, however, back to the humanist phallic and integrated self (Moi, 1990, p. 8), but to a male identity which is insecure, fractured and fraught with problems.
Considering the norms and social codes of the 19th century, there can be no doubt that Jude leads a very unconventional and even progressive life. In contrast to a character such as Michael Henchard in the Mayor of Casterbridge, Jude appears to consist of a complex blend of traditionally male and female attributes and continues to seek a semblance of security throughout his life in a world which clearly "has become unmoored from natural certitude" and in which "to the unappeased spirit in search of articulate paradigms, nothing – not even the body's native stresses – can be reliably categorized" (Weinstein, 1984, p. 139). Lured primarily by the enigmatic Sue Bridehead, Jude is propelled into a kind of obscurity which renders his identity as well as his sexuality highly problematic. If this is an extremely unhappy situation for Hardy's male protagonist, it does have the advantage that it puts the reader in a position first to realize and then to further explore the fact that "all labels that 'ticket' a person, especially the most common ones of gender and class, are false" (Higonnet, 1993, p. 4).

Applying traditional male and female stereotypes (Grimm-Horlacher, 2002, pp. 42-58), there can be little doubt that the two main protagonists in Jude the Obscure are characterized by an odd combination of what Linda Dowling calls "male effeminacy and female mannishness" (Dowling, 1979, p. 445). The overriding consensus in the secondary literature is "[that] Sue assumes the attitudes of the decisive Victorian male", while "Jude appears to take on the qualities of the submissive Victorian wife" (Mickelson, 1976, p. 5). And in Hardy's novel, Jude is indeed depicted as "a ridiculously affectionate fellow" (J, p. 85), as "thin-skinned", "horribly sensitive" and as the born victim; he even complains about being a man and is looking for a partner on whom "he can lean on and look up to" (Mickelson, 1976, p. 138). In the following, I do not intend to offer yet another analysis of male and female stereotypes, which Hardy's novel effectively questions and transgresses anyway, but shall instead adopt a psychoanalytically inspired Men's Studies approach before asking in how far Jude's failure is caused by his desperate clinging to the illusion of a transcendental signified, and in particular by a defective understanding of writing.

*Men's studies and the discursive construction of identity*

Although there has been an increase in interest in Men's Studies during the last decades – Susan Bassnett and Gisela Ecker (1996) even speak of a "groundswell of interest in [...] the multifacetedness of masculinity" (p. 100) –, work on masculinity is still an almost negligible quantity in comparison to the amount of research being done on women in the field of Gender Studies. As Peter F. Murphy (1994) argues, men are only just beginning "to articulate a critical analysis of masculinity in contemporary culture and in modern literature. More recent, and sometimes more radical, books have been written by sociologists, psychologists, and historians, not literary or cultural critics" (p. 4). In addition to this, "the literature on men and masculinity is hopelessly at odds with itself," and Men's Studies are still very much a kind of "unsurveyed territory" (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 1f.). As R. W. Connell (1995)
argues, "most popular books about men are packed with muddled thinking which either ignores or distorts the results of the growing research on the issues" (p. ix), and "[t]hough most social science is indeed about men, good-quality research that brings masculinity into focus is rare. Ironically, most recent studies are not up to the standard set by several researchers in the 1950s" (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1987, p. 64).

If we leave aside the more sociologically oriented branch of Men's Studies and concentrate on approaches inspired by deconstruction, post-Freudian psychoanalysis and discourse analysis, we have to state that the majority of these studies supports the approach that male as well as female identities are to be thought of as subject positions and as relational, performative and linguistic constructs. However, if sexual identities are subject to the structures of language, this does – pace Foucault – not necessarily mean that they are totally bereft of any possibility of agency or that the body becomes irrelevant. Whereas medical research has demonstrated that bodies are not always unambiguously sexed and that one should probably speak of a continuum and not of a dichotomy as far as femininity and masculinity are concerned, cultural anthropology makes clear that bodies are always gendered and that this gendering is oriented towards the creation or exaggeration of difference (Gilmore, 1991, p. 25). If there is no denying that there is a body, we can, as Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler and others have shown, nevertheless not be sure whether we can ever have access to a 'natural' body, i.e. a body outside language and culture, and to what extent this 'natural' body is really important as far as the construction of identity – which is always a sexual identity – is concerned (Fink, 1995, pp. 105, 123).

In the following, I am mainly interested in the way the individual, in this case the 'fictional entity' Jude Fawley, is positioned within the different fields of discourses and sign systems which constitute culture and which, by offering different subject positions, influence and shape (sexual) identity. In accordance with Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, language is thereby not conceived of as a prison house (Fredric Jameson) but as "a site of liberation from the restrictions [...] imposed upon subjectivity" and as the major means for a creative construction of identity. If it is in the gap between the potential capacities of a differential code and any particular specification of it, i.e. between language (langue) and enunciation (parole), that the arena of subjectivity and freedom resides (Ermarth, 2000, p. 411), then it should be possible a) to demonstrate that Jude's identity as a man is the result of linguistic constructs, and b) that this identity (nevertheless) can be conceived of as "multiplied" and as a kinetic process. From this perspective Jude's subjectivity would become a

particular expression of systemic value, 'above all, an accomplishment, a particular work, a particular act,' the 'very expression' of responsibility, not something independent of it. Identity [...] has nothing to do with reducing difference [...]. Rather, identity appears only in the act of specifying sets of rules. And as we operate simultaneously in several sets at once, identity appears as the
A series of constantly multiplied specifications of the potential provided by those rule regimens. (Ermarth, 2000, p. 411)

To reformulate 'the subject' as an element of such differential systems, that is, as a function of discourse, means to accept the multiplicity of what used to be called 'the subject': because subjectivity always operates simultaneously in several discursive systems, whether their grammars and elements are verbal languages or other sign systems composed of gender relations, or fashion, or politics. (Ermarth, 2000, p. 410)

Jude's singularity would then not exist in some essential 'subject' but "in the unique and unrepeatable sequence of a life," while his "palimpsestuousness" would derive "from the multiplied discursive condition in which each moment involves a complex subjective specification of multiple codes" (Ermarth, 2000, p. 411f.). This conception, moreover, allows for "a kinetic subjectivity-in-multicoded-process," i.e. for a subjectivity which is thought of as

the moving nexus or intersection at which a unique and unrepeatable sequence is constantly being specified from the potentials available in the discursive condition. Such a subjectivity is individual in its sequence, not in some irreducible core. Its uniqueness lies in its trajectory: the lifelong sequence, impossible to anticipate, within which an unpredictable series of specifications are made from among the languages available. The volatility of language – its resonance, its power of poetic, associative linkage – provides precisely the varied opportunities for selective specification that constitute the unique and unrepeatable poetry of a life. (Ermarth, 2000, p. 412)

The application of this approach to Jude the Obscure leads to an interpretation which endeavors to demonstrate that Hardy's novel conceives of masculinity primarily as a medial (in the sense of linguistic) construct and that Jude's 'tragic' fate – if it is tragic at all⁴ – is not the result of Hardy's alleged negativity and pessimism but can be read as the consequence of Jude's desperate clinging to the illusion of a transcendental signified.

With its epigram, "The letter killeth [but the spirit giveth life]", which is echoed later in the text by Jude's desperate "we are acting by the letter; and 'the letter killeth!'" (J, p. 388), Hardy's novel not only refers to the Bible but also obliquely to its own textuality as well as to the relation between society, language and the law. And it is exactly this relation which is of prime importance in the novel as well as in the interior psychic space of its protagonist. Hence, Jude the Obscure can be read as a book about the importance of internalized laws and the linguistic or semiotic construction of sexual identity. Therefore we must ask whether Jude's failure as a man and as a human being cannot best be explained by his deficient understanding of how signs work. From this it follows that the negativity and
bleakness of *Jude the Obscure* would not reside in a hostile social environment shaped by the law, but in Jude's catastrophic failure to recognize the sign-based constructedness of personal identity as well as of culture and society. One could even go so far as to read the novel in a positive light, since Jude's failure is an important example of how not to construct one's identity and since other characters, who are in a way less 'monumental,' inflexible or petrified than Jude the 'stonemason' – I need only refer to Vilbert and Arabella – demonstrate that survival and even a limited degree of happiness are possible. Maybe Jude's failure can even be regarded as proof not only of the freedom of the individual but also of the necessity to comprehend the constructedness of society and culture in general and of sexual identity in particular.

**Narrativity, or: Master narratives of masculinity**

If we consider the question of who Jude Fawley really is, we have to realize that at the outset of the novel he is a little boy whose mother committed suicide and whose father is dead too. As an orphan, Jude wishes not to have been born at all, feels isolated and is brought up unloved by his aunt: "It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too, wi' thy mother and father, poor useless boy!" (J, p. 13). Shortly after this scene, Jude's male idol and substitute father figure, Phillotson, the schoolmaster, leaves him in order to study in Christminster. Jude remains behind as a little boy, "who could not himself bear to hurt anything" (J, p. 17) and who "was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again" (J, p. 17). Given these facts, it is hardly surprising that Jude does not want to engage with life and sexuality: "If he could only prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man" (J, p. 18).

However, Jude does not remain passive but very soon follows well-established models regarding the construction of identity. Although Hardy's protagonist comes from an impoverished social background, there is never the question of Jude becoming 'merely' a butcher, a baker or a farmer. Instead, Jude emulates Phillotson and sets out to become a scholar. What is significant is that throughout Hardy's novel, Jude does not only try to enact or perform certain 'narratives of masculinity' but that these fail one after the other. Jude cast as the 'young lover' and later as the 'honest and knightly husband' of Arabella is first tricked into marriage and then left behind when Arabella decides to emigrate to Australia. Although Jude really labors to learn Greek and Latin, he never enters Christminster University – and the story of 'Jude the scholar' is one of failure, too. Underlying Jude's desire to quit his social sphere is the dream of 'Jude the self-made man.' When he sets out to follow Phillotson to Christminster, he walks "the remaining four miles rather from choice than from necessity, having always fancied himself arriving thus [...]. He went along the outlying streets with the cautious tread of an explorer" (J, p. 77f.). After his project to enter Christminster as a 'self-made man' has failed, Jude embraces a further prototypically masculine discourse by praising the dignity of manual labor: "[The] stone yard was a center of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of
scholarly study within the noblest of colleges" (J, p. 85). That this discourse, which finds its incarnation in Tetutpenay, the head of Biblioll college, who advises Jude to remain in his sphere and to stick to his trade, glorifies manual labor only to keep up a rigid class system, is of course not realized by Jude who, somewhat naively, believes in the truth of the spoken or written word: "He had known all that before. He knew it was true" (J, p. 117). Eventually, Jude's contact with Sue and their ensuing relationship triggers off a whole series of different concepts of masculine identity: 'Jude the would-be lover of Sue,' 'Jude and the ideal of a devotional life in Melchester,' 'Jude the would-be husband of Sue and successful baker of Christminster cakes,' 'Jude the failed husband of Sue and would-be intellectual' (the 'Christminster dream' again) and, last but not least, 'Jude the disillusioned knightly and honor-bound husband of Arabella': "'Don't say anything against my honor!' enjoined Jude hotly, standing up. 'I'd marry the W---- of Babylon rather than do anything dishonorable! [...] I am not a man who wants to save himself at the expense of the weaker among us!'" (J, p. 381f.).

In this context, Elizabeth Langland (1993) correctly speaks of "Jude's alternating evasion and pursuit of manhood" (p. 42) and stresses the importance of "social practices and discourses that mock the idea of individual self-determination and locate self-fulfillment in death" (p. 46). If it is a point of controversy whether Hardy's novel actually endorses death as a solution, this ambiguity does certainly not apply to the reasons for Jude's problems. If Jude accepts narrative myths of traditional manliness as truths and wholly identifies with them, he falls prey to Lacanian méconnaissance (Lacan, 1977a) without ever understanding what he is actually doing or what is happening to him. Even when he realizes that the myths he tries to live by do not work, he shies away from facing the consequences so that finally Jude, the would-be scholar, refuses to learn and self-destructively, albeit unconsciously, propels himself from one méconnaissance into another: "It was better to love a woman than to be a graduate, or a parson; ay, or a pope!" (J, p. 48). But no matter with which "of several versions of the book of life typically invoked by Victorian fiction" (Dolin, 2000, p. 214) Jude identifies, he is bound to fail, since, like its protagonist, the logic inherent in Hardy's novel invokes and finds untenable precisely those narratives which seek to reproduce most closely the shape of human existence: the spiritual journey; the story of individual vocation and education; the marriage plot. Its organization into curiously self-contained parts, a sort of episodic form writ large, follows the arrangement of Jude's life into distinct phases, each of which is overseen by an informing myth or masterplot. (Dolin, 2000, p. 214f.)

From this it follows that both on the level of the individual, i.e. with regard to the narrative models of self-made man, family man or explorer, and on the level of the literary text, the narrative trajectory of the novel of development or Bildungsroman is being questioned. If novels of development are "stories of a boy's initiation into
manhood, and [...] rituals of masculine identity" (Dolin, 2000, p. 215) and if masculinity is established by the fact that the protagonist, after a period of learning, proves his identity through his knowledge and education, his material wealth, his integration into society and his newly founded family, then the trajectory of *Jude the Obscure* is the exact opposite. However, given the death of its protagonist, *Jude the Obscure* is not a negative *Bildungsroman* in the tradition of D. H. Lawrence either (Hörnacher, 2006). With Tim Dolin, one could ask whether Hardy's novel does not serve as a deconstructive foil, foregrounding the implicit, unavowedly conservative ideological subtext of the English *Bildungsroman*³. Or, even more radically, one could read *Jude the Obscure* as a "blueprint for the creation of self-destructive individuals" (Guenzloe & Cline, 1989, p. 124f.), which would then demonstrate that the socially propagated 'master narratives of masculinity' are hardly more than a deception serving to secure social structures that guarantee class immobility and the persistence of the law.

**The letter and the law**

If one conceives of the notion of law in accordance with Lacan to be in the general sense a symbolic order or structure which coincides with language and determines the rules of society,⁸ one can argue that it is

the world of words that creates the world of things [...]. Man speaks, then, but it is because the symbol has made him man. [...]. Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him 'by flesh and blood'; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death; and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgment, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it – unless he attain the subjective bringing to realization of being-for-death. (Lacan, 1977a, pp. 65, 68)

In other words, if the human being is the product of the sign, and if culture is the product of the symbolic order, then the question arises whether Jude's project of constructing a successful male identity does not fail because of his deficient understanding of how language and therefore society and the law work on a formal basis.⁹ One could even say that, anticipating Ferdinand de Saussure, Hardy's novel demonstrates that language – and even identity – is form and not substance. From this, two concomitant questions arise, namely how the law is presented in *Jude the Obscure* and how one should deal with it.

Though Jude's problems arise from his misunderstanding of different 'master narratives of masculinity' and though Jude repeatedly blames society and the
'marriage law' for his unhappiness, a closer look at the novel reveals that he is not presented as the victim of the semantic contents of the law. Despite Jude and Sue being afraid of the law, the law does not seem to care about them. As a matter of fact, no official institution ever expresses an interest in whether Jude is divorced from Arabella or not, or indeed takes any interest in whether Jude and Sue are married or not. In addition to this, Jude's divorce from Arabella and Sue's divorce from Phillotson are easily obtained and don't attract any attention at all:

The proceedings in the Law-Courts had reached their consciousness but as a distant sound, and an occasional missive which they hardly understood. [...] The same concluding incident in Jude's suit against Arabella had occurred about a month or two earlier. Both cases had been too insignificant to be reported in the papers, further than by name in a long list of other undefended cases. [...] "One thing is certain, that however the decree may be brought about, a marriage is dissolved when it is dissolved. There is this advantage in being poor obscure people like us – that these things are done for us in a rough and ready fashion. It was the same with me and Arabella. I was afraid her criminal second marriage would have been discovered, and she punished; but nobody took any interest in her – nobody inquired, nobody suspected it." (J, p. 258f.)

If the 'semantic side' or meaning (the signified) of the law does not harm Jude and Sue, this does, however, not hold true for the 'formal side' of the law considered as a chain of signifiers. As has been shown, Hardy's novel consistently devalues the semantic side or structure of the law in order to stress its formal nature as an empty chain of signifiers. Moreover, Hardy's novel argues in favor of the ability to recognize and make use of interstices and soft spaces as a creative room for action. How this is enacted on the level of the histoire can, amongst other things, be shown with the help of writing, for example personal letters, as well as with the help of Arabella and her later lover Vilbert.

If we take a close look at the large number of letters in Hardy's novel, we have to realize that these letters construe multiple realities which have little to do with the reality actually experienced by the characters. In Hardy's own words: "nothing is as it appears." When Sue writes "a passionate letter [...] She was quite lonely and miserable, she told him," Jude later realizes that she was not "quite the woman who had written the letter that summoned him" (J, p. 132). Thus a disappointed Jude tells Sue: "You are not so nice in presence as you are in your letters" (J, p. 165). But Jude never inquires further and never understands that basically he is "trapped within a linguistic worldview which holds that truth is external, is universally applicable, and has already been uttered" (Weinstein, 1984, p. 133). This is not only demonstrated by the often hapless interaction between Jude and Sue but is even made clear by the narrator, who stresses that "Jude was in danger of attaching more meaning to Sue's impulsive note than it really was intended to bear" (J, p. 156). Unfortunately, Jude is at no point able to transcend his
naïve belief in the presence of truth, in the presence of the signified, in the contents of the law. And at no point is he able to gain insight into the functional mechanisms of this law. Although Jude realizes that Arabella has tricked him into marriage and that he does not love her, he never considers a divorce, "the law being the law" (J, p. 182). Phillotson even equates the law with cruelty and refuses "to be cruel to her [Sue] in the name of the law" (J, p. 235). But as has already been demonstrated, the law is totally indifferent towards Jude and Sue. Thus what causes their misery is not the law in itself, but a misunderstanding of it – and maybe one reason why the law gains such importance in Jude the Obscure is the sadomasochistic tendency in both, i.e. Sue and Jude's willingness to submit to any kind of authority. Maybe happiness and freedom are not even wished for! Sue, at least, seeks humiliation and penance when she returns to Phillotson in order to be sexually abused. And it was Sue, too, who started the relationship with a compliant Jude in "the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you" (J, p. 353).

If there is one character in Jude the Obscure who has a reason to fear the law, it is certainly Arabella. In the first place she does not tell her second husband about her son, and then she commits adultery with Jude – if indeed it can be called adultery at all, since at that point in time, Arabella is bigamously married to Cartlett as well as to Jude. If she has a cool and relaxed way of interpreting the law – "Crime! Pooh. They don't think much of such as that over there! Lots of 'em do it..." (J, p. 185) – she nevertheless gets away with it. Arabella, the unfaithful bigamist, neither fears nor openly opposes the law. Most of the time, she just ignores it or 'uses' it and even goes so far as to accuse the law abiding Jude of not respecting the institution of marriage: "You've no respect for marriage whatever, or its rights and duties!" (J, p. 385). Later, Arabella even expressly endorses the law and gives Sue the advice to marry Jude as soon as possible:

Then let him [take you before the parson], in Heaven's name. Life with a man is more businesslike after it, and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you, which you can't otherwise. (J, p. 270)

Although their actions are morally questionable, Arabella and Vilbert, the itinerant quack-doctor, do know how to deal with the law and how to survive. Vilbert, who calls himself "a public benefactor" (J, p. 26), is "well known to the rustic population, and absolutely unknown to anybody else, as he, indeed, took care to be, to avoid inconvenient investigations" (J, p. 26). He is always one step ahead of the law and sells "golden ointment, life-drops, and female pills" (J, p. 27). Traversing enormous distances on foot and being constantly in motion, he, like no other character, symbolizes the deferral of meaning along the chain of signifiers. Whereas Arabella lives her passions and does not care much about justice, and whereas Vilbert gets away with selling perfectly useless pills allegedly "warranted efficacious by the Government stamp" (J, p. 294, my emphasis), Sue and Jude manage to adopt a
similar lifestyle only for a very short period of time. They take advantage of Jude's "adaptive craftsmanship to enter on a shifting, almost nomadic, life, which was not without its pleasantness" (J, p. 309). Or, to quote Sue: "We gave up all ambition, and were never so happy in our lives" (J, p. 313). But this nomadic lifestyle, which coincides with the only true happiness the couple ever experiences, remains an exception. Instead of analyzing the reason for their happiness, instead of actively inquiring into the mechanisms of the law, and instead of engaging with life, Jude and Sue remain in a state of limbo. They speak of their often body- and sexless love as "something too sublime for earth," and not only is Jude himself primarily interested in Greek and Latin, two so-called dead languages, but he is also fascinated by Christminster's emblematic voices of dead philosophers:

Knowing not a human being here, Jude began to be impressed with the isolation of his own personality, as with a self-specter, the sensation being that of one who walked but could not make himself seen or heard. He drew his breath pensively, and, seeming thus almost his own ghost, gave his thoughts to the other ghostly presences with which the nooks were haunted. (J, p. 79)

The "order-loving man" and his refusal of responsibility
In Hardy's novel, language, if incorrectly understood, seems to harbor a lethal quality. This becomes obvious when Jude's son Little Father Time takes the "learned doctors," "solemn stately figures in blood-red robes," to announce "Judgment Day" (J, p. 324) – and when, shortly after this, he takes Sue by her word, i.e. understands her literally and commits murder and suicide: "I said the world was against us, that it was better to be out of life than in it at this price; and he took it literally" (J, p. 338). On different occasions, Little Father Time is not only described as mechanical and impersonal but also equated with his father so that Jeffrey Berman calls him a "younger and more extreme portrait of Jude" (Berman, 1989, p. 157). If Little Father Time's understanding of language is defective and causes his death and the demise of his siblings, it is no surprise that Jude faces a similar fate. As we know, Jude believes in the existence of a universal law of transmutation which would not only allow one language to be translated mechanically into another but would also equate natural with civil law. Jude assumes "that the words of the required language were always to be found somewhere latent in the words of the given language by those who had the art to uncover them" (J, p. 30). And indeed, Hardy's protagonist is continuously looking for meaning: "The mountain-weight of material under which the ideas lay in those dusty volumes called the classics piqued him into a dogged, mouselike subtlety of attempt to move it piecemeal" (J, p. 31). If Marcel Proust's protagonist in A la Recherche du temps perdu searches for hidden meanings in family names "in order to suggest their motivation and to gratify the obsession 'to discover some subject to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value'" (Horlacher, 2002), Jude does not behave differently: "It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to, for some place
which he could call admirable. Should he find that place in this city if he could get there?” (J, p. 25). Throughout his life Jude keeps looking for deep structures and for a law of transmutation which would help him to understand the world, its rules and languages as well as Sue’s "liquid" and — significantly — "untranslatable eyes" (J, p. 89). These untranslatable eyes — just as the dead languages — serve as metaphors for the fact that Jude’s readings are severe misreadings, that they do not produce knowledge about an exterior world but are much better understood as projections driven by lack and desire. And indeed, Jude recognizes neither Phillotson nor Arabella for what they are. In addition to this, he sticks to his construction of an ideal image of Christminster as "a city of light" (J, p. 25) till the end, although the narrator tells us of "doorways of enriched and florid middle-age design, their extinct air being accentuated by the rottenness of the stones" (J, p. 79), and expressly concludes that "[i]t seemed impossible that modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers" (J, p. 79).

Although "hardly a shred of the beliefs with which he had first gone up to Christminster [was] now remaining with him" (J, p. 310), and although he "was mentally approaching the position which Sue had occupied when he first met her" (J, p. 309f.), the death of his children and the fact that Sue leaves him make it impossible for Jude to live with the unbearable "sense of inconsistency between his former dogmas and his present practice" (J, p. 309f.). This keenly felt sense of difference and the absence of a supportive and freethinking Sue accelerate the loss of his flexibility and his final entry into the realm of the material, his petrifaction so to speak, and his death. On the one hand, Jude’s ability to construct his sexual identity is much more flexible and progressive than any essentialist construction would allow for — just compare him to the hopelessly phallic and failing Michael Henchard —, on the other hand, Jude’s construction of masculinity is, as has already been shown, repeatedly characterized by méconnaissance. Whether Jude constructs his male identity through identification with the 'master narratives of masculinity' or whether he identifies with Sue’s demands (J, pp. 239; 241), in each and every case he takes something foreign or alien as his own. He identifies with external concepts, thereby eliminating the distancing of the symbolic and reverting to "Joseph the dreamer of dreams" (J, p. 205), in other words blithely embracing the imaginary. Only this identification seems to give him a kind of security, though it is a treacherous security that ultimately prevents him from understanding that his male identity is nothing but a shifting construct.

If Jude suspects that sexual identity has to be produced and performed again and again, he also senses that this kind of identity does not harbor the security he craves but counteracts his logocentric desire for a transcendental meaning which would end his lack of being once and for all. Therefore, he prefers a form of méconnaissance, an identification with a supposedly pre-given subject position — and it is exactly this stance which prevents him from learning and makes a second, albeit unwanted marriage with Arabella possible. If Jude fails, it is because he is unable to accept the primacy of the signifier and because he opts for his fantasies of
regression, i.e. a flight into the imaginary and a putative plenitude. This refusal of the multiple spaces which the symbolic order offers implies the refusal of responsibility and of a life which is not ruled by allegedly transcendental authorities. What Jude is looking for, is plenitude in the sense of a fusion of the signifier and the signified; what he craves is the end of lack and desire. That this wish ultimately coincides with the wish to die is made clear by Jude's suicidal tendency: if, already during his youth, Jude undertakes an unsuccessful attempt to kill himself (J, p. 70) and "wish[es] himself out of the world" (J, p. 31), this early affinity to the realm of death is affirmed throughout the novel if we take into account that the narrator stresses that Jude is "more ghostly, less substantial" than even the voices of the dead philosophers who haunt Christminster, that the city itself is characterized as "a place full of fetishists and ghost-seers" (J, p. 151), that Jude admits: "I am fearful of life, specter-seeing always" (J, p. 151), that the "expression of Jude's corpse-like face in the watery lamplight was indeed as if he saw people where there was nobody" (J, p. 392) and that he is metaphorically killed by the milestone in which, right at the beginning of his journey, he carved his hopeful "THITHER."

The lethal aspects of writing, or: In search of origin(s) and truth

Not without reason does Jude call himself a "monumental mason." He works on "the dearest and most intractable of materials" and sees himself "as in the business of supplying dead bodies, helping to provide 'the carcases that contained the scholar souls'" (Garson, 2000, p. 183). As a journeyman carver of tombstone epitaphs, he is a representative of fixation and death – and significantly enough, it is this job which ruins his health.

I was never really stout enough for the stone trade, particularly the fixing. Moving the blocks always used to strain me, and standing the trying draughts in buildings before the windows are in, always gave me colds, and I think that began the mischief inside. (J, p. 398)

Jude develops pneumonia, but instead of clinging to Arabella, who at least stands for life, he embraces a sex- and bodiless Sue as well as his wishful projections of a Christminster in which he sees not only a mistress but also a clearly phallic "castle manned by scholarship and religion." As a stonemason, Jude has always shunned speech, has happily carved and chiseled away in his endeavor to fix linguistic signs in stone and – in analogy to this – to reach a position where his identity and his masculinity, both so heavily undermined by Sue and Arabella, would be fixed once and for all. Yet if chiseling epitaphs on tombstones promises to allow for a semblance of permanency and thereby the transcendence of time, it is still a form of writing and as such characterized not by the presence of any truth whatsoever but rather by absence and death. What Jude, the stonemason, does, is literally to petrify the signifiers in the vain hope that if only he could monumentalize and fix them once and for all, if only he could put an end to their play of deferral and unlimited semiosis, if only he could become part of the male scholarly society of Christminster, where he supposes a timeless, phallic truth to reign, and if only he
could end his nomadic life and unstable relationships, this would guarantee the presence of a pre-given sense in life and therefore eventually stabilize his identity. But instead of gaining access to a transcendental signified, he unknowingly turns himself into a 'fetishist of the signifier,' unreflectingly working with a medium of fixation and mortification which requires the transitory suspension of the process of dynamic development since only the complete emptying of the phenomenon, the sclerotic process of becoming a sign, the translation and transformation of plenitude into the obsession of writing can ever allow transferability (Horlacher, 2002, p. 7). But, one has to ask, transferability of what? At best of "untranslatable eyes" (J, p. 89) or of the dead languages Jude never really masters. Any attempt to reach a final, monosemic truth is revealed to be lethal: Little Father Time and his siblings die because Sue tries to speak 'the truth' – "It was that I wanted to be truthful. I couldn't bear deceiving him [...] and he took it literally" (J, p. 338; my italics) –, Phillotson, taking a masochistic, self-sacrificing and psychologically troubled Sue "at her word," knows all too well that there is much more than just "a touch of selfishness in it" (J, p. 365), and Jude, Little Father Time's double, finally dies because he has the same defective understanding of language and writing as his son. One last example should suffice to make this clear: What Jude feels during a moment of introspection at the beginning of his journey when he leaves Marygreen for Christminster is projected into his carving of the milestone and even rendered graphically in the novel (J, p. 73):

THITHER

J.F.

At the end of his search for truth, Jude returns to this milestone to rediscover its fundamental message. A message which – significantly enough – does not possess a fixed meaning or signified but as an indexical sign is in itself nothing if not the mere display of the principle of deferral which underlies language and guarantees its functioning. If, in the beginning, Jude's "THITHER" stands for his aims and hopes in life, if it stands for the supposed presence of truth in Christminster, it appears in the end as a self-effacing, ironic commentary, inscribed on a stone which Hardy's text directly links to the gallows and thus symbolically transforms into Jude's tombstone. If Jude's acts of "embodying an aim in a word, and cutting that word in stone," are emblematic of his logocentric desire, if he endeavors again and again "to make the word real – to ensure its fulfillment" (Saldívar, 1989; Garson, 2000) by monumentalizing the signifier, it is exactly the opposite which happens. There is not only no fixed meaning but the signifier, although made of stone, vanishes too. Jude's inscription is "nearly obliterated by moss" (J, p. 390) and its meaning has changed from a hopeful indication of Jude's aims to an ironic comment on the mechanism of language, on Jude's failure and on the novel itself. Or, as Jan B. Gordon states: "In a curious way, Jude the Obscure seems to disappear as a book really, leaving language, texts, and their related activities as a kind of graveyard" (Gordon, 1989, 74).

Where this "graveyard" and where Jude's defective understanding of language and writing come from and which semiotic doctrine Hardy's novel adamantly argues against becomes evident if one considers that Jude basically
follows in the footsteps of St. Paul and that he clings to his belief that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). What Jude is ultimately looking for and what he is trying to write or to chisel is this very epistle "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3; cf. Saldívar, 1989, p. 50). If Jude could find this writing in his heart, his identity and meaning in life would forever be fixed and any fetishizing of the signifier, any hammering and chiseling would become unnecessary. But the kind of writing Jude is looking for is hard to find indeed, given that it would have supernatural, magic powers (Goetsch, 1993, p. 303) since it would be exactly that kind of writing which is not subject to the very foundation and rules which make writing – as well as speaking – possible, namely absence, difference and deferral.17

That any kind of writing into the "fleshy tables" of the heart is characterized by several severe media-theoretical problems does not only become apparent if a) one considers Polycarp of Smyrna's "Therefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning"18 which indirectly proves the very absence of exactly this word, but also if b) one takes into consideration Derrida's notion of arche-writing, c) the fact that the very idea of an arche-text/Urtext or arche-word/Urwort is most probably the metaleptical and retrospective effect of writing,19 and d) that neither oral nor literate cultures can allow for the existence of an arche-logos. As Albert B. Lord has argued, in a world that conceives of itself orally no originary or arche-word is possible, let alone secondary words derived therefrom. Instead, there would be a plurality of 'original words,' and precisely because of that no original word. If one were to take Lord's thesis seriously, which Bible exegeses has hardly done, it would indeed have a fateful effect upon the unending search for the ipsissima vox of Jesus, that is to say the ipsissima structura of his words (see Kelber, 1988, p. 37).20

As Gordon has shown, Jude, "the dreamer of dreams," lives in a world in which "Origins are infinitely desired and therefore absent," so that "some kind of translation becomes necessary (because of the slipping of the Original) and impossible, because a sacred text [...] would be untranslatable" (Gordon, 1989, p. 74). Therefore, this "sacred text" or presence of meaning is clearly denounced as a figment of Jude's imagination: Sue's eyes remain for ever unfathomable and untranslatable and her character incomprehensible to him, and his revered "city of light" (J, p. 25) and worshipped "new Jerusalem" (J, p. 22) is tellingly enough not characterized by authenticity but by "copying, patching, and imitating" (J, p. 85). Christminster and its cathedral are mainly marked by the fact that "numerous blocks of stone were lying about, which signified that the cathedral was undergoing restoration or repair to a considerable extent" (J, p. 131). Indeed, "the Cathedral repairs [...] were very extensive, the whole fittings having been swept away, to be replaced by new" (J, p. 135).21 Ironically, as a stonemason Jude himself is a chief agent of this "copying, patching, and imitating", and the stone yard where he works is one of the most important places "where de-centering, the propagation of an historical supplemnt within a myth of restoration, is maintained for profit. It is a graveyard in some double sense, since the 'copy' speaks also to the death of any medieval scholasticism that could be recovered" (Gordon, 1989, p. 57). But with
Hardy, even this possibility of recoverability is negated, since "[t]here is no natural truth written anywhere that might be read", since "[e]verything in Wessex 'begins' with repetition, with secondary images of a meaning that was never present but whose signified presence is reconstituted by the supplementary and belated word of Jude's desires" (Saldívar, 2000, p. 43).

As a final look at Jude's beloved books reveals, these don't contain any original meaning either but are "amended by numerous correctors, and with variorum readings in the margin" (J, p. 43). Thus "in a world where all knowledge is emendation and revision rather than recovery" (Gordon, 1989, p. 50), texts, be they supposedly holy or not, are generally revealed to be palimpsests. But if meaning becomes a "function of progressive erasure," if the word 'Bible' comes from the Greek *ta biblia*, i.e. "the books" (Alter & Kermode, 1987, p. 11), if the Holy Text is not only from Sue Bridehead's deconstructive editorial perspective revealed to be "the reproduction of an arbitrary totalisation – the collection" (Gordon, 1989, p. 50) and turned into a conglomeration of episodes, thus reflecting the narrative structure of *Jude the Obscure*, this implies that Hardy equates his novel with the Bible and – in analogy to D. H. Lawrence in his *Study of Thomas Hardy* – denounces the holy scripture as a fictional text, i.e. literature. Moreover, the novel not only becomes the equivalent of Sue's edited version of the *New Testament*, it also coincides with Hardy's 'master narratives of masculinity' and Jude's different versions of his own male identity which both are revealed to be of an episodic nature. If, in addition to that, we also take Jude's homoerotic attachment to Phillotson, Arabella's earthy and earthly sexuality, Vilbert's emblematic function as Jude's successor, Sue's depiction as "sexless" and "boyish" and – finally – Jude's female attributes into consideration, it becomes clear that Hardy's novel vehemently a) questions the notion of a 'natural' masculinity or femininity, b) emphasizes the constructedness, alterability and even multiplicity of sexual identities, and c) calls upon the reader not to look for an original meaning but to engage critically with the text, with one's life, with one's identity. But if, as has been argued, it is in the gap between the potential capacities of a differential code and any particular specification of it that the arena of subjectivity and freedom lies, if one's identity is "'above all, an accomplishment, a particular work, a particular act,' the 'very expression' of responsibility, not something independent of it" (Ermarth, 2000), if therefore a discursive universe does not bereave us of personal responsibility and agency, this then is exactly what Jude, the "order-loving man," who takes "so much tradition on trust" (J, p. 153), is not prepared to accept: "My dear one [...] your will is law to me" (J, p. 239). In other words: "There were no brains in his head equal to this business; [...] he wished he had never seen a book, that he might never see another, that he had never been born" (J, p. 31).

**The blessings of allegory**

Instead of offering a transcendental truth, "the direct, epileptic Word," the "cry that might abolish the night" (Thomas Pynchon) or an 'authentic' and unshakeable male identity, Hardy's novel offers only formal and dynamic 'truths.' It does not posit a
simple negation of understanding but – in an almost postmodern turn – simply insists on the unverifiability of meaning and – equating Jude with Little Father Time – vehemently asks for an allegorical reading. As has been shown, taking words literally inevitably entails death. Thus, what Hardy's novel, albeit *ad negativum*, asks for is a metaphorical, even an allegorical reading and understanding of textuality, as has been suggested by Paul de Man. If the character of Little Father Time has often been criticized as being deficient from the perspective of a traditional realist aesthetics, Jude's son becomes explicable if the episode involving his death is read as an allegory: What happens to Little Father Time also happens to Jude and – in a metaphorical sense – even to Hardy's novel, which the latter repeatedly claimed to have been largely misunderstood by the public. Hardy's complaint, however, should not be understood as the implicit postulation of the existence of the one and only 'right' interpretation or of a stable, single and unitary meaning. Basically, the kind of reader Hardy attacks is his own protagonist, is Jude Fawley, i.e. a reader who ignores the figurative and allegorical dimension of writing, who looks for an "anchoring point" and the presence of sense in a literal meaning and who, just like Little Father Time, naively and anxiously "follow[s] his directions literally, without an inquiring gaze at anything" (J, p. 278). What Hardy asks for is an understanding of the figurative dimension of language, which on a metalevel shows that any final understanding is impossible. In doing so, neither he nor the novel contradict themselves since the reader experiences together with Jude

that language itself, to the extent that it attempts to be truthful, necessarily misleads us about its own ability to take us outside its own structures in search of meaning [...]. [A]s an allegory of the breakdown of the referential system, *Jude the Obscure* continues to refer to its own chiastic operations. This new referentiality is one bounded strictly by the margins of textuality (Saldívar, 2000, pp. 44; 47)

...and finally leads to the fact "that the resulting sociological, ethical, legal, or thematic categories" produced by the text "are undone by the very process that creates them" (Saldívar, 2000, p. 47). If Hardy's novel questions "the assurance of the truth of the referent," if there is simply nothing outside the symbolic order and the discursive universe of language which can fulfill the function of an unquestionable anchoring point, then the only 'safe' reference possible is, of course, a linguistic reference. That this reference is not unproblematic in itself becomes obvious if one considers that the novel also demonstrates that a one-sided, fixed and inflexible assignment of signifieds to signifiers – and this also holds true for the construction of sexual identity – is lethal and has to give way to the infinite chain of semiosis, i.e. to the potentially never-ending interpretation of signs through other signs. Thus, with regard to its meaning, Hardy's novel must be seen as an in principle unlimited play of signification, which, contrary to all attempts at controlling meaning through logic and clarification, ultimately leads to indeterminacy and indecision – and it is exactly by these very means that the text gains in fascination, depth and open-endedness. From this it follows that *Jude the Obscure* is not, as literary critics have often argued, a realist novel about the *New Woman* in the form of Sue
Bridehead but an allegory of patriarchal laws, symbolic systems and the illusion of a metaphysics of presence. For Hardy's novel, meaning is always produced, dynamic, unstable and contextual, meaning – just as one's identity – cannot be found or fixed but has to be constructed.

We can conclude that if Jude fails in the construction of his male identity and of a happy and meaningful existence, he mainly does so because he stubbornly continues to believe in the presence of a pre-given, and stable "truth" which can be located or discovered; if Jude fails, he does so because he ignores the fact that (sexual) identity is not a biological given but to a large extent the product of a metaphorical act of writing which retrospectively creates the subject's supposed unity, namely the illusion of an essence, an origin or a presence which does not exist outside language but must be regarded as its very product. This does not mean, however, that on a philosophical level Hardy's novel leaves us with a bleak and simple negative 'truth.' Jude's failure neither suggests nor implies that Hardy's novel denies the possibility of a meaningful existence. Quite the contrary: In an existential and linguistic turn, Jude the Obscure vividly and dramatically illustrates that l'existence précède l'essence (Jean-Paul Sartre), that it is absence which founds the symbolic order as well as the conditio humana and that it is exactly this lack which ultimately guarantees our freedom (Lang, 1998). If Hardy's narrator explicitly states that "nobody did come, because nobody does" (J, p. 31), this implies that individuals as 'subjects-in-process' (Kristeva; Ermarth, 2000) have to create – or better: are allowed to create their own identity and meaning in life, that this work of construction is never finished and that – in contrast to Jude's hopes and wishes but in analogy to Proust's A la Recherche du temps perdu – the price for this freedom resides in the fact that we cannot return to any kind of internal, 'essential' or 'natural' truth at the core of the subject.

References


Notes

1 Thomas Hardy: Jude the Obscure, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Dennis Taylor, Penguin Classics, London 1998 [1895]. All further references are to this edition and are abbreviated as J plus page number. This article is a thoroughly revised and enlarged version of Horlacher (2005).

2 See also: "Life is a something foreign to the classificatory demands made by the spirit. In its utterances, its values, and even its bodily grounding, life is a phenomenon of stain, illogic (sic), and obscurity" (Weinstein, 1984, p. 139).

5 For reasons of space I can only allude to the erotic component inherent in Jude’s relation to Phillotson.
6 "BIBLIOLL COLLEGE. 'SIR, – I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do. Yours faithfully, T. TETUPHENAY. 'To Mr. J. FAWLEY, Stone-cutter.'" (J, p. 117).
7 "[They] need only to prove the self that they have always shared with the dominant class to which they belong, and it is duly restored to them as their rightful inheritance." In other words: "When David Copperfield speculates whether he will turn out to be the hero of his own life, he is questioning whether he can prove himself to be what he indubitably already is" (Dolin, 2000, p. 215).
9 For a discussion of the relative (but often ignored) freedom which Lacanian psychoanalysis allows the subject see Lang (1998, p. xii).
10 Marjorie Garson (2000) argues that *Jude the Obscure* is "not a very good analysis of the divorce issue, if only because the divorces it depicts are so readily obtained" (p. 186); see also Ingham (1976, p. 164).
11 "Jude had one day seen him selling a pot of coloured lard to an old woman as a certain cure for a bad leg, the woman arranging to pay a guinea, in instalments of a shilling a fortnight, for the precious salve, which, according to the physician, could only be obtained from a particular animal which grazed on Mount Sinai, and was to be captured only at great risk to life and limb" (J, p. 26).
12 For a critical discussion of the relation between 'civil law,' 'natural law' and allegory see Horlacher (2006, pp. 324-337).
13 "There is no natural truth written anywhere that might be read without being somehow altered in the process. The text of associations Jude fabricates around him is already woven of interpretations and differences in which the meaning of dreams and the desire for illusions are unnaturally coupled" (Saldívar, 2000, p. 43).
14 "He was getting so romantically attached to Christminster that, like a young lover alluding to his mistress, he felt bashful at mentioning its name again" (J, p. 24).
15 "[T]he symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing, and this death constitutes in the subject the eternalization of his desire. The first symbol in which we recognize humanity in its vestigial traces is the sepulture, and the intermediary of death can be recognized in every relation in which man comes to the life of his history" (Lacan, 1977b, p. 104).
16 "Hardy dramatizes characters whose consciousness of what they want and why they want it remains continuously out of phase with the vagaries of their incarnate behavior. They have no terms for finding out what they are actually doing, and no way of actually doing what they want" (Weinstein, 1984, p. 138).
17 See Derrida’s notions of *archi-écriture/arche-writing, différance* and *dissémination.*
18 *Epistle to the Philippians*, my italics; see also Kelber (1988, p. 32).
19 Kelber (1988, p. 37); see also ibid., where he argues that because the visual objectification of words that takes place in the act of writing enables for the first time at all a distinction to be made between the original (Urschrift) and the copy (Abschrift), one can view the reduction of words to the original or arche-word as having been inspired by the shift towards written forms.
On the level of philosophy, Lord's thesis takes on significance with regard to Derrida's critique of the traditional dichotomy between speech and writing and the longing contained therein for the pure, logocentric origin. Speech, which in the Western tradition (according to Derrida) has become a symbol of our dreams of an eternal truth and a fundamental unity, is in Lord's view devoid of an arche-Logos. In the beginning was not the word, in the beginning were words! See Kelber (1988, p. 37).

See also: "In his bewilderment Phillotson entered the adjacent cathedral, just now in a direly dismantled state by reason of the repairs" (J, p. 162).

"'Jude,' she said brightly [...], 'will you let me make you a new New Testament, like the one I made for myself at Christminster?' 'Oh yes. How was that made?' 'I altered my old one by cutting up all the Epistles and Gospels into separate brochures, and rearranging them in chronological order as written, beginning the book with Thessalonians, following on with the Epistles, and putting the Gospels much further on. Then I had the volume rebound. My university friend (...) said it was an excellent idea. I know that reading it afterwards made it twice as interesting as before, and twice as understandable'" (J, p. 152).

Stefan Horlacher, Professor of English Literature
Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Fakultät Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften
Technische Universität Dresden, 01062 Dresden/GERMANY
E: Stefan.Horlacher@mailbox.tu-dresden.de
The Performance of Normativity: Mormons and the Construction of an American Masculinity

Elizabeth Ruchti

In this essay I argue that men in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have consciously adopted the ideal American masculine performance. I define this ideal through R. W. B. Lewis’ book, American Adam (1959), in which he explains the symbolic relationship between the nineteenth-century American man and the Biblical Adam. I argue that Mormon men, by embracing the role of the American Adam, mastered the performance of normativity while maintaining their abject identity. Mormons have relished their outsider status, often calling themselves a “peculiar people.” Their unabashed peculiarity helped secure their abjection from American culture in the nineteenth century and led to the development of a distinctly Mormon masculinity, one that passes for the ideal American masculinity. I explore early Mormon history to explain the value of abjection for Mormons, and I consider the implications of a performance of normativity staged from a position of abjection.

Mormons: A normative minority

A documentary produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons), Roots of an American Prophet: the Docudrama of the Restoration, depicts their founder, Joseph Smith, as a quintessential American:

It was no accident that the Lord spoke to an American boy; not a scholar or a religious leader for they all trusted in the wisdom they already had, and not to the citizen of any other land, for only in America was there freedom enough for a new religion to survive. Only America was filled with enough free-thinking independent people to form the nucleus of the Church that the Lord had promised to restore. (Brown, 2002)

The history of Joseph Smith, according to the LDS Church, is also the history of a growing America. In his book, Mormonism and the American Experience, Klaus J. Hansen (1981) extends the relationship between Smith and American history to a relationship between Mormonism and America, “The birth of Mormonism coincided with the birth of modern America” (p. 45). Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling (2000), in
their study of contemporary Mormonism, *Mormon America: the Power and the Promise*, explain, “Mormonism began as, and still is, a uniquely American faith” (p. xviii). Mormon theology, according to the Ostlings, wove scriptural pre-ordination into the foundation of the United States of America: “Mormonism, as the movement was quickly nicknamed, provided nationalistic Americans with a very American gospel” (p. xix). The Ostlings describe Mormons as “a model minority, hardworking people with more education than the American average, deeply committed to church and family” (pp. xx-xxiv). These virtues the Ostlings use to describe Mormons are also the virtues ideologically used to define the great American man. R. Lawrence Moore (1986), in his book, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, writes: “If inculcation in the work ethic was the hallmark of true Americanism in the nineteenth-century, then Mormons were the super Americans of that century” (p. 31). Not only are Mormons linked to America through their history and their theology, they are linked through the performance of their identity. Accordingly, Mormon men might be considered the ideal example of American men, but as a minority group, they are also considered the other.

Hansen (1981) qualifies contemporary descriptions of the Latter-day Saints as “super-American” with the realities of nineteenth century perceptions of Mormons: “Yet for all the apparent Americanism, Mormonism was consistently seen as un- and anti-American” (p. xiii). The Ostlings also acknowledge such negative stereotypes that they contend still permeate twenty-first century images of Mormons. The persistence of these stereotypes has prompted LDS leaders and rank-and-file members to become obsessed with their image, wanting desperately to avoid accusations that they are merely a “cult” and not a “real” religion. The Mormon Church has consciously worked at overcoming these stereotypes. They are beginning to see some positive results (Mauss, 1994, p. 22), but, as the Ostlings note, Mormons are still part of a minority, and the stereotypes of the last century still haunt their image.

In this essay I argue that the history of Mormonism developed a distinctly Mormon masculinity, a masculinity that emblematizes the ideal American masculinity but does so from the position of a marginalized other. The abjection of the Mormon people from American society in the middle of the nineteenth century is critical to understanding the development of Mormon masculinity and its later relationship to American normativity. The Mormon man’s abjection and subsequent conformity stage the process of becoming normative and help mark the attributes of a normative performance.

The first vision and the power of the patriarchy
According to the official history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the spring of 1820 a young boy by the name of Joseph Smith, Jr. was overwhelmed by the competing evangelical Christian churches that had overrun his town in western New York (Roberts, vol. 1: 53). After several years, Smith, at age fifteen, decided to take James’ advice, “If you lack wisdom let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Smith went to a grove near his home to ask God, in prayer, which of the competing churches was the “true” church of God (Smith, 1842/1983, 1:11).
The answer to his question came in the form of a celestial vision. Smith says in his history, as published in the Pearl of Great Price, a companion book to the Book of Mormon, that as soon as he kneeled down he was overpowered by some mysterious, evil force. He gathered all of his strength and prayed, asking God to save him from “this enemy.” He then saw a pillar of light, brighter than the sun, which delivered him from the satanic spirit. In the light he “saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” Joseph asked the divine spirits which church to join, and he was immediately told to join none of them (Smith, 1842/1983, 1:15-20; Roberts, 1965, vol. 1: 51).

According to Joseph, the two men he saw in his vision were the Lord and his “only Begotten Son,” Jesus of Nazareth. He saw the Father and the Son as two separate beings, which runs directly contrary to the traditional Christian concept of the Godhead (Allen, 1992, p. 38). Ever since the Roman Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicene, establishing the Doctrine of the Trinity, Christian theology has viewed God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost as three manifestations of the same being (Ferguson, 1990, pp. 648-65). Nineteenth-century American Christians were not entirely committed to the Christian concept of the Trinity, and therefore they would not likely have been shocked or offended by Joseph’s vision of God introducing Jesus (May, 1992, p. 103). Nonetheless, Joseph’s view of the Godhead would have profound and all-encompassing repercussions for him and his Latter-day Saints. Smith’s anti-Trinitarian vision has armed those who oppose the Church with all the ammunition they needed to claim Mormons are not Christians.

In spite of the controversy Smith’s first vision generated for modern Mormons, it represents the purity and tenacity of the Mormon Church’s foundation. A young, innocent boy enters a forest seeking divine truth and leaves with the knowledge that he is God’s chosen one. He resisted the power of evil and was thereby able to commune with God and Jesus at the same time; he moved from humanity to apotheosis in this single instance. His vision encapsulated everything that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have come to believe in, and likewise young Joseph has come to embody all of the principles to which Mormons aspire. Eric Eliason (2001) begins his introduction to his anthology, Mormons and Mormonism: an Introduction to an American World Religion, with the following statement:

These accounts have come to be remembered by Mormons as the foundational sacred episodes of their religious tradition. They also established the Mormon doctrinal ideas that most clearly set them apart from traditional Christianity—namely that humans, angels, and gods are of essentially the same species of physical beings but are in different stages of development. (Eliason, 2001, p. 2)

While it might sound outlandish to a non-believer that anyone might believe they could die and become a god, this belief is a logical extension of Joseph’s first vision and a logical extension of a non-Trinitarian view of God and Jesus. Because Joseph sees two separate beings, his vision suggests that a common man has the
ability to become a god. Smith also claims that one of the beings pointed to the other and said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him" (Smith, 1942/1943, 1: 17). When God introduces Joseph to his "Beloved Son," He confirms that the man standing next to Him is other than Him. They are two separate beings; two separate gods. In traditional Christian theology, the Father and the Son could not appear in the same time and space because those two beings are actually the same entity wearing two separate guises—that of God and that of Jesus. One of the reasons for this view of the Trinity might be that the founders of the Christian Church realized the implications of three members of the Godhead at three different stages in their deification. In other words, if Jesus is the actual Son of God, then God and Jesus must be understood as existing on a continuum of growth, something akin to what mortal beings experience through the process of birth, life, and death.

In a documentary produced by Brigham Young University (BYU), Joseph, Exploring the Life and the Ministry of the Prophet (Black, 2005), Larry C. Porter, Professor Emeritus in Church History at BYU, argues that Joseph's vision was also important because it was given to a common boy. He explains: "[Joseph Smith] learned that God answers prayer. That here you have revelation, personal revelation, given to a young man who has prepared himself and has gone through that process." If you prepare yourself, according to Porter, you too can receive divine revelation. Joseph Fielding Smith (1954), President of the LDS Church from 1970-72, encouraged all Mormon men to become prophets in their own right; the potential for which was established by a fifteen year-old boy's conversation with God and Jesus:

All Saints should be prophets. Every man who can say knowingly that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world and the Only Begotten Son of God, is a prophet. Every man that holds the priesthood, and magnifies his calling, is a prophet; and he has a right to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so far as he is concerned—but not to receive revelation for the Church. There is only one who is appointed to that office. (Vol. 1: 185)

The first vision of Joseph Smith lays the foundation for a Christian religion that does not belong to the tradition of Christianity. The vision establishes a direct link between God and men on earth and ushered in a wave of modern-day prophecies. Those prophecies have been compiled in the LDS scriptures: the Book of Mormon (1930/1983), the Pearl of Great Price (1851/1983), and the Doctrine and Covenants [D & C] (Smith, 1835/1983). The Pearl of Great Price includes Smith's translation of Matthew, the Articles of Faith—the LDS statement of beliefs, Joseph Smith's history as written by him, and translations of ancient texts Smith claimed to be the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham. The D & C contains a compilation of revelations given to Church leaders from 1831-1918. The D & C also includes a revelation regarding a manifesto abolishing polygamy, given by President Wilford Woodruff in 1890 and a revelation granting black men the power of priesthood, given by President Spencer W. Kimball in 1978.

The power of revelation did not rest solely in the hands of Joseph Smith. Revelation is still integral to the workings of Mormonism. All male Saints have the power to receive revelation, so long as their revelations do not contradict Joseph's.
In 1831, in the *D &C*, Joseph Smith reveals a commandment from God that only he, as the President of the Church, was entitled to receive revelations for the Church (1835/1983, 43: 3-6). In other words, as long as a man does not try to challenge the divine authority of the Church President, any Latter-day Saint male can commune with God and Jesus Christ and share the truths he learns with the world.

Faithful Mormon men, through the power of what the Church calls the restored priesthood, have divine power and authority (*Gospel Principles*, 1997, p. 81). The Mormon man has authority over his wife and children. He has the power to baptize, perform sacrament rituals, and heal the sick. Men in the Church supervise women, and, while she can hold positions of authority over other women within the Church structure, her decisions and activities must always be approved and monitored by a priesthood holder, any active Mormon male (*Latter-day Saint Woman*, 2000, vol.1: 93-96). Just as the Mormon woman has limitations to her authority, so too does the Mormon man. In *Gospel Principles* (1997), an instruction manual provided by LDS leadership for the edification of their members, men in the Church are cautioned about abusing their priesthood authority by unfairly dominating those in their charge: “Priesthood holders should preside in love and kindness. They should not force their families and others to obey them. The Lord has told us that the power of the priesthood cannot be controlled except in righteousness” (p. 83).

The Church’s official advice to women on matters of conflict in the home, as stated in their instructional manual, *The Latter-day Woman* (2000), leaves no room for them to question abuses of the patriarchy:

After a husband and a wife have counseled together, under the inspiration of the Spirit, the husband has responsibility to make certain that the power of the priesthood call forth wisdom and understanding from heaven to bless that home. The wife and children then support those decisions with full purpose of heart. In this way the husband’s position as head of the home is reinforced and greater family unity will result. (Vol. 1: 94)

The limitations to patriarchal authority are minimal in comparison to those of women in the Church, especially considering that priesthood authority does not merely reference the superiority of a husband over his wife on earth.¹ A Mormon man’s power is far more pervasive than temporal dominance. His dominance and the gender norms that regulate his relationship with his wife extend into the afterlife (Basquiat, 2001, p. 24). Priesthood authority, the enactment of, and obedience to, is practice for life after death when priesthood holders, if they are worthy, will become gods and their earthly wives, if they are worthy, will become goddesses and serve as their husbands’ helpmates for all eternity (Smith, 1835/1983, 132: 21-25).

*The true American Adam*

To the LDS Church, love for the United States of America is more than just patriotism, it is devotion to God. According to Mormon teachings and scriptures, America was founded for the purpose of the restoration of the true Gospel of Christ through God’s servant, Joseph Smith. A revelation given to Joseph Smith in 1833 reads, in part: “And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land,
by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood” (Smith, 1835/1983, 101: 8o). The Book of Mormon tells us that the American continent was a gift from God to his chosen people; “a land of promise” that was to be “kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations” (2 Nephi 1:5-8). God did not just give his chosen people a land upon which to build His kingdom, He gave them the greatest land on earth, “a choice land [...] above all other lands” (2 Nephi 10:19). This land came equipped with a pre-ordained institution that, whether its designers knew it or not, was designed for the coming of the Latter-day Saints.

In 1952, the LDS Church published the third edition of W. Cleon Skousen’s compilation of Mormon prophecies, *Prophecy and Modern Times*. Skousen devotes one third of his book to prophecies pertaining to America, a testament to the important role the Americas have and will play in God’s divine plan (pp. 15-16). One such reference can be found in 2 Nephi, 10: 10-11: “But behold, this land, said God, shall be a land of thine inheritance, and the Gentiles shall be blessed upon the land. And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles.”

The glory of America, according to the Book of Mormon, exists for the Latter-day Saints. The gentiles who fought to free the land from foreign kings, Joseph’s grandfathers included, were doing the work of God in preparation for a young boy who would need free-thinking and independent people, confident in their rights to chose God’s law over man’s law. God chose Joseph to embody the characteristics of the nineteenth-century vision of the American Adam.

R. W. B. Lewis (1959), in his book, *The American Adam*, describes the nineteenth-century conception of the American Adam as “a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history” (p. 1). He seems to be, in fact, the incarnation of Manifest Destiny. The period of American literary history that spawned this myth is the same period of time in which Smith created his new religion. After the revolution, Americans saw their “new world” as raw material with which to construct their own destinies. Lewis writes:

The new habits to be engendered on the new American scene were suggested by the image of a radically new personality, the hero of new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. It was not surprising, in a Bible-reading generation, that the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the fall. (p. 5) [Italics mine]

The American Adam has no source other than his own natural existence. He creates, defines, and regulates. America was a gift from God, and he, the American Adam—the collective American male consciousness—was the noble creator of this new world. Lewis explains: “This new Adam is both maker and namer; his innocent pleasure, untouched by humility, is colored by the pride of one who looks on his
work and finds it good. The things that are named seem to spring into being at the sound of the word” (1959, 51).

This is also the picture of Joseph Smith that the LDS Church circulates. He was a young, innocent boy—consistently portrayed in LDS films as a strong, handsome, blond Aryan of solid Anglo-Saxon ancestry—seeking truth when God told him that his future was that of a prophet and leader of His people. Joseph was a young poor boy, typically and commonly American, with the strength to fight off evil forces that opposed him. He was predestined to restore the true Gospel to earth, and though he would suffer at the hands of his enemies, his rewards in heaven would be great. Joseph, like all those who followed him, would some day be a god himself. Joseph was the ideal nineteenth-century American Adam, both in the metaphorical sense that Lewis describes, and in the literal sense.

Not only was Joseph the preordained prophet of God’s promised land, poised to usher in a new millennium, he was also returning God’s people to the place where all of humanity originated. One of the most unusual and quintessentially Mormon prophecies that Skousen includes in his book pertains to the Garden of Eden. In the D & C, section 116 and section 117: 8, Joseph reveals that the Garden of Eden was once located near Far West, Missouri, the location where the Saints had set up their Zion before being attacked by mobs and militias (Smith, 1835/1983). Klaus J. Hansen explains the significance of the Garden of Eden revelations:

The American search for the new Adam, in the understanding of Smith, was but a quest for a return of the Old Adam, another corollary of the restorationist theme. The historical reconstruction of Joseph Smith thus made it possible to conjure from the bones of an American Adam and his pre-Colombian descendants an image of America that could motivate those who believed in this past to recreate the Garden of Eden in its literal, original setting. (Hansen, 1981, 67)

According to the teachings found in the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and Smith’s own revelations from the D & C, the myth of the American Adam that so many nineteenth-century Americans fantasized about was real. Adam—the Biblical Adam—was born on what is now known as the North American continent. He was the first inhabitant of the land and therefore supersedes American Indian claims as the original Americans. God gave Adam the power of priesthood authority just miles away from the Latter-day Saints’ Zion, in Missouri. God granted Adam the priesthood, but, according to the Book of Moses and the D & C, God took the priesthood away again when the Israelites failed to keep God’s commandments (Pearl, 1851/1983, 6: 51-68; Smith, 1835/1983, 84: 18-28). God had foreordained that the priesthood would not be returned in full until Joseph Smith was born in the nineteenth century AD (Smith, 1835/1983, 1: 17). Joseph, with his power to commune freely with God and know God’s will, with his authority to create the world around him, and with the determination to follow his destiny, assumed Adam’s role in God’s plan. He became the true American Adam. Everything that happened before Joseph was born was in preparation for his coming. Joseph’s history was Adam’s future. Like the nineteenth-century myth of the American Adam and the Biblical Adam from
which that came, Joseph Smith had no history, only a future; a future that he would control by the will of God.

This future, as told in The Book of Mormon, is the story of America’s destiny in preparation for Joseph. The story begins with a faithful Israelite, named Lehi, and his family, migrating to America around 600 BC. Lehi predicts the imminent fall of Israel to Babylon, but other Israelites refuse to listen and threaten to kill him. God tells Lehi and his family to leave Jerusalem and go to the desert. Lehi’s family and another family, who joined them for the purpose of procreation, build a ship at God’s command and sail across the ocean. They land somewhere in what is believed to be Central America. The two families quickly grow into a large community led by Lehi’s third eldest son, Nephi. Nephi’s two older brothers, Laman and Lemuel, constantly rebel against, Lehi, Nephi, and God’s will. Sometime after Lehi’s death, Laman and Lemuel threaten a coup, so Nephi and his righteous followers, who call themselves Nephites, leave to establish a separate kingdom far away. Anyone who chose to stay with Laman and Lemuel, instead of following Nephi, was cursed by God with dark skin. The Lamanites, as the cursed people were known, are the ancestors of today’s American Indians.

The Nephites and Lamanites fight each other for the rest of the book. Occasionally, the Lamanites find God and the Nephites find sin. In the end, both the Nephites and the Lamanites are sinners, and God allows the evil, dark Lamanites to wipe His chosen white-skinned people off of the face of the earth. Throughout all of this, the Nephites kept a history of their people carved on golden plates. The last historian of the Nephites was a righteous man named Mormon. His righteous son, Moroni, takes the plates when his father dies and records the final days of the Nephites. He then carries the plates to western New York and buries them in a hill. Over one thousand years later, Moroni appears to Joseph Smith and tells him to translate the plates.

This very truncated version of the Book of Mormon story provides a framework with which to understand the primary function of the story and its repercussions for LDS theology. In 1982, LDS authorities added the subtitle, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” to the title of the Book of Mormon, thereby repositioning the Book of Mormon’s function squarely within the tradition of Christianity (Brewster, 1990, p. 9; Davies, 2003, p. 64). This change was justified by the claim in the Book of Mormon that, after being raised from the dead, Jesus traveled the world teaching his gospel and telling the story of his life, his death, and his gift of eternal salvation. Early in the Book of Mormon, the Nephites are told of Jesus’ coming almost six hundred years before His birth. They learn who Jesus is and what his life will mean for them (1 Nephi, 1: 9-11). The Nephites start living Jesus’ teachings long before he is ever born. It is not until Christ’s death and resurrection, however, that the Nephites enjoy the gifts of Christian salvation. Four hundred years later, the Lamanites destroy the Nephites and wipe Christian practices and salvation from the face of the earth.

The Book of Mormon also explains the complicated relationship of Mormon theology and culture to race. The racist assumptions that underscore most of the action in the Book of Mormon still permeate LDS teachings today, and, I argue, are an unavoidable aspect of Mormon theology because of the dependence of the Book of Mormon story on a racial binary. The story follows two loosely interwoven
structures: first, the preparation for the coming of Jesus and the destruction of his gospel by evil; second, the migration of Israelites to the Americas and their subsequent division into forces of good and evil. When the Israelites arrive in America, they quickly break off into two opposing communities, establishing a binary between Nephites and Lamanites, Christians and non-Christians, the good and the evil. God marks the evil Lamanites with dark skin, and the good Nephites are given white skin.

The contrast between the good and evil in the Book of Mormon depends on race. In *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, Newell G. Bringhurst (1981) explains that nineteenth-century Americans, fearing an impending millennium, expected a struggle between forces of good and evil. “Joseph Smith,” Bringhurst writes, “painted this millennialistic struggle in contrasting racial images of black and white” (p. 7). As with Foucault’s explanation of relations of power in *Discipline and Punish*, one group assumes the role of dominance and the other the role of submission, but the roles are not static and require constant regulation. The fear of lost power and abjection motivates regulation. For Mormons, the fear of evil, as marked by dark skin, serves as the regulatory motivator, the ever-present threat of abjection being written upon the body. Whiteness defines Mormon identity as much as their calling as God’s chosen people because the two are completely intertwined. The Mormon’s whiteness entitles them to their chosen status, and their chosen status entitles them to their whiteness.

Mormons have made considerable efforts in the last forty years to change public perception of them as racist. Their theological and historical relationship with race has made this perception difficult to change, and, in some regards, something they cannot change. The Mormon claim that they are the divinely chosen inheritors of the Promised Land and the “American dream” depends on their superiority as white people. Their whiteness, as presented in the Book of Mormon, is a gift from God. It distinguishes them, as the righteous, from the sinners. To suggest such an inherent racism in Mormon theology would shock and anger most Mormons (Smith, 2005, p. 450). Since 1978, when the Church finally granted black men the right to priesthood authority, Mormons have carefully worked to rid themselves of racism, not just for the sake of their image, but because they understand racism as wrong and immoral.

The Mormon belief that they are God’s chosen people is so intertwined with the racism of the Book of Mormon that to give up one they have to give up the other. LDS theology validates Joseph’s position as the American Adam by arguing that Joseph was handpicked by God to return humankind to the blissful state of the Garden of Eden. He was a good, God-fearing Anglo-Saxon boy of solid Colonial stock not marked by the curse of dark skin, who sought with compassion to bring all of God’s children, dark-skinned or not, back to righteousness. With that righteousness, the evil doer’s skin would be lightened, and the doors of Eden and heaven would be opened unto him or her. Joseph had to have white skin to do God’s work and fulfill the destiny of Adam because the pre-cursed state of Adam’s lineage was white (*Pearl of Great Price*, 1851/1983, Moses, 5: 40). With the privilege granted Joseph by his white skin, he had all of the attributes of the first man, Adam. God gave Joseph the priesthood and the knowledge of heaven and earth. Joseph, according to the Book of Mormon, the *Pearl of Great Price*, and the *Doctrine and Covenants*, was
living out Adam’s destiny by re-establishing God’s covenant on earth and handing it down to a lineage of faithful Latter-day Saints. Joseph’s birthplace—America—was also his birthright—the kingdom of Adam, the Promised Land of the Saints.

A trail of abjection
The Latter-day Saints were forced out of one state after another by persecution and mob violence. New York chased them away for Smith’s use of the occult; Ohio ran them off for Smith’s polygamous practices, opposing slavery, communicating with Indians, and building too much wealth (Quinn, 1994, p. 90); Missouri—still the site of the Mormon’s Zion—and Illinois forced them further west for very much the same reasons, except that in these last two cases, the Mormons fought back and the violence escalated (Berrett, 1985, pp. 110-14, 196-199; Quinn, 1994, pp. 91, 95, 100). In each new location, the Mormons violated the sexual and social norms of the various communities, and the communities responded with brutal punishment and eventual abjection. By retreating to Utah, the Saints embraced their abjection and created a world that was not regulated by American cultural values. Their time in isolation must have been a relief to the long-persecuted Mormons because it ended, at least temporarily, their existence as the American abject. One cannot be abject if there is no dominating normative against which to be defined.

Mormons stuck together on all matters, and through their missionary work they brought new converts into the fold all the time. The citizens of the towns Mormons lived in before they moved to Utah feared becoming minorities in their own communities, and worse, minorities to strange theocratic people who called the Indians “chosen people,” opposed slavery, and accumulated land and wealth at disconcerting rates (Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, pp. 38-9). Mormons were seen as a terrifying and diabolical other that needed to be expelled from their midst.

The persecution escalated everywhere the Mormons settled. They traveled further and further west with each new banishment, with the exception of slightly eastward retrenchment to Nauvoo, Illinois. It was during the Nauvoo period, the summer of 1844, that Joseph Smith was murdered by a mob of vigilantes (Roberts, vol. 2: 274-85). Brigham Young became the next president of the Church and led his people west, hoping to establish a temporary kingdom outside of the United States borders where they could worship in peace (Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, p. 44). Under Young’s direction the Mormon’s settled in the Salt Lake Valley in the high deserts of the Rocky Mountains. When they arrived, the land was vacant, save the original inhabitants: the Ute Indians.

In the peace and privacy of their new home, Salt Lake City, Young decided that Mormons could now practice their faith with greater commitment and less secrecy. Young became the official theocratic ruler of the Mormons. This was the design established by Smith, though he was not able to fully practice theocracy due to the Mormons’ subjugation to civil law in the settled territories of the east (Quinn, 1994, pp. 86, 248; Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, pp. 48-49). The practice of plural marriage increased under Young’s leadership (Ivans, 1992, p. 170-1). He reinstated the law of communal living which he called the United Order. This was also one of Smith’s policies, but he was unable to make it work in the east because of outside interference by gentiles. Young was now able to enforce the United Order with some
success, that is, until gentiles began to arrive in Salt Lake City in mass (Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, pp. 36-37, 46-49).

The federal government, having decided to annex the Utah territory as a state, began to systematically weaken the power of LDS leaders in the Utah territory. The Mormon leadership responded by abandoning their dream of a theocratic state named Deseret, and worked to attain statehood on their own terms, but their petition was denied by Congress on the grounds of their polygamous practices (Hardy, 1992, pp. 12-13, 128-9; Roberts, vol. 3: 499-501, vol. 5: 7). When Brigham Young died in 1877, the United States government had imposed their own governor on the territory, Utah already had a large influx of “gentiles,” the United Order had failed, and polygamy was eroding the financial and political stronghold the LDS leadership had over Utah (Roberts, vol. 5: 489, 509). By 1887 the federal government had outlawed polygamy and disenfranchised the Church, confiscating all the Church’s properties and wealth (Ostling, 2000, p. 76). Both polygamy and communalism were ended by the new president, John Taylor (Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, p. 48).

Taylor assumed the presidency at a time when Latter-day Saints were again losing the freedom to define themselves—the colonizers of Utah were now the colonized. The Mormons in the early years of Utah Territory had been prosperous. They made their own laws and lived their lives according to their own belief systems. When Manifest Destiny caught up with Utah, the persecution returned, but now it took place on Mormon land—land, that is, that they took from the Ute Indians, land they had developed for their own purposes (Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, pp. 49-50). The Mormons were now the abject of their own society. John Taylor, in succeeding Young, was given the choice of either ending LDS practices considered deviant by mainstream America or finding a way to continue their practices without risking the wrath of abjection. Taylor and the Church leaders who followed him made a strategic choice to Americanize on their own terms (Mauss, 1994, p. 22).

The great capitulation: Mormon assimilation

According to Armand L. Mauss’ (1994) study of Mormon assimilation, The Angel and the Beehive: the Mormon Struggle with Assimilation, the terms of Utah’s statehood required Mormon assimilation. In his book, Mormonism in Transition (1986), Thomas Alexander notes that by the end of the nineteenth-century Church leaders became increasingly concerned with perceptions of Mormons by non-Mormons (p. 239). Church leaders took an aggressive position on assimilation and encouraged their members to obey American laws and participate in American culture. Anything that marked them as visibly other disappeared soon after the start of the twentieth century (Mauss, pp. 21-2, 78).

This does not mean that the Mormons completely lost their identities in the short time between the annexation of Utah, 1896, and the period of active assimilation in the early twentieth century. On the contrary, in order for the Latter-day Saints to remain the Latter-day Saints, they would have to maintain and re-emphasize some vestiges of their pre-assimilation identity, such as the health code known as the Word of Wisdom, temple ordinance work for the dead (including genealogical work), and the eternality of the family unit (Alexander, 1986, p. 307). As Mauss explains, for any “deviant” religious group to survive, they must maintain a
tension between members who support assimilation—broader social acceptance—and members who support separatism—the protection of their religious respectability (1994, p. 5).

Mormons, in other words, have maintained their uniqueness and independence by retaining aspects of their identities that led to their abjection while simultaneously finding normative acceptance—though not normativity itself—by ridding themselves of the most strikingly obvious forms of their otherness (Alexander, 1986, p. 14; Moore, 1986, p. 43; Leone, 1979, 167-8). Mormons curtailed practices that drew the most attention and brought on the most persecution by either altering the role of those practices in the Church or letting them lie dormant through the period of assimilation. This ended, according to Mauss, sometime after the 1960s when Mormons began to reassert their distinct characteristics (1994, pp. 66, 85). Through their active participation in the assimilation process, the LDS leadership developed an effective technique for holding onto their “unique identity” without suffering the wrath of social abjection. Mormons have learned to perform normativity without losing their abject identity.

Mauss explains that Latter-day Saints had developed such a distinctively Mormon way of life in Utah that dominant culture perceived them as an “un-American, anti-American, insurgent counterculture” (1994, p. 22). As a necessary part of their assimilation, both explicitly and implicitly, Mormons had shed this image. While the Church did abandon these “un-American” institutions in practice, they retained them at the level of doctrine (Mauss, 1994, p. 24). The United Order ended with the influx of gentiles into the Salt Lake Valley, but the Church operates a vast social welfare program and teaches that Zion will be communal (Moore, 1986, p. 42). Mormons banned the practice of polygamy with excommunication as the punishment for any man taking multiple wives (Ostling, 2000, pp. 67, 87), but the promise of polygamy still exists as a reward in the afterlife and still remains a defining aspect of Mormon theology (Hansen, 1981, p. 177).

On the one hand, the Church ordered the practices be stopped and, on the other hand, told members to hold them sacred. Understandably, this caused some confusion in the Church and slowed the process of eradicating polygamy (Alexander, 1986, pp. 4, 6-7). Many members were unwilling to give up this practice as it was fundamental to their understanding of the afterlife (Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, p. 50). As new, more Americanized members took leadership positions the Church took a more aggressive stance on polygamy (Cannon, 1992, p. 207). The Church was eventually able to eliminate most polygamous practices by investigating and excommunicating Saints still engaged in the practice (Hardy, 1992, pp. 290-2; Cannon, 1992, p. 213; Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, p. 227).

Through such hard-line stances, the Church was gradually making its position on the matter clear: polygamy was to stop and, more importantly, civil laws were to be obeyed. The Latter-day Saints were well on their way to ridding themselves of their anti-American image. Though it took Church leaders some time to prove they were serious about assimilation, Mormons soon became fervently patriotic, law-abiding citizens, and their prospects for assimilation were looking brighter. Latter-day Saint participation in the efforts of World War I marked a new beginning for Mormons as Americans (Ostling, 2000, p. 91).
Staging the American masculine ideal

Through the process of assimilation Latter-day Saints assumed an increasingly conservative image that aligned them with the power brokers of American politics and economics, arenas that have historically blocked people of color. They adopted a corporate style of governance and secularized some of their finances (Alexander, 1986, pp. 94-8, 105-110). Church leaders more and more came from successful careers in law and business. Church authorities increasingly aligned themselves with the Republican Party. They also placed greater emphasis on issues of morality—ironically, emphasizing “sexual morality” despite their own past in practicing sexual and marital liberties beyond the Christian-American “norm” (Alexander, 1986, p. 9; Mauss, 1994, pp. 24, 29; Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, p. 65; Ostling, 2000, p. 119; Hansen, 1981, p. 176). Their political stances have become increasingly conservative throughout the twentieth century. The Mormon Church aggressively opposed the New Deal during the Great Depression; they were strategic in the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s. In the 1970s as well, they began a practice of using electric shock therapy as a cure for homosexuality (Alexander, 1986, 37; Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, pp. 69, 224). In spite of their status as the abject, Mormons have become the epitome of the silent, moral majority.

Everything about the LDS Church now takes on a corporate appearance. Even their Sunday services have a stronger resemblance to a business conference than a worship service. White men—and on occasion men of color—sit in rows of theater-style seats that line the raised stage in front of the congregation. They wear dark-colored business suits and short, conservative haircuts. The presiding Bishop only speaks to give announcements, introduce speakers, and attend to matters of Church business. He is, in other words, more like a business manager than a spiritual leader. Each week different members of the congregation, both men and women, young and old, give “talks.” These sacrament speeches replace the sermons typically given by the minister in other churches. The talks typically sound the same following a similar pattern of speech: slow and soft with little affectation. Other members sit quietly on wooden pews that fill the large chapel. They participate in the service by singing hymns, raising their hands to confirm a decision of the Church leadership, and taking the sacrament (Leone, 1979, p. 173).

The common style of dress, speech, and building-design give Mormon houses of worship a very homogenous look and feel. Before, after, and during the Sunday service—or at any other time when Mormons congregate for that matter—the mannerisms of, and interactions between, Church members also look and feel uniform. The bishop and the members of his bishopric stand at the two entrances to the chapel and greet members as they enter the chapel. They smile and shake the hands of the adults and older children and pat the younger children on the head or back or simply let them slide past. Mormon men display confidence. They stand up straight, look each other in the eyes, shake hands with authority, hug other men without embarrassment, and emote publicly when “bearing testimony.” Anthropologist David C. Knowlton (1992) argues that Mormonism advocates, “at least officially, a limited kind of male bonding between companions, and within quorums and presidencies. Here, such male bonding is positively sanctioned to build, and express with emotion, love for one another at appropriate times.”
controlled homosocialism gives the appearance of a strong bond that is not too intimate.

In their Sunday business suits, with their business-style haircuts and their business-style meetings, Mormon men have embodied the image of the great American capitalist. He is calm, confident, and in control. He no longer matches the stereotypes of yesterday. Mormon men today are more commonly thought of as very average white men who have some very bizarre practices. Mormon folklorists, Austin and Alta Fife (1956/1966), in their important study of Mormon culture, Saints of Sage and Saddle, write:

We have outlived the legend that the Mormon may be identified on sight as he goes about, complete with horns and hooves, leering indiscriminately at females. So completely has the Mormon been integrated into American culture that we have reached the point where it takes some discernment to identify him. (Fife, 1956/1966, 1)

The Fifes go on to explain that his outward appearances might let him pass as “one of us,” but his identity and cultural practices “differentiate him somewhat more than did the caricatures of the closing years of the nineteenth-century” (1956/1966, 1). With polygamy and communalism safely in the realm of theology, the aspects of Mormonism that mark them as other and, at times, relegate them to the realm of the abject, are their everyday practices. Mormons still wear sacred garments and participate in secret rituals borrowed from Smith’s early days as a Freemason (Quinn, 1994, pp. 114-5). Mormons live by a strict dietary code called the Word of Wisdom that prohibits the use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and—though this tenet is rarely if ever observed—meat except in times of famine (Smith, 1835/1983, section 89). Mormons rarely swear, avoid movies with adult ratings, do not engage in pre-marital sex, dress modestly, and follow a tradition of male dominance. Mormons appear to be the romanticized Americans from the “good-old-days” in the nineteenth century.

Mormon identity today hinges almost entirely on images of men: homogenous images of conservative, white men. This image of the Mormon man enables him to “pass” in normative culture in spite of his outsider status. It is an image to which Mormon men almost monolithically conform. Mormons, however, have always had the makings of normativity. According to Bruce R. Lott (2000), early Mormon male rhetoric and action demonstrated a marked preference for “a ‘rough’ over a refined ideal of manly performance” (p. 19). Lott explains: “The single characteristic that early nineteenth-century American men believed above all distinguished them from every ‘other’ in contrast to whom they defined their manhood was their ‘manly independence’” (p. 20). Mormon men found their manly independence earlier than average American men because Mormon men married at earlier ages and were indoctrinated into work culture in adolescence (pp. 23, 61). As a result, the groundwork for assimilation, via the normalization of Mormon masculinity, was laid almost a century before the Mormon leadership encouraged members to enter into the normative fray.
Conclusion: Adam, the abject in his own kingdom

Ancient LDS history has had a profound impact on the ways that Mormons define themselves in the modern world. They are the chosen people, chosen at the dawn of time, chosen to carry out the divine mission of the first man, Adam. God chose Joseph Smith to return the power of priesthood authority to the earth and build a following of Saints who, through this power, would usher in the new millennium and return God’s children to him in righteousness. Their reward for this great work is eternal life and the glory of their own personal godhood.

This reward, according to all the teachings of the LDS scriptures, will be granted to faithful white men. Women cannot have the priesthood and therefore cannot be fully empowered Gods in the afterlife, except as a Mother in Heaven who supports the Father in Heaven, the ruler of their Heavenly Kingdom. Their role in this life is to support the priesthood, and their reward in the afterlife will be the continued support of their priesthood husband, now a god. Men of color also cannot be Gods, for, according to LDS doctrine, the goal of salvation is to return to the pure state of Adam. This pure state has been defined clearly by LDS doctrine as white. A man of color, according to 3 Nephi, 2:15, will become a white man once his salvation is granted.

It could be argued from this that the only change to the man of color entering heaven is the color of his skin. He is still the same man; only his “countenance,” as it is often referred to in LDS scripture, has changed. This argument would make sense if contemporary issues of race and the application of a racial binary in the Book of Mormon were simply a question of skin color. The racism that permeates LDS scriptures and culture is, at its most fundamental level, an issue of “us” versus “them,” good versus evil. The nineteenth century that gave birth to Joseph Smith and his Saints and the twentieth century that assimilated them into American culture understand people of color as the counterpoint to white people. The rhetoric and practice of such racism in the Mormon faith insist on a white vision of salvation. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the LDS Church ushers in the new image of the American Adam. He is the white, heterosexual, corporate American man: controlled, subtle, and utterly conservative. He defines his world and the past only serves to preordain his future. He is chosen by God, and he is responsible for the salvation of the women and children in his care and for the conversion and assimilation of the heathen other. He is the Mormon man, granted the divine authority of patriarchal power—essentially, a god in embryo.

As the Mormon man navigates the world of the gentiles, he must confront their lack of faith, their misunderstanding of their place in his world. The Mormon man, the American Adam, is a minority in his own Promised Land. His patriarchal authority is not recognized outside of his community. He must bow to the laws of the land, the laws that were written to enable his God-given right to rule America through divine inspiration. If he fails to follow those laws, he will be abjected from his own promised land. The Mormon man knows that through his trust in God and his adherence to God’s law, he lives everyday with the ever-present threat of abjection.

The Mormon man, in spite of this threat, continues to believe and espouse his beliefs, even if in a watered-down version. His abject status in his own land has not deterred him from assuming normativity and dominance at the site of
performance. Dominant culture views the Mormon man as an outsider, a marginalized other on the verge of complete social deviance—abjection; yet, the Mormon man carries himself with the air of an insider. His marginalized status does not stop him from assuming pivotal roles in American society (Ostling, 2000, pp. 136-7; Gottlieb & Wiley, 1984, pp. 87-90).

Mormon men have become the most normative acting marginalized group in the country. Their success depends on their white, corporate appearance and on their undeterred faith that they are the American Adam. They have achieved, in their marginalization, the successful performance of normativity.

References


Pearl of great price. (1851/1983). Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.


Notes

1 The power of the Mormon patriarch seems at times to go unchecked. In Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance (1996), Lavina Fielding Anderson and Janice Merrill Allred demonstrate a systemic problem of abuse within the LDS Church by male members hiding under the auspices of priesthood authority. Anderson, in her essay, “The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership,” outlines the over-reaching authority of LDS leaders through their aggressive backlash against Mormon intellectuals in recent decades.

2 In her book, Mormon Lives: A Year in the Elkton Ward (1993), Susan Buhler Taber provides an excellent description of the structure and style of a Mormon Church service.

Elizabeth Ruchti, Instructor
Women’s Studies, Carlow University
3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213/USA
e: lizruchti@msn.com
“He was pretty good in there today”: Reviving the Macho Christ in Ernest Hemingway’s “Today is Friday” and Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ

Lisa Tyler

Mel Gibson’s 2004 film The Passion of the Christ, like Hemingway’s 1926 one-act play/short story “Today is Friday,” is about the ways in which its creator believed that he had directly benefited from Christ’s suffering. Both Hemingway and Gibson were raised by religiously conservative, emotionally repressive fathers, and both declared themselves Catholics. Both men experienced suicidal depression as mature young men, and each found in Christ’s torment on the cross both a trope for his own battles with depression and an inspiration to survive his own emotional suffering. In this essay, I first place both men within the sociocultural, religious tradition known as “muscular Christianity” and trace the ways in which they were both influenced by that tradition. I document their emotional volatility and their bouts with profound depression, examining the ways in which each credits faith with enabling him to survive his own dark night of the soul.

It is inconceivable that the suffering of Christ on the cross . . . would mean anything to anyone unless pain was intrinsically shareable.

Ariel Glucklich (2001, p. 63)

At Chicago’s First United Methodist Church, a group of about 30 people gathered in the spring of 2004 to discuss the film The Passion of the Christ. According to a press report, most of those in attendance found the film needlessly, excessively violent. One dissenter, a homeless man and ordained Baptist minister, raised a hand to ask, “Can’t a person benefit from someone else’s suffering? My brother saved me from getting beat up more than once by taking the beatings himself. I’m going through suffering now. If I look at Jesus’ suffering, I know I can do this” (Van Biema, 2004, p. 60). The other attendees listened politely but remained unpersuaded—a problem the speaker later attributed to their own remoteness from suffering.
But that fellow who spoke up, the one who responded to Christ’s suffering because it inspired him to endure his own suffering, has a point, one that I think both Ernest Hemingway and Mel Gibson would appreciate. I want to argue that Gibson’s film *The Passion of the Christ*, like Hemingway’s 1926 one-act play/short story “Today is Friday,” is about the ways in which both men believed they had directly benefited from Christ’s suffering. Both men were raised by religiously conservative, emotionally repressive fathers, and both declared themselves Catholics. Both Hemingway and Gibson experienced suicidal depression as mature young men, and each found in Christ’s torment on the cross both a trope for his own battles with depression and an inspiration to survive his own emotional suffering.

In this essay, after briefly introducing both works, I first place both men within the sociocultural, religious tradition known as “muscular Christianity” and trace the ways in which they were influenced by both that tradition and their upbringing by strict, religiously conservative fathers. I document their emotional volatility and their bouts with profound depression, examining the ways in which each credits faith with enabling him to survive his own dark night of the soul.

As is now widely known, *The Passion of the Christ* portrays the last twelve hours of Christ’s life, drawing extensively on the Gospels for much of its content. Hemingway’s four-page, one-act play “Today is Friday” focuses on the same event, Christ’s crucifixion, indirectly, by depicting the reactions of the Roman soldiers who carried out the execution. Such indirectness was typical for a man who called his own memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, autobiography by reflection (M. Hemingway, 1964) and who once wrote (in an article not published until after his death) “I sometimes think my style is suggestive rather than direct,” adding, “The reader must often use his imagination or lose the most subtle part of my thought” (Wagner, 1987, p. 275).

*Muscular Christianity*

It is important to note that in reviving the macho Christ, both men are (consciously or not) working within the tradition known as “muscular Christianity,” a nineteenth-century social, religious, and cultural movement originating in Britain and emphasizing the importance of health and physical fitness in Christian men. It was not a new movement even in the Victorian era: “Throughout Western literature a strong historical connection was drawn between the idealized knightly soldier and the athlete as Christian” (Ladd and Mathisen, 1999, p. 17). Its best known proponents were writers Charles Kingsley, who is now ironically best known for his children’s novel *The Water Babies*, and Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown’s School Days*, a paean to violence and the British public school of Rugby. (Interestingly, Hemingway owned works by both men—*Tom Brown’s School Days*, by Hughes, and two copies of Kingsley’s *Westward, Ho!* [Brasch & Watson, 1981].)

The movement was later popularized in the United States via the Young Men’s Christian Association: “The development of the YMCA in the United States relied on a muscular Christian agenda to reach a white, middle-class culture” (Ladd and Mathisen, 1999, p. 43). Theodore Roosevelt, a personal hero of Hemingway’s childhood (Reynolds, 1986, pp. 28-30, 163, 232), was among the American proponents of the movement.

In considerations of literary history, Hemingway’s work is usually opposed to the more pious aspects of muscular Christianity. As Clifford Putney (2001) accurately
notes, America’s literary modernists rejected “the Christian manliness of Ben-Hur and other literary heroes of an older generation,” instead preferring “Ernest Hemingway’s soldier-narrator in A Farewell to Arms, a rugged stoic who confessed to have seen ‘nothing sacred’ in the Great War, and who wanted nothing more to do with ‘the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain’” (p. 201).

But an occasional literary critic has noted Hemingway’s earlier indebtedness to muscular Christianity. Although he does not specifically make the connection to the religious movement, Warren Bennett (1995) has linked “Today is Friday” with Ezra Pound’s 1909 poem “The Ballad of the Goodly Fere” and suggested that the theme of both is “the masculinization of Jesus of Nazareth” (p. 203). Hemingway biographer Carlos Baker, who has openly admitted he “dislikes” “Today is Friday” (1969, p. xiv), has complained that its “dialogue read[s] like a locker-room discussion among high-school sophomore football players” (Baker, 1969, p. 169)—thus linking Christianity with athleticism.

Like Gibson’s film, Hemingway’s short story also takes its place in a larger societal dialogue about how we see (or should see) Jesus. It is possible that it is a direct response to Bruce Barton’s 1925 book The Man Nobody Knows. Although there is no direct evidence that Hemingway read Barton’s book, it is probably significant that Barton is the son of the Hemingway family’s minister (Monteiro, 1997, p. 74). Ernest’s father was the Barton family doctor (Fried, 2005), and Barton, a founder of the Madison Avenue advertising agency BBDO, reviewed The Sun Also Rises for Atlantic Monthly (Fried, 2005).

In The Man Nobody Knows, Barton (1925), who was 13 years older than Hemingway, attempts to “re-masculinize” Jesus by portraying Christ as a highly successful proto-advertising executive who “picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world” (unpaginated). Like Hemingway and Gibson, Barton is contemptuous of what he sees as the wimpy image of Jesus. “A physical weakling!” Barton (1925) writes in an unpaginated foreword. “Where did they get that idea? Jesus pushed a plane and swung an adze; he was a successful carpenter. He slept outdoors and spent his days walking around his favorite lake. His muscles were so strong that when he drove the money-changers out, nobody dared oppose him!” The Man Nobody Knows, while controversial, was fourth on the nonfiction bestseller list in 1925 and reached first place by 1926 (Montgomery, 1985).

As for The Passion of the Christ, Björn Krondorfer (2004) specifically linked the film to that tradition in an essay in Cross Currents. Patricia J. Williams (2004) presented Gibson’s film with a mock award in her column in The Nation: “Best Harangue in the Style of Father Coughlin went to Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ, for . . . its reinvigoration of flayed-muscular Christianity as X-treme sport” (p. 9). Leon Wieseltier (2004) writes of Gibson’s Christ in The New Republic, “He is what the early church fathers, writing with admiration of their martyrs, called an ‘athlete’ of suffering” (p. 19). One scholar has characterized the protagonist of the movie as “the action hero Jesus” (Lawler, 2004, p. 67). Gibson himself has conceded that he wanted to show us a different and more overtly masculine side of Christ than the usual Hollywood version: “He’s usually fairly effete and not a powerful presence, which clearly he must have been” (Mel, 2004).
Both works draw on sports themes in their depictions of the Crucifixion. “He was pretty good in there today”—the refrain of the admiring and relatively sympathetic first Roman soldier in Hemingway’s “Today is Friday”—makes Christ sound like a particularly tough prizefighter. It’s probably not coincidental that one alternate title Hemingway ultimately rejected for “Today is Friday” was “One More for the Nazarene” (Smith, 1989, p. 154), which sounds suspiciously like “One more for the Gipper.” While we now associate those words with the late President Ronald Reagan (who uttered them in the 1940 film Knute Rockne All American), they were originally a variation of the famous (albeit possibly apocryphal) last words of the legendary George “The Gipper” Gipp, Notre Dame’s first All American football player, to coach Knute Rockne in December 1920. Gipp died at 25 of a strep throat infection that turned into pneumonia in an era before antibiotics (Howald, 2003).

Hemingway’s play on those words casts the Crucifixion as the “Big Game” of the college football season. While that might seem in questionable taste, the poet Allen Tate has suggested that Hemingway’s attitude toward all sport was “rooted in a religious sensibility” (Stoneback, 1991, p. 129), and in his now classic article on Hemingway’s religious beliefs, H. R. Stoneback (1991) argues that “Sport as a redemptive ritual is central to Hemingway’s life and work” (p. 136). Similarly, in a review entitled “Tough Guy,” one critic writes of The Passion of the Christ, “It’s like viewing an uneven boxing match in which we are forced to watch the underdog, pinned against the ropes, get beaten to within an inch of his life” (Petrakis, 2004, p. 40).

Given these odd (but not historically novel) conjunctions of sports and religious faith, it’s probably not coincidental that Hemingway’s official biographer, Carlos Baker (1969), dismissed “Today is Friday” as “tasteless” (p. 321), and film critics have responded to The Passion with comparable distaste, complaining in Newsweek of the film’s “re lentless gore” (Ansen, 2004, p. 60) or characterizing it in the New York Times as “an unnerving and painful spectacle that is also, in the end, a depressing one” (Scott, 2004, p. E1). In his film, Gibson is insistent that Christ endured more physical suffering than some viewers can bear to witness.

Not coincidentally, both Hemingway and Gibson would have been indirectly familiar with the principles of muscular Christianity. Hemingway’s father attended Oberlin College in Ohio (Sanford, 1999, p. 23), where he played on the football team, and “Oberlin College served as the cradle for the fledgling physical education profession and the muscular Christianity movement” (Ladd and Mathisen, 1999, p. 30). Ernest’s paternal grandfather, Anson Hemingway, was general secretary of the Chicago YMCA—the chief institutional proponent of muscular Christianity in America—and a close friend of Dwight L. Moody (Sanford, 1999, p. 18), the fundamentalist evangelist who has been described as “the champion of an indigenous, American brand of muscular Christianity in the final decades of the [nineteenth] century” (Ladd and Mathisen, 1999, p. 32).²

Gibson, too, would have been acquainted with muscular Christianity. After the Gibson family’s move from New York to Australia in the sixties, Gibson’s father enrolled 12-year-old Mel in St. Leo’s Christian Brothers School, “run by an Irish religious order, with an emphasis on religion, sport and discipline” (Pendreigh, 1997, pp. 37-38). The school modeled itself after the British public schools (Clarkson, 1999, p. 36)—in other words, the birthplace of muscular Christianity. Gibson’s American
accent made him something of an outcast initially, and the teachers were evidently given to corporal punishment; he and a classmate would compete to see who could get the most "strappings" in a day, and Gibson won—with 27 (Clarkson, 1999, p. 37; Pendreigh, 1999, p. 38). One biographer suggests that there were rumors that some boys at the school were sexually molested by the priests (Clarkson, 1999, p. 38). Gibson, who told a friend that the priests at the school were brutal (Clarkson, 1999, p. 37), was later publicly quoted as saying, “Some of them were regular sons of bitches” (Clarkson, 1999, p. 38).

Strict upbringing
Both men were raised by strict, religiously conservative fathers. Perhaps partly as a result of his Oberlin education, Hemingway’s father disapproved of dancing, drinking, smoking, and card-playing (Sanford, 1999, p. 39). Mr. Hemingway believed in corporal punishment, and Hemingway’s sister Marcelline recalls her father using a razor strap occasionally and then compelling his children to kneel and ask God’s forgiveness for their transgressions. The Hemingway household upheld high standards: Jack London’s works were forbidden for their “coarseness” (Sanford, 1999, p. 107), and after reading In Our Time, Hemingway’s father wrote Ernest that “no gentleman spoke of venereal disease outside a doctor’s office” (Sanford, 1999, p. 219). Ed Hemingway was horrified by the news of the breakup of his son’s marriage and wrote, “Our family has never had such an incident before and trust you may still make your get-away from that individual who split your home. . . . Put on the arrows of God and shun evil companions” (Mellow, 1992, p. 342). He called the adulterers “Love Pirates” and wrote that he wished them in hell (Mellow, 1992, p. 342). As Hemingway’s older sister recalls of her father, “the rules he had in his own mind as to what was right and what was wrong were very rigid. With him it was black and white with very little gray between” (Sanford, 1999, p. 39).

Mel Gibson’s father also sees morality in absolute terms: “There’s right and wrong, and that’s all there is” (Pendreigh, 1997, p. 26). “The greatest benefit anyone can have is to be a Catholic,” he once said. “You have the life-long satisfaction of being right” (Clarkson, 1999, p. 5; Pendreigh, 1997, p. 26). Hutton Gibson, Jr., entered a Catholic seminary as a young man and studied to be a priest but eventually dropped out. He seems to have felt the Catholic Church was not sufficiently conservative in its practices, and he particularly opposed the Church’s move away from the traditional Latin Mass and other reforms resulting from the Vatican II conference (Clarkson, 1999, p. 41; Pendreigh, 1997, pp. 26-27; Perry, 1993, p. 10). He apparently believes that Jews have infiltrated the Catholic Church (Clarkson, 1999, pp. 41-43; Pendreigh, 1997, p. 26).

Like Hemingway’s father, he resorted to corporal punishment. “Hutt believed in the power of the hand. If the children did not behave they got hit,” one family friend told a biographer (Clarkson, 1999, p. 18). Gibson’s father prohibited not just the usual cursing, smoking, and drinking, but also television, comic books, and most movies (Clarkson, 1999, pp. 18-19).

Emotional volatility
It’s interesting that both Hemingway and Gibson have chosen to revive muscular Christian themes in their art from a Catholic perspective; the muscular Christian
movement has its roots solidly in English and American Protestantism, and Catholic involvement has traditionally been marginal (Putney, 2001, pp. 87-89). I think it’s significant (and revealing, and again, not coincidental) that it is the Catholic Church that has the strongest strictures against suicide of perhaps any mainstream Christian denomination. Both Hemingway and Gibson experienced profound emotional depression as young men. While Hemingway is known to have suffered from manic depression late in life and ultimately committed suicide, it has never been conclusively determined when the mood disorder first manifested itself. Noting that most people with the disorder begin to experience symptoms during their twenties, Peter L. Hays (1995) makes a persuasive (if admittedly speculative) case that Hemingway was already experiencing symptoms as early as 1923-25, when he would have been 23 to 26 years old.

Hemingway wrote “Today is Friday” in May 1926 (Smith, 1989, p. 154). He claimed to George Plimpton to have written it along with “The Killers” and “Ten Indians” all in the same day, possibly during a manic interlude. “I had so much juice I thought maybe I was going crazy,” he told Plimpton (1986, p. 122). His mood did not last long; that same month he wrote to F. Scott Fitzgerald, “I feel too low to write” (Baker, 1981, p. 203). Hemingway’s self‐disgust was profound: He signed another letter to Fitzgerald, “Ernest M. Shit” (Baker, 1981, p. 205).

Hemingway was guilt‐stricken over his adulterous affair with Pauline Pfeiffer. In February he had sailed to New York to switch publishers, and upon his return, stayed in Paris with Pauline rather than going on to Schruns, Austria, where his wife, Hadley, and their son were staying (Baker, 1969, pp. 165-66). As Hemingway himself (1964) later acknowledged in A Moveable Feast, “I did my business in New York and when I got back to Paris I should have caught the first train from the Gare de l’Est that would take me down to Austria. But the girl I was in love with was in Paris then, and I did not take the first train, or the second or the third” (p. 210). In a passage that does not appear in the published book, he wrote that “the unbelievable wrenching, killing happiness, selfishness and treachery of everything we did gave me such a terrible remorse” (Baker, 1969, pp. 165-66).

Hemingway’s conscience seems to have tormented him for a long time after his betrayal of his wife. “Ernest felt very sorry that he was doing this to me,” Hadley herself told researcher Alice Sokoloff (Diliberto, 1992, p. 230). “He had dreadful remorse. It made me suffer to see the way he suffered for me. I don’t think he ever did get over it, but I tried to make him feel it was all right” (Diliberto, 1992, p. 230). Biographer Carlos Baker (1969) notes that Hemingway was contemplating suicide as early as March 1926 (two months before he wrote “Today is Friday”), citing as evidence Hemingway’s own journal entry, in which he contemplates the mechanics of suicide at some length:

I like to think about death and the various ways of dying. And I think probably the best way, unless you could arrange to die some way while asleep, would be to go off a liner at night. That way there could be no doubt about the thing going through and it does not seem a nasty death. There would only be the moment of taking the jump and it is very easy for me to take almost any sort of jump. Also it would never be definitely known what happened and there would be no post mortems and no expenses left for any one to pay and there
would always be the chance that you might be given credit for an accident. (Baker, 1969, p. 167)

Hemingway resumed his affair with Pauline at the end of March, and Hadley confronted him about it later that spring (Baker, 1969, p. 168). Hemingway was profoundly troubled by his betrayal of his wife and later confessed in a November 12th letter to Pauline, “Last fall I said perfectly calmly and not bluffingly and during one of the good times that if this wasn’t cleared up by Christmas I would kill myself” (Baker, 1981, p. 222). He wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald in September 1926, “Still having been in hell now since around last Christmas with plenty of insomnia to light the way around so I could study the terrain I get sort of used to it and even fond of it and probably would take pleasure in showing people around. As we make our hell we certainly should like it” (Baker, 1981, p. 217). In November, he wrote Fitzgerald, “Anyway I’m now all through with the general bumping off phase and will only bump off now under certain special circumstances which I don’t think will arise. Have refrained from any half turnings on of the gas or slitting of the wrist with sterilized safety razor blades” (Baker, 1981, p. 232). Clearly, before writing “Today is Friday,” Hemingway had experienced suicidal thoughts and what certainly sounds like clinical depression.

There is no evidence that Mel Gibson has ever been diagnosed with either depression or bipolar disorder. Yet his emotional volatility has been widely publicized and was evident very early in his career: “Intriguingly, Mel was at the time already becoming a two-levels personality, even admitting once that he had ‘this maniac inside, a sort of Jekyll and Hyde thing’” (Clarkson, 1999, p. 44). One of the extras on the 1984 film The Bounty called him “a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde figure . . . in the day all solemn while at night he got drunk and did wild and crazy things” (Clarkson, 1999, p. 159). (Robert Louis Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is regarded by one researcher who herself has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a particularly apt rendering of what it is like to have “conflicting, or polar, selves” [Jamison, 1993, pp. 126-27].) An early girlfriend reported that Gibson had extreme mood swings: “He could have very solemn moods and be very miserable, [and] then he would be up again. I remember discussing the fact of there being no middle ground with him. He said he was on an even keel but the truth was that one moment he was funny, [and] the next he was quiet and introverted” (Clarkson, 1999, p. 75).

Biographers have noted his bouts with alcoholism, an affliction that he has said runs in his family (Clarkson, 1999, p. 316). While not all alcoholics are mentally ill, alcoholics are significantly more likely to be diagnosed with manic depression, perhaps in an attempt to self-medicate (Jamison, 1993, pp. 37-38); Hemingway, who was diagnosed with manic depression late in life, was himself a lifelong alcoholic. Gibson repeatedly drank until he blacked out (Clarkson, 1999, p. 193) and (like Hemingway) has sometimes become involved in bar brawls (Clarkson, 1999, pp. 269-70). He liked to mix a double Scotch with beer, a combination he called “liquid violence” (Clarkson, 1999, pp. 159-60). In April 1984 he was arrested in Toronto for drunk driving after he rear-ended another vehicle; he later pled guilty (Pendreigh, 1997, p. 109). “What I probably needed were some guys in white jackets,” one biographer has quoted Gibson as saying about that time in retrospect. “I was going around the twist. I knew I had to channel the maniac inside me. I had to get hold of
it” (Perry, 1993, p. 128). He later conceded that a doctor had diagnosed damage to his liver as a result of his excessive drinking (Perry, 1993, p. 148).

His emotional volatility manifested itself in other ways, as well. In Fade Out: The Calamitous Final Days of MGM, Peter Bart writes of Gibson’s 1984 film Mrs. Soffel, “By the time the shoot was over, some $50,000 had been spent to repair damage inflicted on his rented house in Toronto as a result of the actor’s after-hours tantrums” (Pendreigh, 1997, p. 112). Gibson behaved erratically in interviews, cursing, spitting, confessing he was intoxicated, and calling Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome “a piece of shit” to an on-set reporter (Perry, 1993, pp. 135-37; Pendreigh, 1997, p. 117). In 1993, the tabloids published embarrassing photographs of a drunken Gibson drinking from a woman’s high-heeled shoe and otherwise acting out and misbehaving after too much carousing in a Modesto, California, bar two years earlier; by the time the story had appeared, Gibson was a recovering alcoholic attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings (Clarkson, 1999, pp. 255-58; Perry, 1993, pp. 230-40). In a 2004 interview, he said, “I checked into a few places and sorted myself out. I didn’t make a big noise about it” (Mel, 2004).

In August 2006, however, Gibson pleaded no contest to a charge of driving under the influence and was sentenced to three years’ probation (Mel, 2006). A vitriolic anti-Semitic outburst during his arrest received worldwide publicity and resulted in two public statements of apology from the star, who was also sentenced to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings several times a week for a year. Gibson volunteered to enter a rehabilitation program and make public service announcements.

Gibson has publicly admitted his own difficulties with emotions: “I’m not the most articulate guy. I think a lot of men from Australia are not too good about expressing their feelings” (Pendreigh, 1997, p. 160). Nevertheless, he began seeing a psychiatrist soon after a promotional tour for Hamlet (Clarkson, 1999, p. 301). The scene in which Martin Riggs, Gibson’s character in Lethal Weapon, holds a gun to his head genuinely frightened the director with its intensity, and both the director and Gibson later told (probably apocryphal) stories in which they claimed the gun might have had a real bullet in it (Perry, 1993, 152; Pendreigh, 1997, pp. 126-27). It’s probably not coincidental that he has chosen to play so many troubled characters who flirt with suicide—not just Riggs, but also Fletcher Christian and Hamlet: “In all three instances, the viewer is left uncertain of whether he is performing like a lunatic to unsettle his foes or if he really is a lunatic who has lost control” (Perry, 1993, pp. 211-12). Gibson himself has been quoted singling out Hamlet’s mental instability as the central element in his personality: “He’s a minefield of contradictions and ambiguities and can be both acutely sensitive and brutally cruel, and he has no sense of proportion or timing. Hamlet can be rational, yet volatile. The man was a livin’ time bomb and that’s how I decided to play him” (Perry, 1993, p. 200). During the filming of the 1991 movie Hamlet, Gibson confessed to a friend “that sometimes he felt like shooting himself” (Pendreigh, 1997, p. 151).

Faith and salvation from suicide
Both Gibson and Hemingway draw on a longstanding tradition within muscular Christianity that its peculiar combination of faith and athleticism could cure depression—or, to use the late nineteenth-century term, “neurasthenia”—an illness...

Gibson has acknowledged to a reporter that faith has helped him with the problems in his life (Perry, 1993, p. 222). More recently, he has publicly credited his faith with literally saving his life: “At the height of his stardom, he has said, he was drowning in fame, wealth, drink and despair—until he fell to his knees, asked God’s help and returned to the rigid Catholicism of his youth” (“Gospel of Mel,” 2004, p. 82). In a 2004 interview with Diane Sawyer, Gibson has perhaps been most open about the role his faith played in saving him from killing himself, telling interviewer Diane Sawyer that the film originated in a suicidal moment he experienced 13 years earlier:

Am I going to jump? Am I going to go on? I don’t want to do either. I don’t want to live. I don’t want to die. You ask yourself all these Hamlet questions, and eventually you just have to say, ‘I’m not good enough to figure this out. I don’t know. I just don’t know. Help! If there’s anything out there, help!’ And if you’re lucky, you’ll recognize the signs of that help. (Mel, 2004)

When Sawyer probed for specifics, asking, “You thought of jumping out a window?” Gibson responded, “I really did, yeah. I was looking down thinking, ‘It is just easier this way.’ You have to be mad—you have to be insane to despair that way. But that is the height of spiritual bankruptcy. There’s nothing left . . .” (Mel, 2004). He turned to prayer, rereading the Gospels and meditating upon their meaning. “I had to use the Passion of Christ and wounds to heal my wounds,” he has said (“Gospel of Mel,” 2004, p. 82). He told Sawyer “I have to” believe in the Gospels’ message. “Have to?” she asked, and he affirmed, “I have to.” “For?” she responded. “For my own sake,” Gibson answered. “So I can hope” (Mel, 2004). By his own testimony, then, it is his faith that saves him from the sin of suicidal despair.

Hemingway was less overt about recognizing faith as a source of strength in his own struggles with mental illness. But in January 1926 (just five months before composing “Today is Friday”), he wrote, “If I am anything I am a Catholic. Had extreme unction administered to me as such in July 1918 and recovered. So I guess I’m a Super-Catholic. . . . Am not what is called a ‘good’ Catholic. . . . But cannot imagine taking any other religion seriously” (Meyers, 1985, p. 184). H. R. Stoneback (1991) has documented that Hemingway attended Mass regularly from December 1925 to 1927 (p. 129).

Perhaps part of the attraction of Catholicism for both men is the role that it gives Mary. Women have generally received short shrift in the Protestant muscular Christian tradition; crafting a Catholic muscular Christianity offers scope for a revision of that traditional exclusion of women. In an implicit condemnation of the disciples, Hemingway notes in his short story which followers remain with Christ throughout his final hours: “Just the women stuck by him” (Hemingway, 1938, p.358), a point that is then reiterated twice more in the text. Of course, he also has the soldiers admire Mary Magdalene’s good looks and vulgarly acknowledge the tradition (now widely discredited by Biblical scholars) that she was a prostitute (“I used to see her around the town,” says the first soldier [Hemingway, 1938, p.358]). Gibson emphasizes the Virgin Mary’s sufferings as a mother and makes her the
audience surrogate, the focal character of Christ’s passion. We witness Christ’s sufferings through her eyes.

In their art, both Hemingway and Gibson make it clear that Christ is so important partly because his suffering is not that different from ours. Betrayal is the shared human condition (Flora, 1993). Probably because of preoccupation with his own guilt, it is also the theme of all three of the short stories Hemingway finished in a single day in 1926 (Flora, 1993, pp. 18-19). The title of “Today is Friday” refers not only to the Good Friday of the Crucifixion but to today, the day we read this play. Its contemporary dialogue further suggests that we are complicit in Christ’s death.

Gibson chooses Aramaic and Latin dialogue, yet despite this potentially distancing choice, his film, too, underscores the audience’s complicity in Christ’s execution: “It’s the director’s left hand nailing Jesus to the cross. The cameo is more than a Hitchcockian gimmick. Gibson feels his telling of the Passion holds all humanity responsible for the death of Jesus. And he has said, ‘I’m first on line for culpability. I did it’” (“Gospel of Mel,” 2004, p. 88). In addressing a group of religious leaders in Chicago, Gibson told them, “For culpability, look to yourself. I look to myself” (Neff, 2004, p. 33).

Critic Wirt Williams (1981) contends that in Hemingway’s Weltanschauung, all men share not only in the guilt for Christ’s betrayal but also in Christ’s suffering: “they are born to be crucified and to triumph, if they can, within that crucifixion” (p. 164). Philip Young (1966), alluding to a famous line from A Farewell to Arms, makes a similar point: “the world not only breaks, it crucifies, everyone,” and “when it comes, and they nail you up, the important thing is to be pretty good in there” (p. 130).

The importance of pain

Both Hemingway and Gibson are using the Crucifixion as a trope for the intense physical and mental suffering of depression. Referring to Christ’s trial, scourging, and the procession up the hill to His execution, Diane Sawyer observes that “In Gibson’s film it becomes an intricate, almost unrelenting choreography of pain” (Mel, 2004). Many viewers find the film’s violence gratuitous, and one New Testament scholar has publicly complained that Gibson has put brutality at the heart of Christianity (Mel, 2004). While the scholar meant this comment as a criticism, it accurately describes Gibson’s project. For Gibson, Christ’s pain is the point. “He was beaten for our iniquities. He was wounded for our transgressions. And by His Wounds we are healed. That’s the point of the film,” Gibson told Sawyer, drawing on Isaiah 53:5.

In some ways, The Passion of the Christ is the apotheosis of Gibson’s career, a career devoted to playing battered and bruised icons of masculinity. Notable examples include his characters in the films Lethal Weapon (where Martin Riggs is sprayed with water and then shocked with electricity while he hangs by the wrists from the ceiling), Payback (where Porter is shot, run over, repeatedly beaten, and sledgehammered), and Braveheart (where William Wallace is stretched on the rack and then disemboweled). As Jeffrey A. Brown wrote presciently in 2002, “The self-sacrificing, Christ-like violence suffered by Gibson’s characters not only proves the superiority of their manliness but also sanctifies the supposedly higher moral value of that manliness. The Gibson protagonist suffers not just for himself but for a higher purpose, and thus his followers in the films (and by extension we in the audience) are saved” (Brown, 2002, p. 137).
These characters prefigure Gibson’s direction of actor James Caviezel as the protagonist of *The Passion of the Christ*. "This is a Jesus who can take the pain," one film critic has said. "Mel Gibson has reinvented Jesus in his own image" ("Gospel of Mel," 2004, p. 83). Gibson has acknowledged that the film’s intensity is intentional:

I wanted it to be shocking, and I also wanted it to be extreme. I wanted it to push the viewer over the edge, and it does that. I think it pushes one over the edge so that they see the enormity—the enormity of that sacrifice—to see that someone could endure all that and still come back with love and forgiveness even through extreme pain and suffering and ridicule. (*Mel*, 2004)

As Gibson himself puts it, “Pain is the precursor to change. That’s the good news” (*Mel*, 2004).

Hemingway draws on Tertullian, a native of Carthage (now Tunisia), North Africa, born around 150 A.D. and the first Christian theologian to write in Latin, to make the same point. An alternate title Hemingway rejected for the story is “Today is Friday, or The Seed of the Church” (Smith, 1989, p.154). The second title is an allusion to Tertullian’s famous quotation, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” (qtd. in Pearse). Christ’s martyrdom is what causes Christianity to blossom.

While I am presenting a case here for a particular reading of these two works, it is important to note that both Hemingway’s short story and Gibson’s film have been read as distasteful, and in the case of the film, even as sadistic or pornographic. Both works also have troubling anti-Semitic elements. Hemingway uses the term “kike,” which belatedly reveals that George, the tavernkeeper, is Jewish, only after he has George say of the Crucifixion, “I’ll tell you, gentleman, I wasn’t out there. It’s a thing I haven’t taken any interest in” (Hemingway, 1938, p. 357). His humor here is unpleasant and heavy-handed. As for Gibson’s film, Diane Sawyer cited the history of the Passion Plays as incitements to anti-Semitism; traditionally, Jews have feared the Easter season because Good Friday was a day of pogroms (“Gospel of Mel,” 2004, p. 86). While it is not in my judgment genuinely anti-Semitic, the film does show some stereotyped Jewish figures and does seem to hold the Jewish high priest Caiaphas more responsible than the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, for Christ’s crucifixion.

It seems evident that both artists intended their work to be understood as a tribute to Christ’s suffering, but if that was in fact the way the story and film were intended to be read, then both have been subjected to multiple misreadings. Audiences have read the linkage of sport and faith in Hemingway’s film as a trivialization of faith (rather than as an elevation of sport); similarly, filmgoers have found it difficult to relate Christ’s extraordinary physical suffering in Gibson’s film to their own lives. Neither work, then, has entirely achieved its creator’s goals for it. Yet both men value these works. Hemingway asked for the manuscript back when he sent the play off to be published (Smith, 1989, p. 155) and included “Today is Friday” in anthologies for the rest of his life. Gibson has admitted to investing roughly $30 million of his own money into his film (*Mel*, 2004).
Christ’s choice

Both men seem particularly fascinated with the self-willed quality of Christ’s suffering on the cross. Perhaps it is because both contemplated escaping from their own emotional suffering through suicide that they both so admire a Lord who chose to endure suffering that He could easily have chosen to escape. Christ voluntarily chooses the Crucifixion. Biblical scholars have pointed out that Jesus could have escaped from the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest but chose not to take any of the possible escape routes, instead allowing Himself to be captured and put on trial (Mel, 2004). As one of the Roman soldiers explains in “Today is Friday,” “He didn’t want to come down off the cross. That’s not his play” (Hemingway, 1938, p. 357). He also chooses consciousness: “When Jesus was offered wine with myrrh (Mark 15:23) before he was put on the cross, a palliative to lessen the pain, he refused. He suffered the lengthy agony of crucifixion cold sober by choice. The centurions, on the other hand, afterward resort to alcohol and are a ‘little cock-eyed’” (Bennett, 1995, p. 206). The second soldier in “Today is Friday,” the least sensitive of the three, simply refuses to believe that Christ would willingly have accepted this death: “When they first start nailing him, there’s none of them wouldn’t stop it if they could” (Hemingway, 1938, p. 357). The irony lies in the fact that Christ could stop it but chooses not to.

There is a haunting implication in the film that Christ Himself may have come very close to the kind of suicidal despair that both Hemingway and Gibson experienced: “Gibson’s Satan . . . functions throughout this film as the visual and constant reminder of the temptation to terminal despair that tortures Jesus even more than his physical punishment” (Woodward, 2004, p. 15). If we accept this reading, Christ becomes—like Hemingway, like Gibson—a man battling suicidal despair to triumph spiritually not just in spite of, but because of, his own suffering. It is in this sense that Christ becomes an exemplar for all of us: “‘Today is Friday’ is Hemingway’s assessment of the degree to which Christ is a true exemplar figure for modern man” (Bennett, 1995, p. 204).

I want to suggest that both “Today is Friday” and The Passion of the Christ are works of gratitude—moral reparations, working off a debt. These men are trying to give to others (and perhaps especially to vigorous, athletic, otherwise healthy young men suffering from depression) what they believe Christ has, through His suffering, given to them—a spiritual exemplar, the moral strength to reject suicidal despair, a sense of hope. As usual, Gibson (2003) is more open about his aims, writing in his (unpaginated) foreword to the book The Passion: Photography from the Movie The Passion of the Christ, “My new hope is that The Passion of the Christ will help many more people recognize the power of His love and let Him help them to save their own lives.”

References


Lawler, J. (2004). God and man separated no more: Hegel overcomes the unhappy consciousness of Gibson’s Christianity. In J. J. E. Garcia (Ed.), Mel Gibson’s Passion and philosophy: The cross, the questions, the controversy (pp. 9-24). Chicago: Open Court.


Notes

1 George Monteiro has traced the relationship between Barton’s work and Hemingway’s in more detail. Barton’s book was heavily influenced by his father (Fried, 2005, p. 89), the Rev. William Barton, who like Hemingway’s father received a degree from Oberlin (Fried, 2005, p. 8), center of the Muscular Christianity movement in America. Intriguingly (given the thesis of this essay), Barton—like both Hemingway and Gibson—experienced his own bouts with mental instability. According to his biographer, he suffered from insomnia intermittently until the late 1920s (Fried, 2005, pp. 18-19, 82-83, 142, 240n29) and described himself soon after his senior year of college as “frightened” that “[he] might lose [his] mind” and “on the edge of a nervous breakdown” (Fried, 2005, p. 19).

2 Kathleen Verduin (1987) has traced the presence of muscular Christianity in Hemingway’s writings but mentions “Today is Friday” only briefly and does not note Ed Hemingway’s involvement in the movement as a result of his Oberlin education.

Lisa Tyler, Professor of English
Department of English, Sinclair Community College, 444 W. Third Street
Dayton, OH 45402-1460/USA
e: Lisa.Tyler@sinclair.edu
To Love the Orientalist: Masculinity in Leila Aboulela’s The Translator

Brendan Smyth

This paper examines representations of Orientalist and Islamic masculinity in Leila Aboulela’s The Translator. In her representation of the character of Rae Isles, Aboulela writes back to repressive Western traditions of Orientalist masculinity, fashions a narrative which negotiates a way out of stagnant binaries of West and East, and offers a model of progressive, socially engaged masculinity rooted in Islamic tradition.

Early in Leila Aboulela’s (2001b) The Translator, as Sammar and Yasmin leave Rae’s flat, Sammar remarks that Rae is “sort of familiar, like people from back home [Sudan]” (p. 21). Yasmin replies, “He’s an orientalist. It’s an occupational hazard” (p. 21). Sammar is uncomfortable with Orientalism: “[She] did not like the word orientalist. Orientalists were bad people who distorted the image of the Arabs and Islam. Something from school history or literature, she could not remember. Maybe modern orientalists were different” (p. 22). Despite Sammar’s evident discomfort, in this moment she holds out the possibility that cross-cultural relationships can exist which do not serve to suppress difference – perhaps the Orientalist can be redeemed. It is this moment in the text which highlights the convergence and interdependence of the discourses of Orientalism, Islam, religion, academia and masculinity within the novel, particularly as they are represented in the character of Rae Isles. I want to explore how Aboulela’s representations of Rae ultimately subvert conventional Orientalist notions of masculinity. To do this, I examine how Aboulela’s novel writes back not only to Western traditions of Orientalism and romance, but also engages with Aboulela’s own Sudanese Islamic literary tradition. Out of this writing-back, Aboulela fashions a narrative which provides a way out of the stagnant binaries of West and East, and repressive constructions of Islam and masculinity.

Writing about women’s narratives in the postcolonial Arab world, Miriam Cooke argues:

Women who have learned as feminists to form principled and strategic alliances and networks that allow them to balance their religious, specifically Islamic loyalties, with national, local, class, ethnic, or any other allegiances may be able to invent a contestatory but also enabling discourse within the global context that will not be easily co-opted. They may thus initiate new forms of conversations across what were previously thought to be unbridgeable chasms. (Cooke, 2000, p. 177)
It is in light of Cooke’s claims that I explore The Translator. First published in 1999, The Translator explores the relationship between Sammar, a young Sudanese woman who has recently lost her husband, and Rae Isles, a Scottish academic who studies Middle-Eastern history and gives lectures on Postcolonial Politics. Sammar works for Rae at the University of Aberdeen as a translator of Arabic texts, and over the course of the novel, they develop a romantic relationship. However, as Rae is initially unwilling to convert to Islam in order to marry Sammar, Sammar returns to Khartoum to be with her family and son. Aboulela represents Sammar as a woman who must balance religious and national loyalties with her love for Rae, who must resist co-optation by Orientalist discourse, and who must initiate and sustain a conversation between East and West, Scotland and Sudan. Through her subversion of Orientalist Western masculinity, and her depiction of Rae’s eventual conversion to Islam, Aboulela narrates and negotiates a potential bridge across these divides.

The figure of the male Orientalist features prominently in Aboulela’s writing. In her story “The Museum,” awarded the Caine prize in 2000, Aboulela describes how Shadia, a Sudanese student, finds herself beginning a friendship with Bryan, a Scottish student who has taken a trip to Mecca “In a book” (2001a, p. 112). When Bryan invites her to a museum display about Africa, Shadia finds that “Nothing was of her, nothing belonged to her life at home, what she missed. Here was Europe’s vision, the clichés about Africa: cold and old” (2001a, p. 115). Shadia knows that Bryan’s vision of Africa, the Africa represented in the museum displays and accessed in books, is a European construction which does not correspond to her lived experience. However, she is unable to engage in dialogue with Bryan and challenge the museum’s construction of African identity. When Bryan invites her to speak, offering, “Museums change; I can change...” (2001a, p. 119), Shadia does not respond. The narrator tells us:

If she was strong she would have explained and not tired of explaining. She would have patiently taught him another language, letters curved like the epsilon and gamma he knew from mathematics. She would have showed him that words could be read from right to left. If she was not small in the museum, if she was really strong, she would have made his trip to Mecca real, not only in a book. (Aboulela, 2001a, p. 119)

While Bryan appears to be open to having his Orientalist misconceptions challenged, Shadia feels unable to do so. Her inability to sustain a conversation with Bryan signals a failure to challenge the dominant Orientalist discourses represented in the museum displays. Both she and Brian are victims of the misrepresentation of her culture. In The Translator, however, Aboulela provides an alternative narrative for the relationship between a Muslim woman and Orientalist man.

To understand how Orientalist discourse works, especially how it forms and sustains hegemonic notions of masculinity, I want to turn for a moment Edward Said’s Orientalism. Said argues:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it,
authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Said, 1994, p. 3)

Said continues: “[Orientalism] is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different ... world” (p. 12). Orientalism, then, is a discourse which enables the West to create, to manipulate, and to control the Orient. The terms Said uses – “dominate,” “authority,” “ruling,” “authorizing” – are familiar words in terms of studies on masculinity. Hegemonic notions of masculinity are intertwined with notions of power and dominance over the feminized Other. Orientalism then, can be understood as a discourse informed by notions of Western masculinity in which the West is strong, upright, rational, and male, while the Orient is weak, passive, irrational, and female (Said, 1994, pp. 137–138). Said recognizes the long-standing relationship between academia, intellectuals and Orientalism; while he acknowledges the fact that scholars may be motivated by a genuine will to understand the Other, many academics, however, play an instrumental role in constructing and sustaining conceptions of the Orient which serve to authorize Western geo-political policies.

It is against this background, then, that we are to understand the representation of Rae Isles: he participates in an academic area of study which is complicit in constructing the West and the Orient in gendered terms. He is already imbricated within a discourse where he is an empowered, mobile, highly masculine figure. Rae is a well-respected scholar in his field – his opinions on Middle Eastern issues are sought by various media outlets, and his book – “The Illusion of an Islamic Threat” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 5) – receives positive reviews. Several times, Sammar remarks that Rae teaches her things about Islam that she doesn’t know (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 93). However, as John Stotesbury (2004) emphasizes, Rae encounters the Muslim world from the subject position of the aloof, detached, objective Western intellectual. Yasmin, Rae’s secretary, also comments on Rae’s attitude towards knowledge, telling Sammar that “[western scholars] could study all sorts of sacred texts and be detached” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 93). These attributes of detachment and objectivity are what make a good Western scholar. Rae himself tells Sammar, “I believed the best I could do, what I owed a place and people who had deep meaning for me, was to be objective, detached. In the middle of all the prejudice and hypocrisy, I wanted to be one of the few who was saying what was reasonable and right” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 128). The detachment of the Orientalist masculine subject is what authorizes him to make objective, or ‘right,’ knowledge claims about other cultures. Rae’s perception of his own masculinity is bound up in what he considers to be his capacity to access and make objective knowledge claims while remaining disengaged from any socio-cultural context. His appeals to reason and objectivity simply replicate Orientalist justifications for authorizing representations of the Other.

Sammar’s discomfort with Rae’s status as Orientalist is similar to Shadia’s experience of feeling overwhelmed by the museum displays. However, Sammar has the strength to confront Rae’s Orientalist position. She tells him, “Don’t you realize how much you hurt me staying objective and detached, like you are above all of this,
above me, looking down” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 128). Her point is that Rae’s professed detachment and objectivity is in fact an illusion. Rae is not able to remain apart from socio-cultural contexts. Instead, Rae’s Orientalist masculinity is tied to his position of privilege and status as a white, European/Western academic, whose intellectual virility allows him to authorize, to know, to understand, and to have power over the Orient. However, while Rae’s academic pursuits make him an Orientalist, Aboulala’s representations of Rae work to subvert this notion of masculinity and power.

The first thing that troubles the notion of Rae as Orientalist is the fact that he needs a translator. He needs Sammar to help him make sense of – to help him read – the Orient. Sammar sees her job as a translator as “moulding Arabic into English, trying to be transparent like a pane of glass not obscuring the meaning of any word” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 167). She strives for transparency, yet her presence is always already mediating Rae’s access to the texts he studies. She chooses the words that he works with. Because translation always involves interpretation, Sammar’s role as intermediary between Arabic and English begins in her interpretation of the texts she translates for Rae. Denys Johnson-Davies (1983), a translator of several Arabic texts, including Season of Migration to the North, explains that when working on translating Hadiths and other religious texts, “accuracy must have ascendancy over any other consideration” (p. 83). Sammar herself privileges accuracy in her translations of Hadiths; in a conversation with Rae about a text she has found, she elaborates on the way she would have altered the translation of one of the Qudsi Hadiths (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 42). In the translation of sacred texts, achieving accuracy for Sammar means to not obscure the meaning of a given passage. Her practice of translation acknowledges that meanings are not static and fixed, but are contested and contingent upon specific socio-cultural and historical contexts. Her work challenges the sense of detachment and objectivity prized by Western academic discourse. For Sammar, understanding texts, particularly sacred texts, is inseparable from engaging with the subject matter of those texts.

Another way the novel’s representation of Rae challenges Orientalist notions of Western masculinity is through Rae’s illness. Rae is not a physically strong person. Where Western notions of intellectual activity have traditionally associated the masculine with the disembodied mind, Rae’s intellect is fastened to a dying animal. Rae and Sammar are aware of the fact of Rae’s embodiment, of the fact that he is not a disengaged, disembodied intellect. Stotesbury (2004) argues that Rae’s physical weakness and hospitalization “permits Sammar to approach him on terms of approximate equality” (pp. 74–75). His conversations with Sammar and his academic work are interrupted either by violent coughing fits or by his hospitalization. Thus, Rae’s illness represents the inherent contradictions involved in the notion of Orientalist masculinity. While Rae may claim to be objective, rational, and disengaged, in reality, his body’s emphatic announcement of its presence reveals these Orientalist notions as illusory. Rae’s illness then, is emblematic of a specific hegemonic notion of masculinity in crisis.

Aboulala further elaborates the theme of masculinity in crisis by having Rae recount one of his dreams. He tells Sammar, “I was in a big house with many rooms. It was almost like a mansion. I was hiding because outside the house I had been followed, chased for days. I carried a sword in my hand and there was blood on it,
my enemies’ blood, but I myself, my clothes and my hands were clean and I was proud of that” (2001b, p. 95). He continues:

I went into a room full of smoke, a lot of smoke but when I checked there was no fire. When I left the room, the handle of my sword broke. I held it broken in my hands and knew that it could never be mended, it could never be reliable again. This was a terrible loss, I don’t know why, but I had this feeling of deep loss because I had to go on without the sword. (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 95)

The phallic imagery of the broken sword is clearly suggestive of masculinity in crisis. The blood suggests that the particular conception of masculinity here is one of violence and domination. At the end of the dream, Rae mourns the loss of the power this version of masculinity has conferred upon him. The dream suggests that Rae will no longer be able to authorize truth claims about the Other. There are also strong resonances in this dream with the notion of jihad as an internal spiritual struggle. We could read this dream as suggestive of the way Rae struggles with the notion of conversion to Islam. Again, Rae’s clothes are clean, as he has so far been able to remain disengaged from professing any religious commitments. However, the loss of the sword signals that this disengagement is no longer sustainable. The central thrust of the dream is to reinforce the notion of masculinity in crisis, of hegemonic Orientalist articulations of masculinity being no longer available to Rae.

Having explored some of the ways in which Aboulela disrupts hegemonic narratives of Orientalist masculinity in her representations of Rae, I now want to turn to the way Aboulela’s novel engages with both Western and Eastern literary traditions and representations of Orientalism and masculinity. Aboulela engages with these discourses to open up new conversations and spaces for female agency and cross-cultural, transnational contact. Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North has a strong influence on Aboulela’s novel. First published in Arabic in 1966, a decade after Sudan achieved independence, Salih’s novel focuses primarily on two characters: an unnamed narrator, and Mustapha Sa’eed. Mustapha, as a young Sudanese student, travels first to Cairo, where he is cared for by the Robinsons, and then to London, where he engages in the sexual conquest of several British women, leading them to commit suicide. After spending time in prison for the murder of his English wife Jean Morris, Mustapha returns to Sudan, where he recounts his story to the narrator. As several scholars have pointed out, Salih’s novel is itself a writing-back to Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. In Salih’s novel, the Arab/African subject voyages to Europe on a mission of postcolonial revenge. Said explains:

[I]f you look at it more deeply, it not only contains within it the history of decolonization and reaction to Western imperialism, but it also, in my opinion, deepens the tragedy by showing this man’s reactive revenge, which to many readers in the Third World, in the Arab and African world, is a just revenge. But Salih does it fresh because it’s futile, pathetic, and ultimately tragic. Because it reinforces the cycle of isolation as insufficiency of the politics of identity. It is not enough to just be a black wreaking havoc on a white, there’s another world you have to live in. (Said, 2001, pp. 110–111)
Said’s argument is that Salih’s novel narrates a reaction of revenge against Western imperialism and greed. However, Mustapha’s revenge, while it may appear to be just, is ultimately trapped in the binary opposition between East and West, and traps Mustapha in Orientalist discourses of power and masculinity.

The figure of the Orientalist looms large in Salih’s novel. Indeed, Mr. Robinson (Ricky) and his wife, who are Mustapha’s first guides in Cairo, are themselves Orientalists. Mrs. Robinson explains her conception of the role of the Orientalist when she describes the work of her husband: “I shall write of the splendid services Ricky rendered to Arab culture, such as his discovery of so many rare manuscripts, and the commentaries he wrote on them, and the way he supervised the printing of them” (Salih, 1970, p. 148). The role of the Orientalist here is to “discover” the Orient, to comment on it, and to authorize its reproduction. As Mustapha’s guides, the Robinsons play an important role in shaping his conceptions of the Orient and Occident, informing how he presents himself to Europe. As Brian Gibson (2002) argues, Mustapha becomes “a self-fabricated Othello, a man who presented himself as the exotic Oriental savage in order to tempt women” (para. 5). Mustapha, according to Gibson, chooses to inhabit the subject position of the Oriental as it has been defined by Orientalism. His actions become a performance which reinforces Western stereotypes. Indeed, Mustapha has the impulse, as he listens to his lawyer try to defend him, to stand up and claim, “This Mustapha Sa’eed does not exist. He’s an illusion, a lie. I ask of you to rule that the lie be killed” (Salih, 1970, p. 32). He realizes that he has tailored his self-image to reinforce Orientalist conceptions of the Arab man. His self-perceived male vocation to “liberate Africa with my penis” (Salih, 1970, p. 120) legitimates, or acquiesces to, the models of Arab and African masculinity laid out by Western Orientalist discourse.

Aboulela acknowledges her literary debt to Salih’s novel by using a quotation from the Season of Migration to the North to introduce Part II of The Translator. Stephan Guth (2003) claims that Aboulela inserts this quotation for two reasons. First, Aboulela wants to show Western readers “that there is also a great indigenous Arab literary heritage, that there exist also Oriental experiences, values, traditions and wisdom which can be drawn upon and which are in no way inferior to their Western equivalents” (p. 6). Second, Guth claims that Aboulela intends “to show herself as belonging to this tradition, to give the impression of a harmony between the great (though secular) tradition and her Islamic humanism” (p. 6). Aboulela’s project, as Guth understands it, is to acknowledge and privilege an Arabic literary tradition within which she sees herself participating. Indeed, the similarities between Aboulela’s novel and Salih’s are many. Both narrate the journeys of Oriental Sudanese subjects to Britain, reversing the Eurocentric point of view of imperial travel narratives. Both narrate the return of the Sudanese subject to Sudan. And both narrate intimate relationships between Western and Eastern subjects.

However, Sammar’s journey provides an alternative to the discourse of Orientalist masculinity which manifests itself in Sa’eed’s sexual conquests. Geoffrey Nash (2002) argues that Aboulela’s writing is situated “within the feminized space which may be said to operate between the continuing pressures of Western cultural imperialism, and conservative, anti-modernist cultural Islamism” (p. 28). Aboulela’s characters, rather than capitulating to the dominant competing discourses of Orientalism and what Nash identifies as “Islamism,” negotiate a new vision by
rejecting the imposition of over-determined Orientalist subjectivities. As we have seen, the novel carefully subverts the authority invested in Orientalist masculinity and knowledge/power. However, both Rae and Sammar reject the positions of the young terrorist who claims, “Western men worship money and women. Some of them see the world through dollar bills, some of them see the world through the thighs of a woman” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 159). Although Rae acknowledges that these groups have “plenty to protest about” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 28), he does not see their policies as a “viable alternative” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 29). Sammar claims that the spelling mistakes and stains on their written manifesto are “pathetic,” and that the manifesto itself gives “a sense of people overwhelmed” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 27). By rejecting the binary oppositions offered by both Orientalist discourse and the rhetoric of terrorist groups, Aboulela’s characters articulate an alternative vision.

It is relevant here that Guth claims, “The majority of Western reviewers relate the novel to an extra-literary context, which in most cases is Islamic extremism. They praise Aboulela’s ‘seriousness’ and ‘moderation’ in contrast to the discourse of ‘fundamentalist’ radicals” (p. 14). Guth draws attention to the fact that Aboulela’s novel, while it challenges Western literary and discursive traditions, also makes sure to distance itself from the rhetoric of what Western reviewers would call “Islamic fundamentalism.” The rhetoric of “moderation” and “seriousness” employed in the reviews situates the novel within the boundaries of acceptable public discourse, as opposed to narratives which are “strident” or “fundamentalist” or “apologies for terrorism.” While the rhetoric of moderation may be appropriated by reviewers to avoid discussion of the root causes of protest and social unrest in the Middle East, it seems that Aboulela wants to narrate a genuinely viable alternative to the reductive discourse of a “clash of civilizations” – a narrative ultimately underpinned by Orientalist ideology.

Aboulela is aware of her text as a writing-back to not only the male Arab literary tradition, but also to various literary traditions in the West, such as the tradition of English romance. In The Translator, Aboulela gently disrupts and subverts some of the conventions of romance narratives. According to Stotesbury (2004), in The Translator, “romantic heterosexual fulfillment can be achieved not through negotiation with the desired male but by means of a complex three-way accommodation that involves woman, man, and God” (p. 80). In other words, Aboulela complicates the standard romance narrative by making the success of the heteroerosexual romantic liaison contingent upon a successful integration of the desires, or perceived desires, of the man, the woman and God. However, Aboulela does not so much insert religious convention into the romance narrative as she recodifies the religious dilemmas, which are invisible because unexamined, already inherent in Western romance narratives. Aboulela writes:

I was often asked “Why should Rae convert, why should religion be an obstacle etc. etc?” In my answer I would then fall back on Jane Eyre and say “From an Islamic point of view, why can’t Mr. Rochester be married to both Bertha and Jane?” In the same way that I, as a Muslim reader, respect and empathize with Jane’s very Christian dilemma, I want Western/Christian readers to respect and empathize with Sammar’s very Muslim dilemma. (Cited in Stotesbury, 2004, p. 81)
In other words, while the presence of Islam or religious belief and custom might seem intrusive in the novel, what Aboulela does by including it is to force us to examine how romance narratives are already encoded within Western, Christian religious conventions which often remain invisible to Western readers.

The relationship between Rae and Sammar also challenges a literary tradition of very specific gendered Western discourses about relationships between the East and West. Gayatri Spivak (1999), in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, raises for discussion the idea that most narratives of cross-cultural relationships can be reduced to the claim: “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (p. 284). Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) examines Spivak’s claim and elaborates the ways in which Muslim women were (and continue to be) represented in the popular media and by the current Bush administration as a means to justify the war in Afghanistan, and the larger ‘War on Terrorism’ as necessary in order to save or liberate Afghan women. It is partly to contest this larger hegemonic discourse of white men saving brown women that Aboulela writes her novel.

A conventional Western narrative of the relationship between Rae and Sammar might be reduced to the narrative Spivak claims underlies Western, Orientalist romances. According to this tradition, Rae ought to save Sammar from her ‘backwards,’ ‘primitive’ culture. However, The Translator refuses to be reduced in this way. In fact, the novel reverses the conventional rescue narrative and asserts a story in which a brown woman saves a white man from white men (and by white men I mean notions of white masculinity). It is Sammar’s soup which restores Rae’s health, and Sammar tells Rae that conversion to Islam “would be good for you, it will make you stronger” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 89). Sammar does not need a white man to save her. Instead, she saves Rae, both physically and spiritually.

Rae’s conversion ascribes agency firmly in the hands of the West’s Other. Stotesbury (2004) suggests that “such novels [as Aboulela’s] reiterate an implacable creed: for an Islamic woman to envisage personal fulfillment with a Western man, there is only one alternative: the man’s conversion to Islam” (p. 80). Stotesbury reads a form of reverse colonization at work in the novel, where the only solution to bridging cultures is for a Western man to convert to Islam. However, I think that this reading is limited in important ways, as the novel clearly acknowledges that there are ways of subverting the requirement for “genuine” conversions (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 92). Indeed, a refusal on Rae’s part to convert would have upheld the narrative of Western values of detachment and objectivity – would have reified Islamic tradition as pre-modern, as something to be circumvented. Ferial Ghazoul refers to Rae’s conversion and claims:

Though this unexpected reversal is unconvincing, it is prepared for by the fact that Sammar has gradually recognized that her wanting Rae to convert is strictly egotistical. Consequently, she relinquishes such motives and prays for him to convert for the salvation and peace of his soul, and not in order to be an eligible husband for her. She wants him to discover — for his own good — God and His words, as well as Islam and its glory. (Ghazoul, 2001, para. 11)

Rae’s conversion signals an alternative to the detached, objective masculinity of Orientalism which manipulates and dominates. Rae’s conversion signals that he is
willing to explore an engaged subjectivity as a man who understands not just as a disembodied intellect, but as an embodied believer.

It might help to shed light on Rae’s conversion if we remember that Aboulela is effectively writing-back to the West. As Ghazoul (2006) writes, “Arab writers who write in English, French, and Italian are no longer seen as traitors opting out of their own culture and into the culture of the (ex-)colonizers, but as cultural ambassadors who are able to voice a previously silenced point of view” (pp. 121–122). She argues, “with today’s proliferation of the phenomenon of ‘writing-back,’ we find writers from former colonies using precisely the language of the colonizers to question those cultures’ representations of the Other” (p. 121). It is as a form of ‘writing-back’ that we should read Aboulela’s novel. In an essay where she reflects upon her own writing practice, Aboulela (2002) says, “To prove that Khartoum is nicer than London, more beautiful than Edinburgh ... I don’t think so. Not to prove, but to express, to show that it is a valid place, a valid way of life beyond the stereotypical images of famine and war, not a backward place to be written off” (p. 204). Aboulela’s project is not to negate Scottish or English or Western values, but rather to assert the validity of her own Sudanese and Islamic worldview. Her choice of the word ‘express’ rather than ‘prove’ to describe her intentions reveals a distrust of binary opposition and argumentation, a distrust of the rhetoric of the clash of civilizations.

Rae’s conversion also serves as a narrative antidote to the popular notion that Muslim societies must ‘convert’ or be converted to democracy, that Islamic societies must convert to Western notions of freedom and of secular humanism. On a purely narrative level, Rae’s conversion is a relatively implausible deus ex machina. However, within the larger social context of Western neo-imperialism and globalization, Rae’s conversion reinforces the validity of Islam as a worldview which offers a promise of social justice and resistance. Sammar tells Rae that “The first believers were mostly women and slaves. I don’t know why, maybe they had softer hearts, I don’t know” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 126). Rae replies, “Maybe in changing they did not have much to lose ... It was the rulers of Makkah who were reluctant to give up their traditions and established ways for something new” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 126). This exchange positions Islam as a religion of the oppressed. Sammar and Rae explicitly identify Islam as a religion which offers the potential for liberation and dignity to women and slaves – the oppressed classes. Indeed, Rae later tells Sammar, “What I regret most ... is that I used to write things like ‘Islam gives dignity to those who otherwise would not have dignity in their lives,’ as if I didn’t need dignity myself” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 200). Rae realizes that Islam offers a space for agency for those who have hitherto been denied one. By converting to Islam, Rae rejects the patriarchal authority previously invested in his Orientalist identity, and embraces a masculinity of the oppressed, of the marginalized. His conversion stands as a rejection of the Orientalist discourse which dominates the East.

Rae’s articulation of Islam as a religion of the marginalized echoes a rich theological tradition emphasizing the place of social justice in Islam. Ali Shari’ati, a prominent Iranian scholar deeply influenced by the writings of Franz Fanon, writes:

Islam is the first school of social thought that recognizes the masses as the basis, the fundamental and consensus factor in determining history – not the
elect as Nietzsche thought, not the aristocracy and nobility as Plato claimed, not great personalities as Carlyle and Emerson believed, not those of pure blood as Alexis Carrel imagined, not the priests or the intellectuals, but the masses. (Shari’ati, 1979, p. 49)

Shari’ati argues that Islam privileges the agency of the people as determinants of social change. In contrast to Western traditions which privilege elites, Shari’ati finds in Islam a system of thought which advocates on behalf of those who are marginalized and oppressed.

In a similar critical vein, Asghar Ali Engineer and Farid Esack draw comparisons between (predominantly Latin American) Christian liberation theology and Islam. Drawing upon theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Aloysius Pieris, Engineer (1984) claims, “Liberation theology subordinates institutions evolved in the historical process to a lively sense of living, active God who inspires human beings for passionate but rational pursuit of social justice which is a dominant note of faith” (p. 23). Engineer argues that there is great potential for developing an Islamic theology of liberation. Drawing upon the Qu’ran, he states, “The Meccan verses revealed to the Prophet sharply condemn the practice of accumulation of wealth and warn the Meccan merchants of the dangerous consequences which will follow if they do not spend their wealth in the way of Allah” (p. 25). For Engineer, the Qu’ran is a text which articulates an explicit vision of social justice through the redistribution of wealth and the privileging of the needs of the poor and marginalized. For Esack (1999), a South African Muslim scholar, the “re-examination or reviewing of our faith in personal terms cannot be done in isolation from the struggle against unjust socio-economic systems” (p. 3). Drawing upon his experience of resistance to the oppression of apartheid, Esack emphasizes the role of Islam in fostering socio-political challenges to systemic injustice and inequality. Personal faith cannot be separated from social activism and praxis in the wider community.

The concept of Islam and the sacred which Aboulela articulates in her novel draws upon the traditions of both Islamic liberation theology and Islamic feminism to challenge both Orientalist and patriarchal Islamist notions of religious experience. Ghazoul writes:

The sacred that Aboulela espouses is neither an abstraction, nor a dogma, nor is it empty rituals. Rather, it is the struggle within against the incontinence of desire and the need to grasp the essence of the religious experience. The fiction’s voice is unmistakably that of a woman articulating the lived experience and the unlived dreams of a segment of society that has often been condemned to silence or made to succumb to patriarchy. (Ghazoul, 2001, para. 13)

The notion of the sacred that Sammar embraces is one that allows her to articulate her experience in the world and sustains her agency in the face of hegemonic patriarchal Western and Eastern narratives. This is a notion of the sacred which infuses and complements daily life, marking and making time “for praying and tea” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 137). It is a notion of the sacred which emphasizes a mindful approach to lived experience. Rae’s conversion demonstrates his commitment to
lived experience over abstract textual knowledge, and articulates a version of masculinity which brings a mindful awareness of one’s place in the world. His acknowledgement that he too needs the dignity that Islam confers (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 200) emphasizes the way that patriarchal discourses not only suppress women and Others, but also do damage to men in positions of privilege and power.

Aboulela’s depiction of Islam as a foundation for social justice writes back to Western imperial discourses which depict Islam as a backward, barbaric religion of extremists and terrorists. Her use of Islam also provides an alternative narrative to those articulations of resistance which appeal to secular or humanist values. Cooke (2000) writes, “Juxtaposing religious observance, however defined, with political activism in the public realm, they [Arab women writers] claim simultaneous and contradictory belongings even as they resist globalization, nationalism, Islamization, and the patriarchal system that pervades them all” (p. 151). Aboulela’s narrative articulates a resistance to the patriarchal models offered by both Islamization and Orientalism, while maintaining a liberatory role for Islam. The relationship between Sammar and Rae provides a model for cross-cultural exchange, conversation, love and translation which resists the stagnant binaries of East and West, the residual ideologies of colonialism. Near the end of the novel, Sammar imagines Rae standing on the balcony of his hotel:

The hotel was built by the British in colonial times. It once glittered and ruled. Now it was a crumbling sleepy place, tolerant of rats and with showers that didn’t work. But still the view was as before, something natural brimming over, the last stretch of the Blue Nile before it curved and met with the other river, changed color and went north. (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 202)

The image of the crumbling colonial hotel parallels the crumbling edifice of Orientalist representations of masculinity and domination of the Other. These notions are revealed to be no longer sustainable. However, Aboulela, through Sammar, provides us with a hopeful image – the view of the river continuing as before, with “something natural brimming over.” The description invites us to read Aboulela’s narrative as an attempt to build an alternative in the ruins of colonial discourse, an alternative which remains attentive to the way in which identities and relationships exceed representation and language, always brim over.

References


Notes

1 An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the Middle Eastern and African Studies 2nd Annual Graduate/Undergraduate Conference, Engaging with Africa and the Middle East through Research on January 26, 2007 at the University of Alberta. I am grateful to the participants at the conference and the reviewers at *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* for their helpful comments and suggestions.

2 The Qudsì Hadiths are texts inspired by Allah, but communicated in the words of Mohammed. The Hadiths are considered supplementary and subordinate to the...
Qur’an, as the Qur’an is both divinely inspired and “is Allah’s wording” (Aboulela, 2001b, p. 42).

Brendan Smyth
Department of English and Film Studies
University of Alberta, 3-5 Humanities Centre
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E5/CANADA
e: bsmyth@ualberta.ca
A gender that is neither male nor female? The role of eunuchs in late antiquity and their place in the emerging churches in the West (Roman Catholicism) and in the East (Byzantium) have both fascinated and repelled writers in the past and present. The anatomically mutilated male body has been seen as a biological and social anomaly, but with regard to the effects of this anomaly on the possibilities for enacting a differently gendered life, the views varied greatly—from severely restraining the eunuch’s life choices (servants; prostitution) to endowing him with royal authority and sacred qualities (court eunuchs; military generals; angels).

Kathryn Ringrose’s book is a rich and detailed historical study on eunuchs in Byzantine culture, covering a period of almost 1000 years, from “the founding of Constantinople in 324 to its capture by the Turks in 1453” (p. 3). Ringrose does not proceed chronologically but thematically, and thus offers a lively introduction to the world of eunuchs from late antiquity to the end of Byzantium. Paying particular attention to the reliability of sources that address “eunuchism” (p. 3), she guides the reader through medical definitions, the legal code, the eunuchs’ roles in Byzantine society, and their place in the royal system, the church, as well as in the religious imagination. Along the way, Ringrose addresses theoretical issues on gender construction in the Byzantine world and on the various discursive functions of eunuchs in medical lore, hagiographies and ecclesiastical texts. She argues that eunuchism was never a stable category; just as castrated individuals defied gender boundaries, the social function and reputation of eunuchs as a group kept changing over time. “Within that long history [of a millennium],” she writes, “eunuchs were particularly prominent both at court and in the church from about 600 to 1100 . . . and individuals flourished despite the fact that Roman and Byzantine law prohibited the making of eunuchs within the empire and that ecclesiastical traditions frowned on bodily mutilation” (p. 3).

Ringrose does well to address early on the range of anatomical changes that would place men into the category of eunuchs. Voluntary self-castration would be one way of becoming a eunuch (one feared and opposed by most church fathers), but certainly not the only one. Castration, to begin with, was not the removal of the penis (as erroneously assumed by modern readers in a post-Freudian age; on this issue, see Gary Taylor’s intriguing study, Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood [2000]), but refers to the removal of testicles. At stake was not (phallic) appearance, but procreation, and the term eunuch “could refer to any nonreproductive man” independent of the “specifics of genital mutilation” (p. 14f). Some men were born eunuchs (with deformed genitalia or lacking sexual desire),
others were “cut” as boys (without a choice on their part), yet others had their testicles surgically removed as adult men. The Greek language testifies to the range of these procedures, from tomias referring to “cut men” (surgical removal of testicles from scrotum) to spado (natural eunuchs), from thlibias (intentionally crushed testicles) to the fewer cases of curzinasus, the doubly castrated men, whose testicles and penis had been removed.

In the church, finally, the term “eunuch” could refer to celibate monks who had taken a vow to remain nonreproductive. The metaphorical usage of eunuchism here referred not to anatomical but spiritual castration: a monk in its social and biological function was the equivalent of a eunuch. By adopting this analogy the church could make sense of the famous passage in the Gospel of Matthew without encouraging Christian celibate men (ascetics and monks) to literally cut themselves. Jesus says in response to a question about marriage: “There are eunuchs born that way from their mother’s womb, there are eunuchs made so by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can” (Matt. 19.12). With Origen being one of the possible exceptions, church fathers almost unanimously heaped scorn on physically castrated men (they are castrated “for the sake of the kingdom of women,” Athanasius wrote), while praising bodily whole men who practice celibacy as the true eunuchs: those men, according to Epiphanius, metaphorically “castrate themselves for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven” (p. 115). These sentiments are repeated by church fathers such as St. John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea, and later translated into some monastic rules, which prohibited (anatomical) eunuchs to join the secluded communities of celibate men.

The strict separation of anatomical and spiritual eunuchs, by which church fathers tried to differentiate between legitimate forms of male celibacy and artificially produced, unnatural forms of celibacy (after all, how would it be a feat for a eunuch to conquer sexual desire?), softened, however, over time in the Byzantine culture. “The Byzantine hagiographical corpus,” writes Ringrose, “includes remarkably few examples of negative rhetoric about eunuchs” (p. 117). By the eighth century, the general cultural acceptance of eunuchs in high positions of imperial authority allowed eunuchs to cross over into “prominent religious positions” (p. 118). Ringrose presents evidence both from legendary narratives and historical sources. One of the early prominent “ecclesiastical eunuchs,” for example, was the “patriarch Germanos (715-730)” who had been “castrated when he was already an adult, as a political act” (p. 118). Prominent court eunuchs could enter the monasteries—often like a retirement option—if they vowed to become a monk for the remainder of their lives.

The Perfect Servant is formally arranged in two parts. Whereas the four chapters that make up the first part address larger conceptual and theoretical issues relating to questions of gender, definition, language and sources (while always staying close to the material itself), the second part delves into more detail of the textual and historical sources relating to specific realms within which eunuchs arose to prominence in Byzantine society. Chapter 5 looks at prominent eunuchs crossing over into the ecclesiastical world; chapter 6 looks at powerful eunuchs in the imperial (secular) realm; chapter 7 investigates the parallelism that is constructed in religious texts and icons between the appearances of (court) eunuchs and angels;
and the last chapter details the various offices that eunuchs held in the imperial palace—most of which were designed as positions of “perfect” servanthood.

Throughout these chapters, Ringrose also gets across two important points: for one, that eunuchs within Byzantium “constituted a third gender” (p. 4) and, second, that there is an inherent difficulty in reconstructing the lives of eunuchs since almost all texts about them were not written by them but by “bodily whole” men. Each text, then, cannot be taken at face value but must be carefully examined as to the specific views and polemics of its author and must be compared to a wide range of sources before a more comprehensive and accurate picture of eunuchs can emerge.

In many ways, The Perfect Servant can be read as the companion volume to Matthew Kuefler’s earlier study of eunuchs in late antiquity in the Western tradition, The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity (2001). Together, these two books not only provide an impeccable introduction to eunuchism in the Christian West and East but also broaden our understanding of Christian men and their concomitant ideals of masculinity both in the emerging Christian churches and in the (sometimes counter-cultural) religious imagination.

Björn Krondorfer, Department of Religious Studies
St. Mary’s College of Maryland/USA
e: bhkrondorfer@smcm.edu
In the past decades, openly gay scholars in religious studies have recovered the history and experiences of gay lives within and outside religious communities, investigated discourses on sex and gender, defended differences of sexual orientation against public hostility and biblical Scripturalism, critiqued heteronormativity, and generally broadened the vision of scholarly inquiry within the academic study of religion. A subgenre of writing within this field has focused on the experience of gay men in view of their religious upbringing in a particular tradition as well as their current devotional practices. In these texts, autobiographical insertions and confessional revelations are often blended with historical, phenomenological and ethical musings. These texts come across as a rich tapestry of images, reminiscences and thoughts that are often more suggestive in nature rather than systematically argued. Though informed by academic discourse, their devotional, confessional and hagiographic style makes them at times resemble a breviary—a gay breviary, that is.

Donald Boisvert’s *Sanctity and Male Desire* falls into this genre of gay devotional writing. He argues that Catholic male saints inspire not only devotion but also desire, and that their stories and images contain an eroticism that can be recovered from beneath a more repressive Catholic culture. Boisvert, who teaches religion at Concordia University in Canada, approaches this topic as an openly gay man who was raised in the Catholic tradition (the reader learns this on the first page of the Introduction). Situating himself within a larger argument—advanced by scholars like Mark Jordan and Robert Goss—that Roman Catholicism is simultaneously homophobic and also “homoerotic and campy” (p. 8), he wants to explore the possibilities of desire with which the iconic images of male saints are invested. In a certain sense, such an approach falls into a loosely understood Foucaultian framework with its interest in an archaeology of knowledge, except that the knowledge to be unearthed, in Boisvert’s case, is less related to discursive formation and more to an embodied knowing of desire.

In the introduction, Boisvert argues convincingly that as objects of veneration, saints exude a sensual quality. Since they serve both as model and mediation, the sensual quality is claimed by the believer in two ways: first, wanting to imitate them as exemplary models (if only in one’s fantasy) and, second, investing one’s wishes and hopes in them as intercessory forces (mediation). In either case, desire is at the center of veneration. The passionate and sensuous devotion to saints—often in tension with orthodoxy and scholasticism—speaks to the strong dynamics between devotee and the object of admiration. “In intensely Catholic cultures,” Boisvert writes, “[saints] are clothed and bathed, covered with flowers or...
dripping in bright red droplets of blood, gaudy and almost comical in their painted features, and lit by the reflective glow of a thousand votive candles” (p. 19).

Boisvert is not interested in pursuing the whole spectrum of desire that saints might elicit and evoke from their devotees; instead, he focuses on the possibilities of investing male saints with gay erotic desire. It happens in two ways: exploring the queerness of the saints themselves and, second, affirming the gay embrace of male saints as eroticized objects. “I have been engaged in a process of ‘queering’ hagiography,” he writes, and “I have examined the lives and imagery of a limited number of male saints . . . recast[ing] them as gay icons” (p. 207). Devoting each chapter to one (sometimes two) saints, he introduces and reflects on, for example, the archangel Michael, Saint Sebastian, Paul and Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Damien and Peter Julian Eymard. One chapter is devoted to the “erotic Christ,” and in the two concluding chapters he reflects more broadly on how to understand saints in a secularized, modern world (can we meet men today who are saints?) and how to affirm gay male sanctity today.

I would call Sanctity and Male Desire an example of gay devotional writing since it unapologetically presents a partisan view of sainthood. It wants to speak to the gay community, and it does so powerfully. It encourages gay men, who would like to remain within the affective and religious universe of (Catholic) Christianity, to embrace proudly and courageously those dimensions of the tradition that give them spiritual sustenance without having to deny their erotic embodiedness. Not coincidentally, each chapter ends with a short devotional prayer and hymn, casting the respective saint into a supporter and protector of Christian gay men. Autobiographical insertions, in which Boisvert reveals openly his own desires for saintly male bodies, indicate an agenda of gay male sanctity that knows no shaming. In this sense, Sanctity and Male Desire is a gutsy, brave and daring book.

Boisvert does not strive to “prove” a claim historically or textually (or intertextually) but wants to persuade through the rhetoric of experience. Within a community of like-minded people, this works well. How persuasive it is, however, for a reader who does not inhabit the same erotic investment in devotional imagery and this particular religious imaginary remains questionable. A non-gay reader may find the book intriguing, enlightening and, at times, amusing and provocative; but not sharing the same experiential universe, the argumentation itself often seems rather weak. A gay, non-Catholic reader may find the erotic(ized) language of the book appealing (the description of beautiful male bodies and erotic practices), but the passionate veneration of saints may remain utterly foreign to them.

To his credit, Boisvert does not make the reductionist claim that all male saints were gay, though some might have been: “No doubt some canonized saints were homosexual, as were other holy men from the Judeo-Christian tradition” (p. 193). It might be easier to say that many saints were “queer,” if by queer we understand generally a life deviating from normative behavior and expectations.

Yet, Boisvert can be flawed for another kind of reductionist move: he constructs an image of a perfectly shaped, highly eroticized male body ascribed to each of the saints. This imagined saintly body is repeatedly described as “beautiful,” “erotic,” “titillating,” “handsome,” “bare-chested,” “naked” or “semi-naked,” “muscular,” “glorious,” “ragged” and endowed with “perfection,” “virile masculinity,” “masculine strength,” etc. More often than not, the saints of old
appear in a body conforming to the modern norm for gay beauty. Hints of age and deformity (say, through illness) are mentioned only in passing and do not elicit an eroticized response. “Mine is decidedly a fetishistic gaze,” Boisvert admits and, revealingly, adds: “If [Sebastian] were a contemporary model strutting Calvin Klein underwear in some ad, the image would be equally arousing” (p. 48).

An exception of sorts is the body of Christ. Though Boisvert imagines Jesus to be a “handsome man,” “caring and attentive, sensitive yet principled” and working “bare-chested in the burning sun” (p. 180), he is attracted also to the “broken body” of Christ. The crucified Jesus (a “handsomely glorious body of Jesus [hanging] from the cross” (p. 171)) “elicits strong feelings of comfort and passive submission, the male docile and compliant body.” Yet, this submissiveness is immediately complemented by the symbol of the “lion” with its “brute aggressive force, the male as dominant energy and the definite top” (p. 170). Not surprisingly, the “fully male, genitally endowed” sculpture of Michelangelo’s Risen Christ, with its “muscular arms, thighs and buttocks” (p. 177), commands Boisvert’s admiration.

The fantasized ideal of a perfected, virile male body reflects a homonormative body, a constructed body that appeals to a particular gay male gaze. Indeed, this uncritical embrace of one dominant body image speaks more to a hagiographic fantasy than a queer discourse. Boisvert’s project of “queering hagiography” seems, at times, more an exercise in “gay hagiolatry”; it is an excessive adoration of a construct that affirms a particular gay identity rather than a broadening of queer bodily possibilities.

In fairness to Boisvert, he does introduce a range of men’s lives and stories (the reflections on Paul, Augustine and Francis of Assisi, for example, do not follow the above mold), but these do not carry the weight of the book. At times, this reviewer wished for a more persuasive historical and theoretical grounding; instead, Sanctity and Male Desire remains grounded almost exclusively in experience, memory and re-envisioning—and that is both its strength and its weakness.

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


William G. Doty

This is a fairly hard volume to read. Not because the poetry is bad: it has moments of epiphany and insight many writers would love to produce, but because the materials and themes are so close to the bone. Readers will experience a great deal of various sexual connections, many sad moments of loss and confusion.

Its strength is in its oh-so-direct confrontations with male sexuality from several directions: an older neighbor seeking a blowjob, the author’s brother and he exploring the same (“how could you let someone / pee in your mouth?” p. 17). Abortion as well (p. 67), and what seems like incest (p. 68), and anal rape (p. 74).

An account of male:female intercourse (p. 12f) is hilarious: the male puzzles through his first use of a condom (come on now!), dropping it onto a dusty floor before drawing on a second rubber. But the author can speak brilliantly the kaddish prayer for his departed brother—killed at nineteen by a drunken driver. And Jewish-Christian-Islamic tensions reappear (pp. 52, 63) so well as contemporary political defamations of George W. Bush’s invasion of the sovereign state of Iraq (p. 8).

Family rears its weighty head repeatedly, in a manner that usefully highlights how sexuality so largely derives from familial attitudes. Social construction of reality begins in the cradle, and Newman’s poems return repeatedly to this theme, even though it leads so often to “The silence between us [which] is the silence of men” (p. 72). Here “disfigured manhood” becomes precisely an indicator of what we might term “disfigured humanhood,” for I could imagine such a volume (perhaps I’ve read it already) being written from a woman’s perspective.

A rather intense element here of dismay and pessimism, yet as well a sense of having learned wisdom that can open doors to new futures, witness the tiny piece, “Catching My Breath” (p. 93):

My body has learned many lies,
but here, in this bed we share,
they fall from me till I am clean,
a tree in winter,
awaiting the new season.
And the last words of the volume (“Poem From The Barnes and Noble Café,” p. 100):

the earth transformed to a tent where we all break bread,
each of us carrying what we’ve seen
the way musicians carry music
in the moments before they start playing.

William G. Doty, Department of Religious Studies
University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa/USA
e: wdoty4@comcast.net
In the introduction to *Gay Religion*, Thumma & Gray state that “seldom does a day pass that the news services do not contain a story highlighting debates over the place of gay and lesbian believers in American religious life” (p. xi). Yet, they add, little or no attention is given to the tales of harmonious life between homosexuality and religion. The anthology *Gay Religion* seeks to do just that.

*Gay Religion* provides a richly diverse collection of 21 essays focusing on the relationship between homosexuality and religion in American society. These 21 essays are grouped into three categories: (1) denominational heritage expressions; (2) subaltern/sectarian expressions; (3) popular expressions. This “three-part heuristic typology,” note Thumma & Gray, “is offered for understanding innovation and tradition in gay spiritual practice” (p. 282).

The group of essays entitled “denominational heritage expressions” focuses on the relationship between homosexuals and the denominations in which they were raised. These essays cover both denominations and a wide variety of religions that one might not consider as denominations, such as Judaism, Buddhism, and Santeria.

These denominations and religions are part of the American religious landscape and have definite theological or political views of homosexuality, and it is on this crucial issue that these essays revolve. Specifically, how does a Jew, Buddhist, Seventh Day Adventist, or United Methodist, to name a few, continue to live out his or her faith tradition while also living as a homosexual?

Shokeid’s “Why Join A Gay Synagogue,” Cadge’s “Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Buddhist Practitioners,” and Vidal-Ortiz’s “Sexuality and Gender in Santería: LGBT at the Crossroads of Santería Religion” provide evidence that homosexuality and religion, at least in these religious groups, are compatible.

Other articles, such as, Drumm’s “No Longer an Oxymoron: Integrating Gay and Lesbian Seventh Day Adventists” and Thumma’s “Gay Evangelicals: Negotiating a Religious Identity” document the struggles of some homosexuals in faith groups where homosexuality and religion are not compatible.

Two other essays, Primiano’s “The Gay God of the City: The Emergence of the Gay and Lesbian Ethnic Parish,” Cadge’s “Reconciling Congregations Bridging Gay and Straight Communities,” and Ponticelli’s “Shades of Grey or Back to Nature? The Enduring Qualities of Ex-Gay Ministries” document the unique American trait of creating voluntary organizations to deal with social issues. In this case, the voluntary organizations seek to build bridges between homosexuals and their respective faith groups.
The group of essays entitled “subaltern/sectarian expressions” focuses on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) groups creating their own religious groups that are centered on the identity of being LGBT. Building on the entrepreneurial experience that is American religious life, LGBT people create parallel groups and organizations “that nurture and solidify a new gay religious identity” (p. 164). Specifically, LGBT people have taken old cultural forms and expressions, such as liturgical practices and theologies, and innovatively have created new, distinct religious realities.

The first three essays highlight the creation of new, innovative realities from traditional cultural forms. Lukenbill’s “Pluralism and Diversity: Music as Discourse and Information in a Gay and Lesbian Congregation” examines the music of a gay and lesbian congregation in creating a new theological identity for the congregants. Bates’ “Liberation in Truth: African American Lesbians Reflect on Spirituality and Their Church” documents the use of liberation theology and liturgical practices consistent with black church to create a religion acceptable to African American homosexuals in their relationship with the divine. Savastano’s “St. Gerard Teaches Him That Love Cancels That Out: Italian American Catholic Gay Men in Newark, New Jersey” highlights the use of iconography, symbols, and hagiography associated with St. Gerard Maiella to create a unique religious tradition.

Wilcox’s “A Religion of One’s Own: Gender and LGBT Religiosities” builds on the work of Robert Bellah’s “sheilaism” that was first put forth in his Habits of the Heart (1985). Hasbrouck’s “Utopian Imaginaries and Faerie Practice: Mapping Routes of Relational Agency” and Neitz’s “Queering the Dragonfest: Changing the Sexualities in a Post-Patriarchal Religion” also focus on the individualism of “sheilaism,” but within the context of alternate religions in the United States.

The final group of essays, entitled “Popular Expressions,” examines the manifestation of gay religion in popular culture. While popular culture is not religion, religion, as documented by scholars of implied religion, can be found in popular culture. And, that is what this collection of essays is devoted to—what are those expressions of LGBT culture, outside of religious institutions and organizations, where LGBT people find religion and spirituality.


The remaining three essays, Gorrell’s “Rite to Party: Circuit Parties and Religious Experience,” Peterson’s “Gay Men’s Spiritual Experience in the Leather Community,” and “The Spirit Within: Gay Male Culture as a Spiritual Venue” provide different viewpoints of gay male culture as spirituality, particularly the ritualism of these experiences as providing the religious meaning for the participants.

Gay Religion is a groundbreaking book and with any groundbreaking book some mistakes are bound to be made. For example, a few of the essays in this collection are rather dated. Yet, what makes a groundbreaking book so powerful is that it focuses attention on a much-neglected issue and initiates further discussion and study. Gay Religion provides a valuable resource, both as a text and a typology, to continue studying and documenting the relationship between homosexuality and
religion in the United States in the twenty-first century. It will be a valuable resource in the classroom to enable students to see the complexity of the LGBT lifestyle both in American religion and society. Furthermore, *Gay Religion* will spur current students to become scholars of the emerging field of gay religion.

Craig This, Department of Sociology
Sinclair Community College/USA
e: craig.this@sinclair.edu
**Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography** focuses on a central topic of men’s studies and masculinities: male intimacy and friendship, and explores the decline of male intimacy and public display of affection. Interestingly, his empirical evidence comes from a rich collection of 142 photographs from the author’s private collection, taken between the years 1850-1950. The male portraits, including both studio photographs and snapshots, ably illustrate the progression of display of affection and intimacy between men during that period. Through the over time changes in these rich collection of portraits, Ibson shows a rapid decline in expressing heterosexual intimacy and friendship. The book is organized in seven chapters and an epilogue. First, Ibson displays the high levels of intimacy with extensive photos mostly taken at studios from mid twentieth century. Most photos from the era display high levels of intimacy between men, some family, some colleagues and some friends. Many men are portrayed holding hands, embracing each other and sitting on each other’s laps. The author identifies a gradual decline in the display of such affection between men today: this sort of intimacy displayed in the photo studios in mid-twentieth century America is replaced with homophobic spaces between men. The author pairs this decline with the parallel trend of decline in studio photography and inclusion of women into the public sphere.

Second, the author, borrowing from Roland Barthes, argues photography is a cultural performance and highlights the performance aspects of photography in many studio photos. In these group photos, men dress up as cowboys or pretend to drink, smoke, stage fights, pose with guns and rifles and stage weddings in drag. Ibson sees these photographs as performances of masculinity, during which men reinforce the traditional definitions of manhood. An important part of this performance, he identifies, is cross-dressing: many men in the pictures dress up as women and pose for stage scenes such as weddings. According to Ibson, cross-dressing is also a performance which enables men to display intimacy, which they otherwise would not be able to. For example, in Harvard’s Hasty Pudding Club, in 1795, cross-dressing was a permanent part of their performance and they defined it as a way to “to cherish the feeling of friendship and patriotism” (p. 75). However, in 1915, cross-dressing was banned by the dean from all theatrical performances on the grounds that it effeminates males and threatens masculinity. However, through the rich collection of photographs, the author captures the “part of the significant web of male association” (p. 75).
Third, the author looks at war photographs throughout WW1. Through war photographs, he identifies men in military uniforms holding hands, hugging and displaying affection. With these photos, he captures the profound attachment of men to other men: the band of brothers and the bonds and friendships that war created.

Similar to the war pictures, Ibson also identifies schools as another venue for displaying male affection. In school pictures, particularly in sports teams, the author traces the evolution of display of affection and intimacy amongst men. An adult athlete told Michael Messner: “a lot of athletes are attracted to athletics because they are fighting feelings of tenderness - not necessarily gay - but they are fighting feminine qualities.” However, in a society where male intimacy and affection is declining and becoming less socially acceptable, men seek less obvious ways to show intimacy and display affection.

In this book, Ibson tackles a very important sociological question of lack of display of affection and intimacy amongst men. The lack of intimacy amongst men in the contemporary American society, according to Ibson, is a relatively new development. Through a very rich collection of visual evidence, he accurately documents the decline in male intimacy in a relatively short period of time. With beautifully taken photos, he documents our recent past and the step by step changes and shows the intimate show of friendships regardless of sexual orientation are gradually replaced by composed distances between men from “hugs and kisses to empty seats between men in theatres” (p. 195). While his thesis is not new, the use of photography as evidence in cultural understanding of American men offers a unique, empirical support. Despite the richness of his photographic data, in some chapters, especially his chapter on the World War II, he resorts to using less convincing evidence from popular culture instead of his rich photos.

While the author depicts an important decline in the expression of intimacy and friendships, the argument remains predominantly on the descriptive level. He offers some concurrent changes (such as the incorporation of women into the public sphere and the decline in studio shots), but does not delve into causes of the decline in intimacy. Overall, this is a wonderful contribution to the understanding of masculinities in the United States. The next step would be to identify the causes of this decline in intimacy.

Yasemin Besen-Cassino, Department of Sociology
Montclair State University/USA
e: beseny@mail.montclair.edu

Myron M. Beasley

It’s about framing. One morning I see the profile of Henry Louis Gates pan across the television screen. The commentator introduces the segment of “Good Morning America” by emoting, “Rap music, the music of angry black youth...” Gates, a black male, an intellectual with titles behind his name, speaks directly and passionately defends rap music, attempting to disrupt and even “reframe” the genre, asking the audience to place rap within its proper context to be understood. Today the same preamble occurs in the discussion of rap music in contemporary American culture—“the music of angry black youth.” Cheney’s *Brothers Gonna Work It Out* disregards the popular demagoguery and forbids a populist perusal common amongst documents produced by many popular intellectuals; instead her text frames hip-hop culture from a critical cultural perspective, which recognizes nationalism, rap music, and even African American culture as contested domains where black nationalism is explored “as an embodied-social politics or a politics that is determined by race and gender discourses.” Through the use of oral, literary and lyrical text, “race/gender politicking” is made apparent within hip-hop culture (p. 3). Such a critical perspective provides greater flexibility to enable “scholars to envision black nationalism in ways that are inclusive of various forms of expression, from those of territorial nationalists to those of cultural nationalists and from oral performances to literary stylings” (p. 17). Acknowledging the artists as raptivists, Cheney reminds the reader that “[h]ip hop nationalists are the most recent in a long line of organic cultural workers who are situated between the intellectual activist and the commercialized entertainer.”

The book is comprised of six chapters in which three major themes are developed: the history of hip-hop music; race and gender performance; religion and social change. Drawn from the author’s dissertation, this thoroughly researched and well-written book leaves very few stones unturned. Cheney opens with a meticulous review of various methods that support the critical cultural frame the project embraces. While providing the reader with a comparative analysis of methods and approaches of interpreting black popular culture, Cheney “messys” the dominate reading of black culture as stable, linear and parsimonious to unfold the goal of the text which is to re/frame how this genre is discussed in American culture and to engage in the sexual politics of rap.

An excavation of masculine protest discourse is performed in the chapter titled, “We men ain’t we.” The chapter documents the history of nationalism and nationalistic discourse and foregrounds historical narratives of such “race men” as Alexander Crummwell, Mualana Karenga and Amiri Baraka to Black Panther leaders Seal and Cleaver. The rhetorical analysis reveals the seeds of the pervasive phallic
discourse in black nationalism and the reader is reminded of the complexities of such rhetoric within African American communities, including the role of women who embraced and supported the “men in charge” discourse of the Black Panthers, not to mention the ongoing debate between “Nationalism = Masculine versus Non-Violent = Feminine.” Cheney also highlights ruptures in the discourse embodied by figures such as Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin. The opening chapters outline the often hidden or not-well-articulated link between the rhetoric of black nationalism, the civil rights protest of the Black Panther movement to the hip-hop raptivists of the golden age.

The author moves to focus on the work of Chuck D and Public Enemy to explore the popular and political culture of rap music. Cheney opines, “As a trailblazer of the consciousness movement within rap music, Chuck D claimed his legacy as the political progeny of the Black Panther Party” (p. 63). We learn, though, the rap artists reared in the pervasive integrationist discourse of the late 70s and early 80s, were highly influenced by the visible disparities of Reganomics and the Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas hearings which suggested that “race could no longer ensure political allegiance” (p. 67). While this community of organic intellectuals understood that, “For the first time in the history of African American history, civil rights were no longer an integral part of the Black nationalist agenda as young, working-, and middle-class black men and women attempted to redefine and revise liberatory politics at the end of the twentieth century,” music was their response to such social conditions (p. 71). We gain further insight as to how the raptivists (by the way, most of whom were educated at small elite private liberal arts colleges) used their intellectual prowess in the construction of lyrics, in staging their performances; even the mere act of naming themselves were highly intellectual and political choices drawn from both African American cultural history and American politics. For the raptivist, music was a vehicle that endorsed the pro-black nationalist discourse that critiqued both the black middle-class and the pervasive anti-black and anti-working-class rhetoric of the Bush and Reagan regimes.

The topic of sexual politics and same sex desire are giving adequate attention in the chapter titled “Ladies first.” Cheney encourages the reader to place the strident homophobic, sexist and misogynist rhetoric of rap nationalist in its proper context: “the social-political struggle for the remasculinization of black men” (p. 100). The focus on the ‘race first, gender second agenda,’ hindered female rap artists from speaking publicly against such patriarchy, opting to remain silent rather than having their statements used “against their brothas.” However, several such as Queen Latifah, we learn endorsed the masculinist discourse in both her music and her public performances. On the topic of homosexuality in hip-hop culture, Cheney suggests that homophobic rhetoric be read as metaphor for black male disempowerment and white men (who in Black Nationalist discourse are rendered as weak). Although Cheney acknowledges Rigg’s “Tongues Untied” (1989) documentary as a testament that “black nationalism as a politics of masculine protest is not necessarily dependent upon heterosexism,” the author falls short in considering the ramifications of homophobic and sexist discourse, assuming rather that the majority of Americans are media literate.

A fascinating highlight of this text is the placement of religious doctrine in the context of hip-hop culture. The apparent inclination toward Islam is apparent with
the (male) hero worship of Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey: “With very few exceptions, raptivists of the Golden age were influenced by the teaching of Elijah Muhammad” (p. 119). For raptivists, even the traditional black church was not beyond critique, while the Nation of Islam (a black nationalist theology) becomes the privileged faith for its social and political emphasis on the ‘here and now’—instead of the ‘life thereafter’ offered by the traditional Christian faith. It is not until the final pages of the text where a synthesis of the before mentioned strands of Cheney’s major argument are fully realized. It is at the demise of the movement that we get a sense of its being.

The final chapter is where the book should begin. It is here that Cheney is more explicit about sexual politics, addresses the demise and the failure of black nationalism as a movement and waxes eloquent about the feminist rap rappers who are accomplishing progressive and radical social change. It is here, also, that she actually begins to further develop what she seeks to do—explore gender and sexuality in the golden age of rap. More poignantly, the return to the thoughts of filmmaker Marlon Riggs, whose career speaks to the “reframing” of black men, is what I consider should be the nascence of her argument for the text: “Perhaps Riggs was onto something when he boldly pronounced that “black men loving black men is the revolutionary act of our times. Once black men - particularly heterosexual men - begin to address their own gendered oppression, redefine the masculine ideal, and learn to love themselves and their communities without fear or anxiety, they can discover and appreciate the value of freedom” (p. 171)!

Myron M. Beasley
Art Institute Chicago/USA
e: performbrazil@gmail.com