



Independent Open Access Book Publishing 101

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In a previous editorial (Gelfer, 2009), I wrote about the economics of open access journal publishing. Specifically, I noted how a particular viewpoint expressed by Conley and Wooders (2009) glossed over some of the skills involved in open access publishing, and how this resulted at once in a devaluation of the publishing profession, and the co-option of free labor from academics. The outcome of this combination is that open access publishing can be seen as the privilege of those who can afford to support a volunteer economy. However, I am still an advocate of alternative publishing models, as demonstrated by JMMS being an open access journal. In this editorial I want to assume that we have made peace with the nature of volunteer economics, and offer some further practical thoughts not in the domain of journals (because this has been done in many other places), but books. Further still, I want to talk not about open access books in the increasing number of institutionally-supported open access monograph initiatives (important though they are), but genuinely independent publishing that is delivered not just online as open access content, but also via other channels such as print and Kindle.

My thinking on this subject was encouraged by the idea of writing a non-academic book about masculinity that could be written exactly as I wanted (in other words, not mediated by what a publisher believed they could sell), and that I could give away online. I was interested in the kind of impact that such a book could potentially have more than the cultural and professional capital that could be derived from a traditionally published book (whether academic or trade). With this in mind I drew up a plan for a book called *The Masculinity Conspiracy* (Gelfer, 2011), which I intended to give away for free online, posting each chapter as it was written and soliciting comments along the way that could directly result in the text being revised and inform the chapters that had yet to be written.

I started by registering the domain name masculinityconspiracy.com with a small hosting package (which cost about \$50 in total). After investigating several publishing platforms I settled on WordPress to deliver the content of the book. There are plenty of other possibilities, but I already used WordPress for a blog, so knew how it worked, and there are many people with WordPress accounts who could comment on the blog using their existing online identity. I posted the text of the first chapter online, breaking the text up across pages with somewhere between 500 and 700 words, so readers could comment on specific sections of the text rather than a whole chapter. I then went and let people know about the website, whether they be in my personal network, or by posting messages on subject-related discussion boards.

From the beginning the site received a modest but steady number of readers, some of whom left interesting comments which often took the text on unexpected tangents, and some directly went on to influence the text of later chapters. Indeed, for the first four chapters, everything went exactly as I would have hoped and expected. And then the site was hacked. I was unsure if this was a random occurrence, or something aimed specifically at me, but the text and comments were all deleted, leaving pictures of skulls and “got to hell” messages. My Internet Service Provider rolled the site back to a restore point before the hack, recovering the content, but claimed this was my problem (despite the fact that I was using the WordPress software they provided). One month later the site was hacked again, this time leaving messages in Arabic and pictures of Saddam Hussein. I took this hack more personally, as it was accompanied by emails questioning the size of my penis. Clearly, someone had taken significant offense to *The Masculinity Conspiracy*, which was at once most annoying in terms of the hack, but also rather exciting in terms of having clearly touched a nerve in the public domain in a way that is rarely achieved by orthodox academic publishing. As the ISP could not guarantee the hacking would be stopped, I moved the whole site over to the WordPress hosting service, which to date has remained untouched.

As I posted each chapter online, the trick seemed to be to continue letting people know about the site. For example, I was interested in engaging men’s rights advocates with the text, and posted news of each chapter on men’s rights websites: significant spikes of readership could be seen as a result in the WordPress statistics module. To give you some idea of the number of readers, in the past year the site has received about 20,000 page views, which is a small readership by popular standards, but good by academic standards.

Once the full text of the book had been posted online it became clear that despite the fact that it was being given away for free, not everyone was satisfied. Some of this was stylistic: some readers are happy with a dark background, others are not; some are happy with 500 word pages, others want the whole chapter on a single page. But also, some readers said they wanted wholly different formats, such as print or Kindle (and were willing to pay for these). So I investigated how this could be realized at little or no cost to me.

For a print edition I settled on the services of CreateSpace, an Amazon company. CreateSpace offers print-on-demand services that can produce and sell books one unit at a time, at no cost to authors. There are other companies that provide similar services. All that is required is to populate a Word document template with your text, adjust the formatting until it is satisfactory, fill in some information for a cover template (or design your own), upload the document as a PDF file, and away you go. CreateSpace provides an ISBN and barcode for the book. You can set your cover price within a certain range and earn a royalty on every copy sold via the CreateSpace website (a royalty significantly higher than a traditional publisher), or pay a modest fee and also make the book available for sale in all the usual online places. You can also then take that same document used for the print edition and upload it to Kindle Direct Publishing (another Amazon company), which will automatically convert the document to Kindle format within a few minutes and allow you to sell it via the global Amazon network within 24 hours (again, paying a

decent royalty on sales). Both the print and Kindle editions can be created at no cost with a skill set comparable to using Facebook.

Between the ability to write exactly what you want to write, receive immediate feedback from a variety of readers during the writing process, and being able to make the text available almost immediately in both print and Kindle formats, the whole idea of publishing with a traditional publisher becomes rather puzzling. Of course, there are other variables at play. First, not everyone is capable of producing a clean text without the input of a professional editor, so you will need to be honest about the quality of your writing skills. Second, the whole “build it and they will come” mantra that underpins much open access ideology simply does not work. Once you have built it, you must then let any- and everyone know about it. The key to success in such endeavors ultimately comes down to self-promotion. You have to be comfortable planting links to the website wherever possible, and finding creative ways to start conversations about the work (this is also true for promoting traditionally-published books), such as co-opting a journal editorial. I even have a masculinityconspiracy.com t-shirt that I wear to conferences, on airplanes, at school fairs and any other place where there are potential conversation captives: you’d be surprised at its effectiveness. Third, even if you manage to cause a flurry in the blogosphere with such an initiative, you will not be able to leverage it for a job promotion or grant application: it will not be taken seriously as a “real” publication.

In short, with current technologies it is possible to independently and at almost no financial cost deliver to the world a book-length text with great speed and the ability to genuinely respond to readers. It requires sacrificing some professional capital, but has the potential to generate new capital outside of the profession. I am not suggesting the traditional publishing process should be abandoned in favor of this independent publishing process, but it nevertheless offers a compelling complement that is worthy of serious consideration.

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Holiness Sex: Conservative Christian Sex Practices as Acts of Sanctification

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In this article about conservative Christian heterosexual advice manuals I will pursue two lines of inquiry: First, I will argue exegetically that these texts represent a particular modern intertwining of sexual and religious discourses. Here, the bodies of the Christian heterosexual couple are shaped as tension-filled sites: In their sexual bodies the Evangelical men and women, who consume and contribute to these texts, are tasked to negotiate and endure the antinomies of sexual discourses in high modernity in addition to those of Christian theologies of grace. While these manuals combine a discourse that highlights the importance of freely enjoying sexual pleasures, they also echo a wider cultural sense that sexuality is a dangerous power in need of constant disciplining. In terms of theology, this complicated shaping of heterosexual enables a body theology of grace, in which it remains constantly unclear how much agency and submission the Christian man or Christian wife have to perform in the drama of salvation. As my second and theoretical line of inquiry, I will demonstrate how the proliferation of Christian advice products is part of the modernization of Evangelical heterosexual discourse by creating a specific marketable and consumable identity of Christian sexuality.¹

While there is a movement to broaden Anglo-American Evangelical public discourse to include care for the environment and concerns with global poverty, this inclusion of wider social issues did not come at the expense of Evangelical concerns about gender and sexuality.² The right order of the sexes is a central focus that not only motivates political evangelical discourses but also produced a flurry of debates among Evangelicals themselves about how to live a God-ordained sexual life. Marriage and sex advice manuals are prominent sites for these internal debates. They present to the scholar, therefore, an excellent place to analyze what is at stake theologically for Evangelicals when it comes to matters of sexuality. Such a theological analysis is needed if we want to gain a deeper understanding of why Evangelical Americans are prone to reproduce over and over again a discourse in which “men are naturally aggressive,” “women are ordained to be submissive,” and where homosexuality is connected with deviance and disease.

The classic text dealing with these manuals is Amy DeRogatis' 2005 article "What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation in Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals, 1950 to the Present" (DeRogatis, 2005). In it, she contrasts the development of Evangelical Marriage manuals with those of so-called secular authors, using Jessamyn Neuhaus' work on the history of sex manuals in the U.S. as a reference point (DeRogatis, 2005; Neuhaus, 2000). Whereas Neuhaus shows that post-World War II secular manuals up to the sexual revolution focused on male sexual satisfaction in marriage, DeRogatis presents us with Evangelical texts that are very concerned about mutual sexual satisfaction, for example Beverly and Tim LaHaye's (1976a) *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love*.³

A few other texts have since appeared analyzing the intersection of secular and evangelical marriage guides, most notably among them Rebecca Davis' (2010) *More Perfect Unions: the American search for Marital Bliss*.⁴ However, in this article I will focus on DeRogatis' important analysis by extending it on three points: First, I want to continue her examination of printed marriage manuals by adding Internet-based texts, culled from discussion forums and marital advice websites. Doing so will add the dimension of user-feedback, which was inevitably absent in DeRogatis' 2005 article. Thus, we can see how ordinary users adopt and adapt the message of elite evangelical advice columnists.

Secondly, and more substantially, I want to follow her tantalizing suggestion that sexuality for evangelicals is of salvific importance. Under the heading "Sexual Bodies and Salvation," DeRogatis discusses how some of the marriage manuals, particularly Marabel Morgan's (1973) *Total Woman*, empower the wife to be the guardian of her husband's delicate ego and masculinity.⁵ By making herself erotically attractive, the woman can shore up and restore her man's virility, which may have suffered from the indignities and failures endured in his work-life and broader society (DeRogatis, 2005, pp. 125ff). Yet, the question remains how sexual practices relate to the wider project of Christian salvation for the Evangelical consumers of these texts. Already in 1986, Lionel Lewis and Dennis Brisset noted in their overview of Christian marriage manuals the theological dimension of sexuality in those texts: "Not only does God reveal himself in sexual love, but, as one book poetically argues, the only way mortals can find Christ is in the marital act, which is the holiest of acts" (Lewis & Brissett, 1986, p. 69). Apparently, salvation involves more complex activities than the verbal act of "confessing" Jesus as the Lord and savior. In order for this confession to be authentic the entire life-performance must be styled in a particular way, namely that the Christian should submit to Jesus. However, Lewis and Brisset's article misses a precise theological analysis as to how sexual activity is theologically pertinent. Providing such a theological perspective would require an understanding of how religious claims and sexual claims in these manuals are shaped by wider cultural processes. Not a timeless theology is at stake but an analysis that can locate the evangelical marriage text in the context of a process of theological revivalism and change.⁶

Analyzing the sexual theology of the manuals in the wider context of the modernization of sexuality will allow me to finally expand on a third point in DeRogatis' analysis. Here she asks why evangelicals continue to buy these manuals, given that according to their own surveys such Christians have the most fulfilling sexual life. In an aside she ventures the guess that parents buy these texts for their

children in order to help ensure the passing-on of their own Christian faith to the next generation (DeRogatis, 2005, pp. 133, n. 90). My discussion will demonstrate how the proliferation of Christian advice products is part of the modernization of Evangelical heterosex discourse by creating a specific marketable and consumable identity of Christian sexuality.

I will proceed in four steps. First, I will describe the kind of texts that are the basis of my analysis. Second, I will analyze the tension between sex as natural act and as disciplined performance in Evangelical heterosex manuals. Third, I will interpret this tension as one that is theologically productive. Fourth, I will demonstrate the connection between these texts and the modern commoditization of sexuality and religion. As a word of caution, let me mention that in this article I will focus on both the construction of Christian masculinity and femininity in their mutuality. In the context of the texts it is impossible to divorce an understanding of one from the other.

Focus on Focus on Family

Evangelicals shared in the big publishing push of sex manuals following 1970, and their marriage and sex advice publications were in turn part and parcel of the expansion of Evangelical media in the US. Before Dr. James Dobson founded Focus on the Family in 1977 he had already made his name as a family and marriage counselor. His book *What Wives Wished their Husbands knew about Sex* sold over 100,000 copies in 1975. Today, Dobson's book is still sold as part of a host of Christian books, broadcasts, videos, CDs, pamphlets and workshops aiming to educate the Christian married couple about the techniques and ideals of Christian heterosex (Dobson, 1975; LaHaye, 1976a, 1976b).

My primary textual basis comprises current broadcasts, websites, message boards, and printed matters produced by the conservative Christian media, counseling, lobbying, and ministry organization Focus on the Family—one of the main producers of conservative Christian culture (Apostolidis, 2000). At its heights, Focus commanded an annual budget of more than \$100 million, a mailing list of over 3 million names, and radio shows that were broadcasted by over 3000 stations (Apostolidis, 2000, p. 24; Burlein, 1999; Gilgoff, 2007, p. 2).

Focus has had to reduce and restructure some of its offerings due to financial difficulties and we witness a slow change of leadership due to Dobson's retirement. Yet it is too early to sing Focus' dirges. This organization still has deep reaches into the conservative mainstream of the US, by influencing churches and Evangelical movements from the Southern Baptist Convention to Evangelical Episcopalians.⁷ Focus' audience is particular in that it represents the non-extremist, politically engaged, and modernizing segment of US conservative and evangelical Christians.

Besides its reach into the US mainstream, two other qualities recommend Focus as a site of study. First, its materials present a carefully managed message that nevertheless integrates a polyphony of Evangelical voices: Some evangelical websites become increasingly egalitarian and permissive when it comes to heterosex. The site "christiannymphos.org" for example endorses the idea that Christian wives should stimulate their husband's anus by digital penetration. Other manuals on the other hand are concerned about sexual acts because they could turn out to be performances that transmit STDs: sexually transmitted demons (DeRogatis, 2009). As

we will see, Focus however integrates into a complex picture of Christian heterosex the importance of mutual pleasure for the heterosexual couple *and* the dangers of spiritual corruption through sexuality. Through this strategy, sexuality can be conceived as both natural and as in need of Christian intervention.

Second, as an extremely successful media organization with strong consumer feedback, Focus echoes and shapes how Evangelical Americans talk about sex. Paying attention to the language relayed by Focus is particularly important given how difficult it is to define the scope of Evangelicalism in America with reference to institutions or substantive theological beliefs (Viefhues-Bailey, 2010).

Traditional attempts at defining Evangelicals have focused on four characteristics: a belief in the necessity to submit to Jesus Christ; the inerrancy of scripture; the importance of missionary activity; the preeminent role of the cross (Bebbington, 1989, pp. 2-3; Noll, 2004, p. 422). Yet, at the same time, scholars of Evangelicalism, like Noll, contend that Evangelical movements are “diverse, flexible, adaptable, and multiform” (Noll, 2004, p. 424). Citing Noll, Benson and Heltzel wonder “how clearly can we define ‘evangelicalism’” (2008, p. iv) and the religious studies scholar Randal Balmer acknowledges the “unwieldy nature of evangelicalism in America” (1993/2006, p. xvi).⁸ Sociologically, evangelicals are part of a variety of denominations and they hold a variety of beliefs, such that the sociologist William Shea claims that Evangelicals *are* the true heirs of the Protestant reformation whereas his colleague Alan Wolfe argues that they have left the substance of Protestantism behind (Shea, 2004; Wolfe, 2006a). Given this impasse in an attempt at defining the evangelical movement with reference to allegedly held shared *beliefs*, I have suggested elsewhere that scholars should focus on shared *linguistic performances* (Viefhues-Bailey, 2010). Independently of what individual Evangelicals may or may not believe, they are connected by a shared use of language—about God and about sex. Thus, I define US Evangelicals as those Americans who circulate certain types of languages about God. They talk about “accepting Jesus” or “biblical truth,” and so on such that they can recognize each other and differentiate themselves from other Christians (for example, Catholics, who in turn have their own dialects).

Focus is a central relay station for these languages. By analyzing the discourses relayed through Focus, we can therefore gain insights into the tensions produced through and in the linguistic world that defines Evangelicalism. Particularly, we can study the role languages about sex play in producing this linguistic world with its peculiar theological tensions.

Lastly, let me mention that I focus on Internet-based texts since they allow us to see a complex fabric of Evangelical discourse, where one linguistic context connects to a host of others. A 2009 broadcast advising the husband to prepare every once in a while a bubble bath for his wife, so that she can relax from the stresses of childrearing and prepare herself for the bliss of mutual intimacy, also includes references to the husband as head of the household. Thus, this broadcast invokes sets of discourses about the theological need for the wife to submit to her husband. These discourses in turn use language about the right political order: the vice-president has to submit to the president of the US. These connections establish a web of meanings such that Christian heterosex discourses lead to and nuance political, theological, and psychological texts. The Christian man will learn from them

how to be a caring husband, take responsibility for his household, and how to be a good American citizen. Let us now trace some of these interconnections in exemplary passages from sexual advice sites mainly produced by Focus on the Family.

Marital Heterosex as Performance of the Natural Mutually Orgasmic Bodies as the Ideal

In its current products Focus declares sexual fulfillment for the couple—orgasms for both husband and wife—to be the goal of marital heterosex. With this message Focus echoes non-Christian sex manuals of the pre-World War II era, which stressed the importance of mutual orgasms (Neuhaus, 2000). Like these earlier texts, Dobson and Focus seem to claim that a couple that orgasms together, stays together.

This emphasis on mutual orgasms contrasts with another tradition in the history of conservative Christian sex and marriage manuals; one that reaches from Marabel Morgan's *Total Woman* (1973) and *Total Joy* (1976) to more contemporary Evangelical workshops and groups. Morgan insisted that it is not important whether the Christian wife achieves sexual fulfillment in marital heterosex. Rather, she stressed that the wife should completely orient herself to fulfilling her husband's desires. By making herself desirable, for example through dressing in sexually enticing outfits, the total woman submits completely to her husband's desires. She will be rewarded with the joys of having a satisfied and happy mate and with the material security he will secure gladly for his wife (Morgan, 1976).

The historian Rebecca Davis analyzed the odd mix of male dominance and female power in Morgan's scenarios. The Christian husband as the God-given and natural head of the household seems to stand at the center of the family's power structure. He is the one providing material stability and leadership for the family. Yet, through her acts of submission the wife is tasked with shoring up the frail and endangered masculinity of her husband (Davis, 2010). The men in Morgan's texts are both designed by God to be in charge; and yet they are permanently threatened in their sexual identities. Without their wives' abiding attention and constant care their masculinity would wither away. We find this peculiar vision of male and female powers not only in Morgan's texts from the 1970s and 80s but also in other sites of contemporary Evangelical culture. For example, Marie Griffith observes in her study of the Evangelical woman's movement Aglow that members are convinced of the responsibility of the wife to uphold their husband's Christian virility: "It is up to her to see that her man is kept satisfied, as well as contained, assuring him of his worth by admiring his virility" (Griffith, 1997, p. 56).

This particular Christian concern about virility exhibited in Morgan's texts and in the movements described by Griffith is oddly in synch with so-called secular sex manuals from the post-World War II period, where we notice a shift away from the idealizing of mutual orgasms in the prewar period to a focus on male orgasms. The woman has to be taught to conduct herself during the sex act such that the husband will indeed orgasm.

Mutually Problematic Bodies as Sites of Discipline

In contrast to the male-orgasmic tradition in Morgan's vision of Evangelical heterosex, current Focus texts highlight that the marital act should be mutually

fulfilling. This prescription however leads to a situation in which both the male and the female bodies are problematic. Both female and male bodies need Christian attention so that they can become orgasmic.

For example, in one Focus message board a Christian wife asks whether it is biblical to use a vibrator to help her orgasm. She ends with the following plea: "Please help, I really want to be able to experience this feeling the way God intended it to be felt." Focus recruited Dr. Clifford and Jenny Penner to provide advice and they answer with a nine-step program that aims to integrate slowly the vibrator into the couple's heterosex play. Nevertheless, the ideal would be that she could learn how to orgasm without using the vibrator. Using a vibrator can be dangerous, since the wife could end up getting used to too much of the kind of steady stimulation that a vibrator but no husband can provide. The Penners write:

Sex was designed for becoming one as instructed in Genesis 2:24 and referred to again in I Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 5:31. Does using a vibrator help you build intimacy? Because it can interfere with your ability to learn to respond to him [sic] touch, we do not recommend the vibrator as the way to learn to be orgasmic.

The goal of becoming one in marriage is achieved by orgasmic mutuality through mutual stimulation of one real penis and one real vagina (Penner, 2009, #2770).⁹

While this discussion presents the body of the woman as problematic and in need of special attention, in another message board we see the body of the *man* as needing intervention. Here, participants of a Focus message board "For Woman Only" discuss the problem of how women can rekindle their husband's sex drive. In these texts women appear as concerned both about their own sexual fulfillment and about their husband's spiritual and sexual health. One contributor, ARGirl, asks how to deal with her husband of one year who seemed to have lost interest in having sex with her. She describes her anger and frustration and her desire to be sexually fulfilled. The advice she receives from other women visiting the board ranges from offers of prayer to the suggestion that the husband may suffer from a hormonal or spiritual problem (like porn addiction). One member who goes by the handle Polly_Winzeff suggests the following:

On our honeymoon, 9 years ago, we went to a Christian bookstore and bought, "The Act of Marriage" by Tim & Beverly LaHaye. We did this because we started having trouble in this area in our first couple of weeks together! ... This book was just what we needed. You see, I think in the beginning, the man is so excited to be having sex with his wife, that he just goes for it and doesn't worry about performance. But once he has one experience of being unable to perform, or thinking his wife is not quite satisfied, it is enough to make any man crawl into a hole. ... He needs to know that this is normal and that his wife will never ridicule him for the occasional inability to perform. After my husband read the chapter on impotence, it cured him! ... This might be all you need. And don't forget to pray for [your husband]! As you have said, if your husband is not ill, or on

medication, or overly stressed, then this might be all you need. And don't forget to pray for him! (ARGirl, 2009, #2774)

Polly_Winzeff leaps to the topic of impotence. This move may be biographically motivated but the move to conceive of male sexuality as a site for Christian intervention echoes the other responses to ARGirl's question. In the world construed by the texts of Focus, both male and female bodies are tasked with coming and they are thus sites for Christian discipline.

The Penners' nine steps for gradually introducing a vibrator were one example for the scripting of heterosex in these manuals. This need for ritualizing the sexual performance is in line with the manuals that DeRogatis discusses. However, in a notable deviation from these texts, Focus' message boards show a concern for the male body in addition to the female one as needing intervention.

Consider Tim and Beverly LaHaye's *The Act of Marriage* (1976), which Polly_Winzeff suggested to ARGirl, and by extension to us. Discussing this text, DeRogatis focuses on the fact that it presents a detail-rich script for the first marital encounter of a young Christian couple:

As the husband is tenderly caressing the clitoris or vaginal area with his hand, the couple will probably be lying on the bed with the wife on her back. If she will spread her legs, keeping her feet flat on the bed, and pull them up toward her body, it will be helpful for them both. The husband finds this voluntary act of cooperation very exciting and it makes her most sensitive areas accessible to his caressing fingers. (LaHaye, 1976a, p. 102)

In scripting in fine detail the allegedly natural marital heterosexual encounter, the LaHayes inscribe on the bodies of the bliss-seeking couple the expectations of Christian normativity. The husband is the instigator of intimacy who appreciates "voluntary" cooperation—note how the text oddly invokes the specter of involuntary or forced cooperation. The wife is supposed to be making herself readily available for his probing penetrations. In numerous passages like these, *The Act of Marriage* makes clear that the image of a young wife taking on the leading role of exploring and probing her husband's body is supposed to be inconceivable. In fact it is notable that the passage prescribing the wedding night is mainly focused on what "the husband" should do to the body of the wife. She has to cooperate or to instruct, every once in a while, her husband. But the onus of agency is mainly on him. This rhetorical focus on male agency reflects the sense that the body of the woman is problematic but that of the man is not: "A man's ejaculation is almost ensured without benefit of prior experience; a woman's [orgasm] is an art that must be learned by two loving, considerate, and cooperating partners" (LaHaye, 1976a, p. 91).¹⁰ At the same time, the husband bears responsibility for the sexual success of the marriage.

Apparently, in the world of LaHaye's text men are always sexually aggressive and ready to orgasm. DeRogatis comments, "One wonders what an orgasmic bride and a flaccid groom would do with this manual to guide them?" (DeRogatis, 2005, p. 110). Yet, in Polly_Winzeff's appropriation of the LaHayes' text in Focus' message board we see a more complex picture. In the textual world of Focus at least one

flaccid groom read through the passages dealing with male performance anxiety and worked with his wife to overcome it. In general, Focus' texts present the male body as both naturally aggressive, easily geared towards active penetrative heterosex, always on the brink of coming *and, at the same time*, as the object of delicate intervention by Christian sex therapists and wives (Slattery, n.d.). What sets these texts apart from others in the universe of Christian sex manuals is that contrary to those centered on male orgasm, like Morgan's books, Focus propagates the mutual orgasm model. However, in line with Morgan's vision, Focus also produces an image of the male body as a problematic site in need of Christian and wifely intervention. Its virility and sexual performances are both naturally given and in need of attention.

The Tensions of Christian Heterosex and of Theology of Grace

This particular tension-filled picture of Christian masculinity and heterosexuality is not unique to the Christian sex manuals. Rather, it extends to Focus' wider vision of how to live a Godly erotic life. Susi Shellenberger, who until the recent financial crisis ran the advice column for *Brio*, Focus' now defunct magazine for teen girls, counsels her readers "**Let the guys take the initiative!**" when it comes to romantic attachments (Shellenberger, 1998, original emphasis). While women can aspire to leadership positions in the professional worlds, in their erotic lives they must submit to the allegedly natural leadership of the man. Focus tells its readers again and again that women by nature desire a secure, steady, and predictable environment and they are more cautious. It is in the nature of men on the other hand that they appreciate the risk and adventures of change, writes Dobson. "Boys are designed to be more assertive, audacious and excitable than girls." A real boy has the tendency to risk life and limb and "harasses grumpy dogs. . . . He loves to throw rocks, play with fire, and shatter glass. He also gets great pleasure out of irritating . . . other children. As he gets older, he is drawn to everything dangerous. At around sixteen, he and his buddies begin driving around town like kamikaze pilots on sake. It is a wonder any of them survive." In sum, in Dobson's anthropology, boys and men are chemically hardwired to be risk-takers and to be assertive and aggressive (Dobson, 2001, pp. 2, 4, 27).

This is however only one side of a complicated picture. Yes, the Christian man has to live up to his aggressive, risk-taking, sexually demanding masculine nature—yet he also has to be submissive and passive towards the word of God. He has to be a leader in his family, but also is called to practice mutual submission. In Focus broadcasts on how Christian men can be more involved in their wives' intimate life and how the couple can achieve true intimate bliss, we hear talk about the need for mutuality in the bedroom but also reminders that the husband has to be the leader of the house. Yet, what it exactly means to be a Christian man is, therefore, unclear: how much aggression is mandatory and natural—and how much submission is demanded?

The contours of the path to Christian manliness are always in question. Like Scylla and Caribides, this path is guarded by two extreme versions of masculinity, which must be avoided at all costs. These are, as I have argued previously, the hyper-male homosexual and his counterpart the hypo-male (Viefhues-Bailey, 2010). The pagan, disease-ridden, all penetrating, sexually abusive gay is a stock figure of texts that describe to Focus audiences how the American family is threatened "by the

forces of hell" (Dobson, 2002). This is the hyper-male who does not submit to God's law and natural order but lives a masculinity that is out of bounds. In contrast the hypo-male, the homosexual man lacking in natural aggression and violence, appears in texts that talk about ex-gay conversions. The way out of this sexual confusion is through male role models and through prayers so that Jesus can shore up the afflicted man's masculinity (Comiskey, n.d.). Christian men have to be aggressive as they are naturally in a state of quick sexual arousal—but they have to be not too aggressive or too sexually demanding, lest they become threatening hyper-male gays. And they have to be submissive to God and work on mutual submission with their wives—but not too much, unless they become hypo-male homosexuals. Thus it is not surprising to hear that during a chastity workshop, Evangelical boys were told that in the Garden of Eden lived "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" and that abstinence was not emasculating (Hendershot, 2004, p. 93).

The Christian woman on the other hand has to embrace her submissive and passive feminine nature—yet she also has to be aggressive enough to resist potential spousal violence. Focus texts discussing wifely submission are full of reminders that such submission does not mean that the husband can abuse or "lord it over" his wife. In the world of these texts these conflicting demands are represented through the rhetorical figures of the Feminist or the Abused Wife. The Feminist shows Christian women the dangers of grabbing for power in the family. Such a woman, like the Feminist, will lose her God-given femininity and she will become masculine. The Abused Wife represents the opposite danger: a woman who has given up her power to protect herself and her god-given femininity from the violence of her husband, brothers, or of other men.

A consequence of this conflict-ridden discursive frame of Christian sexuality is the following. Each individual Christian woman affected by these texts has to confront in her body a deep conundrum: she is tasked with shoring up her husband's allegedly natural virile aggression by being sexually submissive and, at the same time, with protecting herself from sexual and physical abuse by limiting her submission. Likewise, the Christian man has to negotiate in and through his sexual body the need to be sexually aggressive and domineering and the mandate to be a gentle servant of his family, in submission under God and in mutuality with this wife. Masculinity, in other words, demands a complex understanding of agency.

The sexual body becomes therefore the field in which Christians—men and women alike—negotiate the correct amount of agency needed in the drama of salvation. Languages of submission appear not only in Christian texts about sexuality: The Christian citizen has to submit to the rightful authority of the American nation; in order to read the bible correctly a Christian has to submit to the text; and the inner-Trinitarian relationship between God the Father and Jesus the son is characterized by Jesus' perfect submission to the Father's will.

In all of these examples, the right kind of agency is at stake and a good Christian has to carry out the particular kind of submission demanded from her or him. After all, submission is an activity, as Stormie Ormatian writes for Focus: "Submission means, you have to submit yourself" (Ormatian, 2002). An example of this delicate balance of agency is Heather Jamison's article "Pursuing Holiness in Marriage." Here she states, "Holiness means that we are to become different from our natures, which have nursed us and comforted us." Jamieson names the different

ways in which her own nature and her natural desires hinder her to embrace holiness and a fulfilling life of marriage and she concludes that holiness “goes against our flesh.” To overcome this natural resistance Jamieson advises the reader to pursue the following activities: “Rest in Jesus. ... Adore Him for yourself. ... You will ... find that reclaiming intimacy in your marriage is not only possible—it is natural.” Resting in Jesus suddenly brings to light a different experience of nature, one in which it is in line with holiness. Nature corrupted became nature redeemed through actively embracing passivity; i.e., through resting in Jesus, adoring Jesus and trusting Jesus to fulfill our needs (Jamison, 2003). Given this theological framework it is clear that Christian heterosex is *aimed at realizing the right natural order* and therefore about disciplining these sex practices so that Evangelicals can navigate through them the conundrum of grace.

Thus, if we read in these manuals the claim that Christian heterosex is “natural,” then we need to be mindful about the two possible understandings of nature; i.e., nature redeemed and nature fallen. The former is a normative and performative concept. Sex in line with our redeemed nature is in line with what we *should do or feel* and it results from performing within the realm of sexuality our submission to Jesus. As DeRogatis pointed out, Evangelical sex manuals are not simply geared at providing advice about how to achieve orgasm; rather they are proscriptive in yet another way (DeRogatis, 2005, p. 110). Through consuming these texts, the Christian couple learns what sexuality *should* be like and feel like, if the sex act is performed in the way that God intended it to be. We can see now that in following these prescriptions the natural act becomes part of our redeemed nature. The couple therefore exercises compliance not only with constraints of natural sexuality but moreover compliance with the right kind of Christian masculinity and femininity. The sexual task is not only to be orgasmic but also to fashion the desired kind, and gender-appropriate level, of activity and submission that is needed for nature fallen to become nature redeemed. Only in our redeemed nature can we fully submit to Jesus and accept him as our Lord and savior, not just in words but truly in spirit.

The Commoditization of Sex and Religion

The previous analysis demonstrates how Focus produces a complex heterosexual body theology. This complex interweaving of languages concerning sexual pleasures, psychology, biology, politics, and theology picks up on certain not-Christian modern sex discourses and rejects others—Christian and not-Christian alike. For example, the high-modern proliferation of sex-talk and the concomitant discourses of liberated sexualities are both taken up and modified: They are taken up, for example, by adding a Christian voice about the uses of sex toys or by explaining how a Christian wife can stimulate her husband’s penis. Yet, in contributing to the proliferation of sexuality discourses, these Christian texts also modify them by embedding the languages of liberated desires into the creation of a complex sexual, political, and theological cascade of power and submission. In so doing they contribute to the ambivalences in high-modern sex-talk, which combines discourses of sexual liberation with those that create sex as a potentially dangerous site in need of disciplinary intervention. Sex in the world of Focus is both a practice of natural pleasure and one in need of disciplined intervention. Thus, it seems that Focus’ texts

on sexuality mirror what Scott Jackson calls the “sexual antinomies in late modernity” (Jackson & Scott, 2004). In other words, conservative Christian heterosex discourses appear as distinctly modern.

In this context let me turn to DeRogatis’ question as to why conservative Christians continue to buy these sex manuals. What can account for the flurry of products offering sexual advice and commentary? The incessant speech about sex or sexuality as discursive phenomenon itself is a distinctly modern mechanism of subject formation. For Foucault in the *History of Sexuality* (1978) modern sex discourse turns erotic pleasures, acts, artifacts, and experiences into sites of legal and medical interventions for bio-political purposes. Thus, the production of Evangelical sex as discourse is part of the modern invention of sexuality.

Yet, this sex discourse develops further into the production of sexuality as market commodity (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Whereas the medicalization and consequent pathologization of sexuality shaped modern discourses of identity, some of these identities are now being released into and produced by market forces. For example, “homosexuality,” first produced by and then released from the discourse of psychiatry, is now part of identities that can be attained through the right kind of consumerism. Thus, the taxonomies of stable sexual identities that legal and medical institutions create enable markets in which these identities can be purchased. By buying certain items and by frequenting certain parts of the city, I can ascertain my sexual identity (Hennessy, 2000). Given this move of sexuality in the market, I suggest that we interpret the proliferation of Christian sex products, such as manuals, websites, radio, video, and CD productions as adding to this process of commoditizing sexuality. These products introduce a “Christian heterosexuality” to the high-modern sexual taxonomy.

At the same time, these products also commoditize Christianity by providing another subsection to the market for products like the *Christian Dad’s Answer Book* or other manuals for how to be Christian. These texts make Christianity into an object in need of definition. Such definitional certainty may not to be desired by those living in a monoculture, where the rhythms of a more or less unified devotional practice are integrated with those of work, communal festivals, or the exchanges of goods and stories. However, ordinary conservative Christians, as Alan Wolfe’s work shows, do not live in such cultural isolation. They are among the most itinerant and seeking groups in America (Wolfe, 2006b, p. 101).

In these situations of mobility, where the boundaries of a religious identity are fluid, institutions that span different localities and unite them into a virtual community become important. Currently, these are particularly in groups with a strong radio, TV and (with rising impact) Internet presence. For the case of Islam, Oliver Roy shows how a network of multiple media organizations shapes a common religious language for populations with diverse geographical and cultural origins (Roy, 2002). Something similar is true for those mobile middle class Americans who are the main consumers of Focus’ products. Focus’ media output offers (with input from different localities) trans-local religious languages, which constrain and enable the theologizing of ordinary Christians. This development of a trans-local Christian language marks the conservative Christian sex discourses under review as a particularly high-modern phenomenon. Through DVDs, videos, radio series,

pamphlets, books, and seminars Focus provides a market on which Christian consumers can buy the right kind of Christian identity.

The type of language that is fit for this commoditization of Christian identity uses what I call the grammatical register of speech. For Wittgenstein, a grammatical investigation involves an inquiry into what we, as members of a specific speech community, find natural to say (Viefhues-Bailey, 2007). In these moments we treat our language use as an object and not as a performance in which we participate. The flow of words has stopped. We engage in such an inquiry if we encounter misunderstandings profound enough to make us wonder whether our words make sense. To use an image, in these situations we resemble people who are walking in a familiar city but have lost their way. To orient ourselves we imagine a map of the city and discuss where we should turn. Drawing a map of the city and deciding where to turn based on this information involves a different kind of knowledge of a place than that involved in simply walking. The former is abstracted and the latter is performative. While we need this grammatical register of language in situations when we have lost our way, it cannot be sustained as an ordinary mode of speech.

The grammaticalization of Christian speech through manuals and other such products that help establish Evangelical identities objectifies Christianity, and requires that its practitioners engage with it on the level of abstraction. In this form Evangelicalism can become commoditized since it is produced as an object abstracted from localized performances. Moreover, since grammaticalization is the register of speech through which this type of Christianity is spoken into being, a permanent instability of meaning is introduced. To recall the image of the lost walkers: Instead of walking, more maps are drawn and compared and redrawn. In sum, the texts under review place Evangelical Christianity into the modern discourse of religion, which is characterized by using a distinctly grammatical register. Thereby they create an entirely modern product: Evangelicalism as sexuality and religion. Importantly however, this commoditizing language of Christian sex also enables a particular body theology of grace, as we have seen. Their sexual bodies are for Christians a landscape in which to negotiate the complex question of what is the right amount of agency required in the drama of salvation. Yes, conservative Christian languages about sex as relayed by Focus are evidence of a modernization of Christianity as religion, but this modernization expresses also a theological conundrum with deep historical roots.

Conclusion

This analysis of Christian sex manuals in conjunction with Internet-based materials from the influential media, mission, and advice organization Focus on the Family yielded the following results. First, in paying attention to how users contribute to this type of sex discourse we noted that both the body of husband and wife are construed as sites in need of intervention. In contrast to a surface reading of conservative discourses on sexual roles, the body of the man is both imagined as sexually charged and as fragile. Second, my theological interpretation of these tension-filled visions of masculinity and femininity in conservative heterosex discourse showed that this advice literature contributes to the construction of a complex body theology. We can identify the connection between sexuality and salvation that DeRogatis' text so tantalizingly posited. Through their sexual acts

conservative Christians are encouraged to enact the right kind of agency that allows for and reflects submission to Jesus. Third, in content and form this body theology contributes to a specific high-modern commoditization of sexuality and religion. Why do conservative Christians continue to buy sex advice? Through participation in this Christian consumer culture, they perform their identity as husbands and wives living a Christian life of nature redeemed. In addition, they have the best sex, naturally.

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Notes

¹ I am grateful to the reviewers of this article whose critical remarks helped me to strengthen it considerably.

² In the following I use Evangelical as shorthand to refer to Anglo-American Evangelical churches. In so doing I want to acknowledge that the texts under examination in this article arise from religious contexts that differ from, for example, the Black Churches or Latino evangelical movements (Benson & Heltzel, 2008). This attempt to broaden the agenda is mostly supported by younger Evangelicals in the United States, who see critically the movement's engagement with conservative party politics (Wilcox, 2000, p. 5).

³ Contrast, for example, the statement that the clitoris is of no importance, which characterizes the consensus for post-War manuals, with what the LaHayes have to say about clitoral stimulation. Outlining in detail how the husband should stimulate the clitoris, the LaHayes admonish: "The vigor with which the husband massages this vital area should be determined by the wife. Some prefer it slow and easy, while others enjoy vigorous motion." DeRogatis does not cite this passage directly, yet it is representative for the adoption of a sex positive attitude in Evangelical manuals from the 1970s onward. A newer piece by DeRogatis focuses on a strain in Evangelical thought that sees sexuality as profoundly dangerous (DeRogatis, 2009).

⁴ Other noteworthy works on the Evangelical understanding of gender and sexuality are: Griffith (1997), Bartkowski (2001) and Moon (2004).

⁵ Davis discusses in extensive detail the complicated power distributions in Morgan's texts and workshop materials; see particularly her chapter "Marriage under Fire," (2010, pp. 176ff).

⁶ The temptation to treat theological movements that claim to be committed to doctrinal orthodoxy as reiterating timeless beliefs seems great in the study of religion. Samira Haj (2009) describes the deleterious effects of giving into this temptation for the study of Islamic revival movements and warns the reader that being committed to orthodoxy and to modernization of a tradition is not a necessary contradiction.

⁷ Hudson reports that Focus' listeners also include a significant number of Catholics (2008, p. 138), and Wilcox notes that Focus' attempts to ban gay marriage led the organization to reach out to African American, Hispanic, and Korean conservative Christians, as well as conservatives of other faiths (2000, p. 9).

⁸ Despite the groundbreaking nature of his book, Balmer's own definition is somewhat circular: He uses the term "evangelical as an umbrella term to refer broadly to conservative Protestants ... whose beliefs, institutions, and folkways comprise the evangelical subculture in America" (1993/2006, p. xvi).

⁹ Other websites are not as conflicted about introducing a vibrator into the Christian sex act. The website <http://www.book22.com> celebrates both the Song of Song (as the 22nd book of the bible) and Christian sex. One of the “intimate kits” on offer includes a vibrator. I am grateful to one of the reviewers of this article who pointed me to this website.

¹⁰ DeRogatis discusses this and the previous passage from LaHaye (DeRogatis, 2005, pp. 109f).

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Scripted Bodies: Reading the Spectacle of Jacob Wrestling the Angel

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This article argues that by reading the spectacle of Jacob's struggle with the angel/man in Genesis 32:22-32, we might explore how the difficulties of representing human and divine male bodies are also bound up with certain scriptings of what these bodies can mean. This is not to simply map biblical characters onto modern masculinities, but to focus on the "technologies of the self" that are involved in reading in the present, a type of "pre-posterous" reading (Bal, 2008) of these biblical patriarchs who inhabit a textual world that has historically been a part of constructing our conceptions of how social, political and theological textualities structure everyday life. I am concerned with how such representations are formed by interpretation and, if such interpretations are to become more androcritical, this includes the necessary acknowledgment of a poetic-ethic double-bind in deconstructive reading and retelling.¹

The Bible writes our flesh, its meanings and possibilities. But writing is nothing if it is not read, and the distinction between writing and reading opens a space for movement, for a field of energy. This, indeed, is the field of religion, in which believers are bound (*religare*) over to the reading, again and again (*relegere*), of the texts by which they are both bound and set free. (Loughlin, 2006, p. 381)

Struggling with the Corpus

In what is now a well rehearsed move in postmodern discourse, "there is nothing outside the text" (even though, in scenes that mirror some of the quests of modern biblical scholarship, there is much debate over what Jacques Derrida "originally meant" by his statement "*il n'y pas de hors-texte*"); our perceptions of representation and signification are characterized by what Derrida calls a "general writing." If a "general writing," and, for the purposes of this article, biblical texts in particular, can be said to communicate the meanings and possibilities of corporeal, enacted and performed bodies, how are "we"² to understand the textual constructions of divine and human male bodies that men and women are bound to read again and again? If biblical depictions of male patriarchal power have had enormous cultural influence across the years in which the bible has been sourced as an authoritative text (with authoritative interpretations), then it is not simply

believers and bible readers who are bound into a intertextuality of which this bible is part and who are forced to stretch the limits and ligatures of the influence of these particular texts. Feminist scholar and poet, Alicia Ostriker, understands her revisionary work as trying to locate herself “with respect to the looming male tradition of religion, myth, philosophy, and literature” (1993, p. 27) highlighting that the bible “is the ultimate authority for so many other texts; and, what is more, we can observe within biblical narrative the actual process of patriarchy constructing itself. We watch the Law of the Father gathering its material and building itself up, bit by bit, layer upon layer” (1993, p. 121). However, like any artefact that is constructed from that strangest and most potent of materials, language, there are points of articulation where structures break down and the materials can be arranged otherwise to produce a different reading.

This article argues that by reading the spectacle of Jacob’s struggle with his adversary in Genesis 32:22-32³ in particular, we might explore how the difficulties of representing and inscribing human and divine male bodies are also bound up with certain scriptings of what these bodies can *mean*. This is not to simply map biblical characters onto modern masculinities, but to focus on the “technologies of the self” that are involved in reading in the present, a type of “pre-posterous” reading (Bal, 2008) of these biblical patriarchs who inhabit a textual world that has historically been a part of constructing our conceptions of how social, political and theological textualities structure everyday life. Biblical sources have also influenced the *representations* of these realities. I am concerned with how such representations are formed by interpretation and, if such interpretations are to become more androcritical (after but extending the work of Daniel Patte, 1995), this includes the necessary acknowledgment of a poetic-ethic double-bind in deconstructive reading and retelling. By demonstrating that poetic retellings of biblical narratives enact an artifice that operates in the dynamic space between reading and writing we are more able to foreground the poesis of interpretation. In this way, the process of interpretation is always a double-move; it both frames and constitutes the object that is being interpreted, and, in relation, constitutes the subject as interpreter. This shall be further explored in Mieke Bal’s concept of “envisioning” as interpretation below. However, this is not to argue for an essentialist nature for either subject (interpreter) or object (biblical text). Both parties are, in some senses, undecideable, and are static for only as long as it takes for a reading to form and be performed between them. With this in mind, I shall be arguing for a sense of “relational masculinities,” masculinities performed and constituted in relation to figurations of maleness within biblical texts and to their reception through poetic retelling and interpretation.

In order to draw such conclusions, I will be gathering resources from an interdisciplinary array of thought, garnered from biblical studies, literary and cultural theory, and gender studies to centre on the difficulties of seeing, reading and writing the bodies of Jacob and his opponent in Genesis 32. This multi-dimensional reading process is not without its problems. Biblical scholar Jennifer Glancy (1998) has raised questions as to how the concepts clustered around the term “the male gaze” have been used problematically in a predominantly text-based hermeneutics. Thus section one of this article is concerned with the ancient problem of how reading enables the reader to see or gaze or glimpse textual bodies in the “mind’s eye,” asking questions

of how the written and gendered bodies of the wrestling protagonists are presented and what implications this has for the difficulties surrounding the representation of male bodies more generally. Mieke Bal's work on "envisioning" goes some way to answering Glancy's concerns and I use W. J. T. Mitchell's (1986) extensive work on "iconicity" to legitimate the use of visual studies terminology to understand a "biblical visuality."

If section one is an attempt to "gaze" upon male bodies in biblical texts, section two engages with the work of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Björn Krondorfer, and Philip Culbertson, to think about how envisioning both the divine and the human male body is denied, in a complex double-bind of affirmation and negation concerning the meanings and possibilities of such imaged bodies. A relational masculinity is never simply a one-to-one resemblance. There are unsettling paradoxes in trying to "gaze" on and read this wrestling bout and we are not granted an equal view of the protagonists. Although Jacob names the place of his wounding/blessing "Peniel" because "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30), the bible sets up irreconcilable contradictions between the visible and invisible God. According to Exodus, within the veiled space of the "tent of meeting," "the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (33:11). A few lines later, however, as Moses intercedes for his people asking YHWH to "Show me your glory, I pray" (33:18), YHWH warns that "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live" (33:20). And yet the writer of Psalm 27 yearns for a visible presence; "'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his / face! / Your face, LORD, do I seek'" (27: 8). In another scene at "the tent of meeting," the LORD comes down in a pillar of cloud (Num. 12:5) and speaks with Aaron and Miriam. He warns them not to speak against his "servant Moses" because, "With him I speak face to face— / clearly, not in riddles; / and he beholds the form of the / LORD" (Num. 12:8). Following Elaine Scarry's work (1987), I shall argue that it is only through the voice and the "touch" or "strike" that renames and wounds Jacob that the divine adversary is given "substance." As Scarry notes, "God's invisible presence is asserted, made visible, in the perceivable alterations He brings about in the human body" (p. 183). In the struggle at the Jabbok, the difficulty of making meaning with the textual event is played out in the inscribing of the wound on Jacob's (textual) body. Envisioning "biblical visuality" in this scene, then, has to necessarily focus on the marking of Jacob's body; although this scene seems to depict a physical, bodily struggle (something many poetic retellings of this scene pick up on), the body of the adversary (alternately interpreted at different points in this story's reception history as man, angel, or God) remains veiled, even as Jacob seems to hold him in his grasp.

In order to demonstrate the productive tensions that such visibility/invisibility engenders, I use Michael Symmons Roberts' poem "Choreography" as a retelling of the textual spectacle of the wrestling bout and as an "intergenesis," a term that Gary Phillips proposes for reading "that is the act of rewriting or inserting texts within some more or less established network. Meaning does not lie 'inside' texts but rather in the space 'between' texts" (Aichele & Phillips, 1995, p. 14). This intergenesis intervenes in our reading process, adding more interpretive text, and demonstrates that the reader is always responding to more than simply the textual marks in front of them. This is the space between reading and writing that offers the possibility of the "otherwise" of relational interpretation. The poem enacts the performances of

the male bodies in this textual spectacle as undecideable and fluid as they slip and slide between visibility and invisibility, deconstructing the fixing power of the gaze. Although the notions of undecideability and performativity have almost become theoretical truisms in postmodern gender studies, there is still work to be done; how can reading and interpreting biblical male bodies be deployed in more complex acknowledgements of how such texts are recited and rewritten in relation to modern masculinities? If we are “bound” to keep reading these texts that continue to exert some authoritative influence (whether literary or theological, or a complex manifestation of both) over “Western” cultural imaginaries, how might an analysis of the difficulty of deciding upon what biblical male bodies mean assist in restructuring the possibilities of performing masculinities?

Gazing on the “Textual Spectacle” of Jacob and the Angel

The important ideas that have clustered around Laura Mulvey’s influential exploration of the concept of the “male gaze” (1975) are operational in the interstices between critical theory, biblical studies, and critical men’s studies in religion and I use them to explore how reading and writing the bible may function as both a scripting and reciting of male bodies, and as a crisis in the representation of male bodies. The aim is to get close enough to the texts to see the cracks and fissures appear, to stretch those textual bindings in an intergenesis that inserts new reading/writings in the form of poems and that invite us to watch and encounter “deconstruction happening” (Beal, 1997, p. 2). However, in trying to “see” textual imagery, it is also important to acknowledge that variations of the word/image problem have caused philosophers, theologians, artists, and poets consternation for millennia. From the earliest religious concerns about being created in the “image” and “likeness” (Gk. *eikon*) of God (Gen. 1:26-2:24), through the Augustan poet Horace and his *Ars Poetica* to Archibald MacLeish’s poem of the same name, the necessary confusion between words and images has animated how we read and write, communicate and use imaginative language. Horace’s idea that “as is painting so is poetry” (*ut pictura poesis*) and MacLeish’s sense that “A poem should be wordless / as the flight of birds” (1985) rely on implicit theories that link image and word indissociably. Shorthand statements like, “I saw it in my mind’s eye,” or “she has remarkable poetic vision,” hint at the long history of metaphorically conflating concepts of “seeing” with linguistic cognition and understanding. It is beyond the bounds of this article to introduce the history of thought on perception and imagination but aspects of this conflation are certainly at work in reading and interpreting biblical texts.

To get a little closer to the problem, the subtle but decisive differences between “resemblance” and “representation” are constantly in tension (cf. Mitchell, 1986). Mary Daly’s famous quote that “if God is a man, then man is God” demonstrates an understanding that men, to whom it was (and is) deemed possible and desirable, have attempted to *resemble* the attributes of culturally conditioned gods/God and to organize social structures to this symmetrical end. However, in this article, I want to problematize this truism a little to show that it is in the complex negotiations of *representation*, particularly through interpretive maneuvers, that sustains or deconstructs such an ideology. By shifting the focus to *representations* of human and divine male bodies, there is an inherent admission that men *cannot*

resemble gods/God, a source of asymmetrical anxiety and crisis for conceptions of masculinity. The interpretative gap that opens up between “world” and “representation,” and which has to be repressed in order for any model of resemblance to operate, is a source of anxious threat for masculine identities. This anxiety can be traced through looking again at the signs, the designations, of Jacob’s struggle with the stranger.

The “Visual Category” in Reading and Retelling Biblical Male Bodies

Since Mulvey’s film studies essay, her psychoanalytic concept of “the male gaze” has been used within different disciplinary environments, and appears with regularity in gender criticism and visual and film studies (Bal, 2002; Collins, 2010; Silverman, 1992). Critiquing and extending the theoretical reach and usefulness surrounding the “male gaze” has started in biblical and theological studies (Collins, 2010; Culbertson, 2009; Glancy, 1998) and I frame this section around an attempt to engage with Jennifer Glancy’s questions:

is it legitimate to draw on an essentially visual category in the analysis of written texts? Moreover, is vision a natural category common to all human cultures, or is vision historical, embedded in culture? And if the experience of vision, of seeing, is culturally constructed, is it legitimate to draw on the notion of the gaze in a transhistorical manner? (Glancy, 1998, p. 64)

These are provocative and significant questions and Glancy does not propose extensive answers within her article. But she has set my own thinking on important trajectories in linking the spectacle of the textually perceived biblical male body with the compositions and performance of male interpreters writing their own texts *in the present*. This necessarily entails analysis of the contingencies of reading in the present while trying to avoid the dangers of attributing a transhistorical essence to such a reading gaze. However, if I am to explore what is at work in what Glancy terms “biblical visuality,” I disagree with her point that biblical scholars (or any other rewriters of bible) “are likely to find that the disciplinary gaze, as articulated by Foucault and Sartre, has a greater explanatory potential than the gendered gaze derived from feminist film criticism” (1998, p. 73). Explanatory potential lies in different combinations of thinking on the gaze, rather than a single type; for example, the “disciplinary gaze” is arguably bound up with this gaze being gendered as patriarchal and able to construct regimes of signification around the male body as *readable* and *recited* but only in certain ways. Following Ken Stone (who follows some of Foucault’s own thinking on a disciplinary gaze and the concomitant “technologies of the self”), “the subject of biblical interpretation does not only precede but is also formed, in part, through the practices of reading” (2009, p. 204). These relational, constitutional practices can be found in the complexities of “gazing” on the textual bodies of Jacob and the “angel.”

As Glancy suggests, there is no point-by-point relationship between mental imagery or representation and physical material bodies. But we have been entrained and encultured by textualities, by textures of perception. We expect meaning through language and image; we use terms like “the mind’s eye” or “body language” to confuse terms into constructive metaphors; “Do we ‘see’ when we read? Or is this

vision a metaphor that displaces the fact that we *don't* see when we read?" (Glancy, 1998, p. 67). Textual bodies are not there in any materially real sense but when reading certain literatures, we can render their effects on our own embodied reactions whether that be titillation, repulsion, fear, or another complex response. We are able to acknowledge that a literary depiction does not necessarily conform to or resemble "the world," but the complex processes by which we envisage the body and its acts, its body language, demonstrates how we attempt *articulation*, both in writing and communicating about bodies and imagining a body's movement in our own literary recognition. This articulation *is* contingent and not transhistorical; as Nelson Goodman argues, "realistic representation...depends not upon imitation or illusion or information but upon inculcation" which "reduces all symbolic forms, and perhaps even all acts of perception, to culturally relative constructions or interpretations" (quoted in Mitchell, 1986, p. 65). Seeing does have disciplinary connotations as Glancy argues (what one is not supposed to see, inculcated blind spots, the regimes of signification that surround the meaning of what is seen, and so forth) but retaining the dimension of a gendered gaze still yields important insights as well.

Mieke Bal unpacks some of the difficulties of using the concept of the "gaze" that will take us further in exploring the tensions of reading male bodies in a contemporary sense of "biblical visuality":

The concept of the gaze has a variety of backgrounds. It is sometimes used as an equivalent of the "look," indicating the positions of the subject doing the looking. As such it points to a position, real or represented. It is also used in distinction from the "look," as a fixed and fixating, colonizing, mode of looking—a look that objectifies, appropriates, disempowers, and even, possibly, violates. In its Lacanian sense...it is most certainly different from—if not opposed to—its more common usage as the equivalent of the "look" or a specific version of it. The Lacanian "gaze" is, most succinctly, the visual order (equivalent to the symbolic order, or the visual part of that order) in which the subject is "caught." In this sense it is an indispensable concept through which to understand all cultural domains, including text-based ones. The "gaze" is the world looking (back) at the subject. (Bal, 2002, p. 36)

It is this Lacanian gaze that animates Mulvey's film studies essay but here Bal has included the "text-based cultural domains" in which we are caught and bound by the "gaze" as well. However, in order to extend our engagement with Glancy's concerns, Bal notes a further dimension that is linked with but not to be conflated with the gaze: *focalization*. This

indicates neither a *location* of the gaze on the picture plane, nor a *subject* of it, such as either the figure or the viewer. Instead, what becomes visible is the *movement* of the look. In that movement, the look encounters the limitations imposed by the gaze, the visual order. For the gaze dictates the limits of the figures' respective positions as holder of the objectifying and colonizing look, and disempowered object of that look. The tension between the focalizer's movement and these limitations is the true object of analysis. (Bal, 2002, p. 39)

Bal has set up an important generative tension between the “focalizing look” and the “gaze”; what this means for my analysis is that, in the poetic retelling, we can trace this movement of focalization through language and imagery as it comes up against the boundaries of the “visual order.” The poem can look and reread (*relegere*) but only in a tense relationship with the structures of a symbolically inflected gaze. As Deborah Sawyer notes, “the text pre-empts all existence—any space we might think to negotiate has already been anticipated and occupied” (2002, p. 7) and we might say that, similarly, the (textual) gaze already anticipates and disciplines the (textual) focalizing look, surrounding and seducing the subject’s sense of himself. The scripts seem to be given, choreographing the “writing of our flesh” as Loughlin emphasizes in the heading quotation at the beginning of this article, a “dance-writing” that transliterates the body’s movement into graphemes, marks, and textual signs to be read and recited. In what follows then, I acknowledge Glancy’s concerns with the visual “gaze” being used in a biblical studies that is predominantly focused on text-based exegesis, but utilize Bal’s cluster of ideas surrounding “focalization,” “gaze” and the “look” to continue to transgress the text/image boundaries; as Bal notes, “the hypothesis that says readers *envision*, that is, create images from textual stimuli cuts right through semantic theory, grammar, and rhetoric to foreground the presence and crucial importance of *images* in reading” (2002, pp. 37-38). Not only is it legitimate to “draw on an essentially visual category” (Glancy, 1998, p. 64) but “transgressions of the text-image boundaries [are]...the rule rather than the exception (Mitchell, 1986, p. 155). However, the concept of the gendered gaze must be acknowledged to be a form of “pre-posterous” reading, reading the past through the present, and not a transhistorical perspective. With the above in mind, let us turn to a poem that attempts to render Genesis 32:22-32 as a textual spectacle, a “biblical visuality,” and look again at what is marked there.

Choreographies

Michael Symmons Roberts’ poem and intergenesis “Choreography” (2004) reads the Genesis fragment as a violently embodied struggle and narrows the focus to the physicality of the actual fight itself, the wrestling being only portrayed briefly within Genesis itself:

His fist smashes my face.
That’s no wrestler’s move;
so it’s bare knuckles now. Okay.

There’s blood in my eye,
the lid swells to a hood.
I use my head and butt him.

His lips bloom like a rose,
but he’s still ticking, clicking
his tongue on the roof of his mouth.

The poem is written in present-tense throughout with the emphasis on the first-person “I.” Sentences are short and fast, recounting the violent action (bare knuckles, head-butts, gut punches, knees in the jaw, face-dunking, slaps, and finally the enigmatic slipping of the hip “out of its bone-cup”), and metaphorical language is kept to a minimum as the poem circles the performative and spectacular, moving from fight to dance, even if only retrospectively with the realization in one of the concluding stanzas that “that was no stutter, / but a beat. The dance is over.” The poem’s hermeneutics of suspicion doesn’t extend as far as questioning what the strike on the “hollow of the thigh” (Gen. 32:26) might mean, but by detailing the physicality of the fight and then refiguring it as a dance, there is certainly a desire to insert more meaningful description and representation, and thus, by implication, more interpretation into the short lines of the Genesis fragment. It is unclear what the result of reframing this incident as a dance might be. Jacob is not renamed (or even named) by the end of the poem; the only result seems to be his limp, from a dance to which he was not invited but into which he was brutally forced. However, if we use this poem as an intertext, an interpretation that asserts and inserts its constructed qualities into the spaces between biblical text and reader so that we can read all of these intertexts together, we can interpret the poem in complex ways; not only is the poem an initial response to an oft-retold biblical story in itself but it also helps foreground a type of reading report, displaying a need to imagine this textual spectacle more fully, from a text that, as Eric Auerbach famously commented, “remains mysterious and ‘fraught with background’” (1953, pp. 11-12). In a sense, the poem offers an *extra*-biblical visuality, a need for more imagery that the reticence of the biblical text provokes in the reader. We want to know what is happening here and this also means we want to *see* what is happening. Where the Genesis text emphasizes that Jacob was left alone (32:25) before being accosted by the stranger, even though the audience has to be a constituent part of this solitary figure in order for his being set apart to begin to make meaningful sense, the poem is more aware of its audience and foregrounds the focalization on the spectacle of the struggle. The quick descriptive sentences jar us into looking at the acts; their rapid articulation generates the imagined physicality of the bout.

Because the poem opens without any explanation for the assault (and with no hint that this is a retelling of Genesis 32), our focalization for much of the poem is on the bodies themselves. Jacob is present through movement and articulation within a kind of textual *spectaculam*⁴ and, as we shall go on to explore below, heteronormative focalization is securely surrounded and choreographed by a male gaze’s cultural signifiers—male bodies caught in the spectacle of violence. It is deemed legitimate for men to look upon male bodies within an encultured heteronormative gaze only when they are performed in certain ways. However, this move is double-edged. Placing male bodies into this spectacle involves interpreting them or constituting them in ways that the “male gaze” can legitimate but, at the same time, it also demonstrates their performance, the necessary choreographies of their articulation. As Paul M. Collins argues, this “means that the classic iteration of male gaze/female object is brought into question. The process of deconstruction is reinforced when males are ‘spectacularized’ or the male body is fetishized in cinema or through visual images, and is foregrounded as spectacle in sport and popular music (2010, p. 91). This is the point where we, as readers and interpreters, start to

get too close to the male body's textual visibility. In the next section, I shall use some of Judith Butler's thinking on the performativity of gender to explore how this performance of male bodily signifiers is also bound up with denying the consequences of the male body's "to-be-looked-at-ness." But, at this point in the poem, just as the spectacle of male violence seems to limit the reader's focalization of any other signifier, a question is raised.

"Choreography" as a performance of reading and retelling Genesis 32, extends the detail from the brevity of the text, and yet more detail does not necessarily lead to more decideability. The poem questions the "man's" incommunicative nature; he clicks and ticks, marking time as if in a dance, but not saying a word until the colloquial "You had me there...I had to do your leg to settle things." As much as this is a focalized spectacle in the constituted "religious" space (*religare/relegere*) between reading and writing, the poem also remains reticent about designating a meaning to this biblical text. There is even an excision of the motif of the renaming of Jacob after the strike on the hollow of the thigh, arguably reevaluating this portion of Genesis, for without the name change from Jacob to Israel as the result of meeting God *panim el panim* (face to face), meaning becomes even more difficult to ascribe. We have been allowed to watch the struggle, the extra-biblical visuality of the poem shaping our focalization on these male bodies, but, as I shall discuss below, at the moment in which the male body becomes most visualized, or gazed at and written upon, this body becomes less available or even denied. The poem finishes with the angel's disappearance, refusing to tell Jacob his name.

Denying the Look: Revealing and Re-veiling

If "Choreography" attempted to fill in the gaps and show us the struggling bodies of Jacob and the "angel," it was also aware, by the final lines, that this focalization could not be sustained. Why might this be? Philip Culbertson demonstrates one of the significant problems with talking about the heteronormative male body; in order to maintain patriarchal potency the vulnerable realities of the male body's constitution must be elided. Thus "patriarchy is built upon the assumption that a male body is a text which will reject all attempts by other men to read it. To accept such an attempt would be to destroy the basis of power and control" (2009, p. 117). Where Laura Mulvey argued that the feminine object is signified and contained by "to-be-looked-at-ness" (1975, p. 11), the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of the male body becomes a point of crisis and problematic identity formation. As Björn Krondorfer has also explored (specifically in what he terms "confessiographies," or men writing themselves), writing the male body circles what he terms a *non-absence*; that is to say, that "although the male body is always *in* the text, it is *not present* in the text as a consciously gendered body" (2008, pp. 270-271). The male writer assumes the facticity of his own body and thus need not question its constitution. That the imagined constitution of the male body is also often ignored in critical exegeses is tied up with averting the gaze from *other* male bodies as well as one's own; in Culbertson's thinking this amounts to an encultured refusal to read heterosexual male bodies. Reading (and retelling or rewriting) emphasizes the created or scripted nature of meanings engendered by male bodies; it raises the specter that the meanings of this body could be constituted or versioned otherwise. This section explores how the male body can be absented in interpretation, an absence that, as

argued above, is constituted by the parameters of the “male gaze” and that is an absence that colludes with the technologies of patriarchal power.

The idea that the “gaze” constitutes both viewed and viewer is again key to this argument. The reading subject who is constituted in the dynamic space between texts, between reading and writing, is not a unified, autonomous, disembodied will, able to pick between random signifiers at will but is bound to cultures and texts in ambiguous ways. Judith Butler’s work emphasizes that reciting these bindings and boundaries serves an important function in creating a sense of gendered subjecthood. According to Butler, “as a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations” (2008, p. 14); it is only through the recitation of certain norms that gendered identities are offered the illusion of stability. In this way, reciting biblical texts has the potential to fix perceived norms simply through relational reiterative interpretive practice. Reciting and rehearsing hegemonic masculinities through these interpretations also risks part of the transhistorical essentialism of which Jennifer Glancy warns. An androcritical biblical *intergenesis* then becomes much more than practicing an advocacy interpretation; it also involves attentiveness to the fact that, as we have noted, “the subject of biblical interpretation does not only precede but is also formed, in part, through the practices of reading” (Stone, 2009, p. 204) and, to a certain extent, is also constituted by the resources and citations which he deploys. The possibilities that are written onto male bodies are constituted by the interpreter/focalizer and this interpreter/focalizer also constitutes themselves by seeing and re-cognizing certain elements in the other. As Butler highlights,

the act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (1988, p. 526)

This is not to argue that there is a single script from which genders are performed, but it is to note that there are hegemonic scripts that incorporate certain elements of human experience into certain codifications and choreographies in order to make meaning from them. The scripts need actors to rehearse and perform them and, in turn, the actors use the scripts to communicate and articulate their signifying languages. This does not disallow scribbling in the margins or ad-libbing, but if these moments are to be meaningful, they are also constituted by linguistic and symbolic elements within canonical scripts. The element that is most often absented in the scripts (and scriptures) of the divine male body and, by extension, in representations of the bodies of Jacob and the “angel” (if this is what we take the Hebrew “*ish*” to designate here) is their genitalia. This symbol *and* embodied reality is part of a complex refusal for the male body to signify “to-be-looked-at-ness” and yet, in order for the symbolic functions of the penis/phallus to be deployed and rehearsed, this symbol seems to require affirmation (visibility) as well as negation (invisibility). How does this negotiation operate when reading the “biblical visuality” of Genesis 32, acknowledging, again, that we are reading somewhat “preposterously”?

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has done extensive and significant work on the difficulties early Israelite religion had in both affirming that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, whilst prohibiting the representation of this divine image. He has specifically used the story of Jacob and the “angel” as an example of “unmanning”, which, when read together with Symmons Roberts’ poem, suggests that maintaining Jacob as an unproblematic figure of patriarchy is a difficult task. In the same way that “Choreography” finished without a victorious Jacob, Eilberg-Schwartz notes that “Jacob leaves the struggle with a limp and is unable to discover the being’s name, and he himself does not say he prevailed, but that his life was preserved, describing it as a stand-off rather than a victory. In fact, the name Israel may originally have meant ‘and God prevailed’” (2009, p. 174). But what of the wounding, the marking, which occurred during the spectacle of the poem? It was focalized as

[he]taps the hollow of my thigh,
and something gives. He helps
me up. He’s damaged me.

Somehow he’s slid my hip
out of its bone-cup, left me
clipped and limping.

The male gaze can cope with a wounded warrior image as a strong identifier but the nature of this wound might give pause for thought; “The thigh or loins is frequently a euphemism for the penis. Jacob’s offspring, for example are said to spring from his thigh (Gen. 46:26; Exod. 1:5). Recall also the oaths taken by placing the hand “under the loins” (Gen. 24:2, 9; 47:29)” (Eilberg-Schwartz, 2009, p. 174).⁵ As soon as Jacob is recognized as a man, “he must be marked on the genitals, signifying his submission to God. Jacob only becomes Israel through an act of partial emasculation” (Eilberg-Schwartz, 2009, p. 176). Elsewhere, Eilberg-Schwartz argues that this emasculation and feminization of Israelite men became necessary in a relationship imagined as a marriage covenant with a monotheistic male God. Suppressing the homoerotic impulse could then take two forms; “a prohibition against depicting God (veiling the body of God) and the feminization of men” where “women were deemed impure and men were feminized so as to disrupt what in this religious culture was a natural complementarity between the divine male and human females” (1996, p. 37). In this way, the invisibility of the divine stranger, and the veiling of the “biblical visibility” of the mark made to Jacob’s genitals work together in both poem and biblical text, rendering the bodies both present (even more so in the physicality of the poem) and absent by assenting to the “dance-writing” that structures the male gaze and halts any focalization on the penis. As Mulvey highlighted, “according to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like” (1975, p. 12). This reluctance might stem from the fact that looking at, or reading, the penis actually entails meaningful risk:

The penis will not behave: now a penis, now a phallus, the one when we wish the other, it is itself a text that we can barely read, even with double vision. It seems not one thing but two. The phallus is haunted by the penis and vice versa. It has no unified social identity, but is fragmented by ideologies of race and ethnicity. (Culbertson, 2009, p. 119)

Like Jacob's patriarchy, upheld by YHWH's promises to him that he will father a great nation, looking too closely we begin to see the fissures in the textual fabric. The look has to be denied in order for the phallus to retain its symbolic power. As resemblance between the penis and the phallus cannot be affirmed, so modes of representation that then, conversely, veil any representation have to suffice. As Eilberg-Schwartz has it, the "myths of Noah and Adam and Eve regard shame about nakedness as a foundational moment in the emergence of human culture...to be uncovered is to reintroduce a state of disorder. Culture is preserved by the virtuous sons who cover their father's nakedness" (1996, p. 43).

Although Judith Butler argues that "masculinity and femininity are learned bodily performances that masquerade as natural by invoking bodily markers (primary and secondary sex characteristics) as their signature and guarantee" (Armour & Ville, 2006, p. 5), many biblical texts retain a complex and "fraught background" for such a performance. The performance (and focalization) is often surrounded by a theocratic gaze. Performing the markers of human maleness is thus both guaranteed and regularly undermined by the inherent biblical theology of the text. Deborah Sawyer notes that there are tensions between Israelite law codes and the patriarch narratives such as we find in Genesis where a discernible process of demasculation takes place. Abraham is usurped by God in "his role as father, as protector of his son...along with his role as husband and primary instigator of his wife's pregnancy. The limitations of Abraham's identity, as a patriarch are now clearly defined and subordinate to divine supremacy" (2002, p. 54). Sarah also takes on a more active role than Abraham in her demands that he father a son through Hagar. Tamar ridicules and shames Judah, highlighting his breaking of Levirate law twice (Gen. 38), and yet even this surpassing of the law results in the Davidic line continuing; Sawyer sees these stories as evidence that, although "the biblical texts were no doubt written by men and for men, the maleness affirmed by them is complex rather than purely hegemonic, and they contain an overriding theology that affirms the deity largely at the expense of the autonomy of the male audience" (2002, p. 64). If we read Jacob and his struggle with the divine stranger with this in mind, the marking on his body becomes a complex sign to focalize; if there is a danger that this strike might render him infertile, the irony that this occurs just before he is renamed as Israel would suggest that this divine male can both withhold and guarantee Jacob's potency and masculinity. The anxiety for biblical males (and for male interpreters of these patriarchs) is that it may be unclear as to whether the deity will guarantee or withhold their own performative masculinities. Seeing God "face to face" (Gen 32:30) is an envisaging that might be a denial of the deity's visage, his "to-be-looked-at-ness" and a destruction of the focalizing body (Exod. 33:20; "for no one shall see me and live"); it might also result in a name change that instigates male paternity and patriarchy, as in Jacob's name change to Israel. The "biblical visuality" that Glancy questions can then become a complex type of

theophany and, within the bible's theological and theocratic backdrop, such theophanies invoke crises in the constitutional elements of the gaze. Reading human and divine male bodies is risky and yet we are bound to go on reading.

To return to the poem once more, we become aware that this "biblical visuality" only allows us to focalize Jacob's body, albeit without lingering over what type of wound has been inflicted upon him. Although the poem seems to fill in a lot of the physical detail that is absent from the Genesis narrative, the man/angel's "divinity" and identity remains unrepresentable. In both versions, the biblical narrative and the poetic retelling, the antagonist is a stranger that is difficult to fit within the "visual order". Symmons Roberts seems to acknowledge this by depicting the assailant as "ticking / clicking his tongue on the roof of his mouth" throughout the struggle, clicking louder as Jacob strikes him harder. It takes Jacob the entirety of the fight to realize that, once he has been wounded and damaged, the angel's clicking was "no stutter, / but a beat. The dance is over." In this way, we are brought up short in our envisioning of the spectacle. Other senses are being engaged.⁶ If we take it that Jacob is imagined to be wrestling God by the later redactor of this story who is attempting to explain the aetiology of Peniel and the name Israel, we then have the two attributes that Elaine Scarry understands as the substantiation of God in the "realm of matter"; God's voice and God's altering or wounding of the body. The paradox of male potency explored above remains. Scarry notes that "Genesis is filled not only with the emphatic material reality of the forever multiplying human body, but with God's voice which takes two different forms, a command ("Be fruitful and multiply") and a promise ("You will be fruitful and multiply")" (1987, p. 191). So, just as God's voice intervenes, predicts and promises, in a kind of divine choreography, it is extremely troubling that the wounding of Jacob takes place at exactly the site through which this command might continue to be followed (even though Jacob already has eleven children at this point). As Scarry highlights, "the crowd of eventual humanity resides within the parental body" (p. 192) and it seems that here, as with the Akedah or "sacrifice of Isaac" in Genesis 22, God is almost aborting his own promise and command, even as it is constantly repeated to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, if "the place of man is in the body [and] the place of God is in the voice," (p. 192) then "the body in its most intense presence becomes the substantiation of the most disembodied reality" (p. 194). As Scarry emphasizes, "the human child, the human womb, the human hand, the face, the stomach, the mouth, the genitals (themselves circumcised, marked)—it is in the body that God's presence is recorded" (p. 204). In the wrestling bout of Genesis 32 Jacob's antagonist remains unrepresentable. Our textual envisioning can only really be directed towards Jacob's body which is altered, wounded and marked by the divine assailant. In the Genesis text, Jacob is also renamed as Israel, a name given through the voice of the stranger, another alteration, another type of inscription or writing on the body, a "recording of the elusive voice in the transformation of the material world" (Pyper, 2005, p. 120).

The nuances brought forth by a multi-dimensional exegesis, foreground the fictive reality of Jacob's body as a contested site of signification. Jacob's phallic guarantee has been seriously undermined by his struggle. His "bodily marker" that might serve to naturalize his patriarchal power has been brought into question. This is a strange scene and one that, for the male gaze, is not imbued with the "visual

pleasure” that Mulvey explores in her article as our focalization moves from the obscured, struggling bodies, to where Jacob’s seat of power is almost lost; his “manhood” is damaged and marked and made painfully present. The biblical text will return him to the patriarchal script as the father of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (as Mulvey highlights in her essay, the male character has to be returned to the thrust of the narrative rather than being gazed at for too long in spectacle), but at this point, we can see some of the articulations of both biblical text and its interpretations. Many theological interpretations also rush to place male patriarchy back in power, focusing on God’s blessing to Jacob as Israel, or as with St. Augustine, casting the assailant as a type of Christ figure, or, with Luther, imagining the crippling of Jacob by a dark and powerful divine male (Rogerson, 1992). But if we are to pause this scene before this act is made what might be imagined instead?

Conclusion: Narratocracies and Ethico-Poetics in Biblical Interpretation

The undecideability of what is happening at the Jabbok river is key. As I have highlighted, as much as we might try to “envision” both wrestling bodies in order to begin to confer meaning upon them, each is denied us in different ways. I have argued throughout this article that the ideas clustered around Mieke Bal’s complex of envisioning (look, gaze, focalization) are useful and legitimate to think with when re-reading Genesis 32:22-32. These are not transhistorical concepts but neither are the perceived essentialisms of text and image. As W. J. T. Mitchell argues, “the differences between sign-types are matters of use, habit and convention. The boundary line between texts and images, pictures and paragraphs, is drawn by a history of practical differences in the use of different sorts of symbolic marks, not by a metaphysical divide” (1986, p. 69). I have also muddied the Jabbok waters further in that, following the prompts of the poetic retelling, with its auditory as well as visual imagery, I responded to the difficulties of envisioning the unrepresentable divine body. As much as readers are bound into a complex non-focalization on Jacob’s wounded body—particularly because of the site of the wound and what this might entail for constructions of patriarchal potency—it is only through the wounded, renamed, Jacob-Israel that there is any substantiation of the divine. Re-reading and re-writing on Genesis 32:22-32 helps us pause at its undecideability. This pause, before a meaning is decided upon, is emblematic of what is at stake, and what requires further work, in understanding the author-ities that are revealed and re-veiled during androcritical reading. If we want to read masculinities otherwise, this pause at the Jabbok provides a troubling scene of male performance, human and divine. This involves recognizing that the symbolic marks on male bodies are written and perceived in ways that often elide the troubled fragmentations at the heart of many different performances of masculinity. As we have seen in the above analysis, such marks can allude to ways of representing the invisible formless deity on the male body. In so doing, however, certain wounds also threaten to undermine masculine potency. Imaging the male body as representative of God’s body (an *imago dei*) becomes a much less smooth interpretive move. God does not have a body, but bodies are wounded and altered in the name of God, and these wounds can “unman”; patriarchal power is consistently wounded by the divine male.

Interpretive representations of the bodies of Jacob and the angel can attempt to unite these fragments in a “phallogocentricity” but, as with any sign, this unity is

always haunted by the potential of its fragments to mean otherwise (in Derridean *différance*). The “otherwise” is always present and has to be negated in order to decide upon a meaning. To put it another way, just as biblical interpreters and poets attempt to represent and gaze upon these bodies, as *representation* rather than *resemblance*, they have already become artifice and available for deconstruction. The poetic retelling writes the scene “otherwise.” The spectacle of Jacob and the angel/man wrestling seems to invite us to look, to search for a revelation of masculinity whilst, at the same time, re-veiling how masculinities might be constituted. As with “Choreography,” we demand a name and no name is given. And, with this, acknowledging that the gaze constitutes the gazer, that “*to figure* is always *to see as*, but not always *to see* or *to make visible*” (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 70), male readers of the bible might have to admit to the many blind-spots in our figurations of masculinities, tracking the traces of male bodily representation which is also always a supplementation for the absence of an essential manhood.

However, underlying these traces and in many ways, making them possible, is the impossibility of totally escaping the “religare,” the bindings of making meanings with these texts. In many scholars’ desire for a postmodern ethics, much important work has been done on Emmanuel Levinas’ demand that we must turn to the undecidable face of the Other, the face that puts our totalizing schema under question, that leaves us in relation to others. But, as we have seen, there is a certain impossible risk in turning to face a biblical Other whose (textual) gaze, whose visage, deconstructs our own movements of focalization. This is not to argue for a simplistic submission to the biblical text but to acknowledge, with Erich Auerbach, that in terms of the possibilities of representing and gazing on truth, the bible

is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other scenes, issues, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it. The Scripture stories do not, like Homer’s, court our favour, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels. (Auerbach, 1953, pp. 14-15)

I have attempted to interject in biblical interpretation with a poetic retelling of Jacob and the “angel” in order to place an intergenesis in that “space for movement” that Gerard Loughlin sees between writing and reading (2006, p. 381), and, for this article, in the space between writing and reading male biblical bodies. If Auerbach’s biblical “autocracy” might be imagined in “terms of a *theocracy* and its aesthetic correlate *narratocracy*,” (Sherwood, 2008, p. 130), a policing of textual signs and what they might mean, a poetic retelling offers interpretive room within such a space. This “space for movement” is also the space that is crisscrossed by different focalizations on the part of interpreters and writers who work within their own contemporary paradigms and who envisage masculinities in ways that can also be read back into and scribbled over the scriptures. Michel de Certeau has explored this strand of the ethico-poetic; he notes how the reader

insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body. Ruse, metaphor, arrangement, this production is also an "invention" of the memory. Words become the outlet or product of silent histories... The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place. (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxi)

The choreographies remain but within this dance-writing are spaces to articulate male bodies otherwise. Where Emma Goldman said of the feminist movement in the late nineteenth century, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution," I now ask what kind of dance steps we might perform to keep moving, to keep making (*poesis/têchne*) relational masculinities; as Ken Stone emphasizes, "the 'technology of the self' is thus not so much about the discovery or liberation of one's 'true' self but, rather, about the creation and recreation of the self in its variable relations with itself, with others, and the world" (2009, p. 209) and, as such, is a constant becoming and possibility—and yet, always within limits. Following Certeau's explanation of how reading texts is process of rearranging and inventing through rewriting, a thicker understanding of the *poesis* of interpretation, as outlined here, offers different points of focalization in envisioning the paradoxes of biblical male bodies, both divine and human. Genesis 32: 22-32 becomes an undecidable text that forces a pause in attempting to create masculinities from biblical material.

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Notes

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² This collective “we” is, of course, a dangerous register, including those who might not wish to be included in such a reading position as I take in this article and, similarly, excluding those readers from whom I differ in gender, sexuality, ethnicity, economic status etc. However, it is an attempt at acknowledging that I never read alone and that no reading position is static and fixed (functioning as a postal or zip code from which we might identify an interlocutor). Here, it also functions as an invitation to read together for a short time, even if only for the length of this article.

³ All biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV.

⁴ Latin, designating the Roman circus, an arena for spectacle and performance.

⁵ That the “hollow of the thigh” has a strong possibility of signifying male genitalia (Eilberg-Schwartz, 2009; Eslinger, 1981; Smith, 1990).

⁶ I am indebted to one of the anonymous peer reviewers of this article who highlighted that the poem also has an auditory dimension and set my thinking down this route.

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Review of Björn Krondorfer, *Male Confessions: Intimate Revelations and the Religious Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010) xi + 286 pp.

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If there is anything wrong with Krondorfer's book it is that he tries to draw too much into its pages, covering as it does everything from Augustine's extensive and complex ruminations on God, the body, sex, love and his mother in the *Confessions*, to Scott Haldeman's brave and unsettling attempts to theologize (male) masturbation in the 21st century. Sandwiched in between are several long and detailed excursions into various kinds of culpability associated with the Holocaust as viewed from the perspectives of (male) confessants. Yet this should not deter the potential reader. The book is rich and engaging as Krondorfer seeks to address various kinds of male confession in search of a genuine interiority that is truly able to face—and this is the core of the project—the judgment of an Other, whether that is the divine or the reader, who is not male or not male within the current heteronormative standards of the contextualizing reading culture. It is a project of male subjectivity within a post-holocaust, post-feminist world and, as such, it is a timely and yet still, a risky endeavor.

The book begins with the male confessions of the title: Saint Augustine in the fourth century, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau at the beginning of modernity. Twentieth century "confessions" include Michel Leiris' 1939 essay on manhood as well as the fascinating confessional doublet of Calel Perechodnik, the Jewish ghetto policeman who confesses his shame to his (dead) wife for his betrayal of her, and Oswald Pohl, the Nazi war criminal who confesses his (Christian) faith for very different reasons shortly before he is hanged for war crimes. Krondorfer, of course, selects and edits the accounts. Yet undoubtedly, these accounts have been chosen because the confessional genre offers a context—potentially at least—within which a man might be able to stop seeing himself reflected in the mirror of some Other and at least attempt the reflexive movement of being seen, being addressed, being, even, the construct of another's subjective gaze, touch or desire. The confessional genre attempts the challenging task of performing an intimate act of self-revelation in a public frame and thus, of course, runs the risk of becoming merely self-justifying. But it also demands—in so far as it aspires to be a genuine attempt to engage with the reader—a serious, introspective response whether the author intends that this reader should turn to God—as in the case of Augustine—or cries out to them for absolution, as in the case of Perechodnik.

One way to reduce the emotional weightiness of the confessional genre would be to stand back and take a more or less academic or scholarly stance. Yet Krondorfer takes deliberate steps to deny himself and the reader this kind of relief—clearly he would see this as yet another kind of collapse back into the appearance of neutrality within what is, in fact, a highly contextualized and indeed gendered writing framework. Throughout the book, the text is broken up by Krondorfer's own

“confession,” that is to say, with his own attempt to address the Other—the reader—struggling to avoid narcissistic self-indulgence but staunchly committed to unveiling the authorial male body. Evincing a kind of natural reserve, Krondorfer confesses his own discomfort with the body, his own body, and with the unaccustomed intimacy of the approach he has chosen, as well as the sometimes acutely uncomfortable position in which he finds himself—particularly in the case of Perechodnik, for example—of having to be seen to assess and judge the subjects whose confessions he considers, not simply from his position as a university professor, but also as a man.

The book is also taxing in the way that any attempt at something genuinely counter-normative tends to be—setting unexpected hackles rising and catching the reader out in certain kinds of unsuspected resistance. The fact of the matter is that it is still difficult to confess the male body—Krondorfer reveals to us—when it has, for so long, been identified as clean, closed and self-sufficient and identified with the epistemic privilege of the normative elite or privileged male. It clearly remains difficult for men to construct new patterns of value or emphasis for themselves and for those who are not men, to accept these attempts at transformation. The very admission/confession of weakness, for example, still tends to compromise male identity composed as it has been of a definitive will to power that admits of no insufficiency except, perhaps, in relation to the unquestioned masculinity of a God like that of Augustine, or some similarly gendered ideal. In addition, to acknowledge some investment in leaky male bodies with their wet or sticky emissions intimately associated with powerfully non-rational feelings, is to run a huge risk of collapsing the gesture of confession into something readers will find at best puzzling and faintly distasteful and at worst, contemptible. Yet the kind of male confession to which Krondorfer aspires—a truly adequate awareness of the Other to whom he confesses—requires that the orchestration of the normative male be replaced with just such a process of risk in relation to a genuine—appropriate—openness and vulnerability.

Of course, we may want, like Krondorfer, to ask in the end why Augustine and the others choose the confessional form over attempts to address significant others in their lives, more directly. The victims of this approach are the many silenced women, men and children whose contributions or suffering is disregarded by the confessant, both in fact and in the confessional format. For Augustine, for example, though he is clearly indebted to his mother for his natural birth as a man, as well as for her part in his spiritual birth as a Christian, the female body and its gendered sex is almost entirely missing from his account; his “confession” reflects the indifference he cultivated towards a feminine Other in pursuit of his lust for the Otherness of God. The “published” confessions on which Krondorfer focuses in the first part of the book are—as he argues himself—all open to this kind of critique; that alongside any genuine striving for interiority or engagement with an Other, there is invariably a more self-serving agenda that turns the confession into rhetorical performance whose purpose is to make the confessant look more convincing to a specific audience. And even in the second part of the book where Krondorfer looks at a number of more recent attempts by male theologians to make theological sense of themselves as embodied, sometimes gay men, these accounts still gloss over the presence of the numerous significant others to whom a more

direct address might have been appropriate, even as the previously “excluded Other” of the male body is brought into new focus.

This is in some ways an uneven book—there is more than enough information about some of the characters to constitute general biographies whilst the specific analysis of masculinity or the attempt to fit the discussion into a more theological framing is less consistently apparent. Nevertheless, the issues raised here about the possibility of male subjectivity, particularly within the context of the heteropatriarchal traditions that still underpin significant elements of contemporary global experience, are explored in this book with a wealth of scholarship and creative insight that must make this an important book for anyone interested in gender studies whether in the field of “religion” or beyond.

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Review of Kent Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-In-Pain as Redemptive Figure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 220 pp.

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Kent Brintnall's *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-In-Pain as Redemptive Figure* is a profoundly responsible reconciliation of art, religion, feminism, and queer studies. The work is seductive, beautiful, and at times forces the reader to pause in awe at the momentary loss of self invoked by the text. And, this is the point. Through exhaustively analyzing action films, Robert Mapplethorpe's photography, and Francis Bacon's paintings through a Batailleian lens or what could also be called Barthesian *punctum*, Brintnall manages to maintain the reader's attention, lacerating the reader's very subjectivity.

The work is divided into four major sections, preceded by a prelude and followed by a postlude. Both the prelude and postlude challenge dominant thoughts on George Bataille's work, and the *meat* of the work is a performative negotiation through an examination of several mediums—thoroughly Batailleian in intention and affect. Unlike some other secondary sources on Bataille, Brintnall *consciously recognizes the paradox inherent* in any attempt to essentialize Bataille's works. With this in mind, and in using Bataille's own texts as well as the aforementioned works of others, Brintnall posits what might be considered insurrectionary notions of gender semiotics.

The prelude of *Ecce Homo* entails a discussion of an image depicting the brutal "death by 1000 cuts," an actual photo series that was near and dear to Bataille. Specifically, Brintnall is attempting to rectify errors of perception that other scholars have run with in their own attempts at minimizing/problematizing both Bataille's content, and style. To Brintnall, the point of Bataille's work is to force subjects to meditate, become vulnerable, and only at this point can communication (and perhaps glimpses of immanence) materialize. The theme of the male-body-in-pain (such as Jesus' as we are reminded throughout the book) is such a point of rupture, often (intentionally? unconsciously?) overlooked. Regarding the divine-male-body, the crucifixion image as no longer valid for the purpose of subjective rupture is a Batailleian theme that Brintnall elaborates upon in a digestible manner.

The first chapter on action films titled "Suffering|Triumph" explores various action films, positing several observations. One such observation is the idea that "homoeroticism demands a sadomasochistic story" (p. 33), meaning that the blatantly homoerotic depictions and performances of protagonists in action films is attractive to the viewers due not to the hypermasculine, nearly nude actors, but to the violence and carnage that he both takes and inflicts (at least this is what the viewer must tell himself). This chapter goes on to discuss notions of verisimilitude and Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*, raising questions about feminist theology through the plot of the film. Again, Brintnall calls for questioning of

theological and subjective convictions in the focus he calls to the (divine) male-body-in-pain. The chapter ends by suggesting that acknowledging our own fragility will be imperative to a new (political) future. Though sound on its own, this chapter seamlessly plants the seeds for the psychoanalytic investigation of masculinity and masochism that follows.

The second chapter, titled “Masochism|Masculinity” provides an overview of psychoanalytic discourse relevant primarily to Freudian notions of masculine subjectivity. Brintnall introduces Lacan, and more contemporary thinkers (Hollywood, Silverman, Mulvey, among others) to chime in on the issue, gracefully positing his own thoughts on the subject. Again true to Bataillean fashion, Brintnall, in a manner that exhibits his own thorough consideration and research on the topic, stands much of psychoanalysis on its head. About Freud’s notions of normative masculinity, Brintnall observes (through a rigorous preceding discussion) that “masculinity and homosexuality are, ultimately, both founded on the penis’s desirability” (p. 91). This is perhaps one of the easier to digest postulates that Brintnall puts forth in this heady section. This chapter initially seems unnecessarily intense, an intuition that a careful reader would need to see past. The dense, yet readily accessible information conveyed in this chapter is imperative to later sections, especially the postlude. Again, Brintnall closes this chapter by pointing out the necessity of vulnerability (the “lessons of death”) in order for “the foundation of a new way of expressing self and seeing the other” (p. 99) to actualize. In pointing towards different events and mediums that can perform this novel means of existing, Brintnall moves on to discuss the works of Robert Mapplethorpe in the third chapter.

Like the preceding chapters, the third chapter begins by employing Bataille’s works in order to transition into the specific topic of investigation. In this chapter titled “Content|Form,” the mission is to “consider the startling—and, [Brintnall] will argue, politically productive—juxtapositions in Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs” (p. 103). Brintnall, like Bataille, acknowledges the possibility of artwork (due to being outside the realm of discursivity) to rupture the personhood of the viewer. In particular, Brintnall finds this utility in Mapplethorpe’s photographs. Brintnall gives a thorough examination of Mapplethorpe’s work, providing accounts from various critics and thinkers. Brintnall expresses that “these images offer a critical apparatus for seeing cultural representations of masculine subjectivity and homoerotic desire differently” (p. 115). Brintnall acknowledges the well-founded critiques that Mapplethorpe’s depictions of black men propagate racist ideology. However, he calls for a closer examination of the impact of such works putting forth that this promulgation is not necessarily the result. It is precisely this sort of close (re)examination of art (and culture, religion, gender, psychoanalysis) that Brintnall sees to be imperative. In calling attention to deeper issues, Brintnall escapes the glaringly obvious critiques that much historical criticism cannot seem to move past. For Brintnall, seeing Mapplethorpe’s work as (only) racist, Bataille’s work as (only) pornographic, and the works of various psychoanalysts as (only) propagating gender binaries (amongst other problematic ideologies) is to miss the opportunity for profound self-evaluation (implicit the notion that self-evaluation has broader, social impacts). This chapter closes with the affirmation of willing degradation, as was the case with Jesus. This active inclusion of masculinity (in evoking notions of the *male*

body willingly suffering) serves as a smooth transition to the discussion of Francis Bacon's paintings that follows in chapter four.

Again, Brintnall opens the chapter by discussing Bataille's works and then flawlessly transitions into examinations of Bacon's paintings. The discussion, of course, focuses on the male-body-in-pain that Bacon so relentlessly expresses in much of his work. It is in this section that Brintnall most clearly expresses the connection between the crucifixion of Jesus and art: "Just as certain Christian discourses command the believer to identify with the crucified body on the cross, the formal devices of Bacon's paintings compel the viewer to identify with the mutilated body on the canvas" (p. 165). Brintnall meditates in this chapter on the vulnerability of the male body that is depicted over and over again in various paintings by Bacon. In doing so, as he does throughout the book, he pushes against dominant conceptions of male superiority and invulnerability (without ever denying the existing hegemonic gender implications). Brintnall warns against the theological penchant of assigning meaning to the crucifixion, in that doing so brings the adherent further away from meaning. Such paradox, fluently woven throughout this text, is deeply Bataillean. The chapter closes in what seems to be the suggestion that the call for active and conscious vulnerability in men is actualized in Bacon's paintings, which force vulnerability on the disrupted viewer.

The postlude elegantly ties the book's themes together. It assumes and takes seriously the postulates put forth in the previous sections in order to discuss what Brintnall perceives to be problematic analyses of Bataille's work. His generative interpretation, through examples and other scholarship (primarily Hollywood), is convincing and laudable. Brintnall notes the heterological doubling that takes place in Bataille's works concerning gender and other issues. In doing so, he is able to put forth very strong arguments against the ways in which other scholars have approached Bataille's works. What Brintnall offers is a feminist, queer, and ultimately *Bataillean* understanding of Bataille that maneuvers deeper through the symbolism and semantics than previous scholarship has been able to do. He closes the postlude (and the book) with the following sentences: "Bataille imagines a space of anguished ecstasy that propels the desiring subject and desired object beyond subjectivity, beyond objectivity, beyond gender, beyond identity. Propelled, through rupture, into fragmentation, we find ourselves-by losing ourselves-anew" (p. 197).

Overall, this book is compelling and laudable. However, certain caution to the reader is warranted. Brintnall employs a set of stars/asterisks periodically throughout the book that seem to demarcate a new/different line of thought. This is both invaluable and confusing at times. The reader will have to pay close attention in order to not confuse lines of thought (though the book *can* be digested intelligibly without attention to such demarcation). Likewise, bodies of italicized text throughout the book serve as an authorial locator, which perhaps has danger in distracting the reader. The exhaustive investigations of action movies, psychoanalytic theory, and the works of Mapplethorpe and Bacon at times seem unnecessarily thorough in the moment, dangerously bordering on losing the reader's attention. Personally, it was precisely that such detailed account held *my* attention that I was moved by the text. This is perhaps one mechanism through which the work is performative. I would encourage the reader to stick with the detailed analyses, and trust in the payoff.

This book has immense utility in various stratum of academia. Taken in its entirety, it has set the bar for scholars seeking generative appropriation of Bataille in their own projects. Previous attempts by other scholars fall short in comparison; however, they are necessary building blocks in the culmination of this book. To scholars and students of feminism, queer studies, masculinity studies, and gender studies this book provides an invaluable *different* approach to traditional issues explored in these fields. Employing action films in discussing masculinity and vulnerability *through* the hermeneutic of informed thought (gender studies, etc) has academic capital in its innovation and practicality. Regarding scholars and students of art (film, painting, photography) particular sections on specific works, terminology and approaches have pedagogical value. The book provides overviews of discourse on certain works/mediums/interpretations, and the works cited section is a valuable map for scholars and students of the art referenced. Lastly, in the field of literature and literary criticism, this book will earn its esteem. The book itself is performative: Brintnall negotiates this Bataillean affect on the reader in a fluid manner, making the text as a whole worthy of literary investigation and appreciation.

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Review of Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in 19th Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) 376 pp.

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The “jolly fellows” of the title are the drinkers, brawlers, and pranksters of nineteenth century America. Richard Stott’s intention is to explore the “masculine spaces” (p. 1) of nineteenth-century America in order to examine why men both started and stopped fighting. Stott’s *Jolly Fellows* appears to be a vast undertaking as its research extends out from each end of the nineteenth century and encompasses the vast geographical space of America. However, this is deftly managed by Stott who provides the reader with a thorough overview of the connections and movements of this subset of the population over the extensive scope of his topic.

The violence that Stott examines reaches beyond the boundaries of tavern brawls as it infiltrated sport, frontier life, minstrelsy, and the temperance movement. It describes an aggressive world, where masculine behaviors such as gambling, fighting, heavy drinking, and playing pranks were the vehicles that enabled men to engage with each other. This particular performance of homosocial behavior became known as jolly fellowship, which was not only tolerated but condoned by men who did not participate in its rituals. That said, however, Stott makes it clear that the type of man who filled this masculine space were those who could be described as “manly,” although Stott does not make an attempt to define this beyond stating they engaged in jolly fellowship activities. This means it lacks the insight into types of manliness that would have been gained from a more thorough examination of the men who reveled in their jolly fellowship and those who avoided it. But discussion of jolly fellowship does provide a framework through which Stott interrogates codes of appropriate behavior amongst men in general. Stott perceives with regard to the mock trials which occurred in Mississippi that the victim was often in breach of male protocol, and when discussing the pranks in Kentucky he interprets it as an act of gaining power over another. These linked, and yet slightly different, interpretations of the motivation for jolly fellowship could have been explored in greater depth, which is probably a consequence of choosing to study such a wide era and physical space.

Traditionally manliness is associated with discipline in this period, and Stott illustrates how this self-control infiltrated the boundaries of jolly fellowship through a range of examples, which include head butting contests. Stott explains that these were pre-arranged and enacted with restrictions placed upon the method of head butting. Stott is at great pains to insist to his readers that jolly fellowship was not an uncontrolled and uncontrollable force, stating that men “stopped drinking before getting drunk and often would stop gambling before they lost their money” (p. 56), but he fails to provide sufficient evidence to back up this view.

This text extends into a consideration of race relations, as Stott discusses how minstrel performances fed into the themes that were prevalent in jolly fellowship. The “controlled chaos” (p. 175) and the hyper-masculine stage persona of the minstrel reflected the jolly fellow, and even their songs focused upon fighting and drinking. Stott argues that minstrelsy was a type of prank in itself in its embrace of the masquerade and he connects the humor of the show to that of the jolly fellow. This is a fascinating discussion surrounding these two cultures and one that produces some of the most productive insights in this study. As Stott charts the movements and the changes within jolly fellowship, the reader is also taken through some rather uncomfortable reading, particularly regarding the treatment of minorities, as he explores how the Ku Klux Klan’s roots were embedded within jolly fellowship.

With regard to the relations between the genders, Stott’s research is less than illuminating; he does not fully explore the sexuality of the men involved in jolly fellowship, despite including the story of a drunken fight between two men who tore off each other’s clothes, which is surely a revealing act. This story has been remembered by a tavern owner’s daughter, but Stott does not comment on her—or their—possible motivation for this act, or even attempt to contextualize it. In fact, sexual aggression is described as the motivation behind some of the jolly fellows’ acts, yet Stott’s argument remains purely focused upon the masculine space as a separate entity, and therefore he spends little time interrogating its impact upon the opposite sex.

This study of violence and the American male experience is often mediated through alcohol. Stott argues that drinking possibly provided an excuse for the behavior in this period, rather than it being the cause, although he does concede that it was part of the reason for the jolly fellows conduct. Continual connections between alcohol consumption, fighting, and playing pranks are frequently displayed in this text which cause Stott to declare that, despite the temperance movement, to not drink in this period meant emasculation. Stott’s careful overview of the tensions and shifting power which occurred between the temperance movement and the jolly fellows would have benefited from being explored in greater detail, but, on the whole, his analysis of the synergies between alcohol and violence is productive and detailed.

This well illustrated study contains some fascinating and amusing retellings of jolly fellowship from a variety of sources, which serve to make this a lively and enjoyable read. The individual cases of jolly fellowship that are examined also help illuminate its wider context. Although it felt as though the text was trying to wrestle and pin down an area that was far too broad to manage, its wide focus did enable the author to provide a useful insight into the extent of jolly fellowship’s integration throughout America and comment on the degree to which it was able to assert power over the time period. This is a worthwhile book and considerably contributes to the body of work that exists in this area; however, it also feels like it is a starting point from which, I hope, much more research will continue to build on.

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Review of Erik Sidenvall, *The Making of Manhood Among Swedish Missionaries in China and Mongolia, c.1890–c.1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 189 pp. and Yvonne Maria Werner (ed.), *Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011) 322 pp.

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Back when the very first edition of JMMS was in preparation I received an email from Yvonne Maria Werner of Lund University introducing me to a large research project focused on constructions of Christian manliness in Northern Europe between 1850 and 1940. The network of researchers connected with and inspired by this project produced various papers for JMMS including Werner's own "Manliness and Catholic Mission in the Nordic Countries," "Christian Social Reform Work as Christian Masculinization? A Swedish Example" by Anna Prestjan, "The Exemplary Lives of Christian Heroes as an Historical Construct" by Alexander Maurits, "'Heroes of the Heart': Ideal Men in the Sacred Heart Devotion" by Tine Van Osselaer, and "Domestic Heroes: Saint Nicholas and the Catholic Family Father in the Nineteenth Century" by Josephine Hoegaerts. This collection of papers alone comprises one of the more significant historically and regionally focused explorations of Christian masculinities for some time. The two books under review here provide further fruits of the project: Erik Sidenvall's monograph *The Making of Manhood Among Swedish Missionaries in China and Mongolia, c.1890–c.1914* and Werner's edited collection *Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, which includes a contribution by Sidenvall as well as old JMMS hands Prestjan, Maurits and Van Osselaer.

Sidenvall's book is based around a series of micro-biographies of missionaries in Northern China and Mongolia, deriving minute detail from letters and diaries, which is held in tension with a broader context of both Swedish and international missionary endeavor of the time. Sidenvall focuses on the how working-class men engaged in a process of "self-making," while embodying a particular contradiction: "On the one hand, a discourse emphasizing the primacy of religion and the subordination of human ambitions to a greater Divine cause—the progress of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, a gender discourse, widely circulated within society, about what true manhood was" (p. 13). We see this contradiction, for example, within the experience of missionary Olof Bingmark who was able at once to engage in sincere missionary activity in China, but also secure a livelihood and social standing that would have been elusive to him in Sweden. Specifically, Bingmark reached "several years earlier than most men of his social background, the coveted position of the married man" (p. 60). Further still, the fact that Bingmark and his wife were of a working-class background, coupled with their being in the missionary field,

meant that the typical division of labor along public and private lines was blurred, with a more fluid understanding of the couple's responsibilities within both domestic and missionary work. This complements much of the previous literature surrounding gender and mission that is considered largely in a middle-class context where the distinction between public and private labor and men and women's responsibilities is more distinct. In conclusion, Sidenvall views such missionary work as an alternative form of self-making for Swedish men. While secular men may have engaged in self-making through being "dextrous and conscientious, the missionary world ... pointed at the importance of the respectable (i.e. bourgeois) Christian marriage" (p. 159).

Werner's edited collection—divided into five parts—spans a broad thematic and geographic territory. Part 1, "Key Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives" includes two chapters: Olaf Blaschke shows how both German Catholic and Protestant churches perceived the feminization thesis and sought to make Christianity more appealing to men (a concern still expressed today); Callum Brown explores similar themes within the context of Great Britain, where masculinity was perceived as inherently more secular than femininity, but also how women's changing relationship with the church proved to be equally responsible for secularization. Part 2, "Visions and Ideals of Christian Manhood" includes four chapters: Van Osselaer and Maurits extend their previous JMMS articles with an examination of Christian heroism in Sweden and Belgium; Marit Monteiro demonstrates the importance of clerical authority in the construction of masculinity for the Dominicans in the Netherlands; Prestjan reveals aspects of Swedish Christian masculinity through a reading of numerous clergy obituaries; David Tjeder shows how two Swedish church leaders resisted the feminization thesis, arguing for an intellectual understanding of Lutheranism that was inherently manly. Part 3 is "Missionary Masculinity" which provides an example of Sidenvall's missionary masculinity and China, and Werner's understanding of Catholic missionaries in Scandinavia whose pious celibate masculine performances were in stark contrast with Protestant expressions of masculinity. Part 4 is "Fostering Christian Men" in which Elin Malmer examines how the evangelical Swedish Mission Covenant sought to influence the lives of soldiers, and Nanna Damsholt charts the discourse of masculinity within the Danish folk high school movement. Part 5, "Transgressing Gender Boundaries" includes three chapters: Inger Littberger Caisou-Rousseau unpacks representations of Christian masculinity in a number of Swedish novels; Anders Jarlert shows how Sweden's Queen Victoria can be considered under the influence of Charles Kingsley and high church Lutheranism as "manly"; Gösta Hallonsten analyzes the "new feminism" of the Catholic Church and how this problematizes the assumptions upon which "Christian Manliness" was historically based.

There is a downside to both these books, and that is one of analytical depth. Sidenvall's use of micro-biographies offers a compelling window into the lives of Swedish missionaries. Indeed, it is quite possible to read these chapters as simply an interesting account of missionary activity of the time. However, within the thematic context of JMMS the discussion of masculinity is often eclipsed by missionary detail (although given this book has been published in Brill's Studies in Christian Mission series this is entirely to be expected). As a relatively short book, more could have been made of the analysis of masculinity without the theme becoming unwieldy; but

it is nevertheless very readable and well-argued. Similarly, because Werner's is an edited collection we are provided with chapter-length treatments of subjects that often would benefit from extended discussion. Of course, this is a limitation of the edited collection form, and hopefully it will serve as a springboard for further work by some of the authors.

Situating these books within the wider literature (at least for those familiar with Christian masculinities, if not Northern European Christian history), naturally enough Sidenvall notes the experiences of his subjects were in parallel with the phenomenon of muscular Christianity. This context is something of a two-way street: certainly, these Swedish missionaries would have been aware of how such a muscular Christianity was being imagined and were influenced by this; however, at the same time the kind of missionary activity in which they were engaged was exactly the type of muscularity being praised by the likes of Roosevelt and Baden-Powell. Similarly, muscular Christianity—through the work of Charles Kingsley—and, in general, the feminization thesis of the time, is cited on various occasions throughout Werner's collection.

However, from the perspective of English and North American studies of muscular Christianity—that has almost become synonymous with any discussion of Christian masculinity in this historical period—both these books provide a useful complement, showing how the phenomena also occurred in Northern Europe, as well as more distant mission fields. But instead of a mere complement, it might be more appropriate to consider both these books as a challenge to English and North American studies of muscular Christianity, as they catalogue a far broader spectrum of masculinities, dreams and anxieties than we have come to expect. In this regard, Sidenvall and Werner provide a significant leap forward in how we understand Christian masculinities of the time, both in terms of the masculine performances they document and the assumption that we view this period in history only through the lens of the English-speaking world.

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Review of Ludger H. Viefhues-Bailey,
*Between a Man and a Woman? Why
Conservatives Oppose Same-Sex Marriage*
(New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)
vii + 176 pp.

Brett Krutzsch

In *Between a Man and Woman? Why Conservatives Oppose Same-Sex Marriage*, religion scholar—Ludger H. Viefhues-Bailey—argues that intellectuals have not yet cultivated a sufficiently nuanced understanding of American conservative Christian resistance to state-sanctioned gay marriage. Too often, for Viefhues-Bailey, conservative Christians are assumed to reject same-sex marriages because of their presumed adherence to a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. Such a myopic view of conservative Christians' understandings of sexuality, religiosity, and power relations obfuscates the contested, negotiated, and lived experiences of the people under discussion, thereby providing little insight into how conservative Christians produce and reproduce gender and sexuality norms that are resonant for many Americans. In highly-accessible writing, Viefhues-Bailey sets out to analyze the rhetoric of conservative Christian opposition to same-sex marriage, thus contributing to the growing body of literature that examines how the discourse of American Christian heteronormativity is naturalized through Protestant notions of gender, marriage, respectability, and civilized family units, which conservative Christians regard as essential to the well-being and success of the American nation state.

In an attempt to explore conservative Christian messages about gender, sexuality, and marriage, Viefhues-Bailey analyzes ample material produced by the Christian organization Focus on the Family, which, according to the author, appeals to conservative Protestants of varying denominations and locales through the proliferation of the group's magazines, websites, books, and other media. Rather than critiquing Focus' argumentation, Viefhues-Bailey delves into Focus' texts to investigate the creation, maintenance, and use of rhetorical figures in conservative Christian America. For example, he proffers that the authors of Focus materials construct and perpetuate two static images of gay men, which he terms the "over-sexed hyper-male" and the "gender-insecure hypo-male." The first is portrayed as predatory, particularly toward young boys; the second is imagined as lacking a father figure and unfamiliar with proper masculine behavior. Both are figured as promiscuous and prone to drug use. Viefhues-Bailey argues that these rhetorical figures serve to create normative Christian male gender and sexuality performances, whereby the Christian American man is constructed as one who does not embody any of the qualities associated with the "over-sexed hyper-male" or the "gender-insecure hypo-male." Consumers of Focus publications are inculcated with prescriptive and proscriptive gender and sexual performances that serve both in the formation of their own embodied gender and sexual practices, as well as in the shaping of their views on the possibilities of same-sex relationships. Viefhues-Bailey asserts that the very creation and repetition of rhetorical figures speaks to the

instability and tenuousness of conservative Christian heteronormative gender and sexual scripts, thus requiring the norms to be constantly (re)inscribed and (re)inforced.

The configured image of the deviant gay male is the latest iteration of rhetorical figures that are constructed for the purpose of establishing an alterity against which American Christians can judge themselves. He writes, "Part of the production of white masculinity, for example, is the imagination and cultural depiction of black male sexuality as out of bounds, violent and savage ... Native men were presented as being overly feminine or childlike (and thus needing European masculine rule)" (p. 140). In other words, Christian and white ideas about normative masculinity are—historically and presently—imbricated, an extension of what Viefhues-Bailey sees as the effects of colonialism and the subjugation of peoples on "civilized" Christian and gender sexual ideals. Just as non-whites and non-Christians have been portrayed as barbaric, sinful, and uncivilized, the "deviant gay body [now] functions in analogy to the construction of 'the savage black male,' namely to stabilize respectable middle-class masculinity" (p. 140). Viefhues-Bailey aptly argues that the vilification of gay men as predators, pedophiles, and sex addicts serves to maintain Protestant gender and sexual ideals as epitomes of gentility, appropriateness, and social stability. For conservatives to sanction same-sex marriages would be to destabilize Christian heteronormativity as the ideal gender and sexual model for the "civilized" American nation.

While Catholics have esteemed celibacy, and Mormons have endorsed polygamy, American Protestants have overwhelmingly valorized monogamous heterosexual matrimony as the sexual ideal; Viefhues-Bailey, therefore, posits that Protestant sexual norms contribute to situating America as an explicitly Christian country. He writes, "U.S. officials were quick to believe that immigrants from groups they considered to be racially inferior (such as Jews and Asians) were incapable of forming the 'true' romantic bonds that were the hallmarks of Christian marriage" (p. 74). State endorsement of heterosexual monogamous marriage serves as a mechanism for allowing Protestant sexual ideals to determine American norms. When conservative Christians defend heterosexual marriage as the sole legitimate matrimonial option, they are fighting to maintain the idea of America as a Christian nation. When they oppose same-sex marriages, they present such relationships as antithetical to both Christianity and to the stability of the United States. For conservative Christians, heterosexual marriage is the locus of the American social order, principally because the structure inculcates submission as a necessary value. Viefhues-Bailey suggests that the patriarchal conservative Protestant family system where children submit to parents, wives submit to husbands, and husbands submit to God, replicates the submission that is necessary to the nation in order for it to function optimally. "The desire to live in a society structured by a sexual hierarchy of submission and to anchor claims of authority in some cosmic order seems to resonate well with many Americans" (p. 128). Put differently, a conservative Christian ontology includes ideas about unique gender roles within the social order, particularly with regard to men serving as heads of their households. Conservative Christians oppose lesbianism and feminism not because they are seen as predatory or promiscuous like gay men, but because they subvert claims about the necessity of a gender hierarchy. Same-sex marriage, therefore, signifies a major threat to what

conservative Christians have deemed the natural social order of the nation and the universe.

Between a Man and a Woman? is a thoughtfully argued work that presents ideas of how conservative Christian assertions remain pervasive and successful in America. Readers interested in a close analysis of conservative Christian rhetoric about gender, sexuality, and marriage will find this text helpful and engaging.

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