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Masculinity, Historiography, and Uses of the Past: An Introduction

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Abstract

This essay serves as an introduction to a collection of articles on masculinity in early Christianity. It considers problems of the masculine subject as both the knower and the known in traditional historiography. By juxtaposing Tertullian's polemic against heretical women with da Vinci's drawing of the Vitruvian man, this essay explores how to think about masculinity as a way of arranging the world and our knowledge of it and in it, using a gaze of queer patience.

Keywords: masculinity; Christianity; historiography; Tertullian

These heretical women—how audacious they are! They have no modesty; they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to practice exorcism, to enact healing, and, it may be, even to baptize! (Tertullian of Carthage, *Against Heresies* 41)¹

Audacious and Immodest

Between Tertullian and Leonardo there were one thousand three hundred years and a wine-dark sea. Tertullian (155–240 CE) was a North African from Carthage. Leonardo (1452–1519 CE) was an Italian from Florence. Both men were Christians. Both grappled with their respective era’s rearrangements of mortality and divinity, mapping and re-mapping where we stand in time and how the world works; both harkened back to a classical heritage, imagining themselves as heirs and rescuers of a more glorious past.

Tertullian was a black man living in a slave society which gave a master, of any colour, absolute rights over the bodies and survival of his women, children, and slaves.² Leonardo was a gay man living and working off the excess wealth accumulated through trade with the Ottoman empire and the colonial plunder of Africa and the Americas.³ The erasure of these figures’ gayness and blackness in popular memory suggests the purpose of popular memory, the collective historiography that pools in school textbooks and encyclopaedia entries and community imagination. Great men of the past are, by default, straight white men. The past is there to stage a long parade of great men through

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- 1 I am indebted to several colleagues for reading and offering excellent feedback on this essay: David DeVore, Camille Leon Angelo, Kelly Murphy, and Rebecca Lyman. I also thank my teammates on the Books Known Only by Title project who bore with me while I struggled with it, as well as the Centre for Advanced Study in Oslo and the German Research Foundation for providing the time and funding to make it possible.
 - 2 Assertions that North African or Egyptian Christian “Church Fathers” were black are usually met with patterned and suspect half-indulgence, conceding that they were not white and did not resemble Germanic or Celtic peoples who were also part of the Roman Empire, but still balking at accepting that North Africans before the Islamic conquest were very dark-skinned. The involvement of Christianity and the Classics with white supremacy produces discomfort, especially in white scholars and readers, with any suggestion that the venerable ancient past was populated by black and brown people, that enslavement did not correlate with colour in the ancient world, and that white Western Europeans have received knowledge from black and brown people. This reluctance and foot-shuffling, arising when a plain statement of fact about the skin colour of an important early Christian thinker is made, is a fruit of white supremacy. Tertullian was black. So was Augustine. Ancient authors described Berbers, the ethnic group to which Tertullian most probably belonged, as having black faces (Corippus, *Johannis*) or as being black-skinned like the Moors (Procopius, *History of the Wars*, IV). There is more than one way to be black, and there have always been very dark-skinned people outside of Sub-Saharan Africa, not least in East Africa, South Asia, and the region including and surrounding Papua New Guinea.
 - 3 There is a similar degree of squirrelness arising in response to the statement that Leonardo was gay, suggesting a fundamental use of the past as a chain-making tool linking up straight white men to justify the dominance of straightness and whiteness and masculinity today.

time. Great men move through time with feminised and racialised others as stepping-stones, submerged in forgetfulness. To assert that a great man of the past, particularly of the Christian past, was black or gay is to disrupt the use of the past as an argument for present patriarchal orders, and for a yet more unequal future.

The year Leonardo was born, Pope Nicholas V published the bull known as *Dum Diversas*, allowing European Christians to capture and enslave “barbarians” in Africa and the Americas, lands which the rise of new navigation technologies had recently made accessible. In schoolbooks, the invention of the sextant and other tools inaugurated what for white Europeans and Americans is lauded as “the age of discovery”: men got for themselves the heady freedom to expand the map of the known world across the globe.⁴ The received narrative does not question why European men needed to, and believed they could, *know* the whole world, nor why we build whole pedagogies and academic disciplines on coming to know it through stories of their deeds. Until university, and long after, I never heard the story corrected and retold as a vicious and desperate swarming out to plunder other lands. In the millennialist communities of my youth, any amount of violence and exploitation could be brushed aside because colonialism was what made the spread of Christianity around the world possible. The rhetoric of kingdoms and reigns, of bringing all men under subjection to Christ, was not coincidental to the colonial programme of mastery. The entire world was to be made obedient to one sovereign father.

Even if we were to continue writing history as a story about men, our narratives, and with them our imaginations, would have to change if men of colour told the story of Leonardo’s fifteenth century. Our imagination of the past, and with it of inheritance and devotion, would have to change if our notion of Tertullian’s Roman Empire and the Christianity it birthed could expand beyond narcissistic fantasies to encompass the reality that few early Christians were white. Our fathers, if we were reared in Christian communities, are black and brown.⁵ It is a bitter humour that leads a feminist historian to sketch out a better patriarchy. I do so not to suggest that this is the direction critique of the historiography of masculinity should take, but only to make it impossible not to see that patriarchy is the partner of white supremacy, training all cultures up in structures

4 “The Age of Discovery,” Lumen, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com>. This online curriculum modifies the traditional narrative only very slightly from what I was taught 30 years ago. There is one sentence stating that it was only an age of discovery from a European perspective and that people in Asia, Africa, and the Americas did not see it that way. This single sentence does little to offset the impact of the long chain of bold men the rest of the text supports, and there is no mention of genocide and slavery is mentioned cursorily across three lines of text.

5 On colour in the ancient world, see Denise E. McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) or more recently Erich S. Gruen, *Ethnicity in the Ancient World: Did it Matter?* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020). On the whitewashing of Christianity, see Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity: A Hidden Past, Hurtful Present and Hopeful Future* (Chicago: 13th & Joan, 2020) and Ekaputra Tupamahu, “I Don’t Want to Hear Your Language!” White Social Imagination and the Demography of Roman Corinth,” *Bible & Critical Theory* 16, no. 1 (2020): 64–91.

of mastery, so that when we talk about masculinity we are always also talking about race.

What we learn of in school as the Renaissance and Reformation (the rise of humanism, rationality, and freedom) is the age in which our own discipline put down roots. The emergent humanism for which the age of Leonardo is praised took place at the cost of the dehumanising logics which produced the Atlantic slave trade. Being human in this age meant being a man, and being a man meant *not* being a man of colour; being able to possess rather than be possessed, to do violence rather than suffer violence, and, at the pinnacle of learned Renaissance masculinity, the privilege to retreat from physical reality into speculation about one's own splendour as heir to the Classical and Christian past and the centre of the universe.

As Leonardo grew old, a German monk began agitating for the "return" of European Christianity to its original early expressions, in the time of Tertullian and before. This use of the past is displaced and circular: it is not a call to learn from the black Tertullian, Augustine, or Origen. It is a depositing of one's own grandiosity in the past and the initiation of a relationship with that displaced deposit of importance as an argument for one's own current value. Such masculinist cycling of narcissistic supply through the past is a core historiographical manoeuvre which neither began nor ended with the Renaissance and Reformation.

Between Tertullian and Leonardo there are one thousand three hundred years and a wine-dark sea. And yet they are close together, both map makers of patriarchy. Tertullian expresses outrage at the religious agency of women. His outrage creates heresy out of excess female agency, instantiating an order of knowledge and practice in which a woman must not teach, argue, heal or baptise unless she does so in agreement with him. Leonardo positions the man, in an image which has become an emblem of humanism even as it salutes a world in which only a tiny fraction of us counted as human, at the centre of the world, as part of a diagram of physical perfection, natural order, and right proportion. Both Tertullian and da Vinci are making maps that place men in the centre of the world, whether as God's spokesman or his finest creation. The centrality of man and the blending of man with God has governed our imagination of both masculinity and the Christian past for centuries.

If the history of masculinity is to be written differently, we have to look at maps of masculinity with queer patience. Let us look now at the diagram (Figure 1) of Leonardo's man carefully, even if it means witnessing our own erasure.⁶

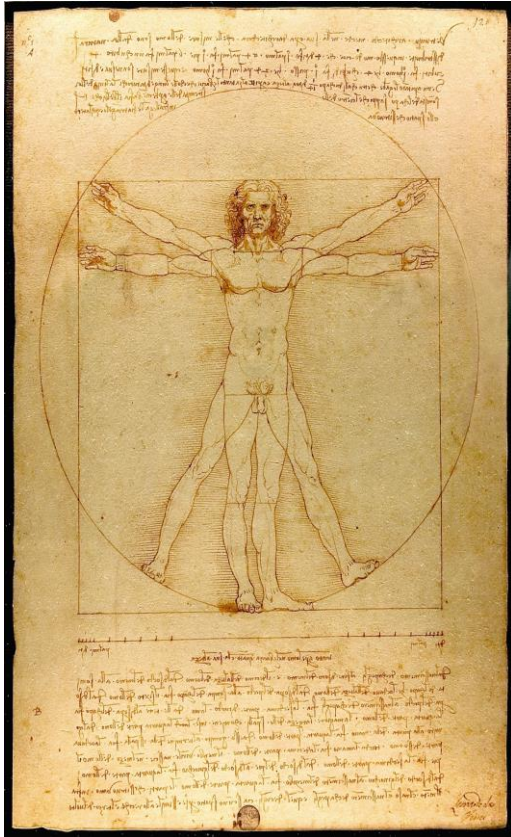


Figure 1. Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man (image by Luc Viatour; <https://Lucnix.be>; Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2738140>)

Look at the man. One can see the image as an arrogant and violent assertion of grandiosity, of “Man” as the centre of the universe. One can see a white body and a

6 I offer Dürer's woodcut of a draughtsman making a perspective drawing of a reclining woman as an instructive comparison for the difference in this age between looking at men and looking at women. The image can be accessed at <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/366555>. In the left half one sees a scantily clad woman, lying back on two pillows with her left hand reaching between her legs where there is some drapery. Her crotch and knees face towards a frame set up in the middle of the surface she is lying on. The frame contains a grid through which the man, in the right half of the painting, is looking at her. He has in turn drawn out a grid on his paper. The surface the woman is lying on is the surface the man is drawing on, his desk, her bed. There is a gigantic obelisk sticking up from his lap as high as his nose and a sword at his belt.

man's body asserted as the natural representation of the universal.⁷ Or one can also see the labouring gay da Vinci sticking the foot of his compass into the spread-eagled man's belly, again and again, down the sensitive part from navel to groin, along a trace of invisible hair. The Vitruvian Man is both these men at the same time: the grandiose ordering subject and the object of tenderness or desire or probing curiosity, both the ideal man standing straight and lordly, and a naked man spreadeagled, legs apart, arms open, throat, heart, belly, and organs exposed.⁸ If he is lying down, the silent and immobile object of knowledge or desire or violence or all three, is he feminised? Or is there simply something askew?

In Book III of his treatise *De architectura*, Vitruvius wrote: "For if a man be placed flat on his back, with his hands and feet extended, and a pair of compasses centered at his navel, the fingers and toes of his two hands and feet will touch the circumference of a circle described therefrom. And just as the human body yields a circular outline, so too a square figure may be found from it." This entirely false geometrical claim appealed to Leonardo's belief that man was a microcosm of the universe, the measure of all things. This was not an individual quirk, but a grandiose euphoria sweeping across elite circles in Italy at the time. Man declared himself the centre of the universe by declaring himself a small universe, a microcosm of the cosmos, and just as wondrous, and so a suitable object of admiring investigation.

The spreadeagled man reaches the tips of his fingers and the soles of his feet out to the circumference of a circle. In this position, open and exposed, he has a different centre than when he stands straight. If you tried to draw the Vitruvian man from memory, you would lay the circle and the square directly over each other, so the circumference of the circle touches each side of the square. But matching both the circle and the square, and laying them directly over each other, renders a figure with enormously long limbs and gigantic hands and feet, as in the attempt at solving the Vitruvian puzzle by Cesare Cesariano in his translation of *De architectura* into Italian. If you look at the image again, you see that the two shapes are displaced, the square shifted downwards so that its lower corners protrude from the circle but contain the straight-standing man exactly. The centre of the square is exactly at the man's pubic bone, while the centre of the circle is a little above his navel. You can see that Leonardo has fudged the placement of the navel. It has a tail, and forms a vague line with the centre line of the man's abdominal muscles. Even by placing it too high, it remains a touch below the centre of the circle. In struggling to make the man fit and to function as the basis for perfection and proportion, Leonardo had to give him the torso of a short-legged man but the navel

7 On the enduring impact of the universalisation of the white male body on our built environment, see Lance Hosey, "Hidden Lines: Gender, Race and the Body in Graphic Standards," *Journal of Architectural Education* 55, no. 2 (2001): 101–12.

8 There is space here to see the man as the crucified Christ, or as Prometheus chained and exposed. Quite apart from these figures of canonical memory, the spreadeagled man can be read as a retroactive cipher for hundreds and thousands of ordinary men crucified, lynched, or tortured.

placement of a long-legged man. His navel, his link to survival through dependence on a woman, is nudged out of the centre. His penis is the centre of the straight-standing square, the square which had to be misaligned from the circle to render up geometrical evidence for a phallogocentric cosmos. That is what is askew. The man is not a banner of miraculous mathematical and architectural fact, not a clear demonstration of the universality of the golden ratio. He is under tension. He has been shoved around and poked at and pinned down, nudged off-centre and stretched and squished in order to meet a man's demands. Which is to say, he has been a woman. And he has been, in the process of being drawn, and still is, under a patient queer gaze, many of exactly those racialised and feminised subjects he was created to help knock off-centre.

Rereading this emblem of humanism with queer patience, its claims to mathematical objectivity recede. There is something askew in the man's belly, a conflict between navel and penis, between standing straight and lying spreadeagled, between opening and closing, between his own secret gestation and his capacity to procreate or penetrate. He is a man with two centres. Giving him two centres was the only way to solve the puzzle. I wonder if Leonardo knew we could have imagined ourselves otherwise, that we could have placed the world of the womb at the centre of the cosmos.⁹ It is clear that he struggled for geometrical coherence that was not there and could only be achieved by displacement. The manuscript shows a string of indentations down the man's lower belly, dents where he set down the compass again and again, trying to find the centre. It is possible to read that scene of Leonardo jabbing at the Vitruvian man as the pathetic exasperation of the delusional narcissist, frantic to get himself into the centre of the universe. It is also possible to read it as a trace of another story. Leonardo was making many dents as if insisting on the centrality of the dent we all have in our bellies, a salute to the state of nourishing penetration in which we are all born. It invites a shift from the penis to the navel, to a site of both healing and loss, a memory of perfect nourishment inside a woman. It is possible to reroot our imaginations in a different scene of arrival in the world, relinquishing the possession and combat of copulation in favour of the lonesome bliss of the gestating baby.

9 Quotidian language use tends to suggest that the womb isn't even part of the world, much less its centre. We speak of babies arriving, or in German, for example, "being brought to the world" when they have only moved from the inside to the outside of the womb. Here also queer patience expands imagination: maybe the womb is not part of the world, but maybe the entire world is anchored to gestation when it is marked as what is outside the womb.

To Teach

Much attention has been given to masculinity in terms of the godly man as presented in early Christian ethical discourse, whether to do with the proper order of the household, with pedagogy, with righteousness, or with sexuality.¹⁰ This special issue looks into textual locations of masculinity-talk which are focused on off-kilter and two-centred masculinity, generally framed as a means of escape from some impending or actual calamity. In this issue, we ask how we can re-imagine the soldier, mother, slave, and monk in terms of the entanglement of masculinity with notions of religious excellence and virtue in the early Christian and late Roman world. Whether the late ancient men discussed here are cast as soldiers, surrogates, slaves or sovereigns, each is awry in a manner which renders up new possibilities.

Jamie Wood's contribution examines late Roman and Byzantine military manuals from the fourth to sixth centuries. While theologians in particular have primarily studied masculinity in terms of Christian texts concerned with marriage and family, reflecting the modern American location of the exercise of religious masculinity, Wood argues that with the increasing Christianisation of the fourth to sixth centuries CE, the soldier became the "paradigmatic figure for thinking about Christian masculinity and for making Christian military men." In this textual and social world, maximal masculinity was what protected Christianity and empire and everything that mattered. Masculinity is credited with the ability to prevent collapse and disaster.¹¹ Masculinity is a spectacularly unnecessary and over-articulated survival plan. Wood examines how these manuals, directed at both soldiers and generals, discuss "a model for the formation of hyper-masculine Christian subjects." Military training aimed to produce a military subject who is more masculine yet by virtue of being Christian and participating rightly in Christian prayers and rituals and the display of Christian objects in battle. Here Christianity is a tool of masculinity and masculinity is in service to Christianity. Both are there to give the empire victory and protect it from penetration by invading forces. Wood argues that, in the Roman Empire, whether late ancient or Byzantine, "all moral and religious education was masculinising to some degree." In this period, the project of man-making overlaps with the project of Christian-making.

10 Among a vast literature, see Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) and Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

11 The recent rise of right-wing militias in the United States has moved in parallel with a rise in catastrophising rhetoric around immigration to the United States and co-occurs with claims of the feminisation of society: the hyper-masculine activity of participating in a militia group is supposed to defend against these supposed threats. Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber, "White Men Are This Nation: Right-Wing Militias and the Restoration of Rural American Masculinity," *Rural Sociology* 65, no. 4 (2000): 582–604, show how far back the escalation of masculinity in relation to racialised anxieties goes.

Because Christianity provides a vertical profusion of the social hierarchy (Christ and God are above even the emperor), each man, whether the emperor in relation to his generals or the generals in relation to their men or the soldiers in relation to the enemy, is mapped onto a paradoxical position of dominance conditioned on submission. Each place in these ranks only has the downhill dominance ascribed to it *because of* practices of uphill submission: the emperor is dominant because of his submission to Christ, the soldier because of his submission to his general. So even the most obviously masculine of ancient men has two centres and is eternally off-kilter between poles of dominance and submission.

Grace Emmet's piece discusses "the appropriation of nursing and birthing imagery" occurring in parallel to Paul's persistent use of agonistic language and exhortations to his readers to pull themselves together and be real men (1 Cor 16:13). Why would Paul, who as a religious leader was supposed to be virtuous and therefore manly and avoidant of any behaviour suggestive of embodiment, or suffering, voluntarily apply the language of maternity, especially childbirth and lactation, to himself? This apparent paradox resolves somewhat when Emmet traces the use of nursing imagery in the Hebrew Bible and the Cynics and reminds the reader that "appropriating female identity does not automatically equate to a subversion of gender norms." Here it is vital to distinguish between appropriation and valorisation: to identify himself with maternity is not to anoint embodied female experience with a greater dignity. We can only assume that if we also assume that Paul is extraordinarily valuable, such that anything he associates himself with is elevated. Paul's use of maternal rhetoric is not eccentric in his larger rhetorical repertoire which included a penchant for self-debasing language, casting himself as a slave, a prisoner, and a sick and suffering person. So, using maternal language of himself is consistent with the patriarchal abjection of mothers and Paul's own exploitation of the two centres of ancient masculinity to foreground his own submission in order to elicit more submission in his readers. Greater complexity can also be layered into the reading of these texts by considering how maternity entails ownership, if not legally in the Roman world then at least in the form of physical power over a dependent being. Paul portrays his readers as his children, but asserting the dependence and need of the other in terms that affirm one's own bounty and benevolence is by no means a departure from traditional discourses of masculinity.

In Tyler Schwaller's work linking the Alexamenos graffito to current debates about the ordination and inclusion of queer, non-binary, and trans clergy, we see further displacement, paradox, and odd juxtaposition around images of masculinity. As Schwaller states his own purpose:

I read the Alexamenos graffito, with its depiction of the crucified Christ, alongside select early Christian interpretations of Philippians 2:6–8, with its image of Christ in the form of a slave, to examine the tension between enslavement and masculinity. In particular, I foreground the graffito's context of enslavement and early Christian anxieties over an enslaved Christ to juxtapose competing social and theological imaginations. Whereas scholars have generally seen the graffito's donkeyheaded figure on a cross in terms of

Roman mockery of Christians, I reread the Alexamenos graffito as a mockery of masculine hegemony.

Schwaller discusses uses of the past to establish heterosexist patriarchal orders as if they were eternal and universal Christian requirements. He locates early Christian discussions of gender between hints of radical solidarity with the oppressed and louder bids for respectability and normativity for the emerging Christian community. Contemporary church structures which see themselves as restoring original community orders from the early church use their identification with a pure and primal Christianity to create and enforce patriarchal structures which exclude queer folk from ministry, marriage, or membership and attach male privilege to divine will. Ancient Christian communities failed to depart from schemes of mastery or to reject slavery, acquiescing to the same hierarchical world as the soldiers described by Wood above. Since, as my own piece argues, assertions of dominance, power, mastery, grandiosity, or immense superiority are both counterfactual and highly distracting, subject peoples often see the displacement and instability of masculinity before masculine subjects themselves recognise it. Schwaller terms this “the underlying frailty of fantasies of mastery over self and others which are always subject to failure and resistance.” In re-writing the history of masculinity in early Christianity, it is necessary to tell those stories of failure and resistance, including the failure of Christian communities and institutions to depart from a phallogocentric social order. As Schwaller puts it, “scholarship on antiquity can expose logics of dehumanisation and uncover possibilities for their critique and disruption. Christianity’s historical entanglement with the logics and practices of enslavement, which are inseparable from conceptions of masculinity, provides a poignant case study.” This is a call for a redemptive use of the past, even in a world where both da Vinci’s Italy and Tertullian’s North Africa hold thousands of slaves to this day.¹²

In my own contribution to this special issue, I discuss the *Teachings of Silvanus*, reading it as a document of ascetic pedagogy. I examine masculinity not as a set of specific traits or behaviours, but as a three-step scheme moving from alarm at vulnerability, through devotion and submission, to final sovereignty. This pattern can be traced in the rhetorical world of the *Teaching of Silvanus*, where the reader, referred to repeatedly as “my son,” is browbeaten with whole catalogues of alarm at his current state of vulnerability. The solution to this entirely unnecessary problem (everyone is always vulnerable, even Leonardo’s perfect man) is devotion and submission to the master-teacher, who is conflated with Christ. The benefits of this submission are recounted, culminating in a final state of sovereignty in which the ascetic, purged of vulnerability (which the text denotes as anything slavish, womanly, childish or beastly), obtains a state of glory in which he rules over all other beings and the whole world. Tracing over

12 Apart from reportage in media outlets, see Ethan B. Kapstein, “The New Global Slave Trade,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 6 (2006): 103–15, and Robert Press, “Dangerous Crossings: Voices from the African Migration to Italy/Europe,” *Africa Today* 64, no. 1 (2017): 3–27.

masculinity as an escape plan allows me to account for the ambivalence which is endemic in the sources without having to claim that Christian notions of masculinity were particularly ambivalent or more ambivalent than other desperate fictions. In the terms of this introduction, the original vulnerability and final sovereignty are the two centres of Leonardo's man, displaced and off-kilter between embryonic bliss and phallic grandiosity.

So, when we put together a special issue on masculinity in early Christianity, we are not asking merely about how men imagined their own traits or behaviours. We are looking at a programme for structuring the world so as to afford an escape from the human predicament. And since no escape is in fact possible, we are looking at men with queer patience until it becomes possible to see the other centre and the other world it anchors.

To Engage in Argument

What am I writing when I write about the historiography of masculinity? Masculinity is not the sum total of traits ascribed to or observed in male individuals. It is a structuring force not just for sexual practice and family life, but for the embodied and inner experience of men themselves. Masculinity is a means of placing oneself in the world, not just in relation to women and children and slaves, but in a fraught relationship with God and the future, rulers, the body, and the past. Historiography is not the sum total of stories told about the past. It is the practice of world-making through use of the past, cultivating a tenuous but necessary thread between ourselves and something good that has been lost but which we cherish by telling it, retelling it, remembering.

Men and women have different pasts. Taking the Hebrew Bible and Homeric Epic as benchmarks, the West has an eight-millennia long archive of men writing about men. Given this enormously herniated archive and the overwhelmingly male staffing of patriarchal institutions devoted to it, and given the notion of history as a tale of great men moving valiantly through agonistic time, given also the genealogical imagination governing much of the practice of theology, telling the story of Christianity means telling a story of men. How does this historiographic task change if we integrate an idea of men as displaced from reality and off-kilter rather than as obnoxious lords over us? What happens to the story if we apply queer patience such that the array of great men is no longer a parade of masterful subjects, but a gallery of escape artists?

While scholars of feminised and racialised subjects must invent new methods for dealing with archival gaps, scholars who write about men must shift to understanding themselves as working with disproportionate and distorted archival bulges. It is not the case that the archive correctly reflects the doings of those persons who were important and valuable in the past, and those persons were, for entirely innocent reasons of culture and custom, almost all men. The archive bulges with writings by, about, and for men. When we work with archival gaps, we have to retrain ourselves to deal with traces and fragments, with loss and erasure.

Christian history is always involved in the historiography of masculinity: it is the history of a world in which we are required to worship men, in which divinity and masculinity are united in the person of Christ, a salvific miracle suggesting that finally uniting the manly and the divine, surrendering all pretence to humanity, escaping the embodiment one shares with women and slaves, is the final answer to the male predicament. In writing Christian history, particularly in deliberately examining masculinity in early Christianity, we are dealing with an archival bulge, an excess of material and imagined representation. It is no coincidence that both archival distortions parallel distorted imaginings of human genital anatomy as a presence and an absence, which in turn instantiate doctrines of male plenitude and female lack.¹³

While no one at all is bothered by a female historian impersonating a male historian by dutifully joining the chorus of praise for great men of history, there is something different and better to do with how we think about the present event of a feminised historian writing about masculinity in early Christianity. What can happen when a woman studies men? How do we treat an archival bulge? Do we study that excess of information, examples, and discussions or do we step back and ask why there is so much? Why is there such an excessive discussion about how to be a man? Why is being a man a matter of existential urgency and the centre of ethical debate? Where is the other centre?

This essay is an instance of a woman writing about men not as the only subjects worth writing about, but as a curious object of knowledge. Men also wrote about women, as objects of desire, objects of knowledge, objects of violence, objects of possession, or objects of horror or rebuke. But this is not an essay about women. It is an essay about the historiography of masculinity. Its aim is to denaturalise writing about men in history by numerous means, including the non-concealment of the womanhood of the author, by carefully unfolding what it can mean for men to be the object of a woman's knowledge. This is not revenge. Not because no revenge is merited, but because there is no revenge possible. That door will always be closed. That is a different place to think from than to think as a man.

To Practice Exorcism, to Enact Healing and Even to Baptize

Before baptism takes place, exorcism is practiced. One is asked to renounce the devil and all his ways. Here a door opens for me to wax Pentecostal, to call for renunciation and repentance, to name the evil of patriarchy in terms of Christian liturgical custom

13 See Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) on how this notion shapes history writing and the institutions which house the work of history.

and revival culture. Part of queer patience is staying skittish about doors that open too easily. What happens if we don't go through, if we stay right here?

Both Tertullian's polemic and Leonardo's diagram are maps, raising claims to the centrality of the masculine to reality. Special claims to map out reality are linked to masculinity because masculinity is linked to God where God plays the same role of circular narcissistic supply as the past also can. Baptism, exorcism, and healing are all acts performed to cause something new to happen, to rid a person of their troubles, to make a new thing possible. One may notice that in this essay I have not used the word equality. We do not go forward by becoming the same. Equality on terms set by patriarchy is not the answer to the questions posed in these essays and in the streams and streams of other writing in this time. Masculinity is being questioned and critiqued, both in academic and popular terms. That struggle only ends when a new reality is enacted. Exorcism, healing, and baptism are not maps but thresholds we call upon to shift reality and open up space to do something else.

If we are going to change, we are going to have to face the magnitude of what has been lost. If we learn to account for loss, the imagined archive of the Christian past would no longer appear to be a grand march of great men through time. The archive would neither bulge nor gap. It would weep, and we as historians would be obliged to stand in witness and give an account of our comfortable secrets and desperate fictions.

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