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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michèle Cohen. *English Masculinities, 1660-1800 (Women and Men in History)*. London: Longman, 1999. x + 268 pp. \$87.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-31919-6; \$35.80 (textbook), ISBN 978-0-582-31922-6.



Elizabeth A. Foyster. *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage (Women and Men in History)*. New York: Longman, 1999. xi + 247 pp. \$72.75 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-30734-6; \$37.20 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-30735-3.



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Men Are Back (But did they ever go away?)

Masculinity studies is one of the hottest fields in British history. This is especially true in Britain, where gender history is more prominent than women's history. Whether this field will continue to justify the history of (mostly elite) men, is debatable. What this new interest in the history of masculinity will hopefully do, however, is to apply to the study of men some of the methods and findings that social, cultural and women's historians have pioneered. These kinds of scholars have shown us that we need to be attuned to differences between people, that we need to look at how people's lived experi-

ence is constructed, and that we need to focus on power and how its exercise is always relational. The two books under review, published by Longman's Women and Men in History series (a wonderful series producing introductory monographs well-suited to graduate and advanced undergraduate classes, as well as to historians looking for an introduction to a field), allow us to assess the current state of masculinity studies in British history.

Foyster's *Manhood in Early Modern England* examines married male masculinity in seventeenth-century

England. The author asserts that we have too long assumed that the public lives of men are all that matter, and thus we have not examined their private lives enough. Foyster asks us to contemplate “what did the ideal of patriarchy mean for the reality of men’s lives?” (p. 3). She says that patriarchy did not mean that all men were equal; rather the institution created “subordinate masculinities.” Unfortunately, Foyster’s focus on married masculinity means that those interested in the subordinate manhood of bachelors or homosexuals will not find much here.

As with other recent studies of gender, Foyster’s book makes fruitful use of church court records. These sources allow the author to examine ideas about manhood (a term she uses in preference to masculinity, which was not current until the mid-eighteenth century) among people from different statuses, rather than just among the elite. Foyster also utilizes literary sources such as ballads, plays, and conduct manuals. Foyster fails to include diaries, letters, and memoirs, which is perplexing, especially in light of her assertion that manhood was always tenuous and needed to be asserted. What better way to investigate the presentation of self than in an individual man’s record of self?

The author organizes her book into sections on Discovering, Constructing, Asserting, Losing, and Restoring Manhood. The chapter on “Constructing Manhood” looks at how men experienced their bodies, an important question since women have been traditionally defined by the physical, while men have not. Foyster says that in the early modern era manhood was something that had to be learned by young males and then constantly asserted, while qualities identified as feminine had to be continually suppressed. This chapter includes Foyster’s contribution to the growing literature on gender and honor in the early modern era. The author says a man’s honor was tied to his virtue, piety, charity, justice, and credit, but also to his behavior in his household and his control over it. An integral part of male honor was self-control. Since men were seen as the rational sex in the early modern era, this put pressure on males to suppress any irrational behaviors, such as drunkenness. Marriage also conferred honor on a man, for an “unmarried man was but half a man” (p. 46). Foyster argues that while scholars acknowledge that female honor was tied to their sexual behavior, we have failed to see that male honor was also bound up with sexuality and their private lives.

Foyster’s next chapter on “Asserting Masculinity” looks at how manhood was always insecure, which

forced men to constantly prove their masculinity. Pivotal to manhood was the control of female sexuality, which ironically gave power to women since their sexual behavior could affect and threaten the manhood of their male relatives. Manhood was affected through gossip and adultery, two avenues by which a woman could expose a man’s impotence or lack of sexual prowess. Foyster’s findings illustrate how the history of men is bound up with the history of women, and is incomplete without attention to relations between the sexes. She also argues that manhood was not just endangered through female sexuality but also through the sexual behavior of men.

While scholars assume that non-marital sex was acceptable for males due to the double standard, Foyster believes that this was not entirely true. The author argues that non-marital sex was considered problematic if it hurt a man’s marital prospects or disrupted a married man’s household. When men engaged in non-marital sex that resulted in physical consequences, such as bastards and sexually-transmitted diseases, this was especially frowned upon. I would argue that this was true for women to some degree too. Singlewomen who produced bastards were punished more than those who engaged in fornication without (visible) consequences. Early modern England was a practical country. Neighbors looked the other way unless a person’s behaviors affected the community.

Foyster next investigates “Losing Manhood.” She discusses familiar material on the public shaming of cuckolds to provide an example of how uncontrolled female sexuality lessened a husband’s public reputation. Foyster again notes the power of women by showing how adulterous and bastard-bearing wives could “make a mockery” of patrilineal descent. The author moves to the topic of male friendship, tying this to the previous discussion of cuckoldry by pointing out how men sometimes committed adultery with their friends’ wives. Foyster says that in the early modern era too much jealousy on the part of men was seen as a bad thing and could lead to a loss of masculinity because it was an emotion that was not rational. Men walked a fine line between controlling the sexual behavior of their wives on the one hand and exhibiting a self-confident public face on the other. Women’s history provides multiple examples of the dilemmas women faced when it came to their behavior. It is significant to note that patriarchy constrained men as well.

Chapter five examines “Restoring Manhood.” Foyster posits an important difference between men and women,

when males lost their reputation it could be recovered, whereas the author suggests a woman's loss of sexual honor was comparable to death. This seems an overstatement to me, and reveals a class bias. Most women of the laboring and even middle classes were able to marry and live quite within social norms even though they were not virgins, and even most singlewomen who gave birth to bastards eventually married. Nevertheless, I would not dispute Foyster's contention that it was easier for men than for women to restore their honor. The author says because manhood was public, it had to be restored publicly. For instance, when a wife was accused of being a whore her husband often would initiate a defamation suit in her name, not just to reclaim her honor, but his own (for a whoring wife made him a cuckold). While Foyster's explanation seems plausible, another explanation could be coverture; a married woman did not usually wage law on her own, rather her husband was expected to go to court on her behalf. This may explain the involvement of men in their wives' defamation suits, just as much as a search for the restoration of manhood. Foyster also looks at how cuckolded husbands might restore their honor through separation or divorce, (although such public exposure risked public questioning of a man's ability to please his wife, or in other words a questioning of his manhood). Thus cuckolded husbands might be more likely to desert or beat their wives as a way to salvage their manhood and reputation.

Foyster's book is a wonderful entree into the subject of married male masculinity in early modern England. While her brief book does not allow her to fully answer all the questions she raises, her study is one with which future scholars of early modern masculinity will have to engage. Her discussion of how patriarchy affects men is the important flip side of how gender inequality constrains women and is a significant contribution to gender history. Nevertheless, I am left with a few questions. I wonder if this book is about manhood or male honor. I am not convinced that these two terms are equivalent, but at many times Foyster elides them. I also wonder if Foyster's sources (defamation suits and ballads) lead her to focus too much on cuckolded husbands. I am not sure that scholars or Foyster would want to say that cuckolds represent married men in the early modern era.

While Foyster's monograph is a case study of married manhood, *English Masculinities, 1660-1800* is more of an impressionistic introduction to masculinity in general. Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen's introduction provides a wonderful overview of the historiography on early modern masculinity. They show how studies of

male sexuality (especially homosexuality) marriage and courtship, male honor, and gender (particularly the concept of separate spheres) all have contributed to our understanding of masculinity in the early modern era. And yet this research has also raised many questions that require more specific research on manhood. This collection provides answers to four such topics: Male Sociability, Virtue and Friendship, Violence, and Sexuality.

The section on Sociability begins with Hitchcock's case study of the social networks of John Cannon. Hitchcock argues that heterosocial and homosocial environments affected Cannon's attitudes and behaviors toward women. While a youthful farm servant Cannon recorded positive views of his fellow female workers, although he was not as fond of the women who had power over him. In his twenties Cannon got a job as an excise-man, which meant a life on the road, living in lodgings, and socializing with his male colleagues. To fit in and to prove his manhood Cannon began to smoke, sexually harass women, and boast of his heterosexual exploits. Hitchcock's case study is interesting, but his theory that homosocial environments lead to misogyny is not new; and he acknowledges how his argument is similar to those of Merry Wiesner for early modern Germany and Anna Clark for modern Britain. We need someone to address how homosocial settings affected women's attitudes toward men, for they too spent most of their time with their own sex.

Michele Cohen's essay looks at how heterosocial rather than homosocial settings affected men. Cohen posits the existence of "social spaces" in the eighteenth century, places somewhere between the public and the private spheres. Here, in assembly rooms, theatres, and at tea tables, men and women met, conversed, and interacted. But such spaces were fraught for men. While middle-class men learned politeness and gentility through conversation with women, too much interaction could be effeminizing. In eighteenth-century Britain such concerns had nationalistic overtones. British men viewed themselves as masculine and their French counterparts as too polite and effeminate, due to their overexposure to female company and conversation. Cohen's explication of the gendering and nationalizing of language and manners in the eighteenth century makes for fascinating reading, although I wanted Cohen to acknowledge the class-specificity of ideals such as politeness and gentility more.

Part two of the collection focuses on male "Virtue and Friendship." Alan Bray and Michel Rey's essay

looks at continuity and change in masculine friendship in seventeenth-century England. Their argument is that the physical signs of male friendship that had originated in the medieval period, changed after 1660. Acts such as embracing, eating and sleeping together, even disposing of the bodily waste of one's lord or patron, were physical signs of intimacy between men. But in the late seventeenth century as anxiety about sodomy grew [though see now Hart on Young and Herrup, N.E.K., review editor], physical intimacy between men became a cause for concern. The "gift of the body" became tied solely to heterosexual rather than homosocial relationships. Bray and Rey cleverly pull together historiography on the royal court, architecture, homosexuality, and the family to substantiate their argument. Their essay would be strengthened by a comparison to physical intimacy between women and how and why female friendship did not alter in the seventeenth century.

Jeremy Gregory's essay explores the ties between masculinity and religiosity in the long eighteenth century. This topic is an important one. Scholars assume that women in the past were religious and so much work is done on women and religion, but male religiosity has been largely ignored in favor of examinations of men in the economic and political spheres. Gregory examines how the prescriptive religious literature aimed at men encouraged them to exercise forgiveness, moderation, and virtue. Simultaneously there were concerns over the effeminizing influence of religion on men, and an anxiety that religion bred meekness and passivity, two traits that were not encouraged in public men. While the author's focus on prescriptive literature is illuminating, an examination of letters, diaries and memoirs would have added much to his investigation of how eighteenth-century men balanced religion and action in the economic, social, and political spheres. In some ways this lack is supplied by Philip Carter's exploration of James Boswell's "manliness." Carter focuses on Boswell's youth and in particular the writer's concern with how to be a man. Gregory finds that Boswell's idea of manliness was defined not just in opposition to women but also in comparison to other men. This significant point – certain men are more manly than others – could have been developed more. Such a finding presumes various degrees or types of manliness, but the essays in this collection (despite the title) primarily assume a monolithic early modern masculinity.

In the section on "Violence" Robert Shoemaker explores how male violence declined between the years 1660-1740 as a way to resolve conflict. Violence was re-

placed by self-restraint, litigation, or public insult. With all the recent work by Laura Gowing, Tim Meldrum, and J.A. Sharpe on women's involvement in public insult or defamation, men have been left out of the picture. But Shoemaker reminds us that men (of all classes) also resorted to public insult, and that their slanders were, like women's, often of a sexual nature. The increase in male slander even became a source of concern in the eighteenth century, when commentators began to worry that male defamers were imitating women and thus becoming effeminate.

Elizabeth Foyster continues the discussion of male aggression by examining how early modern boys were trained up to be physically strong, mentally and physically tough, and to control their passions, especially their anger. Future patriarchs were taught that if they could not control themselves they would not be able to govern others. The paradox though was that anger could not be completely eradicated for it was what made men active and brave, so instead of being obliterated in boys, anger was channelled. At times Foyster seems to confuse the emotion of anger with the act of aggression, but her insights are intriguing.

The section on "Male Sexuality" differs from recent work that has focused on the libertine or the homosexual. Instead, David Turner's essay examines the 1676 case of the vicar Robert Foulkes who was accused of committing adultery with a singlewoman, and having murdered one of their two bastard children. Turner uses this case to illustrate how male sexual reputation was a topic of rumor and gossip and how at times it could arouse disapproval just as female sexual activity did. Turner says scholars have assumed rather than interrogated the sexual double standard. Turner's corrective is an important one, and anyone who has worked in church court records would agree that engaging in extra-marital sex was not necessarily acceptable for men. Nevertheless, this does not mean that men and women faced the same circumstances; the punishment and stigma undergone by "immoral" men was almost always less than that experienced by "immoral" women. Turner never acknowledges the uniqueness of his case study, nor does he explain why the middle-class clergyman Robert Foulkes was killed for infanticide, a crime for which singlewomen of the laboring classes were usually prosecuted in this period.

Karen Harvey's essay, like David Turner's, is also an important corrective to previous literature. While research on the history of the body has almost solely focused on females, Harvey looks at the construction of

male bodies in eighteenth-century erotica. She examines how the male genitals were used to symbolize manhood and how the male organs were depicted as irresistible to women. What Harvey does not explain is why this does not objectify men, as depictions of the female body are said to objectify women. Harvey also notes how male genitalia were linked to population issues; old male genitals were portrayed as unattractive because they are not generative. This essay is fun and provocative. While not fully persuasive, it contributes much to debates about sexuality and pro-natalism.

English Masculinities concludes with John Tosh's overview of masculinity studies in the period 1750-1850. While Tosh's essay is good, it fits oddly with the rest of the book's focus on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Also, since the essay lays out the current literature and debates on masculinity and because Tosh is the contributor most explicit about the effect of the rise of the middle class on masculinity, the essay would be more useful at the beginning of the volume, especially for the reader new to the subject.

I highly recommend *English Masculinities* as a good introduction to the field, but I do so with a few caveats. First, the focus is almost entirely on middle-class or genteel masculinity. One could argue that this is where the sources lead, but what is surprising is that the kind of records the middling sort have left us (letters, diaries, memoirs) are not used by most of the authors. Second, it is disappointing that the male life-cycle is not explored more. While Foyster does look at youth, there is no discussion of the masculinity of the bachelor or of the aged man. If, as Tosh says, masculinity was wedded to the practice of patriarchy, where does that leave the singleman? And third, this collection is less informed by gender history than is Foyster's monograph. Many of the essays would have been strengthened by a relational approach, or an attention to women as well as men; for masculinity, just like femininity, cannot be fully comprehended without a discussion of the other.

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