

Conclusion.

A book on the collaborative activity of writers in the late Victorian period that focuses on the homosocial nature of their collaborations has to take into account issues about what forms the nature of masculinities now, about the representation and social construction of manliness in the broadest sense, and about the need for the critic to imagine and shape new definitions of homoerotic expression, to produce an identity for masculinity despite the historical trappings of patriarchy, misogyny and homophobia. The male collaborative partnerships that these writers formed in the 1880s and 90s were actually breaking new ground in their definition of masculinities against the backcloth of a harsh, classical paternalism and patriarchy.

There was little attempt in the late-Victorian period to consider the views of men who wished to display a more tender and passionate attitude to their fellow artists, and indeed the "tendencies"¹ were discouraged and, because of the stereotyped roles men were expected to perform, they were not generally permitted to express themselves openly. There are, however, a few examples in the texts where men were able to throw their arms around each other and express their joy, fears or sorrow, as when Holly and Leo lay "panting together side by side."²

Masculinity in the period in which I am writing — the twenty first century, — is no longer regarded as normal, natural, universal and as "given" and I argue masculinity as an effect, and, indeed, a contradictory one. The effect of masculinity derives from economic happenstance and organisational structures, and it emphasises bodily feelings that define the female as 'other'.³ As I am writing at a time when the role of masculinities has changed, I have had to be careful not to impose a contemporary reading of many of the

male images in literary texts from this post-modernist standpoint. For example, one of these areas is the impact of second and third wave feminism on reforming entrenched aspects of masculinity that challenged male supremacy so effectively and produced the 'soft' male.⁴

In examining texts that involve homoerotic writing, the question that arises is whether one is being either prurient or seeing erotic writing where it does not exist. The best way of avoiding such allegations is to be diligent and to present only that which offers a prima facie case for what one is arguing. I concede that the discourse that I have examined might have been the simple expression of bawd in that best British tradition of humour, but I continue to maintain that the homoerotic content of much of the literature I examine arises from commercial interests often in work undertaken in collaboration with another writer.

There have been many examples of collaboration from cultures outside of the literary. For example, the romantic Norwegian painter Frederick Gude (1825 – 1903) collaborated with the genre painter, Adolf Tidemand in Germany on several oil paintings.⁵ The collaboration of two painters working together on one canvas is a spectacle that may even eclipse that of two writers working together on a literary text. The concern of collaboration between two artists from different countries had no bearing on this kind of peacetime collaboration when artists work in personal harmony with each other. But in wartime, despite being opponents in terms of their national enmities, they still work together harmoniously, although each notionally representing his own nation. James brings to the fore a number of concerns in the short story “Collaboration”, with which I dealt in this book, not only about the "impure" nature of collaboration but about whether collaboration between nationals whose country was at war would ever be possible. The question which begins this book still remains partly unanswered in that the reasons for

the Victorians' sense of disapprobation and dislike of collaborating in what purported to be a modern period are not completely substantiated.

The sense of a domesticated family life where fathers began to take on far more of the roles of parenting than before has been well charted,⁶ Men were drawn to domestic chores in what was an increasingly domesticated Victorian age, pointing to the need for adventure romances. William Cobbett is reported to have taken an interest in men nursing their children in infancy.⁷ Authors reacted against these restrictions and engaged in literary work together, alone. What is evident is that, once writers turned to collaboration — in terms of helping one another with writing — not just for commercial reasons, they took part in it with great alacrity and with panache. Indeed, collaboration as a theme in the textual material is common amongst writers working singly, also indicating that there was a late-Victorian interest in male collaboration and homosocial desire in what was certainly a restrictive and hypocritical environment.

In a Victorian age of changing perceptions of gender roles, men took part in collaboration and male bonding to produce masculine adventure stories in the rewritten form of the romance genre.⁸ That they did so stemmed from the suppressions and hypocrisy of the period which caused them to feel a need for robust, manful literature. Lang, it is fair to say, perceived the domestic as an unnatural role for men, and that which he postulates in the romance, apart from the recording of a cultural dawn,⁹ is the unimprisoning through epic of the imaginations and possibilities of men.

Certain of the writers of the period contributed to a homoerotic genre which was a reshaping of an established pattern which was not new but was, rather, an old form, which Kipling and others varied to suit their purposes by a process of re-invention. They took part collaboratively in a 'heated' form of writing predicated upon notions of romance derived largely from Scott. In this cultural ideal "King Romance" could be rejuvenated in

a form of fiction written by co-authors allowing for a world peopled by courageous men and pliant women.

Collaboration was a fascinating endeavour because it not only meant that men combined together to help each other work on a literary project, but that many of the texts reflected the joint-personalities of the authors. It may also have offered a 'third force' resulting from their joint efforts; and even more, if the doubled nature of the self is taken into account. It also reflected the dual nature of existence, that human beings are complex creatures with changing moods and attitudes amongst which is taking part in masculine adventures.

What is specific about this notion of the co-author is that two men taking part in writing together formed what might be termed an adventure in which they could engage. It is, of course, writing in which the authors participated rather than, say, discussion, which suggests in itself some kind of special activity. It is as if both were enacting an adventure, and in an ideal sense, it was a lofty pursuit. The activity of writing is an innocent and elevated sort of energy that masks tendencies which the authors possessed but were unable or unwilling to exhibit, as a result of the restrictions and the enforcement of cultural symbols that were occurring in society.

Real time collaboration had niceties of legal, political and economic significance for those who partook in it, also. The collaborations reflected the financial, moral, sexual, and philosophical concerns of their authors. There existed real difficulties, and quite emotionally charged disputes occurred between writers co-producing texts. It was sometimes the case that their collaboration resulted in a legal battle over the contractual arrangements for the projected work on which writers were to engage together.¹⁰

As Ford put it in *Remembrance of Things Past*, collaboration was a “monstrous” thing of fits and starts and not, as may be supposed, an enterprise that was undertaken with a serious timetable adhered to at all costs:

It is not to be supposed that we spent the whole of our times upon
This enterprise, we each at intervals carried on work of our own.
Then we would drop it, have another month’s try at “*Romance*.”
Then drop it again... Or sometimes one of us would write his own
work in the morning; the other would write away at “*Romance*” ,
in the evenings and till far into the night we would join up. We
pursued this monstrous undertaking all over the shores of the
British Channel...”¹¹

It was the result of the loneliness and difficulty of producing work singly without help that often led to bonding that produced the actual collaboration; indeed it may well have been the source of the adventure which they undertook.

But, of course, it was the commercial element— two popular writers attracting a ready public — that really made the impetus to collaborate. Participation together in the writing of adventure both contributed to and shaped, firstly, identity choice, secondly, the show of identity and, thirdly, the glossing put upon identity. It is thought by some sociologists and philosophers (e. g. Bourdieu)¹² that, over time, persons who participate in kinds of similar activities, taking consistently the same functions in them, develop a disposition toward more actions of the same kind. These activities give rise to the tendency for persons who develop dispositions of one kind in certain aspects of human activity to develop culturally related dispositions in another kind of activity. Writers, who once dealt in collaboration in their texts while writing alone, tended to develop a propensity for joint-work and to engage in bonding resulting in collaborative activity in authorship as, say, Conrad developed from a tendency to single-authored work to a disposition to bond and collaborate with Ford. By paying attention to narratives whose

structures are predicated upon varieties of collaboration, the themes upon which single writers worked gave evidence of bondings and “idols” intent on an “idea”, related by a first, and second narrator, Marlow, who collaborate together and invite the assistance of the professional men on board the ‘Nellie’ to unravel the tale that they have to tell.

The bondings were part of the fragmentation, complexity and introspection associated with modernism.¹³ The bonding of Haggard with both Lang and Kipling, and that between Stevenson and Henley, and that of Stevenson with his stepson, Osbourne, was part of a collaborative process based on the passions which were formed between these artists largely as a result of the repressions and suppressions which characterised the period. These professional and literary men experienced a crisis of self-doubt of great proportions and their work reflected a desire to escape from the repressive and hypocritical times in which they lived, where masculinities were being forged by artists who were attempting to find new ways of expressing their relations between each other and to develop new forms of expressions for masculinities that would take account of the feelings which each held for the other.

These feelings were exemplified by the ring that Lang presented to Haggard as a token of their literary togetherness, even though he was in a heterosexual relationship with Blanche Leonora Alleyne, his wife and co-editor. Often these passions involved jealousies that were expressed through ‘objections’ of many kinds in letters, reviews, articles and even by means of litigation. It is not the case that all collaborations were smooth and without difficulty. Yet collaborations were not always announced as such on the title pages of the books; and collaborators, once taking on a collaboration did not necessarily continue to collaborate, for Haggard produced many titles alone after his collaboration with Lang. Some suggested collaborations, for instance that between Henley, Stevenson and Beerbohm Tree on *Macaire*, were never acknowledged as such because Tree declined the offer of being given attribution.¹⁴

Whether collaboration is an intensification of patriarchal models or acts as a resistance to them remains an issue on which there is some uncertainty. Are the collaborations on adventure stories an expression of the homosexual aesthetic? Or, are they, in their masculine, supremacist ethos, in complicity with the homophobic interdictions of the imperialist age? The answer is, in some senses both because collaborative activity was not deliberately organised for the purpose of supporting patriarchy, but its evolution and ethic can be seen to have been both critical and supportive of it. The adventure genre is not clearly pro or anti imperialism, it vacillates between the two positions. Certainly, the adventure novel profited commercially from the imperial scene, yet whilst Haggard is supportive of the imperial endeavour, Conrad destabilises it. In the desire for boys' literature and in the intense make-believe of the boy ethos, there occurs a rejection of the forces of patriarchy and paternalism because it was an attempt to escape from these very same forces. They were throwing over norms in the society that had become obsolete. It was caused partly by changes in the nature of the mass reading public, and the emergence of new media to which I pointed. Romance offered men a refuge from an England that they thought had become too febrile, domesticated and effete.

The presence of boys, and the absence of women, reflect a desire to reduce the significance of the participation of adults in such adventure stories. The fact that they centred their emotions on boys, and on empire, is a feature of the homosocial fiction of quest and adventure, in a genre engaged in the rhetoric of chauvinism, paternalism and supremacism containing romantic assertions of chivalry and masculinity. The 'boy' ethos is stressed because writers like Stevenson would address another writer, in this case Henley, in emphatically masculine terms such as "Dear Lad" and "My boy". Stevenson in one instance referring quite unabashedly to Henley as "Dear child, O golden voice, enchanting warbler of the ardent tropic, angel friend",¹⁵ and on another as "My dear excellent, admired, volcanic angel of a lad..."¹⁶ The intensive mediation between James

and Stevenson, larded with its gorgeous phrases like “the male Cleopatra or buccaneering Pompadour of the Deep – the wandering Wanton of the Pacific.”¹⁷ is also an example of this tendency to homoerotic writing. At the same time, the writers took part in male pairings to produce a fiction that, reflecting the ethos in which it was written, engages in suppressed homosexuality and, as a result of its provenance in collaboration, treats with situations in which it is evident that male bonding is an integral part of the textual material.

It is clear that there were fixed images of patriarchy and paternalism resident in the minds of people in the late Victorian period which were being called into question. Michael Mason has recently pointed out that, from our perspective, there is a body of opinion¹⁸ which would view with hostility the sexual moralism of the Victorians, because of their suppression of freedom and expression. Nevertheless, important changes have taken place in attitudes towards sexual freedom with the passing of time since the end of the period in question, no more so than the changes in perceptions about gender roles and behaviour. The fact of the matter is that stereotyped images of patriarchy have altered but some look back on the Victorian period with an ironic, and perhaps even wistful, eye. Indeed, certain politicians have rallied to Victorian values as a reference point for the improvement of what they perceived as the ills in the society of recent times.¹⁹

The romance and quest stories were shocking to Victorian sensibilities because of the overt expressions of sexuality which they contain, and the scenes of symbolic sexual vibrancy of the adventure stories in which the important relationships are between men. But it was not so much a matter of an awareness of the commercial opportunities for exotic writing, these adventure stories were written, as we have seen, as a direct result of the critical theories of men like Lang²⁰ and Stevenson,²¹ and to some extent, Henry

James,²² who wrote critiques of the romance genre in an attempt to define and promote it.

In my reading of these novels I see Africa in many ways as a locale for sexual penetration where imperial and sexual uncertainties and suppressions are made apparent. The search for Africa in which the characters take part often becomes a self-reflexive study of what it is to be English, and Africa proves to be, more often than not, a testing ground for masculine potency. The interior of Africa is a shadowy sphere of darkness where the imperialist's manhood can be explored in the quest for treasure in discourse which sets up an aesthetic/erotics in which homosociality figures as a prominent yet denied problematic.

The clubs where these tales of adventure were written as a result of bonding were a playground where the confident ascendancy of the aristocracy in an all-male environment could hold sway. In the Savile and the Reform, the Athenaeum and the Traveller's as well as White's and the Piccadilly Club, the writers frequented a place in which they could live out a Victorian fantasy of masculinity, and where they could extol their literary achievements in a patriarchal atmosphere, where women were considered as less important, less able and perhaps even superfluous.

The bondings between writers were formed largely at the gentlemen's club, coffee houses, tea rooms and meeting places in the drawing rooms of the fashionable people of the period. The study gives an insight into the secret circles provided by membership of an elite group of writers who wrote and travelled together, and then set up a clubland at the heart of British patriarchy in which to operate. We should bear in mind, however, that the writers concerned were part of an aristocracy which had been founded on, and was shored up by, a system of patriarchy and primogeniture that involved a process of the passing on of wealth to the first born who, of course, under English property law had to be male. Haggard reminisces about his life in "On Going Back" in *Longman's Magazine*,

and he realises that his literary career led in later life to emotions of disappointment and dejection about the experiences which he had accumulated. He refers to the fact that he felt that when young his experiences had been sharper and more alive than when he was old, concluding:

How keenly one felt in those days, much more keenly than now! Between then and now stretches a long period of twenty years - years of struggling, active life, of strenuous endeavour, crowned now with failure and now with triumph, of rough adventure, of voyaging by sea and land. Twenty years of experience also of that inner life of a kind that keeps pace with and even outruns the physical life.²³

The 'rough adventure' to which he refers formed the basis for a genre that worked in commercial forms to produce emotional satisfaction, success and financial rewards for its authors. There were pitfalls and failures along the way, however, and no more space for the dual collaborators than for the single author.

A further point was that writing has always been partly collaborative since medieval days. There appeared much speculation in the last ten or more years about the nature of the relationships of these writers. There was evidence to be found of their male collaborations as evinced in tales (James's 'Collaboration' for example), collaborated stories, and adventure novels and increasingly in strategies of authorship that produced the collaborative themes on which single writers worked. The answer lay in the increasing public interest in the texts of the period, arising from greater freedoms and more liberal educational, social and political systems, and in their provenance in commercialism and collaborative methods of production.

The handwriting in the draft manuscripts of the texts revealed some of the characteristics of the writers that were studied. Lang's spidery handwriting and Haggard's methodical copperplate hand revealed something of the character of the

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