THE POLITICS OF MASCULINITY AND/AS EMOTION: WALT WHITMAN'S CELEBRATION OF MALE INTIMACY IN THE FIRST PERSON

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Abstract

This article sets out to demonstrate how the exclusive equation of emotions with femininity is a cultural and historical construction. It analyzes the close, though often veiled, relationship between masculinity and sentiment in American culture and history, especially with a view to demonstrating the political potential of men's emotions to transform the existing social order. The argument is that friendships and emotional attachments between men could contribute not only to enriching men's emotional lives but also, and above all, to erasing sexism, racism, and homophobia from our societies. It is argued that men's friendships with other men might play a fundamental role in promoting greater social equality, as a number of Walt Whitman's poems, all of them written in the first person, will help illustrate.

Key words: Masculinity, emotions, male intimacy, politics, Walt Whitman.

Resumen

Este artículo pretende demostrar cómo la asociación exclusiva de las emociones con la feminidad es una construcción cultural e histórica. El trabajo analiza la estrecha, aunque a menudo velada, relación entre la masculinidad y los sentimientos en la cultura e historia estadounidenses, con el fin de ilustrar el potencial político de las emociones masculinas para transformar el orden social imperante. Argumentamos que las amistades y vínculos emocionales entre varones podrían contribuir no solo a enriquecer las vidas emocionales de los propios varones sino también, y sobre todo, a diluir el sexismo, el racismo y la homofobia de nuestras sociedades. Se arguye que las amistades de los varones con otros hombres podrían jugar un papel clave a la hora de promover una mayor igualdad social, como ilustran varios poemas de Walt Whitman, todos ellos escritos usando la primera persona.

Palabras clave: masculinidad, emociones, lazos emocionales entre varones, política, Walt Whitman.

THE FEMINIZATION OF SENTIMENT
IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Despite the pervasive separation between masculinity and emotion in contemporary (Euro-American) culture, emotion has not always been considered feminine, as can be seen, for example, from the rise of male sentimentality in France and England in the 17th and 18th centuries. The crudeness of the men of Henri IV's court and the men of the Fronde (1648-1653), both of whom diminished women and feminine values, was soon contested by the French *précieuses*, ladies "refined" in sentiment and language. French preciosity reached its height between 1650 and 1660 and became the first expression of feminism in both France and England. The *précieuse* was an emancipated woman who advocated feminist values. She demanded the right to education and attacked marriage as the very cause of the institution of patriarchy. Challenging the authority of both father and husband, the "précieuses" rejected not only marriage but also maternity. They defended trial marriage and the severance of such marriage after the birth of an heir, who would be looked after by the father. Challenging the patriarchal bonds between men and women, who married each other without love, the "précieuses" saw love as, first and foremost, the love of a man for a woman, rather than the opposite. As Elisabeth Badinter has argued, "by demanding of a man in love a limitless submission which bordered on masochism, they reversed the dominant model of masculinity, that of the brutal and demanding man, or the vulgar husband who believed everything was permitted to him" (13). Thus, the "précieuses" seemed to reverse traditional gender norms. A few men, the "précieux," accepted the new rules. Although their number was small, their influence was remarkable. They adopted a feminine and refined style—long wigs, extravagant feathers, band collars, chin tufts, perfume, rouge—which was copied by other (lower-class) men. Men who wanted to be distinguished now made it a rule to appear civilized, courteous, and delicate. Traditionally feminine values began to progress in the seventeenth century to the point of appearing dominant in the following century.

The debate over masculine identity was even more explicit in England than in France. In addition to their freedom, English feminists demanded sexual equality, that is, the right to sexual pleasure and the right not to be abandoned when they became pregnant. England seemed to experience a significant crisis of masculinity between 1688 and 1714 (the period of the English Restoration), which entailed questioning the roles of men and women in marriage, the family, and sexuality. English feminists not only asked for the equality of desires and rights, but they also wanted men to be gentler, more feminine. Thus, the Enlightenment, in both England and France, brought about the "feminization" of social norms and masculinity.[1] The

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[1] It is true, however, that the "précieux" was differently received in England and in France. The image of the "feminized" man who adopted feminine behaviors aroused in England a fear of homosexuality that we do not see in France among those who despised the "précieux." The "new

Enlightenment, as Badinter (12-13) elaborates, represents a first rupture in the history of virility, and was the most feminist period of European history before the present day. On the one hand, manly values were being challenged, or at least not attracting much attention. War no longer had the importance and the status it once had and hunting had become an amusement. Young noblemen spent more time in salons or in ladies' boudoirs than training for war. On the other hand, feminine values were becoming central to the world of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. As Badinter insists, "delicacy of speech and attitudes were gaining more importance than the traditional characteristics of virility...in the dominant classes, unisexism was winning out over the oppositional dualism that usually characterized the patriarchy" (12-13).[2]

The feminization of French and English culture would, in turn, give rise to the 18th-century sentimental movement in Europe. As conventional notions of masculinity and virility were being challenged, men began to adopt traditional feminine values, such as delicacy of speech, good manners, gentle behaviors—and emotional expressivity. This contributed, at least in part, to the emergence of the European sentimental movement, which stressed the importance of the individual's emotional state, encouraging men to explore and express their inner feelings. The movement, as Brian Vickers (ix) has noted, postulated, and therefore encouraged, an ideal sensitivity to—and spontaneous display of— virtuous feelings, particularly those of pity, sympathy, and benevolence of the open heart as opposed to the prudent, rational mind. A number of philosophers and thinkers highlighted the relevance of men's sensations and feelings, which they saw as inseparable from true manly virtue. For example, Adam Smith emphasized the close relationship between man's morality and his emotional life. Actually, he contends that emotions are the primary source of a man's fellow-feeling for the misery of others, and hence of moral virtue itself (9).[3]

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man" of the English Restoration is portrayed as a pervert, as vain, petty, and bewitching as a woman. Women were pitied for having been abandoned by men and manly refinement was attacked. The English saw men's feminization as a direct effect of French fashion on English customs. "Certain pamphlets," as Badinter concludes, "very soon saw a connection between the feminization of masculinity and betrayal, between traditional masculinity and patriotism" (12).

[2] However, the 1789 French Revolution put an end to this development. When women publicly demanded the right to vote, the Convention refused them this. The deputies, who had not known the delights of the "Ancien Régime," reaffirmed the separation of spheres and sexual dualism. Women were asked not to mingle with men and their business. As Badinter elaborates, "reinforced by the Napoleonic Code and ratified by the ideology of the 19th century, oppositional dualism" became the hegemonic ideology for a long time to come (13).

[3] Not even the strongest, most masculine man seems to be totally bereft of emotional empathy. In Adam Smith's words, "men of the most robust make, observe that in looking upon sore eyes they often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason; that organ being in the strongest man more delicate, than any other part of the body is in the weakest" (10). Defining emotions as a central component of masculinity, Smith insists that men regard emotional empathy as "the greatest applause," being often anxious to communicate to their friends both their "disagreeable" and "agreeable" passions. As Smith himself concludes, men "derive still more satisfaction from their sympathy with the former than from that with the latter, and...are still more shocked by the want of it" (15).

Influenced by these philosophical ideas, 18th-century literature embraced as well the main tenets of the sentimental movement. While it is far beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed account of the form and content of the 18th-century sentimental novel (cfr. Tompkins; Douglas; Vickers (xi); and Brown), it may be relevant to note here that, typically, such genre focuses on a "man of feeling," an intrinsically benevolent and sympathetic protagonist who provides readers with the "sweet emotion of pity" (Vickers xi, xiv). Even though the 18th-century sentimental novel counts some heroines, perhaps most famously Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, many of the major sentimental writers of the time relied on men as heroes and protagonists for their works.[4] That is, for example, the case of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), which is replete with sentimental male characters. In chapter XIV, for example, Harley, the protagonist of the novel, is deeply moved by the story of the poor mad woman, giving to it the "tribute of some tears" (Mackenzie 151). Though Harley, the "man of feeling," is the source of most tears, all the sympathetic (male) characters in the novel, as Vickers (xxii) reminds us, are granted them. For example, the narrator yields "one cordial drop" to the memory of a good friend; the servant weeps at the parting; the father of the abandoned maid can only "burst into tears;" and an Old Edwards, half way through his sad story, "paused a moment to take breath. He eyed Harley's face; it was bathed in tears: the story was grown familiar to himself; he dropped one tear and no more" (Mackenzie 136, 138, 154).

While the 18th-century sentimental novel recurrently linked masculinity to emotion, the 19th century brought about a progressive feminization of sentiment. Most scholars seem to agree that, by the middle of the 19th century, American sentimentality was seen as exclusively feminine. Indeed, work on sentimentality, as Chapman and Hendler (15-16) have rightly pointed out, seems divided both geographically and chronologically into studies of 18th-century English "sensibility," which recognize the centrality of the "man of feeling" and the relevance of male writers and philosophers to the cult of sensibility, and studies of 19th-century American sentimentality, which tend to gender sentiment as female.[5] Thus, influential critical texts such as R.W.B. Lewis' *The American Adam* (1955) or Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), to name but a few, see both 19th- and 20th-century American literature as centrally engaged with hard-boiled male characters

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[4] Though such a recurrent association of masculinity with emotion might come as a surprise to contemporary readers, one should never lose sight of the fact that the philosophical bases of the sentimental movement, which would in turn inspire the sentimental novel, were founded by (male) philosophers such as David Hume or Adam Smith, whose works concern themselves—on occasions implicitly, and often explicitly—with *men's* emotions. Written at a time when women were still regarded as inferior beings, these philosophical works paid little attention to women's specific emotions and needs, which were generally considered unworthy of discussion.

[5] One of the few critics who has shown the links between British sensibility and American sentimentality is Philip Fisher, although few scholars, as Chapman and Hendler (15-16) note, seem to have taken up his comparison between the affective patterns of Richardson, Sterne, and Rousseau's texts and that of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

and protagonists. For instance, Lewis argues that as America became independent by breaking its historic bonds with Mother England, a new American hero was born who embodied the specifically American ideological values of independence, autonomy, individualism, and self-sufficiency. In Lewis's view, the Adamic theme recurs in the fiction of classic American writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, or Henry James, and continues in the works of Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Ellison, J.D. Salinger, and Saul Bellow, among others. Dissociating himself from his historic past, this new personality, the hero of the new adventure, has been defined as a stoic, individualistic, self-sufficient (and unemotional) male character. In Lewis's words, the American hero is

> an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources…the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall. (5)[6]

Influenced by these critical opinions, most contemporary scholars seem to keep separating American masculinity from the world of emotions. While the links between women and American sentimentality have been analyzed at length and in depth (Tompkins; Douglas), the position of the sentimental man thus remains largely unexplored. Few scholars seem to have taken up the project of questioning the traditional association of reason and the mind with masculinity, and emotions and the body with women and femininity. Therefore, the origins of American sentimentality in the "man of feeling," as well as his influence on 19th- and 20th-century American culture and literature, have been all but lost (Chapman and Hendler 7).[7]

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[6] Unlike Lewis, Fiedler establishes some connection between masculinity and emotions in American culture. For example, Fiedler acknowledges Samuel Richardson as a paradigm of the sentimental novelist and admits the influence of the sentimental tradition on Cooper, as well as Melville and Hawthorne. However, he points out that the homoerotic male bond underlying most classic American literature is a defense against the feminization and sentimentality of American culture. Moreover, he agrees with Lewis that American literature is centrally concerned with representing a lonely, individualistic hero who seeks independent masculinity on the frontier, thus evading familial responsibilities and emotional attachments. Therefore, both Fiedler and Lewis end up establishing a radical separation between American manhood and the "feminine" sphere of emotions (Chapman and Hendler 2-8).

[7] Critics tend to forget that much of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), for example, focuses on the tragic relationship between a single mother and her daughter, and that such an overt representation of feminine emotions, particularly motherhood, has traditionally been regarded as a central feature of sentimentalism (Chapman and Hendler 7).

BOYS DON'T CRY? MEN'S EMOTIONS
AND/VS. POLITICS

While the feminization of sentiment keeps exerting a powerful influence on contemporary American culture and letters, the traditional view of masculinity as cold, rational, and unemotional has not gone completely unchallenged. For example, Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler have set out to revise and complicate any understanding of sentimentality that occludes the meaning of masculine affect, showing, for example, how men have often participated in what has been described as the sentimental, domestic sphere. By recognizing and analyzing the relevance of masculine sentimentality in American cultural history, the collection questions any simplistic gendering of sentiment as feminine, showing how the division between the public/unemotional/masculine and the private/emotional/feminine has long been problematized by contested discourses of race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality.[8] As Chapman and Hendler themselves put it:

> Rather than see American "men of feeling" as oxymorons—exceptions to the hard and fast gender rules of sentimental culture—we consider them exemplary of the competing definitions of masculinity available in the... United States. (8-9)

Sentimental Men is thus focused on the realization that masculinity and emotions are mutually constitutive discursive practices, which changes our understanding of both, as well as of concepts such as domesticity, the public sphere, and canonicity. Indeed, the volume also re-reads the literary canon by showing how canonical male writers such as Emerson, Melville, or Norris can be read as "sentimental men."[9] The contributors show how many of the cultural conventions associated with female sentimentality recur as well in the male cult of sentiment: the dying child; the destruction of families by death, slavery, poverty; and the unnecessary suffering of marginalized people. So, this study seems to supplement the feminist work done on sentimentality by rethinking men as both producers and consumers of sentimental culture, rather than merely exemplars of an unemotional code of masculinity (Chapman and Hendler 9).[10]

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[8] In this sense, the book analyzes the masculine emotional lives of African-Americans and Native Americans, working-class men and downwardly mobile men, businessmen and poets, gay men and family men from the past and the present. In so doing, it traces historical changes and continuities in the topic at hand.

[9] Herman Melville, for example, wrote *Pierre* (1852), an (over)sentimental novel.

[10] According to Shamir and Travis, feminist and gender studies have tended to divide cultural products into two traditions along the line of emotional expressivity: a feminine mode marked by effusion of sentiment and its representational conventions, and a masculine code, where affect is described negatively, "in terms of disavowal and repression or—in such instances where men 'betray' emotions—in terms of parody or 'feminization'" (2). Challenging most of these (mis)conceptions of masculinity as unemotional, however, these scholars also attempt to demonstrate how the division of sentiment along gender lines—or what Cathy Davidson has defined as the "affective geography of

However, the aim of this collection is not simply to demonstrate how "big boys do cry," but also analyze the political significance of masculine sentimentality. In so doing, the book extends and expands on the work done by feminist scholars on the politics of sentiment by examining the parallels, as well as the differences, between male and female sentimental discourses (Chapman and Hendler 8). In this sense, the book explores, for example, whether a privileged man can identify with an object of suffering in the same way that white women are said to have identified with racial Others, and whether that identification has the same political force—and limitations—as white women's politics of emotional empathy.

While it seems clear, then, that masculinity and emotions need not be intrinsically opposed, a much more controversial issue remains the political significance, if any, of emotions, in general,[11] and of men's emotions, in particular, which has actually become the subject of a much heated debate. While some insist that emotions can promote a radical social change in the traditional understanding of masculinity, others are deeply suspicious of their capacity to change men's lives and gender relations in any significant ways. In this latter respect, much contemporary scholarship (Segal 284-285; Shamir and Travis 5-7; Robinson 1-15) has warned against the widespread belief that every oppositional position is necessarily a liberating one, that every "liberation" of masculine emotion would produce the desired political effect. Indeed, since the 1970s, a U.S. movement for "male liberation," indirectly inspired by feminism, has gained momentum among white, heterosexual, middle-class men. Influenced by texts such as Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man* or Herb Goldberg's *The Hazards of Being Male*, this movement represents men as victims, not of women or feminism, but of their power, and of patriarchy itself. Central to this self-proclaimed male victimization is the idea that men are denied emotional

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gender" (444)— proves to be an oversimplification. In this sense, the book analyzes the alignment of masculinity with emotion in numerous literary narratives, offering re-readings of canonical texts by Crevecoeur, Thoreau, Lowell, and Du Bois. In the editors' words, the work attempts to contribute to the "emotional history of American masculinity" (3), exploring "what happens when boys, indeed, do cry" (Shamir and Travis 19).

[11] Thus, for instance, Ann Douglas has called into question the political use of emotions, showing how the 19th-century feminine influence of sentimental culture and literature, embodied by both woman and the minister, helped to perpetuate several forms of male hegemony it supposedly criticized. Other scholars, however, have argued how sentimental works offer a "devastating" critique of American society (Tompkins 124). In Tompkins's view, the work of the sentimental writer becomes a political tool that both represents and attempts to influence the social values of its time. Focusing on the famous episode of the death of little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which is often cited as the epitome of Victorian sentimentalism, Tompkins challenges the widespread view that little Eva's death, like every other sentimental tale, is full of emotion but has no social or political effects. Likewise, Raymond Williams' influential concept of "structures" of feeling has shown how emotion is an inter-subjective (and thus politicized) feeling that transcends individuals. Interestingly, Williams defines feeling not "against" thought but "as" thought, not as "preceding" the social but "as" social, showing how the moment-by-moment consequences of interdependence are registered by emotion. For him, social and political change is "changes in structures of feeling" (Williams 128-35).

expressiveness. Men are, therefore, encouraged to release their painfully blocked emotions. However, the therapeutic value of male release, as Sally Robinson (1-15) indicates, aims at promoting individual growth, and is not usually translated into the social and the political spheres. In other words, the "unblocking" of tears and men's emotions tends to result in the psychological-therapeutic "standing in for" political change. Thus, the release of emotions leaves an empty and ultimately de-politicized "liberated man," who finally blocks the pursuit of social equality between men and women (Robinson 15).[12] Obsessed with their intra-psychic emotional lives, men can thus avoid hearing women's needs and pressing demands for greater social equality.

THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL
OF MALE FRIENDSHIP AND INTIMACY:
THE EXAMPLE OF WALT WHITMAN

While critics of sentimentality like Robinson thus continue to take it to task for not fulfilling its social and political responsibility, I will be arguing that men's emotions, particularly friendships and emotional attachments between men, could contribute not only to enriching men's emotional lives but also, and above all, to promoting equality and social change. Admittedly, the political effects of men's friendships, like those of men's emotions in general, have been recurrently contested. It has been argued, for example, that men's friendships often result in comradely groups—sports clubs, trade unions, scientific collaboration, expeditions, etc.— which end up excluding women. Even (pro-feminist) men's groups have oftentimes been accused of excluding and/or ignoring women, thereby promoting more male bonding and sexism. As feminist writer Barbara Ehrenreich argued, "men in men's groups are men in bad company" (qtd. Segal 281).[13] Predominantly heterosexual, anti-sexist men's groups have also been confronted at their national Men Against sexism conferences by gay men accusing them of heterosexism and of doing little

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[12] Although in the United States "male liberation" remains a powerful social movement, the emotional "soft" male has proved a failure in many countries. Several Nordic feminists, such as Merete Gerlach-Nielsen, have already voiced their deep dissatisfaction with what they see as a passive and fragmented male. As Badinter explains, "even the most responsive to gentleness on the part of men want nothing more to do with these men, who are ersatz traditional women" (152).

[13] Formed mostly by heterosexual men who were involved in relationships with feminists, the first men's groups were founded in England and America in the 1970s with a view to stimulating men's own reflections on the construction, and possible de-construction, of traditional masculinity. These groups have since contributed to making men self-aware of the detrimental repercussions of patriarchal masculinity on their own lives. Men in men's groups often talk about their own sense of oppression as men, since masculinity mandates, for example, the repression of their emotional inner selves, thus separating them from women, children, and each other. Men's groups have proved particularly helpful, therefore, in encouraging men to be more open to, and expressive about, their emotions. As Lynne Segal elaborates, "above all they celebrate...being more in touch with and supportive of each other" (283).

to undermine gay oppression. Above all, men's groups have been criticized for remaining too personal and local, and for neglecting the public and political side of masculinity. Since masculinity includes both a psychological/internal and social/external component, encouraging men to change their personal life and to be more expressive about their emotions, as most men's groups do, might ultimately prove insufficient, or even irrelevant, to undermine patriarchal masculinity and gender relations at a larger structural level. "The problem for anti-sexist men," as Segal insists, is "the worry as to whether changing themselves" can "actually help destroy male dominance more generally" (284-285).[14]

Even if, as it seems, masculinity scholarship has traditionally identified sexism, homophobia, and de-politicization as three major risks of men's groups and relations, the rest of this article will try to illustrate, however, not only that men's friendships with other men need not be sexist or homophobic, but also that such friendships could actually help undermine homophobia and sexism—as well as other racist and classist distinctions—in our societies. In what follows I will be arguing, therefore, that men's friendships with other men are not purely personal and "apolitical," but that they might play a key role, as will be shown, in the political struggle for gender, sexual, and social equality, as Walt Whitman's poetry (and poetics) will help illustrate. As has been noted above, I will be using Whitman's poems not only to exemplify the transformative potential of male friendship, but also of (male) poetic (self-)expression and (self-)representation more generally. If, as Wordsworth defined it, poetry is nothing but "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," then poems may clearly be seen as vehicles for emotional expressivity -and, therefore, for political practice. Moreover, Whitman's poems, especially from the section "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass*, become particularly suitable to the general aim and scope of this volume on masculinities "in the first person," for much of the emotional strength of these poems derives, as we shall see, from an all-powerful first-person narration.

It is already common knowledge that most of Walt Whitman's poetry is centrally concerned with celebrating male friendship and homoeroticism. However, less has been written about his view of male intimacy as the basis for a renewed American democracy, even though such a conception is, paradoxically enough, at the root of his poetics. Whitman's poetic vision is nowhere better expressed than in *Democratic Vistas*, wherein he distinguishes between a spiritualized bonding between men, which he calls "adhesiveness," and a more purely physical attraction

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[14] Clearly, Lynne Segal sets emotions and politics in an irreducible binary opposition, which Shamir and Travis have identified as one of the major fallacies of much scholarship on the politics of masculinity and emotions (6-7). This fallacy is described by Catharine Lutz as the "essentializing" approach to emotion, that is, the assumption that emotions are internal psychic or psychobiological energies, radically separated from society and language. Likewise, Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog have analyzed some of the main problems of this approach, showing how seemingly "internal" emotions are, in fact, constructed and naturalized by the mechanisms of power that seem to be "external" or alien to them.

between men and women, which he defines as "amativeness."[15] Interestingly enough, Whitman contends that "adhesiveness," which he sees as exclusively male, has the potential to transform America into a more egalitarian and progressive society. His vision becomes nowhere clearer than in *Leaves of Grass*, in general, and "Song of Myself," in particular. For example, in "This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful," Whitman, sitting alone and thinking, looks forward to meeting and knowing men from other cultures and nationalities, who might become his friends and lovers. In Whitman's poetry, friendships between men thus seem to cross and undermine traditional sexual, racial, and national boundaries. As he himself explains, "if I could know those men I should become attached/ to them as I do to men in my own lands,/ O I know we should be brethren and lovers,/ I know I should be happy with them" (Whitman 281). Trying to establish "the institution of the dear love of comrades," the poet portrays friendship between men as a means of undermining cultural and social distinctions and, therefore, as a form of promoting social equality. Thus, in "A Leaf for Hand in Hand," Whitman envisions a brotherhood of men from different ages, regions, and social classes. Once again, then, he represents male friendship as having the potential to bring about greater social equality. In his words, "You natural persons old and young!/You on the Mississippi and on all the branches and bayous of the/Mississippi!/ You friendly boatmen and mechanics! You roughs!/ You twain! and all processions moving along the streets!/ I wish to infuse myself among you till I see it common for you to walk/hand in hand" (Whitman 283-284). Dreaming, as another of his poems says, about a "new city of Friends," which would remain "invincible to the attacks of the whole/of the rest of the earth" (Whitman 284), Whitman saw as the main purpose of the United States to found "a superb friendship," which, in his view, has always been "waiting, latent in all men" (285). The institution of a brotherhood of men, which Walt Whitman defined as the very foundation for a more egalitarian society, seems to become the central concern of most of his poems. "For You Democracy," one of his best-known songs, summarizes the poet's vision very clearly, celebrating, once again, "the manly love of comrades" as a unifying force, which Whitman identifies as the basis for a more democratic America:

> Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
> I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
> I will make divine magnetic lands,
>   With the love of comrades,
>   With the life-long love of comrades.

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[15] As Michael Lynch has explained, Whitman seems to anticipate the modern distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality by setting the terms in gendered opposition. For Whitman, amativeness refers only to sensual, procreative, opposite-sex attraction, while adhesiveness only to same-sex affect and attraction.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of
     America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the Prairies,

I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
     By the love of comrades,
     By the manly love of comrades,

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!
For you, for you I am trilling these songs. (Whitman 272)

Whitman's progressive politics remain inseparable, then, from his view of male intimacy as the basis for a more egalitarian society. Interestingly enough, such a vision is usually expressed or mediated, as can be seen in the above poems, though an all-powerful first-person narrator, who will eventually reveal himself as "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs." While Whitman's poetry may be—and has been—read as highly autobiographical, this vagueness of authorship also allows him to embody the idea of the poet as everyman, an idea reinforced by the obviously inclusive narrator of the verses. Ultimately, then, Whitman's reliance on the poetic I allows him to increase his emotional connection and proximity to the readers and, therefore, both the poetic and the political force of his poems, which remain one of the strongest celebrations of American democracy.

CONCLUSION

From what has been argued here, it would appear, then, that love and friend-ship between men might eventually contribute, as Walt Whitman already envisioned one century ago, to diminishing homophobia, as well as other racist and classist distinctions, in our society. Insisting further, I would like to suggest that Whitman's democratic vision of "adhesiveness" might even contribute to undermining sexism, especially if one coincides with Sedgwick that "homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic and perhaps transhistorically so" (20). Indeed, homophobia is misogynistic not only because it is oppressive of the so-called "feminine" in men, but also because it is oppressive of women. Besides repressing men's "feminine" side, homophobia does indeed seem to have worked to diminish women themselves. As is known, homosexual men have often been stereotyped as "feminine" or "effete" by heterosexual men. Of course, the main aim of this feminization process has been to annihilate homosexuals although, indirectly, it has been demeaning of women as well. In order to assert their superior masculinity, heterosexual men have recur-rently tried to diminish homosexual men by associating them with femininity as a mark of inferiority. Ultimately, then, this has reinforced the connections between homophobia and misogyny. Since homophobia thus reveals men's fear and hatred of the "feminine," promoting male homoeroticism of the type envisioned by Whitman could, eventually, contribute to erasing sexism and misogyny, too.

It is true, as has been argued, that men's focus on their emotional inner selves might sometimes prove conservative, preventing them from engaging in larger social

and political issues, including the struggle for social and gender equality. While acknowledging, then, the conservative component of male bonding, this article has tried to demonstrate and emphasize the political potential of men's friendships for bringing about greater social and political equality. Certainly, (re-)establishing the institution of male friendship will not be easy, and will require important social policies, for example to undermine homophobia and racism, both of which help perpetuate the current separation between men. Within our increasingly globalized and capitalist societies, reconstructing men's friendships will also entail the redefinition of work relations to make them less competitive. While it seems clear, then, that the transformation of men's friendships in contemporary society will require important political transformations, one should not forget that intimacy between men, as this article has tried to illustrate, has itself a political potential, which might contribute, as has also been noted, to undermining homophobia, racism, sexism as well as other social and class hierarchies. If, as feminism has taught us, "the personal is political," then rethinking men's friendships and personal relations to other men might also have important political benefits. It is high time, therefore, that we engaged in a complete redefinition of men's friendships, which, though difficult, is far from impossible. As friendship scholar Drury Sherrod has concluded:

> By acknowledging their need for intimacy, and risking the pursuit of friendship, men can begin to achieve the kind of closeness that males have known in other times and other cultures. [...] With commitment and persistence, men can learn to break through the bonds that confine them and rebuild the bonds that unite them. (238, 239)

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