Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England by Alan Stewart
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and Helms is having success with, among other things, a solo theater piece called *Shakespeare by Heart.* The loss is likely more ours than hers; not many of those who have failed to please academia's wizened and erratic job market have had quite so gratifying an alternative waiting in the wings. The activities Helms hoped to reconcile in her own person are probably fated to remain separate and even hostile, though her final look back is modestly irenic: "When I recall my academic years, I am grateful that, like Winters's Gawain, I have been allowed to leave with what I know" (p. 148). This sounds to me, under the circumstances, like a happy ending.

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Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England. *Alan Stewart.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997. Pp. xlv+224.

In his lengthy introduction, Alan Stewart attempts several possible ways of describing the project of this book. He first offers a historical trajectory, from sodomy located "within the boundaries of the monastery walls" to its position "within the bonds of the most innocent household relationships" (p. xv). In fact, this narrative governs only a chapter detailing John Bale's obsessive claims about clerical sodomy in which Stewart works out from a stunning citation, Bale's lament that in destroying "the sodometrouse Abbeyes & Fryeryes . . . the most worthy monumentes of this realme, peryshed in the spoyle" (p. 78), to argue that Bale depended as an antiquarian and historian on what was destroyed. Such complicity between the reformation and sodomy is evident, Stewart argues, since claims about numerous instances of sodomy in the monasteries were not followed by prosecutions under the sodomy law; hence, a tacit extension of the bounds of sodomy was accomplished.

This historical narrative is questionable even on Stewart's account, since humanist penetration of the household in the guise of tutors or secretaries was well underway before the 1530s; nor is it possible to believe that same-sex relations ever were confined to same-sex institutions. Stewart quickly abandons his historical claim and reformulates his project through a loose analogy: "Humanism . . . signals an alternative economy of social relations, which produces anxiety; sodomy, too, signals an alternative economy of social relations which produces

anxiety" (p. xxix). By humanism, Stewart means nothing more than patronage relations between men in which a rhetoric of equality or friendship attempts to overcome traditional status differences between lord and servant. This disruptive threat will of course be familiar to anyone who knows Alan Bray's crucial essay, "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England" (*History Workshop Journal* 29 [1990]: 1–19). Stewart narrows Bray's account to the sphere he calls humanism and then uses the term to mean almost any male patronage relationship (that is how Bale is smuggled into the story). Treating sodomy and humanism as analogous, Stewart ignores Bray's main point: the possible indistinguishability of normative and excoriated bonds between men. In that light, Stewart's promise that "we shall see" how sodomy threatened "lineage relations" (p. xviii) proves disingenuous—the argument is a familiar one; moreover the analogy between sodomy and humanism as separate anxious formations would seem to contradict it.

The central chapters of *Close Readers* concern the erotics of beating and the politics of friendship. Although Stewart initially claims that pursuing nonliterary texts opens a terrain not previously examined, these chapters revolve around instances which have received attention: the scene of Roger Ascham in bed with his pupil John Whitney, the allegations against Nicholas Udall of sodomy and corporal violence against boys.[1] Stewart borrows a chapter title from Leonard Barkan, which he acknowledges, claiming to take the question of the erotics of humanist education in "a different direction" (p. 84, n. 1) without clarifying the difference or engaging Barkan's book (*Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism* [Stanford, Calif., 1991]). In another footnote (p. 118, n. 80) he acknowledges a "brilliant" essay by Elizabeth Pittenger ("'To Serve the Queere': Nicholas Udall, Master of Revels," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg [Durham, N.C., 1994], pp. 161–89), and similarly fails to engage it or to register how it shapes but also calls into question some of his claims. Similarly, in the chapter on Bale, Stewart mentions an essay by Donald Mager ("John Bale and Early Tudor Sodomy Discourse," in Goldberg, ed., pp. 141–61) but in reviewing how scholars have uniformly denied a relationship between sodomy and the reformation, he ignores both Mager's demonstrations and the fact that he analyzes the same literary text as Mager does in the same fashion. Stewart writes: "Mager has set one of Bale's plays in the context of the 1533/34 act against buggery" (p. 44), which is what Stewart does as well.

1. In pursuing nonliterary texts, Stewart claims to be refusing the "enticements" of literature (p. xviii), suggesting how little he has absorbed new historicist work.

What does Stewart actually have to say? Consider his handling of the scene from Ascham: Stewart marshals, as from the other side of the bedroom wall, the contemporary investigations that led to the execution of Thomas Seymour for treason. Citing these documents at length, he notices their frequent recourse to the word 'friend' (as in "frends and tenaunts" [p. 134]) and recalls that one of those involved with Seymour also translated Cicero's *De Amicitia.* Stewart then superimposes a perfectly recognizable feudal form of friendship (retainers, retinue, allies, and the like) onto humanism; political conspiracy is thus linked to humanist *amicitia,* while Ascham's bedroom scene becomes for Stewart his safe refuge from politics. When one notes that Seymour's conspiracy fastened on the body of Lady Jane Grey, one might recall that she is also a counter in Ascham's text (not that Stewart remembers this). Stewart produces a depoliticized homosexual scene only to attempt to implicate it in the Seymour conspiracy. At least as he tells it, no allegations of sodomy were made on that occasion, and the alliances that Seymour attempted to forge are at best tangential to humanist *amicitia.*

The supposed "coverup" (p. 119) of the co-implication of male-male sex with humanist culture is Stewart's primary strawman, a scene he manufactures only to be able to demolish it. Thus his book ends with a chapter on closet relations in which he purports to show, as if for the first time, that these lordly retreats were places where a master and a trusted companion retired together to transact business. To make his point, Stewart does not merely ignore those who have made such arguments before him, he actually distorts their claims. For example, he draws his reader's attention to the second chapter of Richard Rambuss's book (*Spenser's Secret Career* [Cambridge, 1993]), claiming that it focuses on "early modern subjectivity" (p. 172, n. 26). The "secret" in chapter 2 of Rambuss's book, however, is that Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* constituted a very public bid for employment as a secretary, his aspiration to "a bureaucratic office . . . the place of cabinet councils" (p. 61). That the closet was a shared space of business is a point also made explicitly in my *Writing Matter* (Stanford, Calif., 1990)—"The place into which the lord retires to be alone with his secrets is also the place in which the secretary is" (p. 268)—although Stewart misrepresents and selectively quotes to make it seem otherwise.

Stewart's arguments about the closet constitute his answer to yet another trajectory, posed initially as the question, "What makes the Renaissance so fascinating to gay men?" (p. xxii). The closet is one answer; another is ventured in the initial chapter, on John Addington Symonds's fascination with quattrocento Florence, which pursues the story of Poliziano's dismissal from the household of Lorenzo de Medici at the instigation of his wife. Stewart's purpose is to demonstrate the

tension between male-male humanism and lineage relations that involve the traffic in women. He makes much of a passage in a letter from Lorenzo's wife, Clarice Orsino, to her lord, in which she implores him not to let her become a laughingstock as Ludovico Pulci was in his exchange with Matteo Franco. Stewart claims that Pulci was an old-fashioned poet and that Clarice identified her dynastic claims with him. However, Pulci was accused three times before the Florentine Office of the Night (a body that investigated sodomy), and Franco also so accused him. Clarice's identifications were obviously more complicated than Stewart allows.

But Stewart's interpretation seems to indicate his desire to come to Clarice's rescue. One recognizes these tendencies: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has noted them in relation to Symonds: his chivalry also sought to keep women in their place.[2] Almost every story about women Stewart tells is identical: wives maligned by their husbands' dealings with humanists and courtiers. Stewart's women are the proper rulers of the domestic sphere, a consignment that echoes familiar humanist prescriptions. Indeed, Stewart even suggests that Queen Elizabeth's absence from the scene between Ascham and her Privy Councillors at the opening of *The Scholemaster* represents her exclusion from that male world. The queen would have been surprised to hear that. Women in Stewart are always pawns between men; perhaps in a book in which 'anxiety' is a frequent term, this explains the total absence of even a mention of Valerie Traub's *Desire and Anxiety* (London, 1992), which suggests bonds between women not entirely subsumed by the institution of marriage. And, of course, women could be patrons and writers, too.

Stewart thinks his work politicizes. While making this claim, he characteristically misrepresents work that really does this—as when Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, 1990) is described as nothing but a coming-out manual—while failing to engage critics who treat the Renaissance as an origin or site of modern homosexual subjectivity. When Stewart ends up calling for political criticism, it is difficult to know whether this means moving beyond identity politics or abandoning sexuality altogether as inherently not political. The latter seems more than likely, given that this is a book written by a closet

2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), pp. 210–11. Stewart misrepresents his relationship to Sedgwick when he suggests that her paradigm is not applicable to the male-male relations of sodomy/humanism, since they exclude women (p. xx, n. 11); in fact, he continually measures male-male bonds in terms of the excluded women, noting that even in scenes of beating, the rod is gendered female, called the "master's daughter" (p. 97) or "my ladie *bircheley*" (p. 99).

humanist who regards humanist transaction as the scandalous impingement of the "harsh reality" (p. 84) of economic self-interest on the life of the mind. This constricted view may explain why Stewart never refers to 'civic humanism' or why his work lacks the kind of understanding of humanism's role in social transformation that familiarity with Norbert Elias's work, for example, might have provided. Stewart's book suffers from scholarly and critical insularity; it is an antiquarian work without a coherent project. At most, thanks to lengthy quotations and summaries, it anthologizes texts on such subjects as the pursuit of sodomy in the 1530s, or the debate on corporal punishment in pedagogical tracts, and it is only for the interest of these and similar materials that it can be recommended, not for close reading.

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Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England. *Huston Diehl.* Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1997. Pp. xvii+238.

New historicist and cultural materialist criticism have numerous strengths, but a nuanced awareness of early modern religious culture has rarely been among them. Many recent critics have viewed religion as an ideological veil best ripped away as summarily as possible, so as to reveal the repressive political arrangements it perniciously disguises. This veil ripping understandably reacts against an earlier critical mode which did indeed take religion seriously, often aligning (or pretending to align) early modern religious views with the critic's own deeply held personal convictions. This ideal of sympathy rendered a distanced, skeptical, or politicized perspective on religious matters almost impossible.

Huston Diehl's book, typically new historicist in its critical technique but not in its subject matter, successfully avoids both excessive dismissiveness and excessive entanglement. She argues that Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy is deeply informed by the debates over "idolatry" and by the iconoclastic impulses activated by the Reformation, debates she reads as a struggle over the relationship between physical, visible phenomena and truths that transcend visible evidence. Unlike such new historicist predecessors as Louis Montrose and Stephen Greenblatt, Diehl resists any simple identification of spectacular or theatrical rituals with Roman Catholicism, or of antitheatricalism with Protestant iconoclasm. Protestantism, she argues, is fully as spectacular and theatrical