Philip Carter. *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800.* London: Longman, 2001. viii + 332 pp. $89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-31987-5.

Reviewed by Marjorie Morgan (Department of History, Southern Illinois University Carbondale)

Making Masculinity Problematic

Although gender history purports to be about relationships between men and women as well as processes by which concepts of masculinity and femininity are constructed, there has until recently been far more attention given to women and femininity than to masculinity. That this imbalance is being redressed is evident by the many studies of men and masculinity that have appeared since 1990 and the series entitled "Women and Men in History" of which Philip Carter's book is a part. This series aims to offer studies that are both accessible and innovative, and Carter's work is exemplary in both respects. It is an enjoyable read for students, scholars, and the educated public, with largely jargon-free discussions of theory nicely illustrated by anecdotes and stories of particular individuals. Furthermore, Carter's book is among those recent works charting a new and exciting course for masculinity studies–one that emphasizes the complex nature of masculine identity rather than the monolithic, simplistic view of men as agents of patriarchy.

Carter's focus is on the impact of politeness on notions of manliness in Britain during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By politeness, Carter means a type of refinement that emerged after the Glorious Revolution and involved a mix of outer polish and inner moral virtue. Part of what made politeness distinct, according to Carter, was its location–the town rather than the court or country–and its proximity to women. Unlike other scholars of eighteenth-century Britain, most no-

tably Lawrence Klein, Carter does not view politeness as static. He emphasizes competing discourses of refinement that included politeness, which dominated during the first half of the eighteenth century, and sensibility, which had become prominent by the 1770s. The sensible, or sentimental, man was not averse to displays of emotional sensitivity. He indulged in overt emotion through sighs and tears, in addition to simply polite conversation. Sensibility was thus not so much a complete rejection of politeness, as a reworking of it to combat deception with genuine feeling.

The crux of Carter's argument is that these ideas about refinement influenced the concept of manliness in eighteenth-century Britain, rooting it more in social than sexual behavior. In contrast to previous notions of manliness revolving around independence, self-control, and courage, the eighteenth-century manly man embraced compassion, sensitivity, and moderation. Arbiters of refinement did not reject the traditional notions of manliness, but they did stress the new ones and argue that they reinforced past values such as control, industry, and courage. They repeatedly made the point that the new values and the old were essential for polite sociability and success in an increasingly commercial world. Carter defines the manly man in relation to non-manly types rather than in relation to women, and thus makes the blurred and sometimes subtle distinctions between manly and unmanly categories clear. In so doing, he is able to highlight the slipperiness, or messiness, of masculine identity, making it seem more problematic than it

appears in traditional studies that analyze masculinity in relation to femininity.

One of the strengths of this book is the great variety of sources used. The tendency has been for scholars of behavioral ideals, myself included, to focus on only one or two genres of advice literature and to see them as static. Carter draws on many vehicles used to dispense manly behavioral norms, including travel writing, courtesy books, conduct books, essays, sermons, academic treatises, and periodical essays. Instead of seeing these various forms of advice literature as static, Carter emphasizes change over time between and within them. More importantly, he draws on diaries and journals in a way that enables him to link behavioral advice or ideals with actual behavior. In particular, he looks at how debate about ideals in the literature was reflected by three real-life individuals: legal student Dudley Ryder, Anglican clergyman John Penrose, and author James Boswell. Each one of these men was genuinely concerned about his own and others' self-fashioning and was keen to internalize norms of manly behavior. Their memoirs suggest that presenting an acceptable male identity in eighteenth-century British society was a constant struggle, as each man experienced tensions between the norms of politeness and sentimentality, as well as intended and unintended slips into poor, unmanly behavior such as awkwardness, affectation, harshness, impetuosity, and rowdiness. In other words, being manly was hard work. It involved a continual negotiation of competing discourses of refinement and ongoing self-examination and criticism.

Although Carter does an excellent job of documenting changes in discourses of refinement and manliness, he might have made more of an attempt to analyze why they occurred. There clearly were proponents of polite-ness but also critics; the same is true with sentimentality. Who were the proponents and critics and why did they choose one side or the other? Were there, for example, political, religious, or socio-economic contests underlying the tensions within and shifts in discourses about manly behavior? In other words, what is the relationship between gender identity and other identities, including class, religious, political, and national? Carter sometimes conflates two categories of identity without examining if it is appropriate to do so, such as when he uses "gentlemanly" and "manly" interchangeably.

Regarding the shift in the late eighteenth century from a discourse of politeness to one of sentimentality, Carter suggests that it reflected an increasing concern with the possibility for deception. What changes in the larger society might help explain this increasing concern and thus the rising emphasis on expressing genuine feeling? Instead of exploring these sorts of questions, Carter tends to explain shifts in discourse about ideal masculine behavior simplistically in terms of the succession of generations. He recognizes that this is only a partial explanation, but then unfortunately shies away from offering more. Thus readers will be disappointed if what they want from this book are fresh insights about the eighteenth century. If, however, they want a more nuanced and complex treatment of masculinity than one typically encounters, then they will find this book a very worthwhile read.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-albion