FRIENDSHIP'S LOSS

Alan Bray's Making of History

Valerie Traub

In the headnote that precedes his essay "The Body of the Friend," Alan Bray describes the painful occasion that gave impetus to his work:

> In 1987 I heard Michel Rey, a student of J.-L. Flandrin in the University of Paris, give a lecture entitled "The Body of My Friend." The lecture was only an outline, and his early death left his doctoral thesis uncompleted and his loss keenly felt by many. But in the years that followed that lecture Michel and I often discussed the history of friendship, and I have sought in this paper to complete that paper as he might have done had he lived, as a tribute to his memory. It is a paper about the body of the friend at the onset of the modern world and its loss.[1]

In a position not unlike that of Bray, I—along with you—now confront the loss of a scholar who has done more, perhaps, than any other to return the body of the friend, and with it the complex meanings of intimacy, to historical consciousness. Although it did not fall to me to complete the monumental piece of scholarship that is *The Friend*, the manuscript Alan was finishing at the time of his death, it does fall to me to try to do justice to a scholarly legacy that has had a singular, indispensable, and galvanizing effect on the history of sexuality and that will, in its now complete form, transform the histories of friendship and the family.[2]

Bray's first book, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, forcefully exposed a cultural contradiction: whereas sodomy was associated apocalyptically with debauchery, heresy, foreignness, and sedition, and thus with the dissolution of the social order, intimate male friendship enabled all manner of legitimate social ties and mutually beneficial obligations, advancing homosocial relations within the patriarchal social order.[3] There was nonetheless an affinity and a symmetry between

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representations of universally admired masculine friendship and officially condemned sodomy—as Bray later put it, "They occupied a similar terrain."[4] The result of this "unacknowledged connection between the unmentionable vice of Sodom and the friendship which all accounted commendable" was widespread cognitive dissonance, a reluctance to recognize in idealized friendship the dreaded signs of sodomy.[5] The disparity between the rhetoric of unspeakability that governed public discourses and those social and erotic practices in which many men engaged indicated to Bray a "quiet nominal adjustment," perhaps unique to Renaissance England.[6] This accommodation began to show signs of strain by the end of the sixteenth century, when changes in social relations and modes of symbolizing them caused the overlap in legitimate and illegitimate forms of male intimacy to become an identifiable social problem. With the rise of economic individualism and social pluralism—represented most visibly in the advent of London molly houses—male homoeroticism was dissociated from the broad nexus of homosociality. Newly legible as a secular social ill, it increasingly was prosecuted, as raids on molly houses arranged by the Society for the Reformation of Manners from 1699 to 1738 attest.

In advancing this thesis, Bray's book demonstrated that homosexuality is not a stable, unchanging fact of sexual life but a dynamic field of signification that possesses a history of its own, a history closely tied to other social phenomena: the structure of the household, the growth of cities, the emergence of individualism. To make these connections was to extricate the historiography of homosexuality from its preoccupation with the identification of gay individuals and to refocus it on the analysis of social structures and processes that regulate the intelligibility of same-gender attachments. Thus, despite the proliferation of scholarship on male homoeroticism since the publication of Bray's book in 1982, what Jonathan Goldberg said in his 1994 introduction to *Queering the Renaissance* is still true today: "*Homosexuality in Renaissance England* remains the groundbreaking and unsurpassed historical investigation for the period."[7]

As if to make explicit the historical narrative of which *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* is a part, *The Friend*, offered as volume 2 to Bray's history of male bonds, broadens out temporally in both directions. Tracing protocols of masculine friendship from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries, Bray constructs an immensely learned archaeology of the "formal and objective" expressions of intimacy and obligation that are part of a forgotten history of the family, religion, and traditional society.[8] Rather than function as the only basis of social cohesion, the early modern family subsisted within larger structures of relation, including those of Christian ritual, service, and "voluntary kinship"—the kinship created by rit-

ual or promise, as in the bonds forged by adoption or sworn brotherhood (104–5). Insofar as the role of Christianity in traditional society was, according to Bray, to help members of the community live in peace, its rites recognized several forms of binding connection, including marriage, kinship, and friendship (125). Focused on the public witnessing of such unions in baptism, the Eucharist, the kiss of peace, and burial, as well as the sharing of beds and familiar correspondence, *The Friend* demonstrates friendship's equivocal role not only in giving a social shape to masculine bonds but in threatening them. Friendship, Bray insists, was not an unreserved good; it could be compromised by expectations of material interest, influence, and advancement. Given the precariousness of relations in the public sphere, he argues, even the best friendships could be shadowed by suspicions of collusion, misuse, and enmity, imparting an ethical uncertainty to friendship even when it was most clearly a matter of love. In a characteristic hermeneutic move, Bray discovers traces of the equivocal nature of friendship not only in the rites of traditional Christianity but in the idealized rhetoric of love and fidelity through which friendship was inscribed in letters, poetry, and burial monuments. Such idealized constructions, which we might assume to be empty conventions, were, in part because of their conventionality, replete with affect; in particular, they negotiated the fear that one's friend might prove to be one's enemy. By excavating the remains of friendship in public sites and rituals heretofore obscured by a historical enterprise intent on recognizing only the kinship created by marriage, by locating the family within an encompassing network of friendship that kinship also created, and by interpreting friendship from the standpoint of the Christian ethics it embodies, Bray's compelling narrative returns to the praxis of friendship a social and historical efficacy that largely has been forgotten. *Why* it was forgotten as the Enlightenment ushered in civil society will be of considerable interest to those who seek to understand how the past paved the way for our present.

The influence of Bray's first book and published essays can be seen in all subsequent treatments of male homoeroticism from 1550 to 1800 in England, in no small part because of his activist commitment to "play[ing] a part in changing" "the world around us as history has given us it."[9] Yet it implies a serious underestimate of the value of *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* that the book is most often cited only for its exposure of cognitive dissonance and for its narrative regarding the emergence of a homosexual identity. Because of the stranglehold that questions of identity and the dating of its consolidation have had on the history of homosexuality, and because the critical accent has been on the content of Bray's historical scheme rather than the method by which he composed it, the considerable conceptual advances he made in charting an epistemic shift in the intelligi-

bility of male bonds have not been fully assessed.[10] By highlighting some of his additional contributions to historiographical method, I hope to draw attention to the opportunities and challenges they offer for future engagement and critical dialogue.

It is one of the paradoxes of Bray's scholarly career that the history of sexuality is not the discipline in which he would have located his work. Repeatedly he insists that to begin with the question of sexuality is to misconstrue the issue.[11] The point, articulated throughout his corpus, is to view sexuality in a wider social and interpretive frame, whereas "the effect of a shaping concern with sexuality is precisely to obscure that wider frame."[12] This is true because "what is missing [in Renaissance discourses] is any social expression of homosexuality based on the fact of homosexuality itself. . . . What we look for in vain are any features peculiar to it alone."[13] Bray's determined ambivalence regarding the disciplinary field of sexuality studies is, I want to suggest, simultaneously a product of his historical inquiry and the ground out of which his historiography emerged. His insistence that sexuality—by which I mean not only the identity categories of homo and hetero but the very idea of an autonomous field of erotic relations—was a post-seventeenth-century phenomenon motivates what I believe is his most decisive contribution: the location of male intimacy in a range of early modern social systems. Having described in his first book the forms of social life in which homosexuality was embedded—the village, the household, the educational system, apprenticeship, prostitution, the theater—in subsequent work he situates male bonds within the symbolic gift systems of patronage, preferment, and service associated with the medieval great house. What he calls "the gift of the friend's body"—signified by public kisses and embraces, eating at the common table, the sharing of beds, the familiar letter—functioned up through the sixteenth century as a crucial form of "countenance."[14] Such public signs of favor and intimacy, Bray argues, not only were normative but instrumentally oiled the wheels of social relations. With the demise of the open-handed household—a change both architectural and social—the public conveyance of countenance through the friend's body ceased to be advantageous; lacking its prior symbolic capital, it became unintelligible.[15] As England was transformed into a modern, civil society, friendship was recast as a noninstrumental affinity: "rational, objective, universal," and for the most part irrelevant to Christian ethics and public affairs.[16] Situating this change within a new regime of visibility—the disappearance of lower servants from view, of gentlemen from service, of crowds drinking in the great hall—Bray offers a causal explanation for the growth of suspicion regarding behaviors previously deemed unexceptional, as well as for the persecution of mollies. Just as the "sodomite" took on a "new actuality," so too a "radically new meaning to the desire for the

body of the friend" took shape.[17] As Bray memorably describes this shift, the public kiss and embrace were replaced by the handshake.[18]

Michel Foucault's corpus is often credited, rightly, with articulating the theoretical import of reading for silences, absences, and exclusions. Bray's corpus, it seems to me, demonstrates the payoff of this approach. Characteristic of Bray's rhetorical stance is the adoption of the persona of the sleuth, embarked on a slow process of detection: painstakingly following a "forensic trail" of clues, sharing his mind as it works through assumptions and doubts, examining evidence from multiple angles, entertaining objections, and devising alternative methods in light of them.[19] The discovery of clues, of course, often is an effect of what is not said, and Bray's favored trope for this function in his own work—as well as in others'—was "the detective story where the clue was that the dog did *not* bark" (6, 272).[20] With steady tough-mindedness, he draws significance out of what is, and what is not, available in the archive. In so doing, the archive is reconfigured: it is not a storehouse or treasure chest waiting to be opened but a palimpsest of fragments, on the ragged edges of which hang unexpected meanings. Bray's articulation of the difference between Elizabethan and later discourses of male intimacy, for instance, hinges on "what is left out" of idealized expressions of friendship: the "tactful omission of those bonds of mutual interest of which the everyday signs were such conventions."[21] When suspicion *is* generated by accounts of friendship, as it increasingly was, it is because "some of the conventions of friendship are missing . . . and the missing ones are precisely those that ensured that the intimacy of these conventions was read in an acceptable frame of reference."[22] What could convert signs of male friendship into signs of sodomy, it turns out, was partly the mixing of status or degree—and it was only by looking for "the silence between the lines" that Bray hit upon the significance of social inequality to the sodomy-friendship interrelation.[23] For a social historian generally committed to traditional protocols of evidence, this emphasis on silence and insignificance, on traces and fragments and the difficulties of intelligibility they pose, was a strikingly unconventional move.[24]

That erotic behavior might not signify in or by itself implicitly links the problem of representation to the issue of social embeddedness. The combined effect of this connection is to emphasize the uncertainty of sexuality's power of signification. In her recent book, *Sovereign Amity*, Laurie Shannon cogently rearticulates and extends Bray's argument, maintaining that there is nothing fully dispositive about eroticism to convey particular meanings; erotic acts operate only unreliably as a trigger for articulation.[25] Correlating the gift of the friend's body to the changing fate of homosexuality, for instance, Bray argues that the proximity of exalted and excoriated male bonds means that erotic affects and acts *could* be ele-

ments of both—it depends on how you look at it. How you look at it is itself influenced by historical factors, including what counts as sex in a given culture. What counts, of course, can be highly contingent, variable, and incoherent, even within a single culture and historical moment—as was brought home to everyone in the United States when President Bill Clinton avowed that whatever he had done with Monica Lewinsky, it was not sex.[26]

One effect of showing that sodomy and friendship could be recognized at one moment as utterly distinct and at another moment as close to the same thing was to deconstruct, from a historically specific angle, the boundary between them. The complex elaboration of male intimacy throughout early modern society, coupled with the potential for erotic acts *not* to signify, creates the interpretive field into which *all* erotic behaviors fall: "Mediated as homosexuality then was by social relationships that did not take their form from homosexuality and were not exclusive to it, the barrier between heterosexual and homosexual behaviour . . . was in practice vague and imprecise."[27] One might expect, then, that changes in the social articulation of male bonds might affect the meanings of male intimacy with women—and indeed they did. Just as the sodomite became identifiable as a perversion of normative cross-sex alliance, so such alliances increasingly relied on the sodomite to secure their own status as natural and inevitable. Arguing that the transformation in male intimacy "placed a burden of social meaning on the heterosexual bond between husband and wife that before it had not been required to carry alone," and that, with the ascendancy of civil society, the gift of the body came to be acknowledged "only as a sexual gift between men and women," Bray brings to the theoretical dictum of the dependence of the hetero on the homo a historical specificity it otherwise often lacks.[28]

Yet it is important to acknowledge that, despite this deconstructive impulse, Bray never adopted the inversive desideratum of queer theory: that the burden of proof belongs to those who assume the presence of *hetero*sexuality. Committed as he was to the historian's protocols of evidence, and taking seriously sexuality's lack of dispositive power, he was extremely cautious about assigning erotic signification to particular gestures, behaviors, texts, people. He especially discounted the truth value of Renaissance accusations of sodomy, whose evidentiary basis he rightly judged unreliable: "We will misunderstand these accusations if, beguiled by them, we uncritically assume the existence of the sexual relationship which they appear to point to, for the material from which they could be constructed was rather open and public to all. . . . Homosexual relationships did indeed occur within social contexts which an Elizabethan would have called friendship. . . . But accusations [of sodomy] are not evidence of it."[29]

It is here, perhaps, that we can catch a glimpse of an unacknowledged tension in Bray's corpus: on the one hand, the open and public nature of friendship protected early modern men from suspicion of sodomy; on the other, it also somehow provides an indication in the present that they were not involved in a "sexual relationship." In his first book, after noting the difficulties involved in using modern conceptual categories, Bray adopted the solution of using "the term homosexuality but in as directly physical—and hence culturally neutral—a sense as possible."[30] How "culturally neutral" derives from "directly physical" has long puzzled me, especially since the meaning of *physical* seems here, by default, to imply anal intercourse—perhaps the least culturally neutral, most overdetermined erotic activity during the Renaissance and today. Throughout the first book, then, homosexuality, implicitly conflated with a single erotic practice, is also functionally equated with sodomy. One result of this series of conflations is that the baseline meaning of homosexuality, its status as an analytic object, is foreknown and foreclosed, even as the locations in which it is expressed and the significations it accrues change over time.[31] Another result is that friendship—for all its structural affinity with and proximity to homosexuality—is definitionally posited as something *other* than homosexuality: not, as it were, "directly physical."[32]

This is in fact Mario DiGangi's critique of the way that Bray manages the tension between sodomy, homosexuality, and friendship: "Bray effectively conflates 'homosexuality' with 'sodomy,' implicitly reduces both to the commission of sexual acts, and then cordons off these proscribed sexual acts from the nonsexual intimacy appropriate for 'friends.'"[33] In contrast, Goldberg confidently affirms that the combined theses of *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* and the influential essay "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England" imply that "much in the ordinary transactions between men in the period . . . took place sexually."[34] The possibility of two such opposed interpretations of Bray's core argument is symptomatic not of misreading or misappropriation but of a pervasive ambiguity animating his work. The analytic tension between eroticism and friendship became clearer to me while reading the manuscript of *The Friend*, in which the embedding of intimacy in a vast range of social relations and the foregrounding of ethical considerations had the subtle but persistent effect of minimizing the possibility that the bonds being described were at all sexual. Throughout Bray's work there is a recurring expression of concern that the reader might be "misled" by the appearance of erotic meanings, leading him or her to "misconstrue" the forces at work in the construction of male intimacy.[35] *The Friend*'s brief for the ethical import of friendship is particularly punctuated by such cautions

against misconstruction. Indeed, the ambiguities and tensions in Bray's earlier work are heightened in his final book.

On the one hand, the intense emotional affects Bray excavates in *The Friend*—affects that give rituals and conventions their experiential salience and contribute to their social efficacy—would seem to belie any strict dichotomy between friendship and eroticism.[36] Early on Bray notes that the ethical praxis he aims to uncover need not have excluded the erotic: "The ethics of friendship in the world I describe began with the concrete and the actual, and the only way to exclude anything would be by abandoning that starting point. That hard-edged world included the potential for the erotic, as it included much else."[37] Throughout the book he acknowledges the erotic *potential* of the physical closeness that, at any given moment, might signify one way or the other: bonds that, because of their association with social excess and disorder, signified sodomy; bonds that, due to their coherence with legitimate forms of social organization, signified friendship, kinship, obligation, love. On the other hand, sometimes Bray dismisses the historian's access to "the possible motives and nature of [a] physical relationship" by reducing such interpretation to "no more than speculations"—as in his discussion of Amy Poulter's marriage to Arabella Hunt (225). Sometimes the potential eroticism of friends is specifically, even categorically, denied—most emphatically, perhaps, in the exposition of John Henry Cardinal Newman's shared grave with Ambrose St. John, which forms the Coda of Bray's book: "Their bond was spiritual. . . . Their love was not the less intense for being spiritual. Perhaps, it was more so" (293).[38] Whereas Bray in his final chapter pointedly asks (in response to the sexual escapades recorded in the diary of Anne Lister), "Would a sexual *potential* have stood in the way of the confirmation of a sworn friendship in the Eucharist? The answer must be that it would not, in that it evidently did not do so here" (269),[39] at the telos of his argument he resurrects, seemingly without hesitation, a stark division between spiritual and carnal love.[40] This division is apparent as well in Bray's objections to John Boswell's scholarship on same-sex unions; one of Boswell's mistakes was his inability to grasp that "the expected ideals of the rite would not have comprehended sexual intercourse" (316). Here, however, the circumspection of the qualifier *expected* perhaps carries Bray's central point: that is, the ease with which a distinction between love and sodomy was maintained in the official discourse of traditional society, whatever the actual nature of the relation.[41] The analytic ambiguity at the heart of *The Friend*'s emphasis on erotic *potential* thus pulls in two contradictory directions. At times this ambiguity expands the meaning of homoerotic affect, rendering it as something more than

"just sex," a point about which Bray was explicit: "The inability to conceive of relationships in other than sexual terms says something of contemporary poverty."[42] But when this ambiguity slides into a categorical denial of eroticism, it risks conceding the defining terms of the argument to those who would protect the study of intimacy from eroticism's embodied materiality.

The risk of dematerializing eroticism was articulated a decade ago when Goldberg warned that sexuality "can always be explained in other terms, and in ways in which anything like sex disappears." This caution has been addressed anew by Cynthia Herrup in a short polemical essay, "Finding the Bodies."[43] It is worth noting that, despite the symbolic centrality of the gift of the friend's body in Bray's book, bodies themselves play a very small part in his discussion. One is tempted to say that the materiality of the body is displaced onto the memorials—the gravestones and churches—that populate his account.[44] Nonetheless, I wonder what Bray would have made of the triumphant proclamation on the inside dust jacket cover of *The Friend*: "He debunks the now-familiar readings of friendship by historians of sexuality who project homoerotic desires onto their subjects when there were none."[45] Certainly, Bray warned repeatedly against anachronism and misconstrual: he considered them bad history. But his own negotiation of this problem was considerably more nuanced than an effort to "debunk" the assertions of others; nor does the preemptive rejection of the mutual engagement between past and present implied in the term *projection* accurately convey his own historical method.[46] "Readers of this book can and will appropriate the past for themselves, if I stick to my job of presenting the past first in its own terms," he declares in the introduction to *The Friend*, and he follows up that remark with a pointed reference to the politics of the present: "Could it be that that very appropriation might prelude a resolution of the conflict between homosexual people and the Christian church today?"[47] Insofar as Bray stressed repeatedly that his scholarship grew out of an activist engagement with contemporary gay life, I suspect that any denigration of contemporary gay identification with a homoerotic past may have given him pause.[48]

It is not just that leveling a charge of projection in this way is inaccurate and offensive; more important, it circumvents, and thereby obscures, questions tacitly raised by Bray's scholarship but not resolved in it: namely, the relations between emotional and bodily intimacy, and what we make of them. Indeed, it is one of the legacies of his work that, although the tension between friendship and eroticism informs it at almost every turn, nowhere is the unstable line separating these forms of intimacy brought into sharp focus and treated as an object of analy-

sis. Bray casts his eye first on the conventions of friendship and then on those of sodomy, but in analyzing their connection, he seems to take his cue from early moderns themselves, who were unwilling "to take seriously the ambiguous borderland between the 'sodomite' and the shared beds and bonding of its male companionship."[49] For a historian to "take seriously" this "ambiguous borderland" would mean to submit to analytic scrutiny the movement across borders, the places where and the moments when (and not simply the processes by which) one thing becomes another. Bray's apparent preference was much like that of the early modern society he describes, which "knew that the gaps—and the overlaps—between one thing and its other had their utility" (224). Rather in the manner of the "accommodating ambiguity" he identifies elsewhere (134), Bray does not parse his terms too precisely, as evinced by the sleight of hand in his remark that "the word 'love' in this society could comprehend as easily the public relation of friends as the more private meaning we give the word today, but wherever on that wide spectrum the gift of a friend's body might lie, it gestured toward a place of comforting safety in an insecure world" (158). Indeed, if one substitutes the term *eroticism* for *friendship* in Bray's statement that "the indirection of the language of friendship provided a circumspect path around it" (125), one comes close to describing the rhetorical strategy he deployed in regard to the confused relations among the sexual, the physical, the subjective, and the affective.

Examining the ambiguous borderland, the overlap, between one thing and another might particularly have paid off in relation to one of Bray's key terms: voluntary kinship. It is striking that Bray ignores the applicability of voluntary kinship to the social structure of the molly house. Because of the tight link between sodomy and social disorder—a link that for Bray goes to the heart of what sodomy is—he fails to consider whether the vows of mollies, some of which follow the traditional script of marriage, might not also operate as an alternative form of kinship. The analytic division between friendship and sodomy, social disorder and social cohesion, enables him to recognize bonds of kinship only within the received structure of traditional society: in the form of male couples whose formal vows are backed by Christian ritual.

It may well be wrong to characterize Bray's circumspection in this regard as reticence or reluctance to confront the radical implications of his own work. As a historian, he appears to have approached the relation between friendship and eroticism primarily from the standpoint of evidence. In his final chapter, for instance, he asks of the body of the friend:

> But did it not also have the body's genitals? Did its symbolic significance stop short there? The laughter that closed an earlier chapter suggested that

> it did not. Yet the sexual potential in these gestures has repeatedly come into view only to slip away again. . . . This is not, of course, to say that the erotic has not been part of this history. But sexuality in a more narrow sense has eluded it whenever it has come into view. With the diary of Anne Lister that problem falls away.[50]

Yet even as the evaluation of evidence must be the historian's preoccupation, important questions remain untouched by it from the standpoint of theoretical investigation. Whether Bray's disinclination to probe, rather than work adroitly around, the precise means of the overlap of friendship and eroticism *as a theoretical problem* indicates the historian's discomfort with the deconstructive ramifications of his own radical history, or whether, conversely and paradoxically, it is a further measure of his own deconstructive commitments, is a question about which I remain unsure. Bray delights, for instance, in the enigma of Shakespeare's sonnet 20, which he calls a "dazzling tour de force" that "can be read *both* as asserting the chastity of friendship in the most transcendent of terms *and* as rejecting it in the most bawdy and explicit of terms" (139). In puzzling through this problem, I am reminded that a decade ago Goldberg recognized that Bray's work raises "formidable questions" of "ontology and epistemology": "what sodomy is and how it may be recognized."[51] In its performance of what appears to be a strategic ambiguity carried out in the name of ethics, Bray's new book invites, if only to defer, questions just as formidable about the ontology and epistemology of friendship, eroticism, and sexuality.

In this regard, it is useful to unpack Bray's concluding comments in a review of books on homosexuality in which he notes, with what appears to be mixed appreciation and apprehension, that the books

> have succeeded in undermining their very starting point in the questions they have steadily been drawn into asking. What then is the nature of sexual identity, or of any personal identity? What is the difference between the sexual and the nonsexual? . . . The history of sexuality will not provide answers to these questions, if indeed there are any, but it has disturbingly raised them; and it is there that its importance lies.[52]

It is telling that Bray's skepticism regarding the history of sexuality as a field of knowledge production is articulated in the same breath as his apparent doubt regarding the field's ability to resolve ontological questions about the identity of, and relations between, sexuality and friendship. Both, I believe, are worthy cautions. Nonetheless, as the charge of "projection" of homoerotic desires that has

been leveled in Bray's name vividly suggests, a countervailing epistemological and political danger is that *not* to pursue such ontological questions—what is sexuality? what is friendship? what is the nature of the difference between them?—risks ceding authority for answering them to those who would assert their own tendentious criteria for how sexuality is to be known. Rather than "[debunk] the now-familiar readings of friendship by historians of sexuality," Bray's historical scholarship intersects with the theoretical work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in inviting several queries: How do we *know* when there were no homoerotic desires between historical figures? What is the basis of our knowledge of the eroticism of the past? How *do* we know what (we think) we know?[53]

In response to these questions, the logic of Bray's corpus suggests several propositions. First, if eroticism is always embedded in other forms of social relation, if acts of bodily intimacy are rendered intelligible only from within a precise social location, if the power of eroticism to signify is variable and uncertain, if we cannot always be confident that we have interpreted its presence or absence correctly, then eroticism, like sodomy and friendship, is apprehensible only as a relational structure—not only between people, but between people and history. Not only will our desires for a usable past necessarily inform the history of sexuality we create, but the epistemological opacity of sexuality will be constitutive of the methods by which we investigate it. This recognition leads me, as it did not, apparently, lead Bray, to a second proposition. If we do not know the extent to which relations may have been erotic, it is as mistaken to assume that they were not as it is to assume that they were. In her afterword to *Queering the Renaissance*, Margaret Hunt urged scholars to "scramble the definitions and blur the boundaries of the erotic, both so as to forestall the repressive uses to which rigid understandings of it almost inevitably lend themselves, and to gain access to a much larger analytical arena."[54] In *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, I took that invitation as far as seemed historically responsible by adopting, as a heuristic axiom, a studied skepticism about any a priori dividing line between female friendship and female homoeroticism.[55] It may be that the difference gender makes in this regard is particularly salient: not only did cultural images of tribades have little of the apocalyptic force conveyed by images of sodomites, but the practices of female friendship may have been more congruent with the expression of female eroticism than masculine friendship was with sodomy.[56] What counts as erotic, in other words, may involve gender differentials of which we are only now becoming sufficiently aware.

Insofar as the precise criteria one might use to sequester friendship from sexuality are nowhere theorized in Bray's work, we might approach the question of

their relation as a productive fault line on which his corpus is built—the "blindness" that enabled his considerable insight. If, as I have argued, Bray negotiated this fault line by deploying a strategic ambiguity—by seeming at one point to concede or advance an erotic interpretation while at other points explicitly denying that possibility—it may be because of some criteria of evidence known only to him. The fact remains that nowhere does he submit to *systematic* comparison any evidence of erotic affect in order to delineate the homosocial from the homoerotic. Rather than preclude further investigation, the identification of this problem—and the hijacking of Bray's work to privilege asexual friendship over sexuality—should spur us on. Indeed, just how far the rhetoric and practice of masculine friendship comprehended the expression of erotic desire and the performance of erotic acts, and whether it is possible to construct a legitimate definition of such criteria, remain two questions unanswered by Bray's corpus—questions, in other words, for the rest of us.[57]

Additional questions embedded in Bray's work likewise deserve consideration. In the afterword to the 1995 edition of *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, for instance, Bray boldly asserts that "attitudes to homosexuality unquestionably have been symptomatic of fundamental changes in European society and in substantial part *constitutive* of them."[58] Sexual representation is not merely mimetic; it has an efficacy, an agency, of its own. Such an assertion urges a greater appreciation of sexuality's ideological utility—not only its pliability and susceptibility to pressure but its ability to exert pressure on practices, discourses, and institutions external to it. But from where, one might ask, does this agency derive? Of one thing we can be sure: it is not a function of desire. Strikingly absent from Bray's work is any concept of desire as an internal, generative mechanism or drive. Such a concept is, to his mind, alien to the psychic, emotional, and ideological landscape of early modern culture. In his discussion of the sexual dreams and fantasies expressed in the diary of Michael Wigglesworth, for instance, Bray argues that the sexual impulses over which Wigglesworth agonized (the "filthy lust . . . flowing from my fond affection to my pupils") were experienced by this colonial subject as unbidden, separate from his will, not a matter of his own *desire* at all.[59] As Bray notes in *The Friend*, the "desire for the gift of the friend's body . . . does not correspond easily to anything in our culture several centuries on."[60] Even as Bray may contribute to what David M. Halperin has called "the possibility of a new queer history of affect," his contribution is not to explain what intimacy tells us about the desires of an individual subject (or, for that matter, to historicize emotion) but to describe the instrumentality of intimacy in creating (or threatening) social cohesion.[61] Sworn brotherhood, for example, is a response to the ethical

uncertainty of friendship, and its meaning exists primarily in the wider social responsibility assumed by friends when they formalize their vows. So too the desire for the friend's body functions, much like the homosocial desire anatomized by Sedgwick, as the glue that holds early modern society together.

Yet the question remains: What does it mean to assert for representations of sexuality an agency that does not depend on a subject of desire? The answer to this question is everywhere implied by the dense historical interconnections Bray excavates among religion, ethics, the family, and friendship, but the most trenchant indication of it is recorded in a memorial headnote to an essay he published in an anthology that appeared after his death. According to Katherine O'Donnell and Michael O'Rourke, when Bray was asked, "*How would [your current work] change the exploratory maps constructed twenty years ago?* he said this: it would be a shift from studies of sexuality into ethics and from the politics of identity into the politics of friendship."[62] There is much for historians of sexuality to ponder in that proposed shift, including the presence or absence of the body and erotic desire in ethics and friendship and the risks involved in leaving their material histories behind.

A further consideration is the relation of Bray's work to the category of gender. On the face of it, Bray's corpus seems to offer little to the history of female friendship or female sexuality. Although I tend to think otherwise, certain problems with his approach to gender deserve acknowledgment. Bray duly noted the restricted scope of *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*: "Female homosexuality was rarely linked in popular thought with male homosexuality, if indeed it was recognized at all. Its history is, I believe, best to be understood as part of the developing recognition of a specifically female sexuality."[63] This may have been true when this book was written; whether it remains true today is a question to which I will return. To his credit, Bray recognized that the dissonance between friendship and sodomy was in part a function of gender: "So long as homosexual activity did not disturb the peace or the social order, and in particular so long as it was *consistent with patriarchal mores*, it was largely in practice ignored" (74; emphasis mine). Yet because of the asymmetrical application of the legal and theological category of sodomy to early modern English men and women, Bray's first book does not afford ready analytic purchase to scholars working on women. Perhaps predictably, major studies of female homoeroticism have limited their engagement with his thesis primarily to the perception of parallels between a growing stigma regarding female intimacies and the increasing legibility of sodomy.[64]

Bray's published essays on friendship likewise retain a focus on men, in

part because the formal displays of intimacy that characterized male patronage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were, he argues, less relevant to women, who on the whole were denied access to the public sphere. As Bray remarks in "The Body of the Friend," it was precisely because of the male body's privileged ability to confer cultural capital that the gift of the friend's body was definitively male. In addition, much of Bray's analysis of the symbolic gift exchanges among men hinges on the fact that "the daily cycle of working, eating and drinking, the bodily functions, and sleeping was carried on outside the marital home." "Service in the great houses was men's work," Bray contends, and although women served as washerwomen, herdswomen, and traders, they did so from outside the great house walls.[65] Where, one might ask, did these women live? Given the importance of the patriarchal household, it seems unlikely that they resided in all-female collectives. Does the mere fact that they were not mentioned in household records provide sufficient support for Bray's claim?[66]

A portion of *The Friend*'s long final chapter concerns female relations, mainly by means of the figure of Anne Lister. Prior to this chapter the book treats female friendship as "the silence between the lines" of male friendship, referring briefly and sporadically to a few female burial monuments.[67] Lister's voluble diary breaks this silence, both because of its erotic explicitness and because Lister was intent on enacting with two of her lovers the kind of formal, public, and binding union that sworn brothers had vowed for centuries. She thus provides Bray with a "vantage point" from which to reconsider the congruity between a relationship that was "unquestionably sexual" and "the confirmation of a sworn friendship in the Eucharist" (268, 269), as well as a frame for thinking about the extent to which "that traditional world of kinship and friendship at the heart of religion's role" survived in the byways of the nineteenth century (244). Nonetheless, the criteria Bray uses to admit women's entrance into the historical picture imply that there is little evidence with which to track the path of female friendship prior to Lister's relatively late incarnation. Bray admits that the friendship between Ann Chitting and Mary Barber "had a sufficiently formal and objective character for them to be buried together" in the early seventeenth century, but this does not impact his general view that women's role in the history of friendship is the "silence between the lines." One is left to wonder whether Lady Anne Clifford's apology, in a letter to her mother, for her inability to travel "to Oxford, according to your Ladyship's desire with my Lady Arbella [Stuart], and to have slept in her chamber, which she much desired, for I am the more bound to her than can be," demonstrates something of the public conveyance of countenance that Bray charts in familiar letters between men.[68] In other words, there is the question of how Bray actually reads the

lives of the women whom he includes, and what these readings do to broaden the terms of feminist and lesbian histories. Finally, one is left to wonder about the historiographical irony that a woman should have been the means to reinsert sex back into the historical narrative. Early in the historiography of homosexuality, the boys had sodomy and the girls had romantic friendship; in *The Friend*, as in other recent work, the history of male homosexuality is all about male love.

If we shift our focus from what Bray says about women to what his work makes available to those of us working on women, however, a more enabling set of procedures emerges. Adoption of Bray's insights about the unstable nature of erotic signification and consideration of the ontological and epistemological issues raised by his work, for instance, would greatly nuance scholarship in this field, which has tended to presuppose a certain knowingness about what constitutes sexuality. Indeed, insofar as a central question in the history of female homoeroticism has been how to talk about "lesbianism" before the advent of modern identity categories, we would do well to consider how this question of anachronistic terminology can morph into an ontological question—what *is* lesbianism in any given era?—as well as how such queries might be supplemented with an epistemological question: how do we know it?

Although nothing in Bray's corpus provides clear answers to these questions, in its performance of ambiguity, tension, and irresolution his work urges us to ask them. In the expanse of its historical sweep, *The Friend*, in particular, gestures in a direction that might draw us closer to an answer. Perhaps not since Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* has a responsible scholar of gay/lesbian history approached large-scale historical change and continuity with such confidence and ambition. In part because the postmodern suspicion of the explanatory power of metanarratives has taken hold in those subfields where the history of homosexuality is most often written (social history, women's history, literary studies),[69] the creation of densely local and socially contextualized knowledges has been constitutive of the field. As a result, the history of homosexuality has been constructed in and by means of research segmented along traditional period lines. Even as queer theory has pressured many of the methodological premises of historians, the power of periodization has not been shaken, as such titles as *Queering the Renaissance*, *Queering the Middle Ages*, and *Queering the Moderns* attest.[70] Although it has become a tenet of queer theory to disrupt the "straight" logic of sequential temporality, to expose periodization as a fetish, and to keep one eye on our contemporary situation, the ensuing conversation between past and present generally has been accomplished by relying on a period-bound concept of the past: one historical moment situated in proximity to modernity (or postmodernity).

To queer the Middle Ages, for instance, is also to historicize the modern, with the injunction to "get medieval" pursued by considering how medieval concepts inhabit, resonate with, or clash with contemporary categories and crises: the military policy of don't ask, don't tell; the sexual politics of the Clinton impeachment; the discourse of HIV/AIDS.[71]

Bray's widening of the temporal lens in *The Friend* allows us to consider anew how the retrospective fiction of periodization has functioned as an epistemic force field, permitting certain questions to advance while occluding others.[72] In particular, the common sense of periodization has kept our attention off those problematic areas where period boundaries meet: the ragged edges, margins, and interstices of periodization that frame our narratives. It is here that historical claims, especially about the advent of change, rub up against one another—often leading to charges of scholarly ignorance or worse. As understandable as is the desire to expose other scholars' epistemic privileging of their own turf, a strategy of border surveillance does not help us learn to speak across period divides.

To the extent that the suitability of assuming a longer vantage has been raised within the history of homosexuality, it has been approached primarily via the debate between acts and identities or, in its more historiographical formulation, between the assertion of alterity or continuism. In the context of this debate, responsible reconsideration of taking the long view has gone, precisely, nowhere. Yet as archival materials come to light that support more nuanced conceptions of identity, orientation, and predisposition than early social constructivist accounts would have allowed, these debates have begun to diminish in importance.[73] Recent attempts to move beyond the impasse produced by these debates have demonstrated that it is the precise nature and interrelations of continuities and discontinuities that are of interest, not the analytic predominance of one over the other.[74]

Bray's final book is perhaps the most subtle mediation between the claims of historical continuity and historical difference in this field to date. In addition, by insisting that friendship can be understood only in terms of the wider context that gives it meaning, the book confutes a basic, if undertheorized, premise of the historiography of homosexuality: that we must conceptualize our object of analysis by provisionally isolating its parameters and claiming for it, however tacitly, a relatively independent social status. That is, whether one historicizes the sodomite or the molly, tribadism, sapphism, or queer virginity, in order to gain a foothold for these phenomena in a landscape unmarked by modern identity categories, scholars have tended to approach the phenomena as discrete, internally unified, and relatively bounded. Despite our adoption of Bray's argument that homoeroticism is part of a networked system of social relations, we have failed to recognize the full

ramifications of that insight and so have treated homoeroticism much like the historical periods in which we locate it.

Could it be that this bounded conceptualization of our analytic object is related to the problem of period boundaries? I am not sure, but it seems no accident that Bray's final book flouts both at once. There is no question that many of the issues prominent in the history of homosexuality traverse historical domains. I have already mentioned some: the vexed relation of friendship to eroticism, the problem of anachronistic terminology, the relationship between erotic acts and erotic identities, and the differences between concepts of erotic identity, predisposition, and orientation. To this we might add the dynamic of secrecy and disclosure; the role of gender-segregated spaces; the relevance (or irrelevance) of age, status, and racial hierarchies; the existence (or nonexistence) of communities and subcultures; the relationship of homoeroticism to gender deviance and conformity; the role of medical and legal discourses in the production of knowledge; and the effects of racial or geographic othering. Additional issues are specific to the history of female bodies and experience: the role of female anatomy, especially the clitoris, in cultural representations; the derivative, secondary order of lesbian visibility within patriarchal culture, which underpins conceptual misrecognitions such as lesbian "impossibility" and "imitation"; and the constitutive social force of representations of female homoeroticism compared to those of male homoeroticism. Each of these issues assumes different contours, contents, and emphases when examined from historically specific locations. At the same time, their persistence as issues suggests that we might reconsider whether what is sometimes presented as whole-scale diachronic change (before and after sexuality, before and after identity) might rather be a manifestation of ongoing synchronic tensions in conceptualizations about bodies, desires, and their relation to gender as they confront the realities of new social formations.

Given the number of sophisticated period-based studies produced in the past twenty years, are we not now in a position to stage a dialogue among the sets of questions, concepts, and propositions that have emerged from both synchronic and diachronic analyses? I want to propose that we might consider indexing such conceptual coordinates across time so as to devise a genealogy of male and female same-sex intimacies over the *longue durée*. To do so would be to create a temporally capacious, conceptually organized, gender-comparative history of homosexuality. This history would derive directly from the questions, issues, and theses of our temporally bounded, fragmented, and discontinuous research. Fitted together in a dialogic rather than a teleological mold, viewed from a wide angle and with all the rough edges showing, this research might find a form that is conceptually coherent while also energizing new areas of inquiry. (This project is made all the

more urgent by the proliferation of anthologies of gay and lesbian literature, which tend to recuperate traditional teleological schemas.)[75] But the conversation I now want to hear, frankly, is not principally one between the past and the present—queer theory, influenced by Foucauldian genealogy, has provided an ample set of procedures for that, usable even by as devout a social historian as Bray. What requires new theorizing, I want to suggest, is how to stage a dialogue between *one* past and *another*.

It may seem that I have strayed far from the terrain mapped out by Alan Bray. These were not his questions, to be sure, but they are the questions that arise for me out of the exploratory maps that he so diligently and generously offered. I am not the scholar to do it—and I suspect that I am not alone in my feelings of inadequacy—but collectively, and by following the signposts he has offered, we are in a position to chart more precisely the overlapping coordinates of love, friendship, eroticism, and sexuality that compose part of his historiographical vista. Perhaps the most humbling legacy of the friend we have lost—and of friendship's loss—is this: just as Alan's first book provided guideposts for much of the historical work that followed, his final gift of friendship beckons us to a new landscape, which is also, as he eloquently testifies, quite old yet, because of his work, quite near.

Notes

I thank George E. Haggerty for organizing, at a difficult time of personal loss, a special session in honor of Alan Bray at the 2002 Modern Language Association convention; David M. Halperin for asking me to coteach a course with him on the historiography of homosexuality; Jody Greene for her astute responses to a draft of this essay; and Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter, and Miri Rubin for inviting me to speak at the Birkbeck College Memorial Symposium on Alan Bray in September 2003.

1. Alan Bray and Michel Rey, "The Body of the Friend: Continuity and Change in Masculine Friendship in the Seventeenth Century," in *English Masculinities, 1660–1800*, ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (London: Longman, 1999), 65.
2. See Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). I cannot claim for myself the status of Alan's friend; although we had corresponded about each other's work, we did not meet until the year before his death. It was only after we had met, when he revealed to me that he would be reading the manuscript of my book *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* for Cambridge University Press and suggested that we might dispense with the protocol of confidentiality to further our conversation, that we became regular correspondents. Portions of this essay were communicated to him in my response to the book manuscript that he shared with me the summer before his death.

3. Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's, 1982); unless otherwise noted, quotations are taken from this edition.
4. Alan Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990), rpt. in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 42; and Bray, *The Friend*, 186.
5. Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs," 47; Bray, *The Friend*, 186.
6. Alan Bray, afterword to *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, new ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 116.
7. Jonathan Goldberg, introduction to *Queering the Renaissance*, 4.
8. Bray, *The Friend*, 25.
9. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 11. Scholars have variously adopted, nuanced, or attempted to refute Bray's constructionist account. As Goldberg notes, almost all the essays in *Queering the Renaissance* are heavily indebted to Bray (4). See, subsequently, Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Gregory W. Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); George E. Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Randolph Trumbach, *Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, vol. 1 of *Sex and the Gender Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997).
10. For analysis of the effects of "the historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift" see axiom 5 of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 44–48. Bray's initial account continues to be nuanced by reflections on the meanings of identity, even as the contours of his chronology have gained general acceptance. See, e.g., David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
11. For instance, Bray remarks that his study of sodomy "places it outside a discrete history of sexuality" ("Homosexuality and the Signs," 56).
12. Bray, *The Friend*, 6.

13. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 55–56. See also his review "Historians and Sexuality," *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993): 189–94.
14. Bray, *The Friend*, 150.
15. Regarding the temporality of change, Bray notes that "as a social form the personal service of early Tudor England was in decay by the end of the sixteenth century, but as a cultural form it was not; here the language of 'friendship,' as a set of assumptions and expectations, was still very much alive." Nonetheless, "the protecting conventions that ensured that [male intimacy] was seen in an acceptable frame of reference were often absent by the end of the sixteenth century" ("Homosexuality and the Signs," 53, 56).
16. Bray, *The Friend*, 217.
17. Bray, "The Body of the Friend," 80; cf. Bray, *The Friend*, 218.
18. Bray, *The Friend*, 212.
19. Ibid., 209.
20. See also Bray's headnote to my essay "The Perversion of 'Lesbian' Desire," *History Workshop Journal* 41 (1996): 19–49.
21. Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs," 46; slightly altered in Bray, *The Friend*, 156.
22. Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs," 50; Bray, *The Friend*, 190.
23. Bray, *The Friend*, 174.
24. Bray's other break with traditional protocols of historical evidence was his frequent use of literary representation as a means of access to the social.
25. Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 93–94: "Eroticism, especially homoeroticism . . . seems not to operate as a device governing meanings in the Renaissance; its presence or absence is not determining in nomenclatures, knowledges, or social practices." The language in my text draws on Shannon, "Queerly Philological Reading" (paper presented at the "Lesbianism in the Renaissance" seminar, Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Minneapolis, April 2002).
26. As Lauren Berlant and Lisa Duggan point out, the "Clinton affair" was "a moment of stunning confusion in norms of sexuality; of fantasies of national intimacy—what constitutes 'ordinary sex' and 'ordinary marriage,' let alone the relation between law and morality, law and justice" (introduction to *Our Monica, Ourselves: The Clinton Affair and the National Interest*, ed. Lauren Berlant and Lisa Duggan [New York: New York University Press, 2001], 4). Several essays in *Our Monica, Ourselves* remark on, but none actually analyzes, this constitutive confusion. In "It's Not about Sex" James R. Kincaid remarks of Clinton's infamous denial, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky": "What the 'it' is that isn't sex shifts, of course, according to the context: anatomical, moral, legal, or causal. My point is that it always shifts so as *to keep the bodies themselves out of the picture*. The idea that oral sex isn't sex is just one of those refocusings" (75; emphasis mine). In "The First Penis Impeached"

Toby Miller likewise has other fish to fry: "But Bill's dalliance with desire, his carefully calibrated, Monigated, sense of how far he could go—what constituted sex—was in fact part of the dance of management (not denial) that characterizes high office and its organization of low desires" (118). In "Sex and Civility" Eric O. Clarke notes the "telling incoherence" that "defined the events surrounding the president's actions, the media coverage of them, and the political response: his alleged crimes and misdemeanors both were and were not about sex"; for Clarke, however, this incoherence is less about sex than about "the fraught place of sex in the public sphere" (286). Not incidentally, a survey of midwestern college students in 1991 revealed that 60 percent of them did not think that they had "had sex" if it involved oral contact rather than intercourse.

27. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 69.
28. Bray, "The Body of the Friend," 83; slightly reformulated in Bray, *The Friend*, 218. *The Friend* foregrounds the importance of the advent of civil society, arguing that it divorced sworn kinship from marriage and, in so doing, removed "the family from the traditional setting that this diverse and complex world had created. 'Friends' could still negotiate marriage and did, but friendship was no longer to be created in relations that overlapped with it and were akin to it" (217). The dependence of the hetero on the homo has been a tenet of queer theory since Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
29. Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs," 54; see also Bray, *The Friend*, 193. Suspicious as well of the reliability of literary texts as indicators of their authors' sexual orientation, Bray assumes an exclusive hetero orientation in some of the subjects he analyzes, a problem that Bredbeck, Goldberg, and Smith attempt to address.
30. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 17.
31. Incisive critiques of *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* along similar lines include those of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who points out Bray's "inadvertent reification of 'the homosexual' as an already-constituted entity," which has a "disturbing functionalist effect" on his argument (*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], 86); Goldberg, who questions the anachronistic role of individualism as well as the foreclosure of meaning in Bray's narrative (*Sodometries*, 68–71); DiGangi, who charges that Bray does not consider the homoerotics of Elizabethan male friendship (*The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, 10); and Bredbeck, for whom the stigma of sodomy is less perfectly inscriptive or monolithic than Bray seems to suggest (*Sodomy and Interpretation*, 4–5, 144).
32. "The image of the masculine friend," Bray writes, "was an image of intimacy between men in stark contrast to the forbidden intimacy of homosexuality" ("Homosexuality and the Signs," 42).

33. DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, 10. See also Orgel, *Impersonations*, 42.
34. Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 162.
35. More than once Bray expressed anxiety about the controversy he believed our books would encounter; my *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, he cautioned, required "armour-plating" from the attacks that he thought would be inevitable from British historians (pers. comm.).
36. The kisses of greeting that we bestow on our sexual partners, for instance, may not be qualitatively different from those we bestow on our friends, just as the waning of sexual desire between long-term lovers may not turn them, automatically, into "just friends."
37. Bray, *The Friend*, 7.
38. Bray cites as evidence a letter Newman wrote following St. John's death in which he articulates St. John's "hope that during his whole priestly life he had not committed one mortal sin," which Bray takes as "definitive" (*The Friend*, 293).
39. Bray quickly follows with a second question: "How much does that answer tell one? I have written this book for those interlocutors who are willing to ask that question" (*The Friend*, 269). Bray's point is that the good of these formalized bonds "lay for them self-evidently beyond the individuals for whom a friendship was being made" (277) and that focusing on sexuality does not get us to that point.
40. One can infer from Bray's reading of Newman's life that the line between the erotic and the spiritual depends in part on a division between the private and the communitarian: spiritual love creates bonds of community, whereas carnal love is more limited in reach. Because such a division is belied by Bray's argument regarding the wide nexus of elective kinship that friendships created up through the seventeenth century, it may be that this separation is itself a further effect of the social change he charts. Or, this could simply be the place where his own Roman Catholicism, to which Bray converted as an adult, most comes to the fore.
41. David M. Halperin incisively articulates the issue: "If the funerary monuments Bray describes had conveyed even the faintest suggestion that the *connubium* of friends celebrated in them had consisted in a sodomitical union, we would not find those monuments enshrined in Christian churches. I do not infer from this alone that Piper and Wise never had sex (though Bray makes a very strong claim to that effect about John Henry Newman and Ambrose St John); in most cases, I assume, the evidence does not allow us to draw any firm inferences one way or the other. But I do deduce that the *rhetoric* of friendship or love employed in those monuments succeeded in sealing off the relationships represented in them from any suggestion of being sodomitical" (introduction to *Love, Sex, Intimacy, and Friendship between Men, 1550–1800*, ed. Katherine O'Donnell and Michael O'Rourke [New York: Palgrave, 2003], 10n9).
42. Bray, *The Friend*, 6.

43. Goldberg, introduction to *Queering the Renaissance*, 6; Cynthia Herrup, "Finding the Bodies," *GLQ* 5 (1999): 255–65.
44. This point was made by David Wooten in his remarks during the Birkbeck College Memorial Symposium on Bray in September 2003.
45. A similar incarnation of this problem occurs in a blurb on the cover of a recent anthology, *Sexualities in History: A Reader*, ed. Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay (New York: Routledge, 2002). "Sexual behaviors and mentalities are embedded in systems of power," David Levine observes in his puff for the book, but this recognition is preceded with the claim that "sex is, perhaps, the *least* interesting aspect of the history of sexuality" (emphasis mine).
46. I have found only two moments in *The Friend* that remotely smack of "debunking," and in each instance the issue is not eroticism but an anachronistic understanding of the role and meaning of homoeroticism in early modern culture. In Bray's discussion of other scholars' assertions of *covert* homosexuality (166), for instance, the issue is not the projection of homoeroticism but the assumption of the need for secrecy.
47. Bray, *The Friend*, 6. At the same time, he warns that "to read this book within the narrow terms of a debate as to whether homosexual friendship constitutes a family would be to misunderstand it, perhaps gravely. The ethics it deals with overflow that question. To widen the terms of this debate . . . is to see it within a broader contemporary crisis in the ethics of friendship, the signs of which have been the diverse loyalties of identity, region, culture, or language that have come to mark the pluralism of the late modern world, of which sexuality has been one, but only one, strand" (8).
48. In the introduction to *The Friend*, for instance, Bray characterizes his own historical enterprise as a "seeking among the tombs of the dead those lost friends" who died of HIV/AIDS—"against all expectations I found such friendship there in these monuments" (5). So too, his coda concludes: "As in our own time the permafrost of modernity has at last begun to melt . . . the world we are seeing is not a strange new world, revealed as the glaciers draw back, but a strange *old* world: kinship, locality, embodiment, domesticity, affect" (306).
49. Ibid., 197.
50. Ibid., 268.
51. Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 19–20.
52. Bray, "Historians and Sexuality," 194.
53. I take up these questions in "The Joys of Martha Joyless; or, Queer Pedagogy and the (Early Modern) Production of Sexual Knowledge," unpublished manuscript.
54. Margaret Hunt, afterword to Goldberg, *Queering the Renaissance*, 372.
55. Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
56. It is worth noting that the relation between eroticism and friendship looks different from the standpoint of the history of lesbianism. Efforts to stake claims on one side of a rigid divide between sexuality and asexuality have been constitutive of the field.

From Lillian Faderman's implication in *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women, from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981) that romantic friends were not sexual to Terry Castle's rejoinder in *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) that sex is the basis of a definition of lesbianism, the question of erotic content has been central to lesbian historiography. With very few exceptions, scholars have reproduced rather than questioned the applicability of that binary.

57. Bray seemed content that others might push the ramifications of his work in a more explicitly erotic direction. He acknowledged, for instance, those scholars who not only welcomed his work but critiqued it or used it for their own analysis of the historical relation between the homosocial and the homoerotic (afterword to *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, new ed.). Based on the citations of other scholars and personal testimony offered since his death, many have experienced Bray's work and feedback as not only generative but enabling of their own more explicitly erotic interpretations of the archive.
58. Ibid., 118; emphasis mine.
59. Alan Bray, "The Curious Case of Michael Wigglesworth," in *A Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 206. Given that, from a certain point of view, Wigglesworth's dreams are a perfect illustration of what desire is, Bray's own conception of desire and how it functions in the modern world is worth further investigation.
60. Bray, *The Friend*, 172.
61. Halperin, introduction to O'Donnell and O'Rourke, *Love, Sex, Intimacy, and Friendship*, 5.
62. Katherine O'Donnell and Michael O'Rourke, "In Memoriam—Alan Bray (1948–2001)" (which precedes Bray's essay "A Traditional Rite for Blessing Friendship"), in *Love, Sex, Intimacy, and Friendship*, 85.
63. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 17.
64. The question of influence is complex. Bray has obviously influenced Shannon, whose *Sovereign Amity* (primarily on masculine friendship but attentive to female friendship as well) seeks at several points to extend his analysis of the dangers of inequality, as well as Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), whose analysis draws heavily on his treatment of cultural intelligibility. Yet it is notable that neither of these books is mainly about female homoeroticism. Elizabeth Susan Wahl sees in Bray's focus on those who threaten social stability "a particularly useful approach for analyzing England's apparent cultural indifference to the desire of one woman for another," but she does not develop that observation (*Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999], 52). Harriette Andreadis approvingly cites Bray's historical argument about a homosexual subculture in order to speculate about "an analogous female homosexual subculture" emerging

around the same time in London (*Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550–1714* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001], 52, 95–96). Based on the absence of citations as well as on critical approach, Bray appears to have held little utility for Theodora A. Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668–1801* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); or the essays on female intimacy in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

65. Bray, "The Body of the Friend," 75; Bray, *The Friend*, 158.
66. I owe this question to Laura Gowing.
67. Bray, *The Friend*, 10, 174–76, 199.
68. George C. Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke, and Montgomery, 1590–1676: Her Life, Letters, and Work* (Kendal: Wilson, 1922), 76. This question is also raised by Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 65–68.
69. This critique focuses on such metanarrative's retrospective investment in progress, causality, and supersession; its sequential requirements of the pre- and the post-; its tendency toward false synthesis; and its press-ganging of all prior formations of same-sex desire into modern identities. See, e.g., Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, eds., *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
70. In addition to Goldberg, *Queering the Renaissance*, and Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*, see Anne Herrmann, *Queering the Moderns: Poses/Portraits/Performances* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).
71. See Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Karma Lochrie, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Murderous Plots and Medieval Secrets," *GLQ* 1 (1995): 405–17; Lochrie, "Presidential Improprieties and Medieval Categories: The Absurdity of Heterosexuality," in Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*, 87–96; and Steven F. Kruger, "Medieval/Postmodern: HIV/AIDS and the Temporality of Crisis," in Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*, 252–83.
72. The major studies of lesbianism, for instance, are generally respectful of traditional period boundaries. In addition to those listed above, see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Julie Abraham, *Are Girls Necessary? Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Lisa Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press,

1998); Valerie Rohy, *Impossible Women: Lesbian Figures and American Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

73. Classical, medieval, and early modern medicine, astrology, and physiognomy, for instance, describe some homoerotic behaviors, especially those associated with gender deviance, as linked to, and sometimes caused by, anatomical aberrations, diseases of the mind, or habituation due to sexual practices. Although this view does not constitute "homosexual identity" in its postsexological construction, neither is it an undifferentiated concept of sin to which all were subject.
74. See Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*; and Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. Despite these advances, too often the concept of "identity" remains undertheorized and hazily defined, associated with such different concepts as sexual inclination, tendency, preference, predisposition, orientation, consciousness, subjectivity, self-perception, and subculture—all listed here along a spectrum from "soft" to "hard" identity claims. Several problems and questions arise from this definitional confusion and associational logic. Are identity, orientation, and subjectivity synonymous? If they are, do they mean the same thing as inclination, predisposition, and tendency? Does an inclination, even if defined as innate, necessarily signify something causal, or is it merely probabilistic? Does the subcultural grouping of like-minded persons necessarily constitute an identity or a subjectivity? Does the *content* of a homoerotic subjectivity alter historically?
75. See, e.g., Stephen Coote, ed., *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983); Emma Donoghue, ed., *Poems between Women: Four Centuries of Love, Romantic Friendship, and Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Terry Castle, ed., *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).