Hervey actually had sex with Stephen Fox and/or Count Algarotti. Given Hervey’s importance at court and in the government, and given the deep covert nature of homosexual activity (especially in the eighteenth century when it was a major crime punishable by death in some cases), it would be virtually impossible to document a person of Lord Hervey’s position having homosexual relations. For Hervey, despite what Peter Quin nell says, appears to have lived with caution. There are notable exceptions in those less careful, daring souls who seemed to make no real attempt to hide their homosexuality, even in the eighteenth century. Count Algarotti himself and William Beckford, the Gothic novelist, are two of these in the literary world. (There is little corroborative evidence for other authors who were allegedly practicing homosexuals, such as Thomas Gray and Horace Walpole.) It is indeed rare that we find such documentation of homosexual activity asVoltairine’ s description, in a letter to Frederick the Great, of Algarotti’s sodomy—are the handsome young male secretaries of the French Ambassador:

But when... I see the tender Algarotti... To the delicious embrace—The handsome Lucayac, his young friend,

I imagine I see Socrates fastened

Unto the tums of Alcibiades.

Since Halsband can find no similar documentation for Hervey, he withholds the description ‘homosexual.’ And yet gay is what Hervey was; and it is Lord Hervey’s ‘gay’ that particularly repelled Pope. Unlike Pope, Hervey is very much an active participant in the world he phạm in his writings. As Oliver Elton observes, “He was born into a society which he was too clever to like and not strong enough to quit.” Lord Hervey, the eldest son of the Earl of Bristol, was inherently a part of the wealthy, aristocratic world of the London of the early eighteenth century. This very real power and wealth of Lord Hervey, along with his close relationships with other aristocrats such as Lady Mary, exasperated the upwardly mobile, middle-class, Alexander Pope. Like so many who aspired to acceptance by the upper class, Pope idealized the aristocracy as symbolic carriers of the moral and cultural tradition. This Tory nostalgia led him to react strongly against what he saw as Hervey’s abuse of his aristocratic responsibility. After all, people like Hervey and Lady Mary, personified and defined the conventions of society. For Pope, convention was sacred. This conviction added to the urgency of his attack. Not only were they betraying him personally (as former friends), but Hervey and Lady Mary were also betraying the aristocratic ideal as exemplified by Lord Bathurst and Lord Burlington. Pope sensed the existence of a coterie around Lord Hervey, Lady Mary, and Count Algarotti within the circle, which shared literary and sexual as well as political interests antithetical to his own. Pope deplored the selfindulgence, the excessiveness, and the vanity of his inscrutable group. Probably Pope was not familiar with the particulars of the interrelationships that existed among Lady Mary, Lord Hervey, and Algarotti—that Lady Mary and Lord Hervey shared a passionate (and unrequited, in at least Lady Mary’s case) love for Algarotti, that they both sought for greater pleasures in Berlin. Lady Mary was, without a doubt, more suited to the amoral, worldly, cynical society of Lord Hervey and Algarotti than to the chaste, more spiritual world of the Earl of Bristol. Pope saw Algarotti, eventually, and so identified Lady Mary with Lord Hervey in his satires.

Stephen Fox

To Pope, the relationship between Lady Mary and Hervey was essentially unhealthy. Pope reacted to Hervey’s circle as D.H. Lawrence reacted to the Bloomsbury group over two hundred years later. Lawrence’s feelings toward the exclusive Bloomsbury set is expressed in a letter to his friend David Garnett:

...I feel I should go mad when I think of your set. Camarin Grant and Keynes and Birrel. It makes me dream of beetles. In Cambridge I had a similar dream: I feel it slightly before in Shackleys. But it came full upon me in Keynes and in Duncan Grant. And yesterday I knew it again in Birrel—You must leave these friends, these beetles.

Pope also uses the reductive image of the insect to characterize this type of brittle gay personality. Yet let me set this Bug with added wings:

Whose Buzz the Witty and the Fair enrobs

Yet Will not be tastes, and Beauty nor enjoys.

Behind the grandeur of palaces with real Queens in them, Pope reveals “queenlike” Hervey—a strange, hybrid animal ("bug", "spinal", "load", "reptile") who seems to lack sensitivity, compassion, and a sense of the moral order. Pope sees Lord Hervey as the degenere aristocrat, the “fool of quality,” and associates both Hervey and Lady Mary with unsavory characteristics.

Another source of Pope’s antipathy to Lady Mary is that he once loved her. In a series of letters (1716-18), Pope declares his devotion to Lady Mary. Probably assuming that Pope was writing in the affected epistolary style of the seventeenth century French romantic letter writers, she neither encouraged nor checked these advances. Yet, as the most likely one of a woman, but a fellow wit. Aggressive and not confined to her stereotypes role as a woman (she chased poor Algarotti for a number of years, leaving her family and country to find the “Elysian Fields” in her company), she was buoyed by acceptance into the exclusive society of gay men. Hervey was without any doubt a straitforward homosexual world where women were regarded as somehow less than men (and even something less than human). As a writer and thinker she found solace in the freedom of love and status (as Virginia Woolf found in the Bloomsbury clique) in her relationship with Lord and Lady Hervey. In spite of the fact that Pope offers his own masculine perspective, he manages to illuminate the effeminate and obscene persons of Lord Hervey in the “Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.” It is Pope himself, not Hervey or Lady Mary, who is somewhat of a sexual anomaly, unmarried, childless, and physically debilitated. Pope constructed his portrait of Martha Blount. Pope, it appears from most available evidence, was in the recipient minority of a non-practising heterosexual Lord Hervey, the representative of the Establishment, on the one hand enjoyed at least four requited love affairs spanning twenty years, two each with of the sexes.

**Sources:**


This article is an abridged version of a paper: “The Third Sex: Lord Hervey and His Coteries” presented at a meeting of The American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies, at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, on October 11, 1975. For a copy of the complete monograph, write to: The Body Politic, Box 7289, Suite 10, Toronto M6B 1K9, Canada. Enclose a self-addressed envelope and $1.25 to cover copying and postage.