

Sebastian Zilles

**Somewhere Lost In-Between: Friendship, Love and Sexual Desire  
in Literary Male-Bonds in Contemporary German Prose**

In 1902, the German anthropologist Heinrich Schurtz established the term male bonding to Germany. He noted that male bonds are characterized by a “Geselligkeitstrieb” whereas women are dominated by a “Geschlechtstrieb”. Within this dichotomous gender-model, Schurtz also highlighted that male bonds are an enrichment for society since they are an embodiment of the intellectual concept.

In contemporary German prose literature male bonds are at the edge of dying out. My thesis is that the crucial reason for male crisis is the accentuation of physicalness. Even in 1917, the author Hans Blüher stated in his monography *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* (2. Bde, 1917/1919) that relationship between men are always libidiously motivated. I will transfer this assumption to contemporary German literature, e. g. Robert Schneider’s novel *Schlafes Bruder* (1992), Christian Kracht’s novel *Faserland* (1995) and Juli Zeh’s detective novel *Schilf* (2007). I will focus on the conception of maleness and male identity. As I will point out, all three protagonists ‘use’ maleness as a masquerade. Thus, the question what has to be masked respectively what has to be compensated is raised. In addition, one can also pose the question what can be found when one looks behind the mask.

Within my corpus, the following gradation can be outlined: the inability to hold up or even form male bonds is caused by queer male identity which is presented as fragmented. Queer characters fail on different levels, which are friendship, love and sexual desire.

**Sebastian Zilles**, born in 1985, has degree in German and English Studies. His main research areas are masculinity studies, literary depictions of genius and evil in German literature after World War II and crime fiction. In his PhD project he analyses literary male bonds and concepts of maleness from Goethe to contemporary prose literature. Sebastian Zilles is undergraduate instructor and research assistant at the University of Mannheim (Department for New German Literature and Qualitative Media Analysis, Prof. Dr. Jochen Hörisch).