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KATARZYNA WIĘCKOWSKA, *Spectres of Men: Masculinity, Crisis and British Literature*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2014. ISBN 978-83-231-3245-5. 317 pages. (Anna Branach-Kallas)

Spectres of Men: Masculinity, Crisis and British Literature presents an analysis of models of masculinity in male-authored British literature from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present. Alongside the analysis of canonical novels, plays and poems, Katarzyna Więckowska studies also some less well-known works by men to stress the labour involved in constructing ideals of manhood and the connections between these ideals and social, political, and cultural changes. She focuses on white, hegemonic masculinity as elaborated by British writers and thinkers, excluding the conceptualisation of manhood by women or racial and sexual minorities.

The study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective that includes poststructuralist critique of culture and literature, key concepts of contemporary gender studies, and cultural materialism. The general model used in the analysis combines Jacques Derrida's conceptualization of history as animated by the comings and goings of spectres in *Spectres of Marx* with Raymond Williams's description of culture as formed by the dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formations. The book approaches cultural inheritance, including literature, as not homogeneous, but as constantly re-formed through the recovery or/and rejection of certain elements of the past and models of manhood; it sketches a history of literary representations of the ideals of manhood as haunted by spectres, conjured in order to solve specific political, ideological and social problems. In other words, the book is an instance of what John Toth (2010) has called "spectroanalysis": a model of cultural analysis which emphasises the role of spectres in the formation of present and future culture.

Więckowska approaches masculinity as an unstable and relational construct, produced in opposition to femininity and non-hegemonic masculinity, seen as "other" with regard to class and race. Effeminacy plays a key role in her analysis of selected literary works, genres, and social and ideological transformations, as well as in the general approach to masculinity as haunted by the spectres of excluded Others. Homosexuality is an equally important category, which is presented in *Spectres of Men* as underlying the production of any ideal of manhood. All these ideals are produced through complex processes of exclusion and inclusion, also of past models of manhood, which makes masculinity as such spectral. The returns to old ideals and their adjustment to new conditions are seen as playing a major role in the production of hegemonic masculinity, particularly in periods of rapid ideological, economic and social changes, widely perceived as the time of crisis.

Spectres of Men focuses on moments of cultural and/or literary crises and on texts reflecting them in order to emphasise the dynamic and spectral nature of cultural production. Crisis is one of the key concepts used in the book. The analysis of literary representations stresses the various crises masculinity has undergone throughout ages and emphasises their historical context in order to illustrate their repeated appearance and to underline the unchanging character of the spectres that accompany them. Accordingly, the presentation of the image of manhood that prevails at a given time is accompanied by a description of texts or practices representing residual or marginalised masculinities.

This literary history of British men is divided into six chapters under intriguing titles, encapsulating the changing models of masculinity. *Binding* (from the Anglo-Saxon period to the 17th century) describes the heroic model of manhood, emphasising the original exclusion of the female sphere and the presentation of masculine identity as performative, visible in, for example, *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the work of William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser and Robert Burton. The discussion of Renaissance literature points to a number of ideas and processes that established the modern way of thinking about the male subject, including the image of men as melancholic inheritors of an unwanted legacy.

Bonding is dedicated to the literature and culture of 18th-century Britain. The description of a number of “new” models of manhood (e.g., the libertine and the sentimental man) situates the ideals in the context of the development of science, philosophy, capitalism, new literary genres, and the overall misogyny of the period. Więckowska discusses the links between masculinity, nationality and class, as well as the models of masculinity and femininity presented in the first novels by, among others, Defoe, Richardson, and Gothic writers.

Chapter three and four explore the 19th-century increased codification of the feminine and masculine spheres, emphasising the notion of male labour developed by Thomas Carlyle. *Labouring* (the first half of the 19th century) presents Carlyle’s ideas, their impact on Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* and on Charles Kingsley’s and Thomas Hughes’s ideals of muscular Christianity. *Codifying* discusses the ethos of male labour and heroic sacrifice reflected in adventure stories, colonial romances, and debates on the nature of art, published in the second half of the 19th century.

Ultimately, *Struggling* refers to the crisis of masculinity during the two world wars. The First World War damaged the ideals of heroic manliness and resulted in a general sense of brokenness and fragmentariness. Consequently, during the Second World War a different, more “temperate” model of manhood was adopted. *Dissolving* compares the influence of both world wars on the existing ideals of manhood and discusses the post-war literary projects of rebuilding the society through strengthening the bonds between men and excluding women. This last chapter depicts the diversity of models of manhood in the second half

of the 20th century, focusing on the general critique and deconstruction of masculinity as a norm and the ensuing masculinity crisis at the turn of the century. Więckowska explores here, among others, recent texts by Ian McEwan, Graham Swift, Nick Hornby, thus showing the evolution of spectres of men in most contemporary fiction.

Starting from the Middle Ages and ending with the early 21st century, *Spectres of Men* outlines a fascinating history of British masculinity as fragmented and torn by a number of internal and external forces, and as constantly haunted by the ghost of the past. While the tropes of binding, bonding, labouring and struggling seem to have codified masculinity as power, determination and community in the past, Więckowska suggests that postmodernity stages a radical dissolution of the unified male subject. Her emphasis on crisis reflects the way of thinking about masculinity as undergoing a severe crisis that has dominated the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st and that has intensified the need to return to old ideals of manhood. Based on rigorous research, *Spectres of Men* proposes a thorough, if subjective, attempt to classify and systematise the evolution of masculinity in British literature. It will be an interesting reading for literary scholars and students, historians and sociologists alike. *Spectres of Men: Masculinity, Crisis and British Literature* offers a fascinating and absorbing literary history by and about white men, with a profound insight into the evolution of the Western concept of masculinity.