



Review of Stefan Horlacher, *Masculinities. Konzeptionen von Männlichkeit im Werk von Thomas Hardy und D. H. Lawrence* [*Masculinities: Conceptions of Masculinity in the Works of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence*] (Tübingen: Günter Narr, 2006), vi + 721 pp.

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Stefan Horlacher's magisterial study of conceptions of masculinity in the works of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence proceeds from two initial observations: first, Horlacher suggests that contemporary social and cultural phenomena such as drug-abuse and violence by and among men, or the success story of Viagra, or, for another example, the co-existence in popular culture of icons of masculinity as divergent as Michael Jackson and Arnold Schwarzenegger, can be traced back to fundamental insecurities regarding traditional masculine role models and identities. However, in his analyses of, centrally, Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* and D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Horlacher argues that the authors of these two novels and their contemporaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were as troubled by gender as their late 20th and early 21st century descendants, and that their texts both reflect complex processes of male identity formation, and create spaces in which solutions to problems of identity formation can be imagined. If, as Horlacher, following Stephen Greenblatt and Clifford Geertz, argues, culture can be regarded as textual in nature, and if an individual's experience, including his or her sexual identity, is always and invariably mediated by language, then a literary text can, and does, offer privileged first-hand insight into the human mind.

Horlacher's second observation is less general in nature and serves to situate his own work in the contexts of, on the one hand, traditional literary criticism and, on the other, Men's Studies. While literary scholars have always been interested in male fictional characters, they do not, as yet, consistently read them as historically variable cultural constructs, although, under the twin influences of initially Women's and later Gender Studies, they have learned to do so with regard to female fictional characters; hence, male fictional characters, Horlacher contends, are still often seen as representing universal human norms. In Men's Studies, of course, scholars do not subscribe to this universalistic view, but conceive of the male subject as decentered, and stress the performative aspects of gender; however, they do not, by and large, employ the vocabulary of literary criticism, or draw on literary theory. Horlacher's plea, therefore is for an interdisciplinary approach to literary representations of masculinity, an approach which would integrate components from Men's Studies, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, history, cultural anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, deconstructionism, and New Historicism. His own approach is, indeed, broadly interdisciplinary in nature, though there is a distinct, and perhaps inevitable, bias towards the theoretical frameworks of psychoanalysis and

deconstructionism, specifically, towards the theories of Lacan and Derrida. Borrowing from David Rosen's *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity* (1993), Horlacher describes the purpose of his study as follows: if – to paraphrase Horlacher, who in turn quotes Rosen – Rosen's study is a "series of snapshots of masculinity and experience," his own seeks to complement these snapshots by what might be called, analogously, films in slow motion. Taken together, snapshots and slow motion films might then result in a "social meta-narrative of gender-associated conflict, crisis, and accommodation"; this meta-narrative of changing constructions of masculinity might also seek to account for these changes by investigating the social and cultural factors by which they might have been caused, or to which they might have responded.

Horlacher's study is divided into two main parts: the first sketches the theoretical background indicated above, and concludes with a particularly impressive chapter on late 19th and early 20th century gender discourses in a variety of fields, from art and literature to medicine and the law. Horlacher situates *Jude the Obscure* and *Sons and Lovers* at the interfaces of these discourses, but also in their literary contexts, both with regard to their periods, that is, late Victorianism and early Modernism respectively, and to their genre, namely, the *Bildungsroman* or novel of development; in passing, he manages to show that the boundary lines between the two periods are anything but clear-cut, and, for that matter, that a term like *Bildungsroman* or rather the concept it appears to denote may be anything but helpful.

The second part of *Masculinities* is devoted to a close reading of the two novels, as a result of which Horlacher is able to demonstrate conclusively that not only their female but also their male protagonists cannot any longer conceive of their gender identities as pre-given and stable. Both men and women in *Jude the Obscure* and *Sons and Lovers* need to construct these identities by choosing from a variety of models, that is, from patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior on offer in their societies; these models frequently resist dichotomous classification as either "male/masculine" or "female/feminine," but rather mark (forever shifting) positions in a continuum from the one to the other. Ultimately, then, these texts – and Horlacher also sketches lines of development between his two core texts and other novels by Hardy and Lawrence – do not merely catalogue the human and moral costs of modernity but also address key questions of gender identity and of human interaction, questions which still remain unanswered even in the first decade of the 21st century.

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