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Isabel Karremann. *Männlichkeit und Körper: Inszenierungen eines geschlechtsspezifischen Unbehagens im englischen Roman des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts*. Kulturwissenschaftliche Gender Studies 14. Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2008. 352 pp.

Isabel Karremann's study of "gender-specific unease in the English novel of the 18th and early 19th century" is a well-written and interesting analysis that explores what happens when male identities are confronted with their bodies, the central thesis being that the confrontations "mit der eigenen Körperlichkeit, der *male corporeality*," are represented "als Momente der Furcht, der Verunsicherung, der Bedrohung für die Männlichkeit und die Realität, als deren Machtzentrum sie sich entwirft" (14). Karremann argues that while the texts analysed insist on the necessity of establishing a firm border between masculinity and the body on the one hand, they simultaneously imagine the failure of exactly this differentiation. She thereby successfully develops an unofficial history of masculinity in the 18th century and the early Romantic period which traces tensions in the perceptions of masculinity and reconstructs cultural processes of demarcation.

Using the traditional master narratives of European culture as a starting point to demonstrate how masculinities were usually applied as general standards for all matters human (cf. Laqueur's one-sex theory), she proves with her well-chosen literary examples – ranging from texts by Defoe and Swift to Cleland, Smollett, Maturin, Lewis and Mary Shelley – how these masculine norms collide with disconcerting or recalcitrant realities. Unfortunately, Karremann abstains from setting out a comprehensive theoretical foundation and instead restricts herself to a rather short survey of masculinity studies that emphasises Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection as well as certain aspects of civilization theory insofar as these prove relevant for her interpretations. The fact that the author even adds two brief textual analyses to her introductory chapter (e.g. a reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann's well-known *Sandman* story, which appears somewhat exotic in the context of the book, as it is the only non-English text included) further demonstrates that her main interest lies in working with the novels themselves, her first major example being Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. Here, she argues, the production of disconcertion derives from Defoe's use of illness as a medium: both the chaos of the epidemic and abject elements serve as oppositions to society's disciplinary actions aimed at controlling the body. Thus, the process of signification imposed by the dominating culture is subverted and invalidates the ideal of Puritan masculinity as the major structuring principle. A similar "Nullpunkt der Signifikation" (329) is reached in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, the most recent of the texts discussed. Set against the apocalyptic background of a plague epidemic that eventually no-one but Lionel Verney, the eponymous narrator, will survive, the text can be read as a critical intervention across several discursive fields, such as civilisation and colonialism, thereby effectively deconstructing Romantic notions of mascu-

line superiority in the process. Another extensive and interesting analysis is dedicated to *Gulliver's Travels*, where Karremann shows how a Herculean ideal of masculinity is satirised by means of Swift's hyperbolic descriptions and, thus, subverted: masculinity mimics itself. In accordance with her approach – namely to write a double history of the "Verhältni[s] von Männlichkeit und Körper" (335) by using representative texts of the 18th and 19th century –, Karremann does not limit herself to the literary canon but also includes John Cleland's infamous narrative of Fanny Hill (*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*) and M.G. Lewis's *The Monk*, one of the most widely-read Gothic novels of the time. Even a pornographic text like the former allows for insightful readings via concepts such as *male bonding* or the *gaze*. While in Cleland's text unease is articulated by 'deviant' sexualities (such as homoeroticism or masochism), in Lewis's case, the famous horror vision of the *bleeding nun* in *The Monk*, for instance, is read as an abject phenomenon that blurs the boundaries between life and death, between female chastity and sexuality and inverts traditional power structures: "Das weibliche Andere übt eine 'männliche' Blick-, Wort- und Handlungsmacht aus, während sich der Held in einer 'weiblichen' Position erfahren muss, in der er die Kontrolle über seinen eigenen Körper verliert" (271). This then links the allegedly obscene and gothic with the highbrow canon of texts, for the crisis of masculinity is also articulated in a picaresque novel like Smollett's *Expedition of Humphry Clinker*. Smollett's text presents a number of abject phenomena (e.g. the sewer) and bizarre colonial ideas about cannibalism or castration as part of the travel narrative. The crisis of the nation, which can be sensed throughout the text, is presented "als Männlichkeitskrise" (52): the old masculine ideal can merely defend itself by proclaiming its hypochondriac condition to be the new ideal.

The major strength of Karremann's work is its broad scope, which ties together a vast number of discursive fields (such as abjection and illness, critiques of civilisation, colonialism) with regard to the study of masculinity, stressing literature's status as an institutionalised *Interdiskurs* (Jürgen Link) in its own right and opening up new perspectives on these texts. At the same time, however, this sometimes causes problems for the textual analyses themselves. Although all of Karremann's interpretations are convincing and even intriguing, a more concise theoretical angle as well as more close reading passages are sometimes missing from her work. If one of her main ideas is that in the texts analysed the "traditional" concept of masculinity propagated is subverted by the concept of the body and that thereby the "most human" is reduced to the "merely human" (338), the many frames of reference and contexts offered in her interpretations threaten at times to divert attention from the texts themselves. A clearer outline of her methodology would also have been helpful, including such categories as the reader and the implied reader, which are briefly discussed and occasionally referred to in her analyses, but not sufficiently problematized. Typographical errors are rare (66, 115, 135, 241), though an index is missing.

These are, of course, very minor points of criticism given that Karremann has written a thoroughly intriguing book, offering profound interpretations that allow her to develop new insights even among the 'usual suspects' of literary studies, such as Swift and Defoe. The main line of argument, which ties the novels together into an unofficial history of masculinity as a history of fear, dislocation and disruption, proves to be a strong one!