

Masculinities in Victorian Painting by Joseph A. Kestner. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995. xv, 316 pp. 177 illus. ISBN 1-85928-108-7. \$69.95.

How was male subjectivity constructed through the visual images produced and circulated during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England? Joseph Kestner provides a much needed iconographical typology of male figures in this comprehensive book. He argues for recognition of the diversity of masculinities represented in British painting from the 1850s through the early 1900s. He summarizes many current theories about masculinity, with an emphasis on the psychoanalytical, in chapter one, "Artistic Representation and the Construction of Masculinity." The "dominant fiction of masculinity," symbolized by an equation between penis and phallus, individual male figures and the patriarchal ordering of Victorian society, guides Kestner's interpretations (273): "First and foremost is the differentiation of the masculine from the feminine" (30). All male icons must take their meaning from this inter-gender polarity, Kestner reasons, since it underpins the "predominantly ... hegemonic form" of masculinity (20). Although he allows for the "possible strong homoerotic elements" (250) in certain canvases, the presence of "alternative, 'marginal' masculinities" is minimized in favour of heterosexual masculinity (20). The intra-gender distinctions among men, which can be seen in several paintings in each of the five categories of Kestner's typology, are elided under the psychoanalytical sign of sexual difference.

Sir Frederic Leighton's *Self-Portrait* of 1881 exemplifies how "male artists ... constructed not only an ideology about masculinity but also their own place and status in Victorian phallic culture" (39). The pose and head of the President of the Royal Academy recall ancient Greek icons of Zeus, thus confirming "the masculine order of superiority, power and genius" (42). This image belongs to the first category of Victorian paintings of masculinity, "The Classical Hero" (chapter two). Likewise, Leighton's earlier canvas, *Hercules Wrestling with Death for the Body of Alceste* (1871), uses Greek myth to promote male superiority. Kestner observes that Leighton "aggrandizes the nude Hercules by echoing famous sculptural predecessors" (54). Heroism is narratively played out in terms of sexual difference. When the Victorian male viewer sees Hercules, Jason, Odysseus, Orpheus, or Perseus engaged in rescuing a helpless female or resisting a threatening one, he presumably feels empowered: "the nude male body itself becomes the phallus" (74-75). The salience of the male nude in classical subject painting also tells another story, though. Kestner mentions the "potentially strong [homo]erotic elements" in Leighton's *Daedalus and Icarus* (1869) and *Hit!* (1893) in the last chapter of the book, but his main thesis remains the prevalence of hegemonic hetero-masculinity in the paintings (253).

The iconography of "The Gallant Knight" (chapter three) in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art provided "models" of "gendered difference in the culture, especially the construction of masculinity" (96). Kestner discusses the