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## *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture*

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## REFERENCES

Joseph Valente, *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922*, Urbana, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2011, 289 p, ISBN 978-0-252-03571-5

- 1 In *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922*, Joseph Valente investigates the ways Irish national culture interacted with the Victorian notion of manliness, between the Act of the Union and the establishment of the Irish Free State. According to Valente, during this period, Irish nationalists became the exponents of a manly ideal, that of the English colonizer, which was also constantly denied to them through representations of “Irish feminization and bestialization” (14), a process described as the “metrocolonial double bind.”
- 2 The book opens with the iconic figure of Charles Stewart Parnell, whose popularity and appeal among the Irish, Valente argues, were directly linked to his perceived manliness and a “gender performance” (27) which has accounted for Parnell’s enduring presence – or, in Valente’s words, his “afterlives” – in Irish national culture well after his death in 1891.
- 3 Chapters 2 to 4 examine various cultural expressions, showing how Victorian manliness and the “metrocolonial double bind” pervaded the productions of Irish Revivalism, from the Sovereignty drama (1902-1915) to the Red Cycle tales (1878-1916), and the mythical figure of Cuchulain. The final chapter complexifies the argument by illuminating James Joyce’s subversive interpretations of “metrocolonial manliness.” As the other writers studied here, Joyce was undeniably inspired by the figure of Parnell, and his father’s admiration for him; unlike them, however, “he [came] not to claim manliness for the people but rather to critique it in their name” (196).

- 4 Generally speaking, *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922* exemplifies the significance of scholarship centring on the study of men “as men.” Valente thus sheds interesting light on Irish nationalism and its complex appropriation of Victorian gendered norms. In doing so, he also manages to stay clear of some of the pitfalls of men’s, or masculinity, studies. Rather than relying on the more contemporary category of masculinity, which is not always a useful tool to investigate past events, Valente draws on the historically grounded notion of manliness. The detailed analyses of the works mentioned in relation to political movements at the time are particularly helpful as they show the circulation of the manly ideal between the political, social and cultural spheres, for instance in the cases of the Gaelic Athletic Association (chapter 2), and of the Irish Boy Scouts, or Na Fianna Éireann (chapter 4).
- 5 While *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922* makes an important contribution to Irish studies, some of its limits also lead us to view men’s studies in a more nuanced light. Since its emergence in the late 1970s, this field has been criticized for its sometimes exclusive focus on men to the detriment of the relational dimension inherent in gender. Women are undeniably present in Valente’s analysis – for instance in the illuminating description of Parnell’s relations with the Ladies Land League, or in the study of female characters in the Sovereignty drama –, but we feel the part played by women, as women, in the “metrocolonial double bind” is not sufficiently discussed. A more careful definition of the notion of “national culture”, of its contents and actors, between 1880 and 1922 would also have helped give a clearer representation of the actual pervasiveness of the phenomenon described, in relation to Victorian and Irish ideals of femininity, as well as subordinated Irish masculinities at the time.
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