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Now You're a Man [Book Review]

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Emily Montague by considering it as a source for a satirical piece by the young Jane Austen. Katherine M. Rogers compares *Emily Montague* to contemporary novels of sensibility to assess its departures from convention. The only poor choice is Robert Merrett's pretentious and badly written indictment of Brooke's imperialist propaganda, an essay that confuses author and character and ignores the novel's comedic elements. I was also disappointed that Moss' own contribution, which is something of a corrective to Merrett's, is rather too short to make its case persuasively, and wondered why Dermot McCarthy's essay on the novel's racial ideology, a cogent analysis along the lines of Merrett, was so severely truncated.

Truncation is, in fact, an irritant in this otherwise satisfying collection. In the Documentary section, the extreme brevity of selections limits their usefulness, such that the four tiny excerpts from *The Old Maid*, the periodical Brooke edited, indicate little more than that Brooke was interested in social conduct; how and to what ends one cannot determine. In the Reception section, very short notices of the novel by Ida Burwash, Charles Blue, and E. Phillips Poole offer little more than confirmation that the novel was noticed—rather unenthusiastically—by early twentieth-century critics and might just as well have been briefly summarized in Moss' literary biography. (Other short notices, however, are interesting, such as Carl Klinck's assessment of the novel's literary value and George Woodcock's comments on its Canadian status.) And far too many of the reprinted essays in the Critical Excerpts section are butchered, their arguments impaired by frequent and substantial excisions. Inevitably, an editor must make difficult choices about what to exclude, but Moss should have protected the coherence of individual selections. This problem is not, however, a fatal flaw. The edition is an important teaching

volume that makes possible the rich and contextualized readings the series advocates. As such, it is welcome.

Now You're a Man

Jean Bobby Noble

Masculinities without Men? Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions. UBC Press \$29.95

Reviewed by Marc A. Ouellette

Jean Bobby Noble's book clearly borrows part of its title from Judith Halberstam's examination of "female masculinity." However, given its serious concern not just with the content of the texts and events under consideration—that is, the personal, critical, and often legal responses to Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, Rose Tremain's *Sacred Country*, and the story of *Boys Don't Cry*'s Brandon Teena—but also with the ways in which (ideological) constructs are expressed, Noble more aptly (and frequently) reminds readers of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's statement that "sometimes masculinity has nothing to do with men." This observation, borne out by Noble's careful investigation of invariably controversial novels (and films), also suggests Sedgwick's assertion that Gender Studies scholars should criticize "not through, but of the [pre-existing] categories of gender." Noble reminds readers that gender, sex, and sexuality are separate categories which are too easily conflated and that they are not the only or even the most significant signifiers of identity. For example, female masculinity is most frequently conflated with lesbianism yet this need not be the case, as Noble demonstrates.

Recognizing that gender is (re/de)constructed through pre-existing discursive categories, Noble uses pronouns carefully to illustrate both the self-articulation of the characters in the treated texts, and the dominant culture's attempts at incorporat-

ing the transgressive. What cannot be sold will be othered. Noble's strategy is to refer to characters displaying female masculinity in the terms the characters (would) employ: *Boys Don't Cry's* Brandon Teena and Stephen from *The Well of Loneliness* are "he," while Jess(e) from *Stone Butch Blues* becomes "s/he" and Mary/Martin in *Sacred Country* remains "she." Although potentially confusing—as it was for the jurors deciding the fate of Brandon Teena's murderers—this move immediately destabilizes the very act of reading gendered subjects and texts, and simultaneously points to a radical individualization beyond the realm of gender. Otherwise, gender is circumscribed by the cultural purchase of the pertinent pronouns.

Unlike Halberstam, Noble feels no need to disavow the contingency between female masculinity and male masculinity. This invokes two concurrent processes. First, as Noble asserts, the move is moot because both are always already derivative forms which depend on passing for an essentialized ideal that obviously does not exist, yet is entirely prior to the subject. Second, what Noble's argument delineates (but does not name as such) is clearly a radical re-essentialization. Here, Diana Fuss' distinction between radical and reactionary essentialization, that is, "between 'deploying' or 'activating' essentialism and 'falling into' or 'lapsing into' essentialism," might have informed Noble's conclusions. As Fuss elaborates, "the radicality or conservatism of essentialism depends to a significant degree, on *who* is utilizing it, *how* it is deployed, and *where* its effects are concentrated." Turning the male gaze back on itself, as do the characters Noble considers, effectively re-essentializes the body. The characters' "corporeal instability" occurs because of bodies that have been identified as, performed as, and whose materiality has been lived as masculine. Noble's strategic pronouns, then, echo the counter-discur-

sive (and new) social formations articulated in and through the texts he thoroughly elucidates.

Muscular Prose

Monique Proulx

Trans. David Homel and Fred A. Reed

The Heart Is an Involuntary Muscle. Douglas & McIntyre \$24.99

Reviewed by Louise Ladouceur

With such a beautiful title, I could hardly not read the book. It promised rapture and kept its promise, much like the books written by Pierre Laliberté, the writer at the heart of the story, the mysterious genius who rejects glory and lives like a recluse so that he can secretly pillage other people's lives as inspiration for his novels. This is what Florence discovers when following a trail that begins at the hospital room where her father has died. What were her father's last words, her only inheritance? What did he tell Laliberté that she should have heard? If Florence doesn't like writers and their books, those "corpulent things that aren't even true," this is not the case for Zeno, her partner in Mahone Inc., a small Web site construction business offering exposure to lesser-known artists. A great admirer of Pierre Laliberté's writings, Zeno would do anything to get close to his secretive idol. This will have dire consequences for everyone.

This complex, witty, and often brilliant book is a mystery novel about literature and those who create it. It is sprinkled throughout with valuable insights into the process of writing, such as: "any writer who intends on dealing with the human soul should follow intensive training as a nurse, a garbage collector or an embalmer before being permitted to write a line." It is also a testimony to the power of books, a power that will eventually transform Florence. But, first, she must learn to read: "One hundred times I found myself wanting to

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