

Jackson, Peter, Nick Stevenson, and Kate Brooks. *Making Sense of Men's Magazines*. Oxford: Polity, 2001. 214 pp.

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While there are several stirring publications on women's magazines, there is as yet a very limited number of academic studies on the men's magazine market. The reason may be that a little more than a decade ago it was asserted that "men don't buy magazines" (6), apart from pornography or special interest magazines on sports, photography or motoring. By the mid-nineties men's general interest in "lifestyle" (2) magazines had become the largest and the fastest-growing sector of this dynamically growing publishing industry. The authors of *Making Sense of Men's Magazines* venture upon giving an explanation for the phenomenal success of this new breed of men's magazines, not only in commercial terms but also in terms of what their success tells us about the changing nature of contemporary masculinities, femininities, and gender roles. The book does not aim to celebrate "the new forms of masculinity" (3), neither does it wish to take a moralistic stance: rather, it places the issue in a wider social context, while tracing specific ways in which different individuals "make sense" of changing gender roles and relations.

The authors rely on the existing literatures within research on the media, consumption and reading, and analyze their findings in six chapters. In chapters 1 and 2 it is argued how the media generated a range of discourses about the "alleged crisis of masculinity" (18). The analysis leads the reader towards a deeper understanding of the connections between different branches of the media; how readers themselves reshape the meanings according to different social contexts, and how editorial content is shaped by the readers' reactions to previous issues. By "encoding" and "decoding" (19) media messages, the study identifies a circulation of discourses among the magazines and their readers that shape and reflect wider social changes. The "crisis of masculinity" (20), including contested representations of the new man and the new lad is discussed, based on the collection of more than two hundred articles and press-cuttings.

Chapter 3 gives a thorough analysis of several editors whose names "sound well" in the market, in order to take the reader backstage and uncover the tensions and contradictions that are central to the editorial process. The conflict between advertisers and editorial freedom is discussed together with the dilemma of authenticity as they attempted to move from "the niche markets of the 'style' press" to a mass audience whose profile was barely understood (19).

The following chapter shows an insight into the magazines' editorial content from stylistic and narrative points of view. Providing psychological and sociological support for the analysis, the editors focus on the magazines' coverage of personal relationships as a key to their sexual politics and men's health issues. It is interesting to note that a softer, more caring version of masculinity—which is associated with media images of the new man—has been displaced by other harder images of mas-

culinity, characterized by “laddish” behavior such as an attitude to drinking, or a fear of commitment (76). The authors claim that through a close reading of a selection of stories in the magazines the adoption of an ironic mode of cultural commentary “serves to subvert political critique with those who object to the predominant (sexually objectified) ways of representing women easily dismissed as missing the point, much as feminists have previously been described as humourless” (20). Through their analysis of *Loaded*, *FHM*, *XL*, *Maxim* and *Men’s Health*, the writers argue that the magazines—while tending to articulate a more responsible version of the masculine subject—instrumentalize masculinity by employing a hierarchical discourse of scientific expertise. In particular, they draw attention to the ways in which the magazines discuss the idea of an uncertain future through metaphors of the body as machine, focusing on the notions of speed and performance, and the repression of concerns about ageing and bodily decline.

The authors of *Making Sense of Men’s Magazines* remind us that unlike women’s magazines, which have been around for over a century and are traditionally part of “women’s domestic culture” (170), men’s magazines are not only relatively new but also somewhat controversial. Chapter 5 concludes by arguing that the magazines occupy an ambivalent space in both a “metaphorical” and “material sense” (156), which—in my interpretation of the discourse—is seen as a meeting point between the old culture of masculinity and a new culture of laddism.

In the Conclusion the empirical evidence (based on three methods: one-to one interviews with magazine editors and writers, content analysis of the magazines themselves, and group discussions with a wide range of men and a smaller number of women) is collected, and key ideas about “constructed certitude,” “cultural capital,” “irony” and “ambivalence” are worded (148-57). Analysis of this sort not only provides us with an insight into contemporary constructions of masculinity and gender relations, but also reflects how men’s increasing openness has its attendant anxieties.

It is to the authors’ credit that they draw together critical studies and research on women’s magazines and men’s magazines alike. Their findings—combined and supplemented with the ones carried out by Joke Hermes in *Reading of Women’s Magazines* (1995), Elizabeth Frazer in “Teenage girls reading *Jackie*” (1992), Frank Mort in “Boy’s own? Masculinity, style and popular culture” (1996), Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1987) and Richard Krueger in *A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (2000)—take a middle position, arguing that the magazines represent a commodification of men’s current gender troubles. Besides, they are said to open up the potential for radical change by using humour, irony and other devices to distance men from any significant commitment to personal or collective change.

To have a chat about magazines is one thing. To talk about them in the multitude of ambiguous theories, in a “culturally intelligible” way, from the point of view of an academic, is a different matter. Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson and Kate Brooks have embarked upon no less a venture than making sense of men’s magazines: that is mak-

ing sense of gender relations and roles themselves. In doing so, the authors do not wish to place stress upon their own analytical abilities as academics, but seek to describe the efforts of ordinary people (inside and outside academia) to make their lives “culturally intelligible” (3). Their study has identified a number of contradictions and ambiguities deriving from the complexity of the field and the messiness of the research process where, interestingly enough, all the collected data refer to college-educated and middle class participants. The study does not promise to solve existing theoretical debates concerning either gender studies or popular culture. What it seeks to articulate is a complex position in between some of the dominant traditions within the sociology of culture and cultural studies. I have no hesitation in recommending it as an addition to the resource material of English Departments or Sociology Departments, or as part of one’s own personal collection of academic debates and research questions, to which it would definitely mean a distinctive contribution.

Knapp, Annelie, Erwin Otto, Gerd Stratmann, Merle Tönnies, eds. *British Drama of the 1990s*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002. 201. pp.

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This collection of essays was commissioned, according to the Introduction, by the editors of the series *anglistik & englischunterricht* (13), which suggests to the reader that the research findings in English Studies provided by the individual volumes are regarded as teaching aids at the same time. It is certainly a healthy way of combining and thus widening academic functions and practical purposes. The outcome, in the present case, is a volume abundant in information yet being considerably more than just a storehouse of names, titles and useful statistical data about the appearance of new authors and the welcome rise in the number of theatre-goers. A balance between ambitions is successfully achieved by including essays which offer a survey of trends and/or subcategories in the field under scrutiny to introduce other writings concerned with smaller parts of the whole.

Predictably, the papers together seek answers to the question of how much continuity 1990s British drama has with the traditions prevalent in the previous decades, and how much novelty it displays in comparison with its predecessors. In the first article Klaus Peter Müller ventures to redefine, admitting the various difficulties the task involves, what “political drama” means in the new decade. Following his argument it seems that there is an important shift here: the state-of-nation play, which evolved in the 1980s, has been replaced by works addressing the problems of particular sections of society. Ayub Khan-Din’s *East is East* (1997, film version 1999) is briefly discussed in the same paper as an example for the treatment of ethnic issues in their politically relevant complexity. The contemporary situation of the “history play,” a British inven-