Sarah Godfrey, *Masculinity in British Cinema, 1990-2010,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021, hb., £85.00, ebook, £85.00, pp. 268.

Although much comment is made about male characters and identities in discussions of British cinema, systematic studies of masculinity are extremely rare. To my knowledge, Sarah Godfrey's is the first to appear since my own *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, which was published in 2001. Taking my study as a 'point of departure' (p. 13), Godfrey offers a substantial and detailed investigation of the 1990-2010 period, an era of profound social and cultural change in which the phrase 'crisis of masculinity' was frequently invoked. Godfrey contends that these twenty years were the product of the intersection of neoliberalism, post-feminism and post-industrialisation in which a thematic focus on male disempowerment was the 'most defining characteristic of representations of masculinity in British films during this time' (p. 8). Although the intersection of those three forces was global rather than specifically national, one of the great strengths of this study is Godfrey's insistence that representations of masculinity derive from their particular social, cultural and historical context. She succeeds admirably in showing how the forms of masculinity they produced – 'inherently multiple and malleable' (p. 3) – were resonantly British. It was also very welcome to see a focus on the class and ethnically-based nature of masculine identities in which middle-class white males benefit from fluid and mobile social positioning whereas those less privileged remain 'tied to more traditional social practices and the homosocial, heteronormative hierarchies that they uphold' (p. 44).

The bulk of the study is organised round a series of case study films analysed in depth. Chapter 2 discusses *Brassed Off* (1996), *The Full Monty* (1997), *All or Nothing* (2002) and *Archipelago* (2010), all of which depict white males in various states of disempowerment, expressing anxiety about aims and purposes, but all of which, Godfrey argues, use a 'crisis narrative' to reinvigorate masculine identity (p. 87). Chapter 3 provides a rich and nuanced

analysis of lad culture and its pervasive use of irony to 'evade critique or challenge' (p. 101).

Its focuses, unsurprisingly, on *Trainspotting* (1996), *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998), and the less well-known *Human Traffic* (1999) as the central films but also on the lad culture 'legacy' in a series of films about football hooliganism as a form of male subculture, including *The Football Factory* (2003) in which Danny Dyer emerged as the archetype. In Chapter 4, the focus switches to narratives of youth and race in which *TwentyFourSeven* (1997) and *My Name is Joe* (1998) are explored as social realist rejoinders to laddism, and *Bullet Boy* (2004), *Kidulthood* (2006) and *1 Day* (2009) as depictions of young Black British culture that, as Godfrey points out, rehearse rather tired cliches about urban poverty, crime and violence. Attention switches in chapter 5 to fatherhood, centring on *When Saturday Comes* (1996) and *About a Boy* (2002) as narratives of white fatherhood, counterpointed with a focus on British Asian families in *My Son the Fanatic* (1997) and *East is East* (1999). *About a Boy*'s delineation of the 'man teen' ('kidadult'/'adultescent'/'rejuvenile') Will Freeman, superbly played by Hugh Grant, is the highlight, analysed astutely as an arrested version of the popular cultural construction of metrosexual masculinity. Chapter 6 uses the term 'excessive' masculinity to discuss a range of figures characterised by dysfunctional violence, misogyny and abusive behaviour, concentrating on *Naked* (1993), *Nil by Mouth* (1997), *Enduring Love* (2004) and *Bronson* (2008).

The study's focus is on feature films and its canvas is restricted, eschewing fantasy, including the Bond franchise, and costume dramas. Godfrey argues that although 'heritage films' do engage importantly with post-feminism and Britishness, they are 'less productive for understanding the very contemporary and contextually located discourses of postindustrial, postfeminist masculinity' that is the book's focus (p. 17). Of course there is merit narrowing the focus to enable in-depth analysis but perhaps also a sense, for me at least, of an opportunity missed to provide a more wide-ranging overview that engaged with a greater

variety of films. That frustration is partly engendered by the nature of the case study analyses themselves, which seem to me over-burdened by plot summarising, with a concomitant relative paucity of analysis on visual style, performance, and, especially, the films' production context. Although there's an overview of the development of the British film industry during these twenty years (pp. 43-5), what would I think have strengthened the argument as to the representative nature of the chosen case studies would have been to show how they were the product of particular choices made by studios and producers, of the ways in which they had an eye to domestic or international audiences, analysis of their gestation, their budgets and their reception – in short how the films and with that their representations of masculinity were the product of an industry in flux. Although, Godfrey notes (p.15), the term British cinema is 'neither a neutral nor a self-evident entity', a more extended industry-focused analysis would have deepened that discussion and the ways in which it shaped the types of male characters that were depicted.

The other aspect of the study that left me uncertain was its periodisation. A twenty-year period is sufficiently broad to offer the possibility of scrutinising changes and continuities and, as Godfrey remarks, it is 'conveniently bookended by the end of the Thatcher era (if not the Conservative Government)' (p. 26) at one end and the inception of the Con-Lib coalition government under David Cameron at the other. But was 2010 really a watershed either for the British film industry or for representations of masculinity? How did the discourses of post-feminism, post-industrialisation and neoliberalism shift after that point? This is not to ask for an historically extended study, but for a longer discussion in the Conclusion that would outline the nature of that shift whilst recognising that a detailed exploration lay beyond its scope. There is an attempt to do this (p. 229) but it reads as unnecessarily condensed and even overloaded to the point of being somewhat unclear.

It would not do to end on too critical a note. Overall, this is a very substantial study whose carefully detailed analyses constitute a significant contribution to an understanding of the variety of masculine representations in British films during a period of social, cultural and industrial turbulence. It also contributes to the literature on masculinity and should become required reading for students and scholars investigating the politics of gender and its intersection with ethnicity, class and national identity.

1,071 words

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