Christina S. Jarvis, *The Male Body At War: American Masculinity During World War II*, DeKalb, IL (Pb. Reprint): Northern Illinois University Press 2010, 243 pp., 24,53 $, ca. 20,- €, ISBN 978-0-87580-638-9

Jarvis's book examines the construction of the hegemonic ideal of male bodies during wartime pressures. Specifically, she looks at how the creation of an American masculine ideal eased a dual crisis that Americans experienced in the years preceding the U.S. entry into the European and Pacific theaters of war: a crisis of masculinity and of the nation. In response, governmental efforts were made to produce a new image of American men, which aided in the military mobilization of men and brought cohesion to the nation. Images of a heroic and muscular masculinity supported the belief in a "masculine" nation.

"During World War II," Jarvis writes in her Introduction, "the American military, government, and other institutions shaped the male body both figuratively and physically in an effort to communicate impressions of national strength to U.S. citizens and to other nations." As a result, "hypermasculinized male bodies [emerged] in public images to reflect the United States' rising status as a world power" (p. 4-5). Jarvis explores various aspects of this clearly-stated project in the five chapters of her book. Overall, she demonstrates how a "powerful male 'body politic'" (p. 5) became culturally validated and enacted on the bodies of millions of men through various disciplinary regiments.

A body politic that strives for a hegemonic ideal, Jarvis further argues, produces its opposite, namely marginalized and unwanted masculinities. "Establishing the dominant model of American masculinity as white and able-bodied also helped to create a range of alternate, marginalized masculinities that departed from the norm" (p. 5). The issue of alternate bodies that have potentially de-stabilizing effects on the idealized image seems to be at the core of *The Male Body At War*. Jarvis devotes three chapters to show how, and with what strategies,

differing male bodies were addressed within the framework of a wartime body politic: the wounded body (chapter 3), the racial body (chapter 4), and the dead body (chapter 5).

Jarvis, who is not a historian but a professor of English, substantiates her project by incorporating "a wide range of methods and materials" including popular cultural artifacts, memoirs, government and military documents, novels, films, posters, and a "survey specifically tailored to this project." She reads historical records and documents through cultural studies approaches, thus establishing a "cultural 'grid'" that allows her "to explore a broad range of depictions of male bodies" (p. 6). She reads the written and visual sources closely and with ingenuity. For long passages in the book, her approach is descriptive, but she rarely deviates from a larger interpretive frame that follows the widely accepted gender studies theory of looking at "bodies" as not constituted by essences but as coming into being through "cultural discourses and practices" (p. 7). Hence, she regards male bodies as pliable, changeable, and culturally encoded.

In her first chapter, Jarvis traces the masculine and national crisis in the years of the depression and demonstrates how the government attempted to create a cohesive male body politic via the New Deal programs, such as the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps), the WPA (Works Progress Administration), and the CWA (Civil Works Administration). The CCC alone, whose task it was to preserve the U.S. natural treasures, had employed and trained almost three million men. In other words, there was a huge reservoir of men that could be cultivated and prodded along the ideological lines of a new body politic. "[T]he CCC provided an important site for ... rebuilding masculinities damaged by the depression" (p. 24). Yet, despite all the efforts of the New Deal era no overall cohesion was achieved. The "radical transformation," Jarvis concludes, did not take place until America "entered World War II" (p. 55).

Chapter 2 offers a fascinating discussion of the various disciplinary regimens that were designed to transform men of

an (imagined) crippled and effeminated nation to a force of healthy and strong soldiers: medical screenings, psychiatric sortings, fitness programs, sexual surveillance, health appeals, and exclusionary mechanisms. In the five years from 1940 to 1945, 18 million American men out of 46 million registrants "were examined at induction stations" (p. 57). Each of them was "poked, pricked, prodded, and measured" (p. 56), gazed upon, classified, and immunized. Certain men, of course, did not fit the criteria; in one way or the other, their bodies deviated from what was seen as desirable and were of no further use to the national remasculinization campaigns and the war effort (such as the unhealthy body, the weak and effeminated body, or the gay body). It was during the Second World War, Jarvis writes, that the American military moved from outlawing homosexual acts to outlawing within its ranks "homosexual *persons*" (p. 73; emphasis added)

Given the strong preference of an idealized strong masculinity, how were the male bodies dealt with that did not fit the norm? What to do with the black body and, as the war dragged on, with the wounded and the dead? Did these bodies disrupt the fantasy of a heroic, muscled, white, able-bodied male figure? The reality of war eventually started chipping away on the hegemonic ideal: for one, it was necessary to recruit black male soldiers into the armed forces (upsetting the fantasy of whiteness); later, American society had to recognize the necessity of rehabilitating the wounded body (upsetting the fantasy of muscular invulnerability) and of reintegrating the permanently maimed male body (upsetting the fantasy of triumphant heroism).

Chapter 3 introduces the "abject body" (a notion borrowed from Julia Kristeva) to talk about the kind of masculinity that war-wounded bodies produced. To counteract the potentially destabilizing effects of wounded men, various strategies were employed, such as depicting the wounded male as a brave heroic warrior or obscuring graphic details of gory and debilitating injuries. "Precisely because the wounded body exposed the limits of phallic impenetrability, its restoration

to wholeness . . . became a key component in many postwar cultural narratives" (p. 102). Such restorative efforts were often the task of women (as nurses and wives), but Jarvis, in an innovative move, also points to another mechanism of self-generation: the efforts of men to heal themselves through a "self-generating remasculinization" (p. 103). In postwar novels and films, Jarvis observes, men are portrayed as restoring themselves without the help of women and, actually, against women. Frequently, the ex-combatants, in a violently cathartic climax, reassert their masculinity by abusively lashing out against their female lovers and (future) wives. Jarvis also looks at how technological advances in the prosthetic field constituted another way of making men "whole" again without being dependent on (female) caretakers.

Chapter 4 examines racialized discourse, focusing both on the integration of African American men into the fighting force and the demonization of Japanese men as sexual predators. It also contains an intriguing discussion of the efforts to teach Americans to distinguish between good (Chinese, Filipinos) and bad (Japanese) Asian compatriots.

Chapter 5, finally, examines how war memorials help to maintain a symbolic order in which the dead no longer threaten to unravel the image of heroic masculinity. These memorials, she writes, uphold the idea of World War II as the "good war" (p. 188). Over time, (national) mourning over the loss of lives ceased, and the memorials became a "moral reference point for a nation that has since experienced conflicts and events such as Vietnam and Watergate, which have caused Americans to mistrust their government and to question the ethics of U.S. foreign policy and global interventions" (p. 184).

I want to quibble with Jarvis on one issue in her otherwise excellent work. In chapter 1, she compares the healthy, hypermuscular, nude male body of Nazi aesthetics with the muscular, waist up-naked, "steeled" bodies depicted on American recruitment posters. Her observation that Nazism grounded its beauty ideal in classical Greek sculpture while American body ideals borrowed from comic book aesthetics is certainly

accurate (figs. 13 and 14 in her book demonstrate this vividly). But some of her attempts to differentiate between the Nazi and American male body aesthetics seem a little strained. She writes, for example, that a "crucial difference between American men of steel and their Nazi counterparts is that U.S. hardened bodies were not inscribed by racial hygiene theories" (p. 50). She does not, however, fully explain how such difference would account for the racialized discourse in America, which, still under the influence of a Jim Crow mentality of miscegenation anxieties, produced its own contradictory views on the male black body. In chapter 4, she observes that America toned down its racial rhetoric because it prepared for "full-scale motivation" (p. 122) and because, at least in principle, it was committed to a politics of a unified democracy. This made possible the incorporation (rather than exclusion) of African-American men into the armed forces and, on the symbolic level, of the black body into the new male body politic. But such ability to compromise when political and military needs demand it can be observed also in the dictatorial Nazi regime. Despite their race ideologies, Nazis recruited auxiliary SS-troops from populations occupied in the East and declared their Japanese allies honorary Aryans. These same Japanese men (who got integrated into the white racist universe of Nazism) were portrayed in the United States as loathsome creatures: for a moment, the American white fear of miscegenation was transferred from the black man to Japanese soldiers depicted as colonizing rapists. Hence, when Jarvis compares the American and Nazi German male body aesthetics, she does not fully account for the ability of racial ideologies to adapt to the demands of particular situations and to accommodate contradictions.

It would have also been important to consult Kiran Patel's comparative study on the American and German Labor Services, namely the CCC and the RAD (Reichsarbeitsdienst = Reich Labor Service), which includes extended discussion of their educational tasks as "School of Manhood" and "School of the Nation." But Patel's *Soldiers of Labor: Labor Service*

in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933-1945 (2005; first published in German as *"Soldaten der Arbeit:" Arbeitsdienste in Deutschland und den USA*) is curiously absent in her bibliography.

Nonetheless, *The Male Body At War* is a poignant book. It brings a critical men's studies perspective to bear upon a particular moment in U.S. history - a history that remains relevant to today's gender politics and international relations.

Björn Krondorfer

Gregor Taxacher, *Apokalyptische Vernunft. Das biblische Geschichtsdenken und seine Konsequenzen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2010, 254 S., 24,90 €, ISBN: 978-3-534-23547-6

Hat die Apokalyptik Konjunktur? Naturkatastrophen wie das verheerende Erdbeben in Japan (Fukushima), literarische Endzeitstimmung wie in *Cormac McCarthys* Roman „The Road" (2006) oder cineastisch inszenierte Untergänge wie „The Day After Tomorrow" (2004) und „Hell" (2011) wecken apokalyptische Grundbefindlichkeiten und Ängste oder verarbeiten sie kreativ. „Apokalypse" ist häufig ein Begriff, der sich bei politischen und gesellschaftlichen Krisen aufzudrängen scheint. Dabei ist er beinahe immer losgelöst von seinem ursprünglichen religionsgeschichtlichen und theologischen Hintergrund. Trägt auch die Theologie selbst dafür eine Verantwortung? Überlässt sie das „Apokalyptische" sich selbst, weil sie sich mit ihrem eigenen „apokalyptischen" Erbe schwer tut?

Die Theologie entgeht der Apokalyptik nicht, auch wenn sie es versuchen sollte – das ist eine der Grundthesen des anregenden Buches von *Gregor Taxacher*. Die Theologie bleibt – als Rede von Gott – auf die Offenbarung bezogen, von dorther hat sie ihren „logos", ihre eigene Vernunft: „Es ist dieser ‚apokalyptische' Charakter biblischer Offenbarung, der ihr geschichtliches Schicksal und damit ihre Bedeutung