

Debbie Ging, *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema*

Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 264 pages

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/inmedia/704>

ISSN: 2259-4728

Publisher

Center for Research on the English-Speaking World (CREW)

Electronic reference

Estelle Epinoux, « Debbie Ging, *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema* », *InMedia* [Online], 4 | 2013, Online since 13 November 2013, connection on 22 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/inmedia/704>

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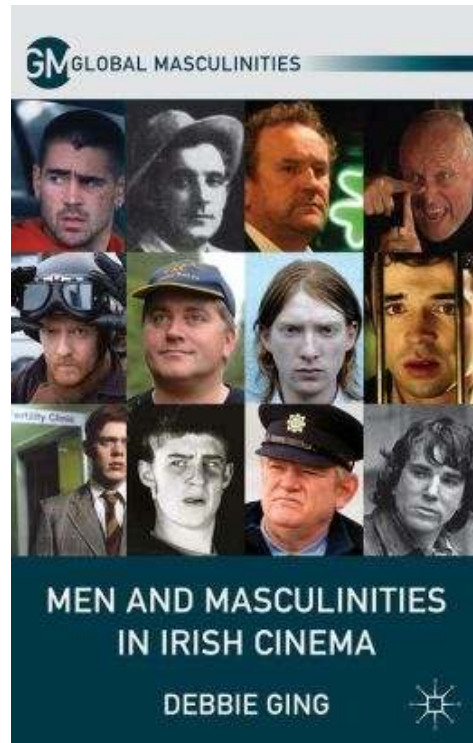
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REFERENCES

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- 1 *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema* was written by Debbie Ging, who is a lecturer in Film and Media Studies at Dublin City University's School of Communications in Ireland. Her book falls into the field of media studies and more precisely film studies. It is divided into nine chapters which interweave the notions of gender, nation, identity and masculinity. The author centres her research around the concept of masculinity, unveiling its multiple understandings within the context of Irish society past and present. She questions the evolving nature of images of Irish masculinity and the impact these evolutions have had on the "changing historical relation between nation, cinema and masculinity in Ireland" (1). The author deems such an examination relevant as the subject of masculinity has slowly emerged as a topic of public interest and debate in the past



two decades in Ireland. The book studies the evolution of the images of men and masculinity in the Irish filmic production, these images being referred to as "non-normative imaginings" (18). The author focuses on analysing the films themselves. The articulation favoured is that "cinema talks to social realities as much as it talks of them" (16). The aim of the author is to scrutinize within the Irish filmic output, the dominant representations of and discourses on masculinity, and how that output can respond to or can be articulated with the public discourses on this topic. Thus her book is not organized in a chronological order, as the author pinpoints that male types, narrative themes and generic trends often cut across decades. Masculinity is explored through different prisms: in early Irish films, in films dealing with paternal masculinity, with boys institutions, with republicanism, with underclass men or criminals, even through the way speaking but also silence are portrayed in films. The author also questions different typologies of men: 'marginalised men', 'men of violence', 'queer fellas', men portrayed in films dealing with the troubles, without failing to read these male figures within their cultural, political and social Irish contexts, past and present. It is through that progress that the book describes the different masculinities which are at work in Irish films.

- 2 Ging studies a wide panel of films, displaying the way masculinity has been portrayed throughout the history of Irish cinema. Her analysis is supported by several references to American, British and Australian cinemas, providing her research with a relevant comparative approach, as similarities are raised between these different national cinemas. The films under scrutiny in the book are numerous and were chosen among the entire Irish film production, from the beginnings of Irish cinema until today. The selection of films was made "by identifying key, recurrent themes, sub-genres and male types" which were said to have "something substantial to say about men and manhood"

(17). The films chosen include, among others: *Knocknagow* (1918), *The Islandman* (1938), *About Adam* (2000), *Intermission* (2003) and *Sensation* (2011). Film production is understood as a “partly autonomous structure” (18) and films are not considered as “simply reflect(ing) contemporary social discourses but are in fact creators of discourse themselves” (16). Thus, films provide an “overview of the impact that the economic, (gender-) political and cultural shifts in Ireland have had on representation of and discourses around men and masculinities in this country” (16).

- 3 The author identifies the three main trends of images of masculinity in Irish films; the films directed during the first wave (1970s-1980s) which were based on criticism and deconstruction, those belonging to the second wave (1990s) which were mainly characterised by both criticism and openness and finally, those from the third wave (2000s) which is part of a reconstruction process, a “more complex wave which overlaps the two previous waves” (209) and which mainly highlights a phase of crisis when “new variants of hegemonic masculinity are becoming increasingly hybridised” (157).
- 4 The most interesting if not challenging aspect of the book is when the author defines what she refers to as that ‘reconstruction’ period of the images of masculinity. The author reads the new images of masculinity within the general context of Irish cinema, accentuating both the internal as well as the external impacts on Irish films and on their images of Irish masculinity. She alludes to the “boundaries of national cinema (which) are less clear” (209) and within which the notion of masculinity itself has become “increasingly hybridised” (209). The author stresses that today it is difficult to establish clear categories for the main images of masculinity.
- 5 She also contextualizes Irish images of masculinity within their historical framework, emphasizing that these ‘new’ or ‘reconstructed’ images owe more to ‘Ireland’s neoliberal present’ than to its ‘colonial past’. Breaking away from the recurring theme of postcoloniality when dealing with Irish history, the author postulates that the new images of masculinity are the result of an evolution of genderscape at large, moving away from an exclusive Irish perspective on the question. It is within this new complex context and taking into account the effects of globalisation that, according to the author, Irish images of masculinity are located in “new spaces, opening up for more self-reflexive and non normative meditation on men and masculinity” (212).

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