



The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures

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The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures serves as an indispensable and fascinating source of knowledge about the male sex at a time when media attention to manhood has increased and when studies of masculinity have become a significant part of the academic curriculum as well as a popular topic of academic research. Subjects include the historical sources of the American body, adolescent and midlife bodies, bodybuilding, the bodies of popular icons such as rock stars and athletes, AIDS, the black body, and the variety of sexual identities endorsed and disdained by our culture. It may or may not be true, as Margaret Atwood asserts, that "Men's bodies are the most dangerous things on earth." But all of these texts affirm the necessity of knowing more about the status of masculinity at a time when feminist authors have made gender and power central themes in our understanding of ourselves and our society.

Like its popular predecessor, *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations*, this volume gathers together a remarkable range of voices and perspectives on this always-timely topic. The collection begins with essays by Margaret Atwood and John Updike that define the precarious situation of manhood at the end of this millennium and concludes with Susan Bordo's essay examining the discourse of "manhood" in best-selling books, film, advertising, and political commentary. The book's contributors argue that the male body is not just an anatomical fact but a cultural sign or site that people seek to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct to fit their values. How this process of shaping occurs can be observed in Joyce Carol Oates's story about a frightened girl and a nude photograph, in Cathy Song's regretful poem about vasectomy, in Philip Lopate's self-portrait as he regards and evaluates the parts of his body, in Margaret Morganroth Gullette's polemical report on the commercial exploitation of midlife bodies, in Rudolf Arnheim's admiring description of an ancient Greek statue that preserves "a god's perfection." The anthology also brings examples from "body history" to bear on the present day: for instance, David R. Slavitt's new translation of Ovid's tale of Narcissus and sociologist Michael S. Kimmel's study of the obsession with physical vitality at the turn of this century both resonate with unsettling immediacy in the context of the values, issues, and obsessions of our own postmodern era.

Work and play, anxiety and self-confidence, youth and aging, health and sickness--all of these contesting conditions are examined in the course of this rich collection of materials. General readers and specialists alike will find abundant new information and insights, and much to argue with as well as much to agree with, in the contents of this engrossing volume.

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