

**ARMENGOL, JOSEP M. (ED.) (2011). *MEN IN COLOR: RACIALIZED MASCULINITIES IN U.S. LITERATURE AND CINEMA*. NEW CASTLE UPON TYNE: CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING. 171 PP.**

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In *Men in Color*, editor Josep M. Armengol provides a worthwhile examination of the ways in which gender, race and ethnicity interact within the world of masculinities depicted in U.S. literature and film. Armengol believes that the analysis of literary and filmic representations of racialised masculinities is expanding rapidly, despite the fact that it is still considered a relatively new area of study when compared to other areas within the field of masculinity studies such as sociology or the psychology of gender and race: both of which have been explored at greater length. Armengol aims to be comprehensive and for this reason studies of various ethnicities are included, with white masculinity explored as just one more type amongst the many different masculinities that are analysed. However it should perhaps be noted that by organising the studies with those of white masculinity at the very end of the book, this particular topic has been given an emphasis – a focus that could have been avoided. The editor is rapidly becoming an authority within the field of masculinity studies, particularly within the United States, and his related work includes *Re/Presenting Men: Cultural and Literary Constructions of Masculinity in the U.S.* (2008), *Richard Ford and the Fiction of Masculinities* (2010) and *Debating Masculinity* (edited by Armengol in collaboration with Angels Carabí, 2009).

*Men in Color* consists of an introduction composed by Armengol and seven chapters by both male and female scholars. In his introduction, Armengol discusses

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the academic gap that this book attempts to fill: previous works by other authors have focused on very specific types of ethnic masculinities, whereas this volume has a substantially wider scope. The remainder of the introduction is devoted to a brief summary of the various chapters and Armengol concludes his introduction by explaining that his book explores not only the differences between several ethnic masculinities, but also their similarities.

The first chapter is written by Aishih Wehbe-Herrera who, continuing on from the work of her doctoral thesis, analyses Chicana masculinity in Denise Chávez's *Loving Pedro Infante* (2001) and Ana Castillo's *Sapogonia* (1990). Wehbe-Herrera suggests that *Loving Pedro Infante* deals with the ideal of *el macho* by means of a dialogue which it employs to communicate between the world of cinema depicted in the novel and the real world. Both books are analysed with proficiency and the analyses, like the further analyses provided in this volume, serve not only as studies of the considered texts, but also as introductions to the relevant body of literature. Wehbe-Herrera does not comment on the psychological implications of the various quotations that she extracts from *Loving Pedro Infante*, however she does deal with the social implications of these quotations, and the ways in which they may be encountered in a society dominated by hegemonic masculinity. Her analysis of *Sapogonia* greatly benefits from interviewing Ana Castillo in March 2006 and May 2008 – Wehbe-Herrera considers that Castillo problematises Octavio Paz's (2007) views on the *macho* ideal. It is only as the chapter draws to an end that both novels are discussed in common: to conclude Wehbe-Herrera states that *machismo* as it is portrayed in both novels restricts men's choices of developing a more complete masculinity. Wehbe-Herrera textually analyses each novel very well, but further comparison between the two could have been made.

Chapter 2, written by Marta Bosch, is devoted to an analysis of post 9/11 representations of Arab masculinities by Arab American women. Bosch provides an interesting introduction to Arab masculinity and accounts for some of the most common stereotypes, for example the traditional depiction of Arab men as either effeminate or hyper-masculine. However, in some cases she offers widely held opinions without supporting those opinions with evidence. She analyses four novels: Laila Halaby's *West of Jordan* (2003) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* (2005), and Frances Khirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007). To conclude, she states that pre 9/11 novels portray Arab men in a more negative way than post 9/11 novels.

Pedro Álvarez-Mosquera discusses the representation of male rappers as a source of masculinity in Chapter 3. Drawing on the fields of sociolinguistics and African American vernacular English, he highlights the importance of the social context in the formation of male identities. In order to demonstrate how the different groups of rappers speak and behave, he makes use of ethnographic

studies of teenagers. Interestingly, according to Álvarez-Mosquera, some white males who have no contact with African American people appropriate their language and behaviour in order to look 'cool'. He also compares two rap films; *8 Mile* (Hanson, 2002) and *Notorious* (Tillman Jr, 2009), the former centred on the white rapper Eminem and the latter on Notorious B.I.G., a black rapper. Álvarez-Mosquera approaches masculinity in these two films using four indicators: toughness, success with women, violence and language. The general conclusion he arrives at is that white rap, although rejected by some African Americans, is backed both by the music industry and by an important part of the American rap audience.

Chapter 4 is written by María Isabel Seguro and explores themes of citizenship, what it means to be American and Asian American masculinity through Chang-rae Lee's 1999 novel *A Gesture Life*. Seguro's work examines the problematic past of the Asian/Pacific War of 1932-1945 in which many Korean women became sexual slaves to the Japanese military (also known as "military comfort women" or *Jungun Ianfun* in Japanese). As Seguro underlines, the protagonist of the novel, Hata, who migrated from Japan to the USA in the 1960s and now owns a medical supply store, has to confront his actions during the war, and also recognise his Korean ethnicity as a part of his life in the United States. He fosters an orphan girl from Korea, an action which could be interpreted as a bid for redemption. Seguro understands the novel as a reflection on the importance of the family in the construction of society and the nation, as well as a reflection on the way immigrants were received by US institutions during this period.

Chapter 5, written by Deidre L. Wheaton, is devoted to an examination of minority-minority race relations in Paul Beatty's fiction, *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996) and *Tuff* (2000). Wheaton analyses "Black man-Black woman" relations and "Black-Japanese" relations (102-103) and believes it is possible to find stereotype reversals and cross-cultural substitutions in Beatty's deconstructions of black masculinity. In *The White Boy Shuffle* Wheaton explores how the male protagonist moves from a white Santa Monica suburb to a multiethnic West Los Angeles neighbourhood —he adapts to the new situation by becoming a basketball star with the help of his coach, who is a Japanese World War II internee, and of a Japanese mail-order bride. Wheaton describes the use of satire as a crucial element of the narrative, playing with the relations between African American and Asian American artistic and cultural elements. Both novels also use the reversal of stereotypes and literary tropes in order to critic racial authenticity. The chapter includes a very useful list of questions addressed to academics that may use Beatty's literature in their courses and Wheaton believes that Beatty's fiction will help students ponder current themes of African American literature, including racism and minority-minority relations.

Mercè Cuenca centres her sixth chapter on the deconstruction of white masculinity in Cold War American Literature between 1945 and 1965. Cuenca's starting point is the crisis of masculinity during the two decades under scrutiny as exemplified by quotations from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952) and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963). Here she detects a gap between the real man and the idealised man who is male (biological sex), white and heterosexual, and who is expected to successfully fulfil the roles of heterosexual husband, breadwinner and father. According to Cuenca, the all-American myth of the self-made man was no longer in place during this early Cold War period. Society demanded a passive man who behaved himself at work and who followed consumerist trends. Cuenca argues that it was in literature—which is enjoyed privately unlike film, art, or music—that it became possible to find places for dissension. She locates those places more specifically in science-fiction and confessional poetry, both separated from the common life of Everyman. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) is described as the first example of this trend; it depicts a protagonist who is both breadwinner and husband whose wish to reshape masculinity is described by Cuenca as similar women of the same period's wish to reshape femininity. Cuenca provides Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath's poetic oeuvre as an example of how stable conceptions of womanhood and manhood were linguistically deconstructed in confessional poetry. Cuenca interprets their poems from a Foucauldian perspective: the alternative linguistic space they construct is no longer fixed and immutable. She ends by proposing a re-visitation of this American literary history through the Foucauldian belief that "ideological structures of power do not only inhibit discourse, but also produce it" (139).

The last chapter is designated to Sara Martín's discussion of the construction of white patriarchal villainy in the *Star Wars* saga. Martín is a master of the two fields she examines here, masculinity and film, and her analysis is evidence of this fact. She is very critical with the idea of a black Darth Vader, an idea that has arisen in part because his voice corresponds to James Earl Jones. She prefers to consider David Prowse, the white actor inside the black suit, and Sebastian Shaw, the white owner of Vader's sickly face as her Darth Vader. Interestingly she also points out that in Spain Vader has been dubbed by Constantino Romero – yet another white actor. Her main concern in the saga is patriarchy: "As a *white* woman, I need to acknowledge how my race privileges me but also how it makes me complicit with white racism (it does). As a *feminist, anti-patriarchal* woman, I need to expose the complicity of women of all races with patriarchal men of all races (sad but true); also, and foremost, I must stress that patriarchy is a more encompassing ideology than whiteness" (150). She aptly argues that Lucas wrote episodes I-III to make Vader look more pitiful.

When considering the book as one unit, it should be noted that although each contributor includes references to all the written works they mention, the edition lacks a general bibliography comprising all the works referred to in the various

chapters. More importantly, it also lacks an index at the end of the volume, a lack that is sadly common among works originating in Spain. Despite this criticism in my opinion this edition constitutes one of the best available introductions to the topic and its chapters could serve as a university syllabus; the books and films analysed would create a rich and varied reading and viewing list and the volume itself could become a textbook for any course exploring these subjects.

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