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The aim of *Embodying Masculinities: Towards a History of the Male Body in U.S. Culture and Literature*, as stated by its editor Josep Maria Armengol in the introduction, is to provide a diachronic study of the American male body, which in this book is understood as a “symbolic and gendered construction” (3), and its cultural representations. It also seeks to show how the male body has “recurrently been used as a *political tool*” (4; emphasis in original). In order to achieve this goal, the book is divided into nine essays, five focusing on specific decades (1920s, 1930s, 1950s, 1980s and 1990s), two on combined decades (1960s and 1970s on the one hand, and 1990s and 2000s on the other) and two more on the 2000s. As can be inferred, the 1990s, 1910s and 1940s are not analysed. The intention of this volume is, indeed, fairly innovative and so is its attempt to provide a diachronic analysis, although, as I will comment on later, there are inconsistencies and shortcomings that could easily have been avoided.

The first chapter of the volume, “The Complete Body of Modernity in the 1920s: Negotiating Hegemonic and Subordinated Masculinities in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*,” is divided into two parts. In the first, Teresa Requena examines the notion of body wholeness and how it became an essential characteristic of hegemonic masculinity in the 1920s. In the second part, she analyses how other scholars have interpreted the male relations in Hemingway’s novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) in binary terms (i.e., authentic and non-authentic representation of manhood). Requena’s point, however, is to go beyond this dichotomy in order to argue that Jake and other men in the novel “strategically negotiate different hegemonic and non-hegemonic positions” (22) which prevent them from being encapsulated in a subordinated masculinity (23). After analysing how Jake and other characters perform “different masculine roles invol[ing] strategic subject positions” (27) she concludes that in *The Sun Also Rises* “hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculine positions are finally shown to intersect, and constantly interact with one another” (28).

In the next chapter, “Embodying the Depression: Male Bodies in the 1930s American Culture and Literature,” Armengol analyses the complex representations of the male body during the Great Depression. As scholars have argued, the difficulty in finding a job and being a successful breadwinner made American men try to find alternative ways

to prove their manhood. One of them was through their bodies. Indeed, the New Deal public murals fostered by Roosevelt tried to prove that success and masculinity could be obtained by having a “strong, muscular brawny body” typical of the “working-class male” (33). This idea was fed by the creation of superheroes such as Superman and by the proletarian literature of the time, which quickly established a dichotomy between the body of the working-classes, regarded as truly masculine, and that of the upper classes, was seen as feminine (36-38). However, and this is what makes this essay especially interesting and original, Armengol argues that literature also provided alternative, “softer” representations of masculinity which were equally dignified. Documentary literature, for instance, respectfully presented “American bodies afflicted by deprivation, hunger, and the worst effects of Depression” (41). Likewise, John Steinbeck’s works, especially *Of Mice and Men* (1937), portray small, less aggressive and more effeminate bodies, valuing “the strength and resilience of ‘the people’ above and beyond the individual body and its external image” (42).

The third chapter, which jumps to the 1950s (more on this later), “Invisibilizing the Male Body: Exploring the Incorporeality of Masculinity in 1950s American Culture,” perfectly portrays the change in the notion of hegemonic male bodies that took place during the 1950s. As Mercè Cuenca argues, the Cold War and the subsequent importance of capitalism and consumerism in the US led to the male white-collar attitude and body being regarded as normative. Thus, the muscular body of the working-class was now associated with a lack of economic success and with sexual activity (53), which was regarded extremely negatively and was “to be avoided if one wanted to embody hegemonic masculinity” (52). Cuenca then proceeds to analyse how this shift was represented in *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *Rear Window* (1954). She argues that both works depict the reticence and difficulty men had to both adapt and accept this new, virtually invisible hegemonic body of the white-collared man.

In the next chapter, “Breaking the Mold: Male Rock Performance, Glam and the (Re-)Imagination of the Male Body in the 1960s and 1970s,” Esther Zaplana provides an analysis of how glam rock stars, particularly Iggy Pop, David Bowie and Lou Reed, used their body to express their rejection of the traditional, patriarchal, militaristic model of manhood (64-66). She examines the body performances of these musicians both in concert footage and song videos, their androgynous clothes and the lyrics of their songs, and argues that they can be interpreted “as a radical subversion of the meanings attached to manliness and its articulation through dress convention” (74).

Ángel Mateos-Aparicio takes the reader to the realm of the cyborg in the fifth chapter. He argues that the history of the cyborg is entwined with that of the human body (97). Thus, he believes that the portrayal of the cyborgs in the 1980s responded to a “moment of conflict and change between the subversive, postgendered vision of the cyborg dominant in the 1960s and 1970s . . . and the reaction of American conservative ideology in the Reagan era” (88). He then proceeds to examine the representation of the cyborg in some of the most successful 1980s films and novels. His analysis is divided into

two parts: on the one hand, he argues that the hybrid nature of the cyborg in *Saturn 3* (1980), *The Terminator* (1984) and *Robocop* (1987) attack different notions of patriarchy while presenting alternative masculinities, embodied by Kyle Reese's sensitivity in *The Terminator* (91) and by Murphy's caring attitude towards his children in *Robocop* (95-96). On the other hand, Mateos-Aparicio shows how this hybridity empowers the female protagonists in *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), allowing them to subvert the patriarchal order.

In "Action and Reaction: The Villain's Body and Its Role in Shaping the Heroic Body in Hollywood Action Films of the 1990s," Amaya Fernández-Menicucci analyses how the representations of bodies of the hero and the villain changed throughout the 1990s depending on the political context in the United States. As she argues, prior to the 1990s, it was rather easy to represent the villains in films since America's "enemies" (Communism, Nazism) were easy to identify. Therefore, the body of the villain was "antagonistic" (110) and asymmetrical to that of the hero, and this polarity continued, albeit with some changes, until the early 1990s (110). Later on, the growing scepticism towards the government affected the representations of the hero and the villain in films, resulting in them becoming less "asymmetrical." Indeed, she argues that from 1994 onwards the stress was "on the mimetic overalls, intelligent fabrics, technical footwear and assorted gadgets that cover up the villain's and hero's bodies" (116). This shift led to a progressive loss of the importance of the body, which eventually ended in its "virtualization" (117-19). Thus, the mind became "the true heroic weapon against ill-intentioned institutions" (120), as represented in *The Matrix* (1999).

In the seventh chapter, Sara Martín compares and contrasts the representations of the bodies of Leonidas and his men in Mate's film *The 300 Spartans* (1962) and in Miller and Varley's graphic novel *300* (1998), as well as in its 2006 film adaptation. She argues that the 1998 and 2006 representations of the myth actually dehumanize Leonidas and make him a hyper-masculine, homophobic, patriarchal character. Indeed, she believes that the massive muscular body with which Leonidas is represented in both the graphic novel and the 2006 film respond to a "politicized identification of idealized patriarchal masculinity with muscularity" (127). Likewise, his constant brutality can be linked to what Martín believes is the growing "new laddism" (134) in society at the time, which continues today. This brutality is entwined with his blatant, untameable homophobia, which, as Sara Martín argues, "further undercuts [the] patriarchal sexist discourse" (140). Martín thus concludes that the *300* graphic novel and film are "in antipatriarchal terms, a step backwards" (142).

The final two chapters of the volume analyse how the body has been used for racist purposes. Maria Isabel Seguro, in "Voicing the Father's Body in Janie Mirikitani's Asian American Poetry," argues how the hybrid body of minorities prevented them from achieving the "American Dream" and thus from climbing the social ladder (145). She analyses the early poetry of Mirikitani, a third-generation Japanese American, arguing that it portrays "the psychological devastation" (146) of racism through the portrayal of

the bodies of Mirikitani's father and of other Asian Americans. Mirikitani's poetry also shows the clichés attributed to the Asian American because of their hybrid bodies and the ordeals they had to face, which eventually engraved in their bodies solitude, sickness and emasculation (156). In "Contemporary Terrorist Bodies: The (De-)Construction of Arab Masculinities in the United States," Marta Bosch-Vilarrubias compares and contrast how Arab Americans and their bodies have been depicted in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She argues that during the twentieth century Arab-Americans were, on the one hand, invisibilized due to the fact that they were denied "a racial status [related] to people of Arab descent" (166) since the government regarded them as "white." This categorization therefore prevented them from "organizing a group against discrimination" (166) through which they could have made themselves visible. On the other hand, they were ascribed a series of pejorative attributes, most of them already stated in Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Ironically, as Bosch argues, these same traits were used to de-racialize the Arab Americans after 9/11 (180). She proceeds to examine certain films and novels which effectively show how there was an attempt to prevent the vilification of Arab Americans by proving wrong the clichés traditionally attributed to them (180).

The main problems I see in this work are three-fold. The first is that *Embodying Masculinities* presents itself as a diachronic study and yet it does not provide an analysis of the masculine bodies in the 1940s. No reason is given for this surprising decision. Likewise, there is no explanation as to why the 1900s and 1910s are not analysed. Moreover, the 1960s and 1970s are examined together in a single chapter, whereas the 2000s are devoted two and a half chapters. The second problem is that although the book focuses on the analysis of masculine bodies, the authors of the different chapters mainly use the general theory of Masculinities Studies instead of using and entering into a dialogue with the existing corpus of theoretical perspectives on masculine bodies. As a result, some classic works such as Pendergast's *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950* (2000) are not included in the theoretical background of the essays, even though to do so would have enriched the essays greatly. In fact, since such works are not taken into account, some of the essays do not provide completely new or original approaches and come through as repetitive. Likewise, the theoretical background of the articles seems to focus too much on Kimmel's works—especially *Manhood in America*, while other major authors and works such as Brannon and David's *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* (2000), Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (1987) or Peter Filene's *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America* (1974) are not taken into account and are not cited even once in the whole volume. Finally, there are some typographical errors as well as missing bibliographical references that could have been avoided with a more careful proofreading.

However, despite such problems, the general impression of the volume is, indeed, positive, as the authors have provided a thought-provoking, profound and innovative analysis of a theme which needed further research. The balance between the analysis of literature, cinema and other cultural representations of the male body is perfect and helps

to create a more enjoyable and interesting reading. Also, some of the articles are a very good contribution to the existing research on masculine bodies theory and the use of male bodies as political tools. All in all, *Embodying Masculinities* is, beyond the shadow of a doubt, a very good contribution to the field of Masculinities Studies in general.

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