Armengol, Josep M., ed. 2011: *Men in Color: Racialized Masculinities in U. S. Literature and Cinema*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. 171 pp. ISBN: 1-4438-2630-8, 978-1-4438-2630-3.

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In his introduction to *Men in Color*, editor Josep M. Armengol —author of *Re/Presenting Men: Cultural and Literary Constructions of Masculinity in the U. S.* (2008) and *Richard Ford and the Fiction of Masculinities* (2010), and co-editor of *Debating Masculinity* (2009)— emphasises the fact that not only are Masculinities Studies a relatively young branch of Gender Studies, but also that, up until the early 1990s, the conceptualisation of the masculine gender had been carried out almost exclusively from a psychological and sociological perspective. It has only been during the past two decades that interest in the mechanisms of (re)production of gendered masculine identity has entailed a formal exploration of the variety of ways in which this concept can be expressed, embodied, interpreted and re-presented. In particular, recent studies in masculinities aim principally at exposing the complex cultural strategies through which the masculine is represented in literature, cinema and the mass media: Baker's *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres 1945-2000* (2006) approaches the representation of masculinity from a wide-angled perspective, mainly aiming to offer a historical overview of the intersection of masculinity and other identity dimensions. In the late 1990s, however, the seeds were only just being sown for what would become a thriving academic debate in the first decade of the twenty-first century: the dynamics of specific models of racialised masculinity in fiction and popular media. Harris's *Boys, Boyz, Bois: An Ethics of Black Masculinity in Film and Popular Media* (2006) applies Connel's (2005) and Kimmel's (1996) influential theorisations of masculinity to the (re)production of Black men's racial stereotyping in popular culture. Likewise, Eng's *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (2001) and Mirandé's *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity in Latino Culture* (1997) explore the process of (de)construction of, respectively, Asian American and Latino masculine identities. Conversely, *Men in Color* seems to follow the example set by Uebel and Stecopoulos's *Race and the Subject of Masculinity* (1997) since it offers an insight into more than one model of racialised masculinity. Yet, the former volume differs from the latter in that it purposefully sets out to address as many ethnic groups as possible.

At a point when theoretical investigations in this field of study can be said to have grown to maturity, Armengol has acknowledged the need for a volume which provides

the reader with a series of case studies that apply state-of-the-art theories to particularly relevant —i.e., visible— cultural productions. *Men in Color* is thus intended as an introductory tour across different academic attempts to map the manifold dimensions on which specific ideas and experiences of masculinity and ethnicity are articulated. In particular, Armengol's volume succeeds in offering a comprehensive view of the way in which Masculinity/masculinities and the representation thereof establish a fluid dialogue with US society in general and between/within ethnicised minorities in particular. Indeed, one of the most appealing aspects of this volume consists in the thorough selection of papers investigating the cinematic and/or literary representation of some of the largest ethnic groups in the USA, including two chapters focusing on whiteness as an ethnic category. Armengol's choice of concluding the volume addressing this particular group is coherent with the fact that, from a chronological point of view, research in whiteness is among the latest to have emerged in Cultural and Gender Studies.

The first chapter is devoted to the concept of *el macho* in *(Me)Xicano* culture and the way it influences and moulds the construction of Mexican and Chicano masculine identities. Aishih Wehbe-Herrera first examines the attention paid in academic debates to the concept of *macho/machismo*, discussing the limitedness of previous understandings of this idea, which mainly focused on its ability to establish cohesive "ties between Mexico and the Chicano community" (10). Wehbe-Herrera argues, instead, that the categories of the *macho* and of *machismo*, far from being mere stereotypes, are intricately interwoven in the process of constructing both feminine and masculine genders in *(Me)Xicano* culture. To demonstrate this point, she analyses two novels, Denise Chavez's *Loving Pedro Infante* (2001) and Ana Castillo's *Sapogonia* (1990). According to Wehbe-Herrera, the former merges the questioning of gender polarisation and ethnic stereotypification in films with the diasporic need to reinforce ethnic belongingness through imaginary representations of the homeland. In particular, by establishing symbolic connections between the main character's obsessive admiration for Mexican actor Pedro Infante and her submissive entanglement in a destructive romantic affair with a married man, Wehbe-Herrera penetrates Chavez's deconstruction of the traditional image of the Mexican *macho* from a feminine perspective. Then, in her analysis of Castillo's novel, Wehbe-Herrera reverses the focal point from which masculinity is being perceived and questioned and offers a well-constructed argument in favour of a reading of *Sapogonia* as a response to Octavio Paz's exposition of the Mexican cultural myth of the *chingador/chingada*.

Marta Bosch, in her chapter on post-9/11 representations of Arab masculinities, reaches some relevant conclusions on recent trends in the fiction produced by women writers of Arab descent. Through her analysis of Laila Halabi's *West of the Jordan* (2003) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* (2005) and Frances Khiralla Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007), Bosch traces the evolution of the perception and re-presentation of Arab and Arab American masculinities in the aftermath of 9/11. Her decision to focus on the works of three women writers is due to the fact that, immediately after the attacks, US publishing houses preferred the works of female

writers of Arab descent to those of male Arab American writers. In order to expose which particular negative images Arab American women writers might need to counteract in their works, Bosch begins her chapter with a brief overview of the main stereotypes associated with Arab men, concentrating on their being ambivalently perceived as feminised and emasculated, as well as "despotic, fanatic, and sexually predatory" (37). She then outlines the specific way in which feminists of Arab descent have been negotiating the overlapping of gender, ethnicity, and diaspora for the past three decades, before proceeding to apply this theoretical framework to the text analysis. Her case study demonstrates that fiction by Arab/Arab-American women writers published immediately after 9/11 tends to avoid any direct mention of the terrorist attack and to offer a more negative portrait of Arab men which emphasises their patriarchal behaviour and beliefs. By contrast, novels published later in the decade see Arab/Arab American men embarking on an identity quest which not only provides them with a progressive negotiation of ethnic belongingness in a diasporic context, but also with the eventual acknowledgement of the limitedness of imposed genderisation.

In 'Constructing Identity: The Representation of Male Rappers as a Source of Masculinity', Pedro Álvarez-Mosquera begins by describing the representational mechanisms through which black rappers were traditionally identified with an ethnic interpretation of masculinity. Through the analysis of the use of the Afro-American Vernacular English (AAVE), as well as that of other elements distinctively associated with or identifying Afro-American ethnicity, particularly those which emerge from the lyrics of rap songs, Álvarez-Mosquera draws a map of what it means to be a black man, both in terms of ethnic identity and in terms of gender. He then moves on to explore the way in which rappers have now been abstracted into an ideal of hypermasculinity to be appropriated by white individuals, as well as by other minority groups, whenever a male subject may want to overcome conditions of disempowerment and victimisation. What is more, despite the general opposition of Afro-American communities and black rappers, rap music has undergone a process of mainstreaming which has resulted in its being commodified by the music industry. Rap music as a site of resistance and articulation of the ethnic specificity of Afro-American culture is thus being challenged to the point that many elements which once signalled exclusive belongingness to the Afro-American ethnos are now even being used by white middle class teenagers and young men in an effort to present themselves as 'cool', virile and unambiguously heterosexual. Concentrating on the 'bio-pics' of two of the most well-known rappers of all time, Eminem and Notorious, the author dissects the representation of rappers in the mass media in relation to the construction of successful masculinity and concludes that this mainly revolves around images of toughness, sexual and economic success, violence, and the ability to use language both to reaffirm belongingness to an ethnic community and to identify the self with exactly these qualities. Perhaps, the author should have drawn more specific conclusions from the comparative analysis of Eminem and Notorious, in particular regarding the mechanisms of ethnic exclusion/inclusion.

María Isabel Seguro's case study of Chang-rae Lee's novel *A Gesture Life* (2001) focuses on how the representation of Asian American masculinity is moulded by the process of assimilation into the recipient society. The first part of this chapter is, in fact, devoted to undermining critical accounts of the novel which reduce it to the format of the Western genre of the *Bildungsroman*. Seguro demonstrates that, far from constituting an example of how a diasporic identity is re-constructed through successful membership in the target society, *A Gesture Life* portrays a lifetime effort to disguise the irredeemably fractured identity of a man, Hata, subjected to both Eastern and Western colonialism. In the second part of the chapter, Seguro contends that Hata's attempts to define himself ethnically always depend on his ability to define himself in terms of gender. His affiliation to Japanese culture is a consequence of his ability to perform his masculinity as a soldier and a patron of Korean 'comfort women', thus linking the idea of manhood with that of violent colonisation —be it of land or female bodies. On the other hand, his integration into American society depends on his economic status as a successful business man and on his ability to become a successful father, thus establishing a direct connection between the patriarchal head of the family and masculinity. Masculinity then is being consistently articulated through male dominance of the female Other, to the point that, according to Seguro, even male Others become subsequently feminised. Since Seguro argues that Hata eventually fails in all these requirements, her critique of *A Gesture Life* demonstrates how a process of self-construction can, under diasporic conditions, become a sustained exercise in self-de(con)struction.

Deirdre L. Wheaton, by examining the "minority-minority race relations in Paul Beatty's fiction" (101), also exposes how attempts to subvert ethnicised stereotypification of masculinity are dangerously carried out by abusing feminine subjectivities. She delves further into one of the concepts —the alienation of the ethnicised male Other— at which María Isabel Seguro has already hinted. Indeed, Wheaton opens the fifth chapter of *Men in Color* with a description of Beatty's use of Japanese characters in *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996) and *Tuff* (2000) as both crucial to the deconstruction of stereotyped assumptions of Black masculinity and, at the same time, as disturbingly close to racist and sexist representations of the Oriental Other. After presenting the critical and cultural context of Beatty's fiction, Wheaton embarks on a compelling analysis of Beatty's use of reversal and satire to question popular representations and understandings of Afro-American masculine identity as homogenous and well-defined. Throughout her analysis of stylistic strategies such as the use of humour, Wheaton deconstructs Beatty's success in undermining "constructions of racial authenticity" (109), while she lucidly addresses the way in which, ironically, black women and Japanese/Japanese-American men and women become disposable tools in the process of criticising the genderisation and ethnicisation of Afro-American male subjects.

Mercé Cuenca's is the first of the two closing chapters discussing how whiteness and white male subjectivity have been genderised and racialised to the same extent, albeit through different mechanisms, as minority identities. Cuenca applies her analysis first to

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), contending that the white male crisis of the Cold War era is embodied in the main character's quest for interior balance between the intellectual and the emotional dimensions of the self. Then, Cuenca shifts the point of view from which hegemonic ideas of masculinity are criticised and deconstructed by focusing on two female writers, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, and the way in which they appropriate masculine elements in the process of poetic self-construction. Thus, on the one hand, *Fahrenheit 451* is a clear example of the use of excess and transgression in a journey to re-construct a white masculine identity that happens to be as fragmented as that of subaltern subjects. And on the other, Plath's *Ariel* (1965) and Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) constitute two instances of how cultural constructions of gender can be subverted and assimilated in such a way that the apparent granitic solidity of polarised identities can be turned into a fluid and fluent dialogue between different dimensions of the same subjectivity, regardless of biological sex. In spite of Cuenca's unarguably well-documented discourse, the chapter might have benefitted from a more direct comparison of the three texts under scrutiny, as there appears to be too abrupt a discontinuity between the section devoted to Bradbury's dystopian novel and the one dealing with Plath's and Sexton's poetical works.

Sara Martín's chapter on the "construction of white patriarchal villainy in the *Star Wars* saga" (143) provides an insight into the complexities of whiteness and masculinity as represented in mainstream cultural productions such as George Lucas's phenomenally successful films. Martín's analysis, as is the case with Mercé Cuenca's chapter, is firstly relevant for its take on the genderisation and racialisation of white male heterosexual subjectivity, which undermines the 'default category' so far taken for granted by many scholars. She questions readings of white male heterosexual subjects as 'negative' in that they are inherently informed by monolithic socio-cultural constructions of the Self. In this sense, she contends that contemporary notions of whiteness are configured by the stereotypes projected onto this category by minority groups as much as they are by mainstream processes of stereotypification and ossification of referential models. She also problematises Afro-American fans' readings of Darth Vader's character as black, exposing how an interpretation of Vader as a positive instance of racial empowerment and of subversive questioning of racial power balance effectually obscures the fact that this sci-fi villain is actually a servant to an unambiguously *white* representative of excessive patriarchal oppression —Senator Palpatine/Darth Sidious. Consequently, in the second and third sections of her chapter, Martín expounds at length on the dangers of wishing to mould non-white identities in general, and Afro-American identity in particular, on the same traditional power-versus-impotence patterns that have historically forged patriarchal societies. She then concludes by pointing at the danger of legitimising white hegemonic structures by humanising the white villain, as Lucas does in the first three episodes of the *Star Wars* saga, which were specifically written to justify Anakin Skywalker's journey to the "dark side".

Due to the variety of perspectives from which the racialisation of masculine identities is approached, as well as to the consistency of the theoretical framework through which

the different authors channel their analyses, this volume would seem particularly useful in an introductory course at both undergraduate and graduate levels. This is not to say, however, that *Men in Color* could not be found to be a useful source of information for specialised researchers. On the contrary, it possesses the topical range necessary to make it appealing as a thematic introduction, while each individual chapter offers a sufficiently profound analysis for advanced researchers. An index at the end of the volume, however, would have contributed to making it a more efficient tool for research. Also, analyses of cinematic productions might have been included in more than just three chapters, so as to provide a more balanced approach to both film and literary fiction. Nevertheless, *Men in Color* can certainly be said to comprehensively outline the most recurrent fields of study in current research in masculinity and to offer a clear and polyphonic portrait of the academic state of the art in both epistemological and discursive terms.

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