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Review / Reseña

Carolina Rocha ed., *Modern Argentine Masculinities*. Bristol/Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2013.

Uncovering Masculinities and Male Subjects in Argentine Film, Literature, and Popular Culture

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Modern Argentine Masculinities, edited by Carolina Rocha, is an ambitious collection of essays that explore the gender identities of men from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century in Argentine history. Using film, literature and popular culture sources, the collection confronts a subject that, as the work's introduction correctly indicates, has not been given adequate attention in recent scholarship. The contents of the book cover a range of sources and topics from constructions of national identity to gender-based violence and from the figure of the adolescent delinquent to the middle-class father. Sixteen chapters contributed by authors in a range of fields, including modern languages, comparative literature, history, and film studies, converge nicely around the theoretical

interventions of R.W. Connell, Jorge Salessi, and Laura Mulvey to flesh out the contours of a vibrant emerging debate on what it means, and has meant, to be a man in Argentina.

The work begins with Marcos Campillo Fenoll's discussion of poetry anthologies of the early to mid nineteenth century. Fenoll argues that through the examination of poetry collecting, circulation and canonization, the production of individual works in anthologies set the boundaries of a male-dominated profession. Fenoll notes that although women appear in some volumes, their presence was always marginal and subordinated to that of men. He compellingly argues that the production of such anthologies not only installed a nationalist sense of male citizenship through literature, but also allowed parties in international literary circles to interact with and read Argentine modes of masculinity against other varieties elsewhere.

Pablo Ben and Gorica Majstorovic each present chapters on meanings of male homosexuality in the city of Buenos Aires. Examining penny-press joke pamphlets and *lunfardo*, or local urban slang, Ben focuses on the construction of male sexuality through humor. He argues that the figure of the *marica*, which roughly translates to 'fairy' or 'faggot', conceptually a principle lens through which homo-erotica has been understood in the literature, has limited understandings of male sexuality, particularly among immigrant groups in Buenos Aires. He argues for a more profound understanding of the sociocultural context of sexual adventures in the city, noting that sexual categories and cultures can serve to confuse rather than elucidate lived experiences. Majstorovic takes a close look at Roberto Arlt's *El juguete rabioso*, examining the relationship of the protagonist to another character's transvestism to reveal the constructed nature of social relationships in male homosexual interactions. Echoing Ben's challenge to better contextualize homosexuality in the city through more nuanced social histories, these two pieces complement each other well.

Kristen McCleary examines masculinities represented in stage productions of the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. She asserts that the Afro-Argentine male character type was one that

romanticized rural Argentina, similar to that of the *gaucho*, or Argentine cowboy, but that his role as a progenitor of the tango served to connect Argentina's rural past to an urban future. She contrasts the portrayal of Afro-Argentine masculinity against that of the immigrant or the creole in roles that illustrate the vulnerabilities and failings of patriarchal relationships, emphasizing the nature of melodrama in making visible gender norms alongside racial and class tensions. Her piece is followed by Todd Garth's fascinating account of Horacio Quiroga, frontiersman and author living in the northern province of Misiones in the 1920s, who was well known for his *cuentos del monte*, which Garth translates to 'tales from the outback.' Garth describes the landscape of masculinity of the border region, emphasizing the value associated with men's physical fitness and feats of bravery, arguing that, in contrast, femininity becomes an impracticality and female worth bound up in the attributes of the female body itself. He notes that Quiroga's characters seldom have happy conjugal relationships, which in part relates to the depiction of female attractiveness as reliant upon a certain mental incapacity and emptiness, which Garth argues is consistent with Kristeva's theory of the abject.

Currie Thompson and Erin Redmond each examine aspects of masculinity found in cultures of nationalism. Thompson explores the military, as a predominantly male domain, and as a backdrop to filmic representations of masculine aggression and heroism. Thompson richly illustrates the role of female characters in two war-themed films from the mid-1940s, demonstrating that these roles help to solidify the naturalness of social hierarchy and sacrifice for the nation. Redmond examines the particular case of Manuel Puig's 1968 novel *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (*Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*), in which Puig examines roughly the same period as the films in Thompson's study, but through the lens of critical reflection on authoritarianism under Peronism. Redmond argues that early Peronist nationalist discourse, as revealed in Puig's interpretation, prefigured a masculinity that was modern and distinct from earlier ideals, while revealing stark contradictions within the Peronist national subject.

Perhaps one of the highlights of the volume are pieces by Nicolas Poppe and Rocha, who each take on more contemporary themes within

Argentine cinema. Poppe explores the question of the delinquent, and Rocha examines middle-class masculinities through two films by director Juan José Campanella. Both tackle questions of masculinity within the increasing spaces of marginalization brought on by neoliberal economic reforms. Poppe explores questions of emasculation and alienation, while Rocha investigates the diminishing of the role of the patriarch within the fluctuating labor markets and diminishing economic circumstances of the middle class. Poppe argues that male characters in recent film demonstrate, via detachment, the unwillingness of adolescent men in Argentina to conform to restricted horizons of male possibility or to respond positively to state-sanctioned sources of authority in an unfair society. Rocha, on the other hand, sees middle-class men caught in between traditional family roles and new economic realities as adaptive and, in some ways, argues that their challenges with new gender roles have the potential to be transformative.

Viviana Plotnik examines father-son relationships and male bonding during the same period of neo-liberal shift, arguing that in no small way have pressures on men's relationships been determined by shifting economic possibilities. She looks at fathers and sons in three films from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, arguing that each film demonstrates the challenge to hegemonic masculinity represented by failures of fathers to assert their gendered-form of dominance across generational divides. Assen Kokalov writes an excellent piece on non-heteronormative male relationships, illustrating the need for a better treatment of transgressive queer characters and a more nuanced understanding of representations of violence against queer men.

Karina Vázquez's contribution on narrative strategies and subjectivities in the writing of Rodolfo Fogwill speaks to political tensions between two generations of men frustrated by their lack of agency. She presents masculine characters that are wrestling with the divide between the masculinity of generations that were involved in militancy and those that later found themselves in a post-transition society with inadequate space to express dissent, much less a masculinity tied to violent resistance. She astutely argues that whereas the period prior to the 1976 dictatorship

offered such possibilities, that agency is complicated in the post-dictatorship period, as men perceive that they are afforded opportunities to experience political agency only through their relationship to consumption. Leila Lehnen's contribution, complementing well the pieces by Vázquez and Poppe, offers that post-transitional crisis reduced young men's opportunities to not only advance economically, but socially, as well. Looking carefully at the 2009 novel *Bajo este sol tremendo (Under this Tremendous Sun)*, by Carlos Busqued, Lehnen finds connections between the veiled violence of the military era and the forms of predatory and fantastical violence of post-transition male subjects. She illuminates the crippling trans-generational effect of state-sanctioned torture, disappearance and violence, and asserts that Busqued's novel provides a variety of hypotheses for how Argentine men in democracy relate to the knowledge of and the impunity of military violence.

Paola Ehrmantraut continues the exploration of the impact of the dictatorship on Argentine masculinities through a comparison of first-hand narratives of the Malvinas War. What is unique about the piece is that it examines the genre of testimonial literature, pointing out the instances in which individual accounts follow traditional military accounts and where they tend to diverge. Ehrmantraut successfully reveals the way in which this genre of writing helps to clarify the competing visions of masculinity offered by the state during the period, through military repression and in waging war against the United Kingdom, and that which returning veterans of the Malvinas embodied and came to symbolize, a 'cleaner' masculine aggression, in contrast to the junta's contradictory and intentionally deceptive messages about the violence of the state and its intentions.

The final two chapters of the work are co-authored by Hugo Hortiguera and Mara Favoretto. The first presents a portrait of gender-based violence in Argentina, particularly domestic violence, and uses news reporting on female-victim and female-instigated violent crime to depict popular understandings of the relationship of sexuality to forms of male and female violence. The authors argue that repetition and hyperbole in journalistic accounts serve to reinforce a patriarchal social order that undermines feminine agency within situations of domestic violence. This is

perhaps one of the most innovative pieces in the collection, in that it relates the representation of violence in television and newspaper sources to the data collected by human rights agencies and social scientists. The final essay in the volume examines the lyrics of *cumbia villera*, echoing the point of the previous piece to demonstrate that popular culture provides ample space for the reproduction of gender-based aggression and misogyny. The authors critique the Kirchner regime for its identification with the *cumbia villera*, and the aggressive masculinity it celebrates, asserting that both Kirchner's have utilized this form of cultural 'street credibility' to appeal to marginalized sectors of Argentine society that are nostalgic for the patriarchal privileges of earlier eras.

Overall, the volume holds together well, covering both a representative chronology and a wonderful variety of sources. It is clearly the work of an able editor, who has spent time guiding a conversation among authors. This fruitful exchange moves beyond a mere coherence of theoretical tendencies to seriously engage with a handful of key thematic and sociological questions in the field. Probably its most important accomplishment is its fleshing out of the relationship between the advances of neo-liberal economic policies and the evolution of a variety of forms of masculinity and male sexuality.

The work is accessibly written and each piece is nicely contained. As such, the book, or a selection of its contents, could easily be used for adoption in undergraduate or graduate courses on gender and sexuality in Latin American literature, culture, or film.