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Review / Reseña

Peluffo, Ana and Sánchez Prado, Ignacio (eds.) *Entre hombres: Masculinidades del siglo XIX en América Latina*. Madrid: Iberoamericana-Verveut, 2010.

The Plurality of Man: Cultural and Literary Approaches to Nineteenth Century Latin American Masculinities

Susan Hallstead

University of Colorado—Boulder

This collective volume brings together leading scholars on Latin American cultural and literary studies to dialogue on frequently disparate views on the many meanings of and forms that masculinity took in Latin America's nineteenth century. And like any successful and well thought out collection, the volume's range is impressive in historical and textual terms. It includes essays that span from the struggles for national identity that were born out of the wars of independence to essays that consider the rise of mass culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the rise of Spanish American *modernismo*. Similarly, the volume's essays

consider texts that range from literary founding documents (such as those of Juan Bautista Alberdi, Esteban Echeverría and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento) to less well known texts (such as Adolfo Caminha's *Bom-Crioulo*) to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century essays with scientific aspirations (such as those of José María Ramos Mejía and José Ingenieros) and finally to the modernista literature of Amado Nervo, José Martí, Rubén Darío and José Asunción Silva, among other modernista writers.

All of the essays, notwithstanding their disparate views on masculinities and the time periods and/or national traditions that may separate them, share the common goal—a goal that is indeed accomplished throughout the volume—of avoiding the pitfalls that have, at times, plagued gender studies, such as falling prey to essentialism, and binary and/or biological reductionism. Peluffo and Sánchez Prado stress throughout the introduction that the volume seeks to emphasize the plurality suggested by its title (i.e., masculinities as opposed to masculinity) to make clear that, just as there is no single concept of femininity, “masculinity” in Latin America’s nineteenth century was multifaceted and ever changing (7). By the same token, to arrive at a deeper understanding of this plurality, the editors also stress the volume’s intent to historicize the construction of masculinities to indeed show that they are “[...] artefactos culturales que actúan como respuestas a condicionamientos sociales precisos” (7). Indeed, the essays contained in the volume do show a deep appreciation for and pay attention to the historical details surrounding the many facets of Latin American nineteenth-century masculinities.

But perhaps what makes this volume particularly useful for scholars of Latin American cultural and literary studies is that it deals with a topic that, until recent years, has received relatively little attention when compared to the many studies that focus on the construction of femininity in Latin America’s nineteenth century. This, the editors state, was one of the main motivators behind the volume (9), since men, in the nineteenth century and beyond, could be subalterns too (such as indigenous men, gauchos, etc.) particularly because gender alone was not the only determining factor of socio-cultural status. Race and ethnicity, age and

national origin, class, sexual orientation and political affiliations all played an equally important part in identity construction (10).

The volume is divided into four parts whose articles are grouped thematically as opposed to division by chronological/historical period or literary genre, in large part because the editors rightly chose to view the formation of masculinities in the region as a “constante circulación de discursos” that were chaotically juxtaposed at any given moment. As the editors explain, one might take a synchronic “slice” of Latin America’s nineteenth century and find that “los sujetos pudieron apelar a un vasto archivo de poses por medio de complejos procesos de citacionalidad (Butler 1990)” (13). These four divisions are: I.) Masculinidad heroicas; II.) Masculinidad y civilización; III.) Fraternidades y espacios homosociales; and IV.) Masculinidades sentimentales e impotentes.

Part I “Masculinidades heroicas” contains three articles: Beatriz González-Stephan’s “Héroes nacionales, Estado viril y sensibilidades homoeróticas”, Álvaro Fernández Bravo’s “Masculinidades coleccionistas: políticas del cuerpo en la frontera, Argentina y Brasil, c. 1880” and Gabriela Nouzeilles’ “El retorno de lo primitivo. Aventura y masculinidad”. Each of these articles explores, as the editors explain, certain foundational moments or figures in the development of hegemonic masculinities. The examples presented in the articles encompass an impressive range. González-Stephan’s article considers the figure of the national hero and the importance of *war* in the construction of an entirely masculine sphere as well as the hero’s relationship to literature and the man of letters in identity construction. Through an in-depth consideration of the literature of the period, Fernández Bravo examines the relationship between race and representation in the formation of masculinities in the border regions of Brazil and Argentina. And finally Nouzeilles studies the fundamental place that the figure of the European male traveler had on the nineteenth-century Latin American imagination. In this case Nouzeilles compares William Henry Hudson’s travel writings to those of a female feminist traveler/tourist, Florence Dixie, to understand more astutely how adventure and masculinity functioned as “performative acts” and how

Argentina's Patagonian "desert" served as the perfect backdrop to enact the primitivist, masculinist fantasies of the colonial explorer (104).

Part II "Masculinidad y civilización" contains four articles: "Asociaciones afectivas: literatura y política en la Argentina del siglo XIX o 'cómo ser europeo en América,'" by Eva-Lynn Alicia Jagoe; "Hombres de la multitud y hombres de genio en el *fin-de-siècle*," by Graciela Montaldo; "De 'Fulano' a dandi: escenarios, *performance* y masculinidad en *Pot Pourri* (*Silvidos de un vago*) de Eugenio Cambaceres," by Claudia Darrigrandi; and "'Telas raras', 'turbantes inverosímiles': *posando* en el Barrio Chino de la escritura modernista," by Francisco Morán. This section deals with how and in which ways masculinities informed what the editors call "simbologías civilizatorias" in the nineteenth century (16). That is, each article, in distinct ways, articulates the relationship between masculinity (again, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the concept) and civilization. More precisely, the articles address the enormous effect that the push to *civilize* post-colonial Latin America's perceived *barbarism* had on the cultural output of the century as specifically related to the construction of masculinity in different national scenarios. (However, three of the articles in this section are weighted in the Argentine literary tradition most certainly due to the fact that Argentina was the locus of the *civilization* vs. *barbarism* divide that occupied nearly a century of literary, socio-cultural and political debates). The articles in this section dialogue well together. Jagoe's article deals with the Europhilia of the early nineteenth century while Morán's article serves as a counterpart to this early tendency since it deals with the orientalist bent of the later modernista movement. Montaldo's and Darrigrandi's articles both attest to the enormous effect that late century modernization and cultural democratization (in the form of consumption) had on the construction of gendered identities: while Montaldo explores the clear shift in the relationship between the traditional privilege of the man of letters and the ever increasing multitude (which, as the author explains, became ever more represented as effeminate and dangerous in its consumptive desires compared to the traditional sense of masculinity of the lettered elite that the multitude challenged), Darrigrandi offers a compelling consideration of the *performative* nature of gender

through the male body and masculine dress (i.e. how the *fulano* becomes the *dandí*).

Section III “Fraternidades y espacios homosociales” also contains four articles: “El enigma del pollo: apuntes para una prehistoria de la homosexualidad mexicana,” by Christopher Conway; “Homoerotismo y nación latinoamericana: patrones del México decimonónico,” by Robert McKee Irwin; “Hombres que leyeron a Verlaine,” by José Ricardo Chaves; and “*Bom-Crioulo* de Adolfo Caminha: un texto fundacional de la literatura gay brasileña,” by David William Foster. The articles in this section, again from a plurality of viewpoints and through a consideration of diverse literary texts and national traditions (in this case particularly those of Mexico and Brazil although Chaves, along with Mexican modernista poets, also considers Rubén Darío and Porfirio Barba Jacob) all consider the ways in which what the editors call “homoerotic communities” (17) moved towards exploring either homoeroticism or early forms of homosexuality in literature. These essays therefore all expand upon and or question the relationship between literature and the limits and conceptions of nineteenth-century Latin American virility. The articles in this section also dialogue very well together. Conway’s consideration of the effeminate *pollos* of the late 1860s who belong to Mexico’s “genealogías sexuales de la homosexualidad moderna” (206), McKee Irwin’s and Chaves’ common affirmation that homosexuality either was not a preoccupying topic for nineteenth-century writers (McKee Irwin comments “...durante todo el siglo XIX, el deseo sexual entre hombres dejó de inquietar a los mexicanos. O tal parece al leer la literatura de la época” [212]) or that it simply was not addressed (Chávez writes: “En el caso mexicano, es notorio el silencio de sus letras decimonónicas sobre lo que hoy, a inicios del XXI, llamamos homosexualidad, de personajes literarios que entren en tal categoría” [230])). David William Foster offers a compelling argument that the late nineteenth-century novel *Bom-Crioulo* was perhaps one of the first Western novels to explicitly address homosexuality in literature despite judicial procedures to block its circulation in Brazil. Together, these essays shed light on the relationship between homosexuality, conceptions of masculinity and the literature of the period.

Finally, section IV “Masculinidades sentimentales e impotentes” contains the following articles: “Sentimentalidad y género: notas para una lectura de Nervo,” by Silvia Molloy; “Nación y castración: El *bachiller* de Amado Nervo,” by Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado; “De la paternidad republicana y la fetichización de la infancia en José Martí,” by Ana Peluffo; and “Masculinidad rechazada: el artista recluso y no productivo en Darío y Silva,” by Kelly Comfort. All of these articles deal with the modernista literature of the late nineteenth century, and they touch upon how different “prácticas de la masculinidad” (18) not related to conceptions of virility—such as sentimentality, bonds of fraternity, fatherhood and even impotency (as in the *artista no productivo* [Comfort])—played an integral part in the development of the numerous forms of masculinities that the volume articulates, even though these practices have been slighted in critical considerations of the modernista movement. Molloy’s and Sánchez Prado’s articles both analyze Nervo’s *El bachiller* and they complement each other: Molloy discusses notions of sentimentality, forms of femininity articulated in Nervo’s work (what Molloy deems *patetismo* typically associated with the female realm) and fraternal relationships while Sánchez Prado analyzes the significance of a particular moment in *El Bachiller* when the protagonist is castrated. In Sánchez Prado’s view, this episode, which highlights the protagonist’s impotency, creates a foundational moment that would project a conservative and narrow conception of virility in post Revolutionary Mexico. In the case of the Cuban writer José Martí, Ana Peluffo considers yet another facet in this category of sentimental masculinities in her analysis of how Martí redefines paternity (290) through two works, *Ismaelillo* (1882) and *La Edad de Oro* (1889), in an attempt to “asignarle al padre un papel más protagónico dentro del espacio ‘femenino’ del hogar” (297). Finally Kelly Comfort closes this section with an intriguing consideration of the figure of the unproductive artist in modernista literature (particularly that of Darío and Silva) as not only the antithesis of the productive male of capitalist markets but also as a figure that could effectively refute notions of dominant masculinity (312).

In sum, due to its vast consideration of nineteenth-century Latin American masculinities, *Entre hombres: Masculinidades del siglo XIX en*

América Latina will certainly become a staple in cultural and literary studies on this topic. It is also fair to say that this volume fulfills the goals that the editors articulate in the introduction: it opens up many lines of discussion, it forms part of an increasingly important conversation on the many meanings of masculinity in Latin America and it will certainly be a fundamental text in future literature and cultural debates regarding Latin American gender studies.