

## **Contemporary Masculinities in the UK and the US: Between Bodies and Systems**

Ed. Stefan Horlacher and Kevin Floyd

Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 243 pp.

ISBN 978-3-319-50819-1

**C**ontemporary *Masculinities in the UK and the US: Between Bodies and Systems* offers promising and insightful discussions and qualitative data on a variety of topics in humanities particularly related to the Anglo-Saxon culture and literature. It stands out as a peculiar guide to understand masculinities in an age of rising authoritarianism marinated in a hypermasculine cultural and political discourse, a disillusioned search for an opportunity to *come out* (for men) of gender stereotypes, and a multiplicity of masculinities in public and private.

The book was edited by two prominent scholars, Stefan Horlacher from Dresden University of Technology and Kevin Floyd from Kent State University, Ohio, and published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017 as a part of a series, *Global Masculinities*, co-edited by Michael Kimmel and Judith Kegan Gardiner. Among other books in the series, the book deserves a distinguished interest and attention with its deliberate focus on the variety of topics and perspectives and its noticeable preference for an internationality of authors.

There are 12 chapters in the book, including an introductory chapter penned by the editors, on distinct fields of humanities ranging from sociology to film studies, literature to sexualities and political science, enhancing the significance of the book considering the fact that the field of masculinity studies has been mainly dominated by studies especially in sociology, psychology and medicine. The book pays a tribute to the textuality and fictionality of masculinities in a rich

contextual frame with a deliberate focus on perceptions and operations of male bodies within larger and rather “abstract systems such as patriarchy, kinship, and even language (2)”.

The introduction chapter that bears the same title with the book was written by Stefan Horlacher and Kevin Floyd to present an overall aims of the book. Providing a brief but insightful background of masculinity studies in the global North, Horlacher and Floyd directly addresses a need for “think[ing] of bodies and systems simultaneously and interdependently” and “think[ing] of the individual gendered self and society together” (5) in particular relation to masculinity studies. Indeed, one may argue that the gendered relation of body to society and larger networks of power has already been thoroughly and comprehensively discussed, however, as Horlacher and Floyd clearly promise the reader, “the theoretical design of this volume...goes beyond current analytical methods in masculinity studies by opening the concept of masculinity to new kinds of interrogation” (6-7) and by deliberately restricting the study to a certain time span and “nationally specific discourses of masculinity” (7).

Paul Higate’s “Modern Day Mercenaries? Cowboys, Grey Men, and Emotional Habitus” presents a short but an overwhelming discussion of (mercenary) militarism and masculinities with particular references to a study conducted in the USA in 2011 “to elicit a deeper understanding of the British contractor’s emotional habitus and focused on two British instructor’s training of future contractors for work as armed Close Protection (CP) officers” (24). Relying on data derived from British participants and American contractors via face-to-face interviews, online and telephone interviews, and personal observations in Khabul, the article seeks to unravel the politics of mercenary masculinities as reflected by both American and British contractors through “their aptitudes, skills, patriotism, and loyalty...coopted into foreign policy initiatives they oppose” (33). Charity Fox’s article, “Rugged Individualists and Systemic Coups: Imagining Mercenary Masculinities in *the Dogs of War* (1974)”, perfectly elaborates the discussion that Higate had initiated. Fox analyzes Frederick Forsyth’s cold-war novel *The Dogs of*

*War* (1974) (Higate already referred to that particular novel in his analysis of mercenaries) as “a prime example of the benevolent heroism attributed to mercenary masculinities... [t]hat serves a pedagogical function...[that] provide[s] meticulous details about globalized systems of commerce and war” (39-40).

Elahe Haschemi Yekani’s “Privileged Crisis in the Wake of 9/11” scrutinizes notorious “crisis of masculinity” with particular references to Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* and Oliver Stone’s *The World Trade Center*. Yekani’s argument is noteworthy in that crisis of masculinity is not perceived as a curse but a privilege, almost a blessing by men. For Yekani, “‘crisis’ seems to have become the predominant *mode* of narrating hegemonic masculinity” and “crisis narratives ... include stories of failure, restoration, and processes of (re)negotiation” (59). However, she concludes, “crisis should not become the universal answer to the ‘problem’ of masculinity. Nevertheless, the re-privileging rise of male crisis narratives in times of cultural upheaval seems worth exploring” (60). She brilliantly exposes that the discourse of crisis inevitably generates a vantage point, a panic room, or a safe harbor where they can justify masculinity as a crisis-inducing machine. Wieland Schwanebeck’s “Does the Body Politic Have No Genitals? The Thick of It and the Phallic Nature of the Political Arena” explores representations of phallus in popular culture and “offers a reading of *The Thick of It* (2005–2012), a contemporary British TV program set in the corridors of power at Westminster” (76). Providing a brief but insightful account of the meanings of phallus from Ancient Greek philosophy to medieval England and to contemporary continental philosophy, Schwanebeck deliberately focuses on indispensably political nature of body politics and male body as well as TV show’s “critical outlook on the kind of masculinity performed in politics” (92).

Sarah L. Steele and Tyler Shores analyze a public campaign “‘Real Men Don’t Buy Girls’ and its use of celebrities to discuss the extent to which celebrity-driven campaigns for raising awareness in gender equality are useful, in this particular case, “implicit social acceptance of child prostitution, and, thus, child sex slavery” (100). By placing

“supposedly desirable and socially sanctioned masculine roles” at the heart of the campaign, the author rightfully interrogates the efficiency and authenticity of such campaigns to create changes in the perceptions and real-life experiences of ordinary individuals. “ ‘Stand It Like a Man’: The Performance of Masculinities in *Deadwood*” by Brigitte Georgi-Findlay presents a dubious portrait of a white male whose “power is never complete...never really in control, but [is] challenged by the pressures of a competitive marketplace and by the pragmatic strategies used by women and minorities (Jews, Blacks, and Chinese) to protect themselves and assert their human dignity” (126). Although the hypermasculine protagonist of Al Swearengen is depicted as the victim of his violent character and his victimization is used as an excuse of “his excessive use of violence against women” (128), Steele and Shores argue that *Deadwood* paradoxically presents a multilayered and contradictory presentation of masculinities to “understand the compromised nature of an American masculinity tied to the marketplace and to a history of violent acquisition and expansion” (128) and while “the men (and some of the women) of *Deadwood* may be able to reinvent themselves in the camp, they are also seen to be constrained by gender scripts that make them lash out compulsively against each other” (127).

In fact, James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* has already been widely elaborated in terms of queer masculinities but Velina Manolova’s “ ‘The Tragic Complexity of Manhood’: Masculinity Formations and Performances in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*” discusses the tragedy of Giovanni from quite a different and interesting perspective, that is, with reference to performativity of masculinity and complexity of masculine performances. Conducting a Butlerian reading of Baldwin and Giovanni, Manolova particularly emphasizes the crucial function of the sense of guilt in performing masculinities, especially ambivalent performances of masculinity. Manolova states that “ Baldwin’s ambivalent investment in the gender binary leaves the utility of the manhood ideal an open question, inviting the transformation of “the complexity of manhood” [1985, 678] into a more comprehensive conceptualization of the complexity of gender” (151).

Alexandra Schein, on the other hand, focuses on another marginalized representation of masculinities, Irish -American masculinities in recent movies and TV series. At the intersection of religion, class, ethnicity, and gender, Schein sheds light onto highly traditional working class Irish masculinities which reflect class and ethnicity affiliations signifying “a firm value system, steadfastness, integrity, and loyalty” “marked with misogyny, xenophobia, and racism” (159). Schein’s analysis includes a variety of films and TV series such as *The Departed*, *The Boondock Saints*, *The Black Donnellys*, *Brotherhood*, *25th Hour*, *The Gangs of New York*, *Blue Bloods*, and *Rescue Me*, which “support[s] [Irish men’s] strong sense of good and evil and reaffirm[s] their plain politics and belief in male action” while “underscor[ing] their image as sacrificial heroes” (168). In the following chapter, Michael Kimmel contributes to the book with “White Supremacists, or the Emasculation of the American White Man”, a study of white extremist males he had already explicated in his 2013 book “Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era”.

Katja Kanzler’s “Law, Language, and Post-Patriarchal Malaise in William Gaddis’s *A Frolic of His Own*” focuses on the long-neglected writer William Gaddis and his novels with a particular emphasis on what she calls “post-patriarchal malaise” or “a white, middle-class man’s sense of victimhood in postmodern American society” (202). For Kanzler, Gaddis’s novel portrays “law as a systemic backdrop... to place at its center a protagonist who grapples with his own position in this world” and the protagonist, Oscar, “should be thought of in terms of a post-patriarchal malaise... developed in the novel, his idealization and efforts to claim the patriarchal legacy of his forefathers, operates as a demystification of the patriarchal masculinity that his Father and Grandfather ostensibly represent” (215). The final chapter of the book, “Wall Street and Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Film and Fiction” draws the curtain with an analysis of “neoliberal theory, politics, and the invention of hypercomplex financial instruments” (220) in manufacturing a “crisis of masculinity”. Ulfried Reichardt splendidly furthers the legacy of Glengarry Glen Ross with his

discussion of “transnational business masculinity” with references to a wide array of Wall Street stories such as Tom Wolfe’s *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho*, Oliver Stone’s film *Wall Street*, Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, and Martha McPhee’s *Dear Money*, which might have been perfected with Martin Scorsese’s *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Reichardt’s article inspiringly explores the affiliation between money-craving capitalist business ethics and erecting the towers of toxic masculinity in neoliberal societies.

To conclude, *Contemporary Masculinities in the UK and the US: Between Bodies and Systems* fulfills its promises to provide a comprehensive, stimulating, and thought-provoking compilation of articles on masculinity and textualities of bodies and systems. Although the focus of the book is occasionally impaired by the diversity of topics and methodologies, Horlacher and Floyd successfully pave the way for further studies of masculinities and/in cultural studies and literatures. The readers of the book are also strongly recommended to two other books edited by Stefan Horlacher; *Taboo and Transgression in British Literature from the Renaissance to the Present* (with Stefan Glomb and Lars Heiler, Palgrave, 2010) and *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Palgrave, 2011) for a more detailed discussion of masculinity in literary studies, which, in my humble opinion, is vitally crucial to understand multifaceted and intersectional nature of masculinities on a global scale.

Murat Göç  
Celal Bayar University, Turkey