

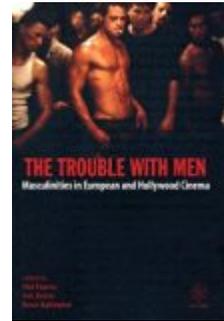
H-Net Reviews

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Phil Powrie, Ann Davies, Bruce Babington, eds. *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London: Wallflower Press, 2004. v + 253 pp. \$22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-904764-08-3; \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-904764-09-0.

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It's Raining Men

The Trouble with Men is a collection of essays that seeks to add to the relatively new area of theoretical enquiry, masculinities and film studies. Most of the essays were originally presented in July 2001 at the “Exploring Masculinities and Film” conference, organized by the Centre for Research into Film and Media at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Perhaps this is what accounts for a rather eclectic anthology, which addresses such varied subjects as sissy dancers, queer Jews, failing fathers, and limp penises and covers a time-span ranging from the late 1920s to the present. The editors do admit to being somewhat “constrained by what our academic colleagues choose to work on” (p. 4). Nevertheless, Phil Powrie, Ann Davis, and Bruce Babington make a valid attempt to unite the essays into a cohesive whole.

The editors begin with a brief historiography of the study of film masculinities, which overviews masculinity in the context of post-feminist scholarship, queer theory, and sociological studies. The concise introduction is useful for advanced undergraduate and graduate students requiring a survey of the field. Since the 1990s, the bulk of theorizations on screen masculinities focus on the American cinema, with relatively fewer works on masculinities and European film. This volume seeks to redress this imbalance; fourteen out of the nineteen essays thus address the national cinemas of France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

The volume’s initial section presents six case studies

on male stars. In the first essay, Steve Cohan delivers a nuanced reading of Gene Kelly’s virile body in musicals prior to *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952). This “camp perspective” adds to Cohan’s already outstanding contributions to the field of gender, sexuality, and masculinity in Hollywood cinematic practice. Next, Timothy Connelly analyzes Clark Gable’s roles in “women’s melodramas” with a view to complicating Gable’s iconic image of masculinity. Graeme Hayes then examines both the eroticization of Alain Delon and the homosocial French genre *policier* of the post-WWII period. Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas explores the lengthy career of Paco Rabal. She deftly connects his transition from a young man to a patriarchal figure to broader changes in Spain’s historical and cultural identity. The last two essays in this section look at two different English film stars. Robert Shail analyzes Michael Caine’s working-class image in the earlier key films of his career, while Andrew Spicer discusses Hugh Grant’s portrayal of the middle-class “twit,” “new man,” and “Byronic anti-hero” in British romantic comedies.

The second section of the book, “Class and Race,” continues to investigate the intersection of class and masculinity. Michele Aron weaves discussions of anti-Semitism, cross-dressing, gender, and identity in the Yiddish film *Yidl Mitn Fidl* (1936) and Barbra Streisand’s *Yentl* (1983) into a provocative essay. The next chapter critiques traditional working-class masculine identities through the lens of three British films featuring miners. John Hill concludes that *The Proud Valley* (1940),

Kes (1969), and *Billy Elliot* (2000) reveal a parallel decline in normative male heterosexuality and labor militancy. Lastly, Carrie Tarr discusses cross-race/ethnic marginalized young men of the *banlieue* in French films released after 1995. Tarr demonstrates that the aggression of the underclass is an act of protest at their emasculation while interracial male bonding is an attempt at solidarity that may be misinterpreted by mainstream French audiences. While each of these essays stands well on its own, this section could be more cohesive. In particular, the collection would benefit from a few more selections on race to balance the emphasis on class, for example, a consideration of the construction of male whiteness or representations of African-American hyper-masculinity.

The treatment of fathers and symbolic father figures is the subject of the third section of this collection. First, by looking at the *The Student Prince of Old Heidelberg* (1927) and its twin narratives of heterosexual romance and homosocial bonding, Bruce Babington positions the patriarchal ideology of the film as rooted in militarism and nationalism. Babington's reading of the Jewish Dr. Jüttner as a father figure for the feminized Karl Henirich is fresh, but the essay seems to belong in the previous section on class and race. Next, Mary Wood tackles the intersection of fatherhood and national identity in her discussion of Italian melodramas between 1946 and 1955. Wood argues that "pink neorealism's" representations of fathers and sons exhibit a changed understanding of social and gender relations in the immediate postwar period. Paul Sutton then turns to how the films of contemporary Italian filmmaker Nanni Moretti present a new kind of masculine identity that is intimately connected to fatherhood. Next, Emma Wilson focuses on two films, *Olivier, Olivier* (1991) and *La Class de neige/Class Trip* (1997), which explore the transition between childhood and adolescence via the themes of missing children and the trauma of sexual abuse. The final chapter similarly explores the strained relationships between fathers and sons in recent British social-realist films. James Leggott shows that films such as *The Full Monty* (1997) and *Gabriel and Me* (2001) are adult-oriented in that they deal with the struggles of unemployed or underemployed working-class fathers. However, the narratives unfold from the perspective of "angelic" boys who ultimately restore the paternal role and familial bonds. The emphasis on father-

son relationships in this section distinguishes this anthology from previous studies of on-screen masculinities.

The fourth and final section alternates between spectacular male bodies and damaged male bodies. This part begins with Pamela Church Gibson's intriguing analysis of the connections between contemporary film, young male consumers, fashion culture, and the "masculine-masculine look." Ann Davies then turns to the usurping female gaze in Carmen films. Various versions of the familiar narrative present the male protagonist in a downward spiral; his increasingly dishevelled appearance embodies his weakness due to his desire for this femme fatale. Peter Lehman more explicitly examines "the failure to perform" by looking at imagery of dead penises in recent mainstream films, such as *Basic Instinct* (1992) and in such experimental films as *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971). Lehman concludes that these divergent films reveal that the flaccid penis betrays either a fascination with the phallus or its lack of importance. Phil Powrie uses Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject to explore the controversial films of French director Gaspar Noé. Finally, Calvin Thomas also uses the theme of abjection to deconstruct the male superhero in *Batman* (1989). He argues that the film articulates a "scatontological anxiety" about cinematic representation that both challenges and reinforces the boundaries of normative, heterosexual masculinity.

Indeed, if one was to pick an overarching theme in this diverse collection, it is the European and Hollywood cinemas' treatment of perceived crises in masculinity during moments of social and historical change. Still, more direct comparisons or transnational syntheses between Hollywood and European representations of class, race, and masculinities would strengthen the collection. Although the editors make a case that many of the chapters are united by a focus on "damaged" men, the breadth of topics covered (albeit fascinating) leaves one breathless. Moreover, although the essays are generally well written, the theoretical focus and frequent use of jargon in a few of the essays might make the text inaccessible to undergraduates or those lacking a firm grounding in film/cultural studies. Readers who are interested in a sampling of some of the current debates in masculinities and film studies should nevertheless enjoy this collection.

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