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Rigoletto, Sergio. *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. Pp. 176. ISBN 9780748654543. \$65.00 (hardcover)

In her seminal article “Masculinity in Crisis? Tragedy and Identification in *Raging Bull*” (1982), Pam Cook examines the critical depiction of masculinity in Martin Scorsese’s work as a reflection on the loss of male power in the twilight of men’s “mythic past.” Cook’s analysis of the performance and representation of male anxieties as symptoms of a renewed engagement with the male hero archetype in Hollywood cinema paved the way for a broader scholarly interest in manhood on the silver screen (Neale 1983, Cohan and Hark 1993), which emerged in concurrence with sociological and ethnographic approaches to the study of men and masculinities (Connell 1987/2009, Kimmel 1987/2013).

The interdisciplinary convergence of the two fields of study resulted in the launch of the *Global Masculinities* series edited by masculinity scholar Michael Kimmel and J. K. Gardiner for Palgrave MacMillan in 2011. It is precisely at the crossroad of these intertwined academic scenarios that Sergio Rigoletto’s book *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* can be situated. Stemming from a larger debate on the representation of damaged and suffering masculinity in films, Rigoletto intends to go beyond scholarships concerned with the staging of male vulnerability and disempowerment as a static matter. He rather advocates for a transformative approach that looks at masculinity in cinema as a “process of becoming” (1). A selected corpus of Italian films from the 1970s—Bertolucci’s *The Conformist* (*Il conformista*: 1970), Fellini’s *City of Women* (*La città delle donne*: 1980), Scola’s *A Special Day* (*Una giornata particolare*: 1977), Pasolini’s *Teorema* (1968), and Moretti’s *Ecce Bombo* (1978), among many others—is carefully scrutinized and contextualized within the political climate of Italy in the aftermath of post-fascist reconstruction and the economic miracle. Looking at the 1970s as a “period of crisis” in Italian cinema, Rigoletto argues that the proliferation of erotic images in films emerged as a survival strategy for cinema to contrast the competitive impetus of television. Other than a means to keep film industry alive, the abundance of sexual imagery in the Italian cinema from the period intervened to revise stigmatizing and regressive understandings of gender norms and roles—especially in the wake of feminist and gay movements. Hence, by looking at films that confront, challenge, and revisit heteronormative models of maleness, Rigoletto not only aims to redefine “the terms under which masculinity may be understood and experienced” (7), but also to unpack the interplay of politics and gender in 1970s Italy.

Following a brief introduction that outlines the scope and rationale of Rigoletto’s historical and theoretical framework, the book proceeds throughout five chapters structured around the close reading of key film texts and their socio-historical contextualization. The first chapter, “Male Crisis: Between Apocalypse and Nostalgia,” borrows its methodological approach from Kathleen Rowe’s conception of male narratives as performances (20), and focuses on how aesthetic and narrative devices are employed to link masculinity in crisis to social transformations in Italy. Federico Fellini’s feminist nightmare *City of Women*, and Marco Ferreri’s dystopian films *The Last Woman* (*L’ultima donna*: 1976) and *Bye Bye Monkey* (*Ciao maschio*: 1978) are taken into account as visualization of male anxieties and castration fears in the so-called “Cool Apocalypse” cinema, that is John Orr’s periodization of films dealing with the decay of neo-capitalist societies. In “Contesting National Memory: Male Dilemmas and Oedipal Scenario”—arguably the most convincing chapter of the book—Bertolucci’s *The Spider’s Stratagem* (*La strategia del ragno*: 1970) and *The Conformist* offer a productive ground for the examination of autobiographical and cinematic conflicts with the paternal authority and the patriarchal legacy of fascism. Bertolucci’s psychoanalytic take on Italy’s historical past and its effect on masculinity as the stage of repression, infantilism, and sexual ambiguity/incompetence allows the transition to the following chapter, “Undoing Genre, Undoing

Masculinity.” The author begins here with a brief contextualization of Elio Petri’s *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (*Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*: 1970) to then plunge into a genre-oriented analysis of popular Italian films such as Lina Wertmüller’s *The Seduction of Mimi* (*Mimi metallurgico ferito nell’onore*: 1972), Steno’s *Hot Potato* (*La Patata Bollente* 1979), and *A Special Day*. Referring to Maggie Günsberg’s volume *Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre* (2003), Rigoletto explores how generic conventions are employed to reconfigure or dismantle conventional assumptions about gender roles and masculinity. Whereas Wertmüller and Steno’s films exploit the disruptive power of humor and comic laughter as a tool for critical thinking, *A Special Day* operates a shift from canonical narratives of heterosexual coupling to a more progressive engagement with themes of sexual and political liberation. Self-explanatory in its very title, the fourth chapter “Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Erotic Imagery and the Significance of the Male Body” cuts across Pasolini’s film production from the 1970s (*Teorema*, *The Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Arabian Nights*, and *Salò*) interpreting the exhibition of male crotches and bulges as the locus of political critique and transgression to heteronormative regimes of scopophilic pleasure. In the final chapter, “Male Subjectivity and the Legacy of 1968,” Nanni Moretti’s *Ecce Bombo* functions as the privileged case study for the convergence of personal and political instances in the articulation of male subjectivity and sexuality in films.

The lack of a conclusive chapter that wraps up the multitude of perspectives and frameworks adopted in each chapter works to the detriment of the book’s cohesiveness, as the interesting arc built by Rigoletto’s film analysis does not converge into a final re-statement of the volume’s main argument(s). Whilst the dialogue with key texts of film and gender studies, as well as with recent scholarship on masculinity and Italian cinema provides a rich theoretical texture to the volume, the conversation with canonical voices in men’s and masculinity studies such as R.W. Connell, Michael Kimmel, and George L. Mosse (*The Image of Man* being particularly useful to unpack the ties between symbolic manhood and nationhood in the fascist era) is only tangential, and pivotal notions of hegemonic masculinity are touched upon merely *en passant*. However, Rigoletto’s book is a captivating journey into a complex segment of Italian film history, vivified by the compelling quality of the author’s film readings and by his ability to re-signify and re-orient the understanding of Italian cinema from the 1970s through the lens of revised masculine paradigms and challenging gender dynamics.

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