

***What a Man's Gotta Do? Masculinities in Performance.* Eds. Adrian Kiernander, Jonathan Bollen and Bruce Parr. Armidale: Centre for Australian Language, Literature, Theatre and Screen Studies (CALLTS), University of New England, 2006, 268pp.**

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There is a need for balance in masculinity studies. The field must be complicated with issues of gender, race, sexuality and class to avoid the risk of normalising white, male heterosexuality as the natural/essential norm of masculinity. The fourteen essays collected in *What a Man's Gotta Do? Masculinities in Performance* aim to address these factors. The collection has excellent contributions from the fields of race, gender, queer and performance studies; most essays view masculinity as a performance whilst hinting at the enormous institutionalised and ideological pressures for men to perform "dominant masculinities". Yet, there is inconsistency in the definition of "dominant masculinity" (with some contributors even simplifying the term to a universal "masculinity", ignoring how race, sexuality and class structure dominance). The strength of the overall collection, however, is that in presenting essays from a wide range of fields contradiction emerges, highlighting the complexities within the field of masculinity studies.

The collection is broken into three sections: Masculine Role Models and Anti-Heroes; Rehearsing and Playing Theatrical Masculinities; and Masculinities Theatricalised and Queer. Section one, as might be expected, provides a character study of masculinity. Essays by Michael Mangan (examining the performativity of Harry Houdini) and Anne Pender (examining the satire of Barry Humphries) highlight the role performance played for their subjects in both enacting and disrupting dominant masculinities. Ailsa McPherson examines late nineteenth-century military plays in order to emphasise the gap between "reality" (actual war history) and performance (the construction of a militaristic Australian masculinity). McPherson suggests that audiences were not always convinced by masculinity as it was performed onstage. Adrian Kiernander's essay in this section provides an intriguing close reading of mobility and physical gestures in a comparison between Australian theatre of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, and more recent theatre, such as *Blackrock* and *The Sum of Us*. Some playwrights manipulate mobility and gesture, Kiernander suggests, either to

present masculinity in crisis or to subvert dominant masculinity's relationship to other forms of masculinity. This section also contains Veronica Kelly's exceptional analysis of race and gender crossing in post-federation Australian theatre. Kelly argues that the racial crossing of Oscar Asche deliberately "brutalised" refined British masculinity in order to present a menacing, colonial masculinity. Kelly goes further to suggest that the gender crossing of Minnie Brune (who performed as a young boy) reflects the growing nation's desire to pin its maturity on the masculine adult (such as Asche) rather than the feminine boy. Kelly's article examines the influence of gender and race (though whiteness is seemingly absent from the latter category) on performances of masculinity that reflected, ambivalently at best, a shifting nationalism in pre-war Australia.

The second section—Rehearsing and Playing Theatrical Masculinities—further attempts to link performed masculinities to the "real world". David Buchbinder provides a psychoanalytic reading of *The Full Monty*, examining the evocation of desire in heterosexual male audiences for the male body as destabilising traditional masculinities. Alan Filewood's essay focuses on the role uniform plays in the recreation of military history. Janet McDonald's analysis of interviews she conducted with male teachers in elite boys' schools in Queensland is a revealing insight into a schoolboy performativity that simultaneously upholds and disrupts dominant masculinities. Despite the hopeful ending of McDonald's essay—that an overwhelming *appearance* of dominant masculinity does not mean that there are no other masculinities in elite boys' schools—the essay demonstrates the significant pressure for boys to conform (performatively or otherwise) to dominant masculinity. Jonathan Bollen's essay analyses recent plays featuring Aboriginal boxers. Bollen concludes that an analysis of masculinity in Australian boxing is inadequate if it does not consider "the transmission of race across the generations". Bollen's article is the only one to deal explicitly with race in this section. Despite his conclusion that boxing performs specific and significant social roles for Indigenous communities, his conception of "masculinity" appears universal. It is perhaps unfair to single out Bollen's article for this, as it is a common fault with many of the essays. Yet it is significant that even in the one essay of the section that deals with race, whiteness is invisible. Just as feminist critics have often struggled to articulate racial difference and avoid normalising white women's experiences, white masculinity is too often reduced to an unracial position that normalises white masculinity.

The final section of the collection—Masculinities Theatricalised and Queered examines, according to the editors, "how performance practice and scholarly

interpretation have found ways to challenge specifically heterosexual, white and able-bodied norms of masculinity”. Bruce Parr’s essay provides the most nuanced reading of the collection of queer masculinities in Australian theatre, coming to the conclusion that they can be popular “when they are not too gay”. Laknath Jayasinghe’s chapter reads vocal performance in Nick Cave’s music as at times disrupting and at other times confirming dominant masculinities. Peta Tait reads shame in queer performance in order to examine unspoken acts as contributing to (the defiance of) representation. The final two essays of the section are perhaps the most complex of the entire collection, each complicating masculinity with issues of gender, race and sexuality. Loeser and Crowley examine an interview they conducted with a 25 year-old man who was adopted as a baby and flown from Vietnam to Australia. Huy Dong (a pseudonym) has battled, in his theatrical art, with racism and homophobia, as well as those who discriminate against him because of a hearing disability. His story leads Loeser and Crowley to conclude that reading identities as performative can open a transformative space where bodies are “never finished, always in the process of becoming something other through affective, symbolic and lived experience”. With the body in process, the qualifiers of masculinity—“marginalised” or “dominant”—merge in becoming a multiplicitous masculinity “replete with many meanings and knowings”. Fiona Nicoll, in the final essay of the collection, returns to the issue of gender crossing and whiteness that she had studied in her monograph *From Diggers to Drag Queens*. Nicoll is led to question the limits of her performances against social boundaries as a way to check her complicity within social structures delivering unearned privilege. She argues that white people often perform benevolence whilst maintaining an investment in the limits of their transgression that does not disrupt the power structures of whiteness.

Nicoll addresses “a pervasive tendency for race to slip from our analytical scope when we scrutinise embodiments and performances of white masculinity, on the one hand, and for white masculinity to disappear once race appears on the horizon of discussion”. This emphasis can perhaps be broadened to suggest that as critics concentrate on one dimension of masculinity, other factors can slip from their analytic scope. For example, performativity is examined but not race or sexuality (Mangan, McPherson, Pender, Filewood); performativity and sexuality are interrogated but race is not (Kiernander); sexuality is examined but not race (Buchbinder, Parr, Jayasinghe, Tait); and, in every case, class remains virtually unrecognised. This is not to suggest that all work on masculinity must engage thoroughly with every possible complication of the topic; certainly in short papers such as these it would

be impractical. It is necessary, however, that scholars signal an awareness of the racial and sexualised nature of the masculinities they are discussing. With the exception of three essays (Bollen, Loeser and Crowley and Nicoll), the collection examines performances of *white* masculinity without noting the racialised nature of this construction. Whiteness exists as an invisible norm. Such a blind spot highlights the pressing need for studies of non-white masculinities (the theatrical work of Vivienne Cleven, David Page or Wesley Enoch springs to mind) not only so as to decentre white masculinity, but so complexities can also emerge regarding the relationships between, for example, queer white masculinities, heterosexual non-white masculinities and queer non-white masculinities.

If the intention of the editors of *What a Man's Gotta Do? Masculinities in Performance* is to question the naturalised qualities of masculinity by exploring various masculinities *in performance* it would seem as if "nature" (or essential manliness) is in the eye of the beholder (and sometimes the critic). A range of critics normalise various aspects of masculinity. The strength of the collection is, however, the breadth of its viewpoints. After reading the entire collection the reader should be left with examples of the best and worst of masculinity studies (often within an individual essay). Often whiteness, able-bodiedness, middle-class experience and heterosexuality are naturalised within a conception of "dominant masculinity" or "universal masculinity", though it is due to the particular author's omission. It is to the editors' credit that certain essays (such as those by Nicoll, Loeser and Crowley, Parr, Bollen and Kelly) have been included to highlight the absences in other essays; and, further, that even with blind spots, many of the essays provide innovative, revealing and original studies of their topics.

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