Jason Cortés

Macho Ethics: Masculinity and Self-Representation in Latino-Caribbean Narrative.

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In *Macho Ethics*, Jason Cortés interrogates the continuities and fissures in masculinities across Latino and Caribbean cultures. Viewing masculinity and self-representation through a queer feminist lens which seeks not to impose typologies or make claims as to universal Latino Caribbean masculinities, he analyzes texts by Cuban Severo Sarduy, Dominican American Junot Díaz, and Puerto Ricans Luis Rafael Sánchez and Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá in order to understand the relationship between authorship, masculinity, and colonial violence that is present in many Latino Caribbean narratives. “The book argues that by attempting to assert their authority and destabilize traditional hierarchies based on normative masculinity, these writers and their avatars within the story face an ethical conflict that demands either a response—a *responsibility*—to these authoritarian genealogies or an acknowledgement of their own complicity with power and violence” (p. 1). This argument engages a dialogue between masculinity, violence, and the ethics of authorship and narrative as it interrogates Latino Caribbean masculinity. At the same time, it invites readers to question the dynamics of power and violence in the narratives of these four authors and opens a discussion of masculinity and ethics of narrative in Latino Caribbean literature more broadly.

Cortés organizes his analysis through a four-chapter structure which spans the early 1980s to the present. His analysis begins with Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá’s narrative of nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, still under Spanish control, and culminates with Junot Díaz’s work on diasporic Dominicans during the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter 1 focuses on Rodríguez Juliá’s trauma and loss in *Las tribulaciones de Jonás* and *El entierro de Cortijo* as illustrative of what Cortés terms “the precarious state of letrado sociocultural authority in contemporary Puerto Rico” (p. 10). In these works, the writer’s necrophilia and obsession with the dead patriarchal bodies of Luis Muñoz Marín and Rafael Cortijo raise questions of authorial ethics and masculinity. Chapter 2 grapples with the work of Severo Sarduy within the wider context of an oppressive, heteronormative, and masculinist Latin American literary tradition, against which Sarduy himself positions his writing. Analysis of texts such as *Calibri*, *De donde son los cantantes*, and *Cobra* reveal the paradox of Sarduy’s writing, as in order to disrupt a repressive Latin American literary tradition, it must also be incorporated into that tradition. Indeed, Cortés departs from the dominant criticism of Sarduy which focuses on the baroque stylistic aspects of his narrative, placing his work instead within a much-needed queer

framework that subverts dominant streams of criticism and disrupts masculinist literary traditions.

Chapter 3 returns to Puerto Rico, specifically the tensions between its “national cultural production and self-effacing assimilation” (p. 11), positioning the examination of Puerto Rican masculinity squarely within this dialectical tension via an analysis of Luis Rafael Sánchez’s *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos*. As an extreme example of Puerto Rican masculinity, singer Daniel Santos, and Sánchez’s rendition of him via his novel, provide terrain on which to reify and/or destabilize machismo and its authority within Puerto Rican literary tradition. Cortés argues that Sánchez’s Daniel Santos simultaneously reifies macho imperatives within Puerto Rican literature and compromises trust and solidarity from readers due to Sánchez’s critique of Santos’s machismo. The haunting specter of Santos’s hypervirility is magnified even more through the figure of Trujillo and the vestiges of his persona in Dominican and stateside constructions of masculinity, the subject of Chapter 4. Through an analysis of Junot Díaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Cortés draws parallels between the figures of Santos and Trujillo as machos, in this case emphasizing the persisting trauma of the Trujillo period and its lasting impression on the formation of masculinity in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora in the United States, leading readers to wonder about the legacy of Trujillo in the development of hegemonic Dominican masculinities seen in the figure of the *tíguere*, a hypermasculine and savvy urban man.

The greatest strength of *Macho Ethics* resides in its engagement with ethics, authorship, and masculinity as structuring points of entry into Caribbean and Latino literatures that at once challenge patriarchal masculinity and further embed these hierarchies in the subject matter and our understandings of these literatures. Cortés’s endorsement of a macho ethics that questions the masculinist dynamics of authorship provides a much-needed intervention into stories told by Caribbean and Latino authors and initiates a conversation about authorship, ethics, and machismo as related to the colonial politics of the Caribbean and its diaspora.

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