Eva Darias Beautell and María Jesús Hernáez Lerena. eds. 2007: *Canon Disorders: Gendered Perspectives on Literature and Film in Canada and the United States*. Logroño: Universidad de La Rioja; La Laguna: Universidad de La Laguna. 186 pp.

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This collection offers a thorough examination of gender issues in canon formation in Canada and the United States. Feminist criticism, the editors note, "has insistently brought to the foreground the complex relationship between canon and power, uncovering the patriarchal ideology of our literary and cultural traditions…." (11). One must remember the pioneering work of feminist critics like Elaine Showalter in her seminal *A Literature of Their Own: from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (1977), which contributed to the visibility of women writers who had been hitherto underrepresented or marginalised. In the introduction to the new edition (1999), Showalter makes reference to the revisionist impulse behind her work: "I had imagined *A Literature of Their Own* as a book that would challenge the traditional canon" (xxi). As in Showalter's study, *Canon Disorders* examines the challenges to traditional canon, and offers a selection of essays illustrative of gender-inflected studies on literature and film. The book consists of an introduction, seven chapters of varying length, and notes on contributors. The editors' introduction sets the main argument of the volume by paying attention to the category of gender and how it intersects with class, ethnicity and culture. In this sense, the collection could be considered a timely contribution to studies of "intersectionality" defined as "the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Nash 2008: 2). Although this concept is never actually mentioned in the volume, there is little doubt that those interested in intersectionality will find *Canon Disorders* of interest.

Aritha van Herk's "Hanging Out the Laundry: Heroines in the Midst of Dirt and Cleanliness", the first chapter in the volume, is concerned with the narrative trope of cleanliness and laundry work both in film and literature, not only to refer to gender and subject formation, but also "as a marker of moral superiority" (25). Van Herk carries out a lucid analysis of the various ways in which linen and laundry work, on the one hand, and filth and dirt, on the other, are related to gender and to the upsetting of conventions and regulations in several works. Among them is Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), in which Grace Marks' unstable and fluid identity questions the cleanliness of the canonical order as she sidesteps the silenced condition of the maidservant. In addition, race and ethnicity multiply the effects of disturbance as shown in van Herk's insightful examination of Judy Fong Bates' 1997 collection of short stories, *China Dog and Other Stories*, and Maxine Hong Kingston's 1975 *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. In these narrative texts filth and dirt are inextricably linked to the voices excluded from the canon: "[t]he contaminated

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thus mirror the filth [the dominant] regulate" (40). However, the unregulated body of the marginalised is more often than not in charge of the cleansing of the germs from the garments of the dominant, and this turns the laundry into a liminal place, full of possibilities and potentialities. Therefore, the laundry becomes a potential metaphor for disruption in canon formation. This study concludes by referring to Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Although it might have been useful to bring Spivak's notion of the subaltern into the analysis of the works under consideration, and thus earlier in the discussion, this chapter convincingly develops how the opposition cleanliness vs. dirt is an apt metaphor for canon-making, "ultimately an act of ordering, measuring, and valuing" (27).

The second essay in the collection is Eva Darias Beautell's "Blood Road Leads to Promise: A Gendered Approach to Canada's Past in Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *The Cure for Death by Lightning*". In it the author takes heed of the unquestionable place Anderson-Dargatz's novel occupies in contemporary Canadian literature. Firmly based on the Canadian tradition, *The Cure for Death by Lightning* explores and revises this tradition from within, thus offering alternative gendered perspectives to Canada's national myths at three different levels: "the writing of the pioneer narrative, the analysis of the metaphoric meaning of the Canadian wilderness vis-à-vis the Western Canadian homesteading, and the recuperation of the erased presence of the Aboriginal cultures in the country's myths of origins" (46). It is to the editors' credit that this chapter is placed after Aritha van Herk's since Eva Darias also mentions how dirt and evil are synonyms for a pioneer woman like Mrs Bell, who equates regularisation and order with cleanliness. In fact, cleanliness functions as physical and metaphorical cleansing of the body when Beth's mother forces her daughter to take a bath after she has been molested in the bush. Darias significantly stresses that one of the novel's achievements is the rewriting of the traditional pioneer narrative by juxtaposing beautiful descriptions of the landscape with the violence exerted against woman, and by paying attention to the violence employed against the Aboriginal culture in the process of occupying the Canadian land. Finally, not only does Darias carry out an engaging study of this novel in the terms outlined above, but she also incorporates further references and makes connections with other works in the footnotes which are extremely useful for those interested in Canadian literature.

María Jesús Hernáez Lerena's "Surviving the Metaphorical Condition in *Elle*: Douglas Glover's Impersonation of the First French Female in Canada" provides a highly innovative approach to the two-way relationship between contemporary criticism and postmodernist and postcolonial fiction. Hernáez undertakes a thorough examination of the novel *Elle* (2003), by Douglas Glover, as "part of a prominent tendency in Canadian literature of creative revisions of autobiographical truth" (73). She convincingly argues that *Elle* demonstrates an active dialogue with the Canadian past as the novel incorporates the personal plight of the historical figure of Marguerite de Roberval alongside postmodernist strategies (irony and parody) to debunk her clichéd inscription in history. Marguerite's life has been recorded in history since the fifteenth century, and it still attracts the attention of twenty-first-century readers and writers who have produced poems, plays and novels largely based on this historical figure. Hernaéz maintains that *Elle* serves the novelist to consider the hybrid nature of a text, placed in between fiction and criticism, which, subtly moving in and out of

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fiction, poses questions about our contemporary engagements with the past. The twofold treatment of Marguerite, as a suffering woman under constraining circumstances and as a critique of colonial and gender issues, allows the reader to see how postmodern critical tenets are placed alongside the representation of a historical figure, whose pain and suffering cannot be easily translated into words. Ultimately, *Elle*'s hybrid nature stresses the complex operations at work in canon formation.

In the following chapter, "Representing Hegemonic Masculinity: Epistemology and the Performance of Male Identity in Documentary Film", Vicente R. Rosselló Hernández concentrates on the analysis of masculinity in documentary, an area often neglected in gender-based studies of film, as he sustains. Referring first to masculinity as a consolidated research field in gender studies, Rosselló moves on to a close reading of three non-fiction films: Rob Reiner's *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), Peter Lynch's *Project Grizzly* (1996), and Henry A. Rubin & Dana A. Shapiro's *Murderball* (2005). He focuses on these texts "as instances of the growing critical visibility and interrogation of [masculinity] and, most importantly, as powerful illustrations of the particular zones of anxiety, liminality and tension that contribute to its fundamental instability" (95). This chapter is heavily supported by theoretical issues especially relevant in masculinity studies, and its first section, "Gender, in Theory: An Overview", offers an extremely useful account of feminist and gender studies and the increasingly pivotal position occupied by masculinity, despite the reticence manifested by several critics who do not seem to find any common ground between feminism and masculinity studies. The author of this essay clearly proves the opposite and acknowledges the fundamental role played by the second-wave feminism in shaping our contemporary attitudes towards gender. The next section addresses the significance of representation in cultural artefacts and the need for a reassessment of documentary film within gender studies to counterbalance the excessive weight of gender-inflected readings of literature and fiction film. Rosselló concludes this section by affirming that "[t]raditionally, then, documentary has not differed much from other areas of the cultural establishment in its ideological underpinnings and institutional practice" (102). The analysis of the three films mentioned above leads him to the conclusion that these documentaries bring to the fore several prominent issues in the field of masculinity studies such as the constructedness of masculinities and the existence of challenges to normative masculine identities. Consequently, Rosselló claims that more critical attention should be given to this type of texts both in masculinity and documentary studies, and that masculinity concerns should become more evident in gender studies.

"The Dismantling of the Oedipal Dyad in Two American Women Poets: The Dynamics of Maternal Desire", by Dulce María Rodríguez González, investigates one of the most productive sites of feminist and gender analysis, that of the mother-daughter relationship, in the work of two well-known poets: Anne Sexton and Alicia Ostriker. The article is heavily informed by the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis and this is one of its strengths. Rodríguez clearly dominates this field as a succinct but informative summary of its main tenets in relation to the mother-daughter bond opens the essay. The range of the material covered is impressive, and would engage any reader who takes an interest in psychoanalysis, and, more particularly, the relevance of the preoedipal stage in the daughter's psychosexual development. Sigmund Freud,

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Jacques Lacan and the object-relations feminist critic Nancy Chodorow are the leading psychoanalysts in this respect, as Rodríguez aptly notes, but Jessica Benjamin and other critics are mentioned in the course of the article. Although one of the chapter's main merits is precisely the overview of these psychoanalytic theories, one feels that the essay would benefit from a more interrogative stance at times; thus the author could have mentioned the critical debate over Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, which, first published in 1978, spawned a large critical body of work on mother-daughter relationships. It is noteworthy that Chodorow herself contributed to this debate in 1999 in the preface she wrote to the second edition, where she qualifies some of her previous controversial assertions and, in so doing, admits that in some ways her critics are right: "the book does not pay attention to women's subjective experience of their reproductive and sexual bodies" (xiii). Lastly, the theoretical ideas developed in the first part of the essay are well integrated in the analysis of the selected poems by Anne Sexton and Alicia Ostriker, which shows the centrality of the mother-daughter bond and, most crucially, the dynamics of maternal desire, "confirming a reality to which the male canon, and art in general, have been blind in the past" (136). In addition, this essay serves as valuable background to the next chapter in the volume.

"'Too Bad Mihijita Was Morena': Anzaldúa's Autobiographical Encounters with Her Mother", by María Henríquez Betancor, also delves into the mother-daughter relationship by focusing on the Chicana autobiographical genre. Firstly, Henríquez traces the increasing visibility Chicana autobiographies have acquired from the 1980s onwards. Secondly, she centres on Gloria Anzaldúa's masterpiece *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), an unclassifiable text in terms of the Western canonical literary genres, as Henríquez posits. It is the discussion of the figure of the mother that provides the most interesting passages in this chapter. The author firmly believes that Anzaldúa "breaks the myth of the good-bad mother to present a woman who created herself through painful identity borders, a woman who teaches, with her own example, valuable skills for survival" (152). Statements like this contribute to a better understanding of the mother in Anzaldúa's text, as well as to liberating her from the prison-house of matrophobia—a term first used by the poet Lynn Sukenick and employed by Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) to refer to the fear of becoming one's mother (1984: 235). In the essay under consideration the emphasis on how the voice of the mother remains "unheard" (153) is in keeping with feminist work on the maternal and "in mother-respecting ways" (Ruddick 1994: 31). Ultimately, the presence of the mother in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* signifies "a starting point to search for other mother figures which can meet [Anzaldúa's] personal needs for an intense connection to the female" (157).

Mladen Kurajica's "*Ganzfeld* or the Ontology of Escape in Robert Kroetsch's *The Hornbooks of Rita K*" closes the collection. This chapter is conceptually the most complex in the volume as its main theoretical framework is Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophy which "does not align itself with the determinism of the metaphysics of presence; nor with the linguistic idealism/nihilism of poststructuralism" (180). Kurajica's central argument revolves around the analysis of the disappearance of the character of Rita in Kroetsch's work, and the spectral presence of such a character in the poetic text. Rita's absence sets up an archaeological project in which Raymond, her

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lover, tries to trace the causes of her disappearance. In this sense, this lack prompts Kurajica to discuss the Western notion of identity and the strategies under operation in deconstruction by means of which binary oppositions are questioned and dismantled. Even though this essay does not purport to dismiss deconstruction altogether, it sustains the idea that the Derridean notion of *différance* has indeed become another metanarrative. Highly innovative and original, this chapter utilises both Deleuze and Guattari's notion of deterritorialization to examine Rita's self-effacement, and their idea of rhizome to consider more vital and open forms of existence. Placed at the end of the collection, this essay significantly aims at alternative ways of approaching contemporary subjectivity and gender.

Canon Disorders is, overall, a persuasive and dynamic study. It is an extremely polished collection with the exception of some small typographical mistakes and errors: "She is lead [sic] to desperation…." (83), "[t]he mother makes explicit her dispair [sic] and her heplessness [sic]…." (135), "her family worked the land and barely earnt [sic] enough money…." (146), "Coatlicue's stone sculpture represents a solid, threating [sic] figure…." (154). In addition, there is no index and the volume would have greatly benefited from one. Despite these minor formal issues, the collection makes an important and substantial contribution to gender studies in the field of literature and film in Canada and in the United States that nevertheless leaves readers with ample space to pursue their own thinking.

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