

of the good life.” Smith-Prei and Stehle conclude with a call to bring popfeminism to the academy and embrace the awkward as a way to expose contradictions, ruptures, and tensions of feminist activism in the neoliberal context.

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## SCREENING IMAGES OF AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN THE AGE OF POSTFEMINISM

Elizabeth Abele & John A. Gronbeck-Tedesco, Eds.  
New York: Lexington Books, 2016

### REVIEWED BY DANI SPINOSA

At the start of the introduction to this volume, editor Elizabeth Abele clarifies the “postfeminism” that frames the essays therein as being used “in its temporal sense, designating the period from the late 1980s on ... as a period when feminist concepts had clearly impacted American society and culture.” While not a reinvention of the term, this definition does a good job of situating these essays, seeing “postfeminism” as an aftermath, and looking at how masculinity and social relations after feminism (in its various forms) irreparably ruptured the comfortableness of early twentieth-century gender roles. While this volume collects very different essays on very different films, television

shows, and actors, the one thing that unites them is a close look at how the waves of feminism affected the men in their wakes.

The best and most engaging essays in this volume are ones that move away from the jargon-laden tradition of feminist criticism without losing the intersectionality and materialism that came out of it. Michael Litwack’s racialized study of *Miami Vice*, Dustin Gann’s queer-inflected reading of *Frasier*, and Derek S. McGrath’s refusal to adhere to a definitive statement on the politics of Josh Whedon’s *The Avengers* films, are all good examples of the way that difficult concepts in gender and queer theory can be adapted to popular media without falling too far into elitist jargon or populist pontificating. Of special note on this topic is Katie Barnett’s poignant and thoughtful look at Robin Williams’s various representations of fatherhood; the prescient turn to Williams’s own depression and suicide foregrounds, in a very real way, the societal pressures of postfeminist masculinity not only on the characters studied throughout this volume, but on real men and lived experience.

The essays in this volume are also, for the most part, refreshingly marked with a sense of humour that makes their reading quite enjoyable. The task of humorous and engaging writing is made easier when you are writing on primary texts that are hilarious in their own right, as is the case with Pamela Hill Nettleton’s study of *Nip/Tuck* and *Boston Legal*. But, Litwack’s aforementioned study and Laura L. Beading’s excellent look at *Firefly*’s Mal Reynolds are also as funny as they are careful in their look at the changing face of masculinity post-feminism. These essays navigate postfeminist masculinity’s high emphasis on homosocial bonds alongside the uneasiness of these characters’ retained desire to be saviour, knight,

and leader beside their frequently strong and outspoken female peers.

The stand-out essay, for this reviewer, is Maureen McKnight’s thoughtful, reflective, and politically-savvy look at *Mad Men*’s Don Draper. McKnight’s refusal to withdraw the scholar from the scholarly work is useful both as a framing device for the essay, and as a way of foregrounding how her discussion of nostalgia in the show relies so heavily on the audience’s affective engagement with the characters. McKnight starts this essay with a lovely claim to personal engagement—“I’ve always been fascinated by the visually arresting opening credits for [*Mad Men*]”—and continues through a close reading of one of the most iconic credit sequences of the last decade with ease and pathos. She connects this sequence, thoughtfully, to Richard Drew’s “the Falling Man” photograph from 9/11 and considers the place of Jon Hamm’s Draper in the context of a 2007 looking back, and the 1960s of the show, framed by its knowledge of what would come next. The result is a character study that made me longingly return to the show after having stopped watching years ago.

All in all, the essays in this volume are thoughtful, interesting, and enjoyable to read. While some essays collected here set their scopes too large and ultimately fail to engage on the level that the essays mentioned here do, all are worthwhile reads for those interested in the politics or in the primary texts themselves. This volume follows in a long line of other, similar, studies of masculinity in contemporary media but it still makes a worthwhile contribution to that conversation.

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## GIRLHOOD AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE

Claudia Mitchell and Carrie Rentschler, Ed.  
New York: Berghahn Press, 2016

### REVIEWED BY CHERYL VAN DAALEN-SMITH

The concept of place has garnered much scholarly interest both within and across many disciplines. Critical geographers view *place* as the inter-relatedness of location plus meaning while understanding the fluidity of both. Mitchell and Rentschler, both known as strong girlhood scholars, have compiled a critical analysis of various aspects of the ways in which we might understand girlhood to intersect with the political aspects of space. Holding in tension the very definition of both girl and girlhood, the editors map out literally and figuratively a way to understand the politics of place, substantively filling an unacknowledged gap in the burgeoning field of Girlhood Studies.

They affirm that indeed experience is at the very heart of what place means and does. "It is something that is practiced and enacted in girls' daily lives, in their localities." Just where are girls expected to be? Where are they permitted to be? What spaces are they not permitted to occupy? What places do girls themselves construct and are said places a space for authentic self-knowing or a space which replicates damaging gendered, raced, and classed social norms? In this critical addition to girlhood studies scholarship, place is viewed as a verb—and the intersectional ways that place impacts the lives,

and rights of girls and young women are unpacked through a myriad of innovative and thought provoking chapters. Astutely, the editors ensure that the various ways in which race, gender, sexuality, class, age, citizenship, and other social oppressions and privileges intersect with the concept of place are front and centre. The reader will appreciate the many stirring accounts, often rooted in girls' own voices and reflections, which unapologetically itemize how denied power impacts the places girls are permitted to authentically occupy.

Firmly grounded in gender and women's studies' core concepts and questions, students and scholars alike will find this to be an important contribution to Girlhood Studies, with each chapter promising various applications perhaps not yet considered.

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## INTO THE OPEN: POEMS NEW AND SELECTED

Susan McCaslin  
Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2017

### REVIEWED BY J. S. PORTER

*For the sake of a single poem, you must see many cities, many people and things. You must know the animals, you must feel how the birds fly .... You must be able to think back to streets in unknown neighborhoods, to unexpected*

*encounters, and to partings...; to days of childhood whose mystery is still unexplained ...; ... to mornings by the sea ... to nights of travel ... and it is still not enough.*  
—Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge: A Novel*

It's not easy to be a poet of the calibre of Susan McCaslin. You need to see an object, or a being, in its fullness, but also its surround, its interconnections and interdependencies. You need to know words intimately, their textures and sounds; you need to know birds and trees and dogs; you need to be able to enter lives foreign to yours as if they were your own. This is one of McCaslin's great talents: to enter another life, or life form, and re-animate it. When she writes about William Blake, she becomes Blake or someone in his circle. Likewise for Teresa of Avila, John Keats, and other luminaries, she becomes the other, ingests them, speaks from their centre. She is always open to the unexpected and the quiet unannounced miracles of the day.

In "Chickadee," the speaker is driving along and a black-capped chickadee trills her into meditation, "lifts it/over the steering wheel and beyond the car." The speaker closes the poem with an invocation to the bird:

Dear bird,  
return and draw again  
that keening song,  
that circling kaddish on loan to air.

A poem entitled simply "Dog" addresses the dog as "you, Nose of Creation, / rolling tumult in grass / vocabulary unencompassed / by 'come,' 'sit,' 'stay.'" Of all the words I've read applied to dogs, none honours their being so simply and accurately as the phrase "Nose of Creation." And nothing I've read reprimands so gently our tendency