

University of Texas at El Paso

From the Selected Works of Beth L Brunk-Chavez

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The Masculinized Woman in America

Beth L Brunk-Chavez



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/beth_brunk_chavez/14/

Simpsons, continued from Page 3 succeeds in accomplishing what its editors hope for it: providing an introduction to philosophy and cultural studies for those who are new to the subject and a review for those with some familiarity. Teachers of introductory classes in philosophy and cultural studies would do well to consider this book. The book is, saying with selfless pleasure what Monty Burns selfishly hisses, "Excellent."

Reviewed by Kenneth R. Wright
James Madison University

The Masculinized Woman in America: 1890-1935, by Laura Behling. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 2001. 280 pp. \$34.95 hardcover.

As Laura Behling states, *The Masculinized Woman in America* explores "how the U.S. woman suffrage movement's emphasis on securing social and political independence for women was translated by a fearful society, . . . into a movement of women whose assumption of the prerogative to vote was perceived to have altered them into 'masculine women' and female sexual inverts." Behling's primary areas of interest are relationships between masculine and feminine women, the connection between the suffrage movement and the rise of theories in sexology and psychology, strategies authors used to disenfranchise masculine women, the seduction plot as a remedy, the subversive nature of parody, and the removal of masculinized female inverts from society. To ground her ideas, she begins the text with an informative section on theories of sex, gender, and sexuality as well as a detailed

definition of masculinized women, who were assumed to be sexual inverts.

Each of Behling's chapters begins with a presentation and discussion of material from the popular press. Some actual newspaper accounts of masculinized women appear, but most often these examples are political cartoons of women who have grown demon-like with power or have aberrantly assumed male roles because of their desire to vote. Behling then focuses on literature that echoes similar complaints against these "abnormal" women. This somewhat interdisciplinary approach to the issue gives readers the sense that the fear of the masculinized woman was pervasive at the time. Many of the texts she draws from are not typically well known, although she does include a discussion of texts by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, and Henry James. Behling does a superb job of locating pieces that exhibit these sensibilities, and they are well suited to her ideas. I found chapter 6, "Distant Relations: 'Put out of Town for Gettin' Too Int'mate'" to be the most interesting and cohesive chapter. Here she cogently discusses how masculinized women were forced outside the bounds of society.

While I enjoyed and learned much from this book, I would appreciate an even stronger connection between the texts Behling examines and the suffrage movement itself. Discussions of the movement appear mostly at the beginning and conclusion of each chapter. Timing seems to be the main connection between the movement and the literature; maybe that is sufficient. However, I would appreciate more

actual suffragist and anti-suffragist rhetoric. The popular press examples and the opening chapters do help, but if the fear of the masculinized woman is a result of suffrage, I'd like to see stronger evidence of such. Additionally, Behling neglects race and class issues. The masculinized woman seems to be a white middle-class phenomenon, and there is no acknowledgement of that.

Despite these few drawbacks, those interested in the portrayal and treatment of women in the popular press and literature, specifically in terms of sexuality, will find *The Masculinized Woman* an interesting and informative read.

Reviewed by Beth L. Brunk
James Madison University

Beth Brunk, PCAS Newsletter co-editor



Beth Brunk, co-editor of the PCAS
Newsletter

I am happy to announce that my colleague, Beth Brunk, in the James Madison University Writing Program, will be co-editing the PCAS Newsletter with me, beginning with this issue.

Beth, who has been teaching at JMU for two years, received her
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