

HARRISON FORD: MASCULINITY AND STARDOM IN HOLLYWOOD

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In *Harrison Ford: Masculinity and Stardom in Hollywood*, Virginia Luzón-Aguado presents a thorough analysis of Ford's representation of masculinity during his career that extends from the 1980s until nowadays. From the beginning of her study, the author states her intention to analyse Ford's representation of masculinity within Richard Dyer's (1979, 1986, 1997) contribution to the field of star studies without forgetting the influence of the industry as well as the more contemporary focus on media celebrity. Luzón-Aguado actually starts her book stating that Ford's success both as an actor and as a public persona can be attributed to "an evolving set of attributes that generally stand for successful white masculinity in Western culture" (2020: 4). The relevance of the media in establishing accepted models of masculinity (and, by extension, femininity) was already noted by Lynne Segal in her seminal work *Slow Motion* (2007). As she states in an article published a few years later, "the power and meaning of masculinity derive not just from autonomy, or familial interaction, nor indeed from any fixed set of attributes that all men share, but from wider social relations" (1993: 62). Luzón-Aguado's focus on one of the best-known Hollywood actors represents a significant piece of work in which the evolving meaning of Ford's masculinity within each specific period of his career provides information on the overtones of this masculinity within wider social and cultural periods.

220 Despite the considerable length of the book, it is divided into just five chapters. Chapter 1 sets the actor within the theoretical frameworks of masculinity and stardom and the following four chapters discuss specific professional and personal periods of Ford's representation of masculinity and stardom which, at the same time, coincide with evolving notions of masculinity within the American cultural, social and political background. In Chapter 1, Luzón-Aguado highlights the fact that masculinity studies applied to cinema cannot be separated from the social and political background in which specific masculinity models became prominent. For instance, the author, referring to Susan Jeffords' study of hard boiled Hollywood heroes, states that these heroes stood for the "hard-line politics" (2020: 19) of the Reagan administration, whereas the Bush administration seemed to bring with it a balance between the paternal and the action figure. Luzón-Aguado states that "some representations of masculinity and fatherhood, such as those in *Independence Day*, *Mystic River*, *300*, and *Taken* seem to point towards a nostalgic retreat to more traditional images of manhood that evince a desire for certainty in respect to what it means to be masculine" (21). For the author, the models of masculinity that were prominent until the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, mainly based on physical strength and power, may be the reason why Ford was not featured in masculinity studies until after this period. With the proliferation of star studies as well as with the appearance of what the author calls "post-feminist masculinity" (28), the actor became "the powerful, heroic yet average family guy, or an everyman, as it is often put; he is strong and tough yet also tender, loving and not afraid of displaying his vulnerability" (28) mainly in the 1990s. However, as Ford's career and star persona lengthened in time, this image evolved until reaching his stage of ageing masculinity.

Chapter 2 focuses on Harrison Ford's construction of his star persona as a "self-made man" (2020: 30). From the time he becomes well-known for his role as Hans Solo, Ford is mainly presented as a "self-taught carpenter/performer in control of his own career" (40) which contrasts with the artificiality that may have accompanied other Hollywood stars. Moreover, in the *Star Wars* series, Ford portrays an apparently rogue character who not only ends up displaying his nobility but also treats his female counterpart, Leia, as an equal. For Luzón-Aguado, these traits together with his role as Indiana Jones created a down-to-earth star persona with whom the American audience could easily identify.

Chapter 3 starts by focusing on Ford's role as Indiana Jones, a hero considered the second most popular in the history of US film. With Ford's association with Indiana Jones, and partly due to the big success of the Indiana Jones saga, the actor became, as the author states, "an individualistic icon of US interventionism, self-reliant, combative, and tough" but also "paternal, tender, and vulnerable" (2020: 56).

According to Luzón-Aguado, the fact that Ford's physical appearance was not threatening or sexualized contributed to Ford's masculinity as seeming less forced and "almost invisible" (58). The author refers to Helen Mirren's description of Ford's masculinity as quite graphic of the kind of masculinity that Ford represented during the 1980s and 1990s. For Mirren, "there is no face testosterone about Harrison. It's just pure, natural maleness. And it's very attractive" (58). Indiana Jones also related Ford to significant values within US culture such as hard work and a simple way of life; what Eimer calls "all American maleness" (1999: 109). It is for this sustained masculine image that the author contends that Harrison Ford's move "from independent national hero to responsible father" (110) was smoother than for other action heroes.

Chapter 4 precisely focuses on Harrison Ford as "Hollywood's favourite father", as the chapter's title states. Here Luzón-Aguado analyses Ford's filmography during the 1990s until his sixtieth birthday, during which prominent roles in films such as *Patriot Games* (1992) and *Air Force One* (1997) solidified his career as an action hero at the same time as "melodramatic concerns" (2020: 183) were integrated into his heroic and star persona such as competence, toughness and self-reliance.

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In Chapter 5, Luzón-Aguado focuses on the latest years of Harrison Ford's career and on ageing masculinity in Hollywood. According to the author, despite the fact that Ford has been open about his ageing process and admitted that part of what brought him Hollywood fame was related to his youth and early adulthood, Ford has had more difficulty in keeping the heroic traits which some of his previous Hollywood characters had succeeded in reflecting. For Luzón-Aguado, in his later years, Ford has been placed in more urban settings and played self-conscious characters with "a closer focus on the unavoidable effects that aging has had on his persona" (2020: 260).

All in all, *Harrison Ford: Masculinity and Stardom in Hollywood* offers a comprehensive look into Ford's career as an action hero whose "guy-next-door" personality and appearance did not directly relate him to muscular, violent heroes; instead, this image turned him into one of the best-known and best-liked action heroes of the 1990s, keeping him on the big screen until today. Moreover, the study shows how the evolution of Ford's heroic characters went hand in hand with evolving notions of masculinity in the social, cultural and political American context until his ageing masculinity stage. This last chapter is the shortest one and, in some ways, it would have been interesting if the study had dived deeper into the ageing masculinity that Ford represents in Hollywood and the ways in which this can be related to the social climate of an ageing population in the United States. The book is indeed an essential contribution to masculinity and star studies.

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