

Toxic Masculinity as Dictatorship: Gender and Power Struggles in Tomás Eloy Martínez's Novels

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Abstract : In the present paper, I examine manifestations of toxic masculinity in the novels by Tomás Eloy Martínez, a post-Boom author, journalist, literary critic, and one of the representatives of the Argentine writing diaspora. I focus on the analysis of Martínez's characters that display hypermasculine traits to define the relationship between toxic masculinity and power, including the power of authorship and violence as they are represented in his novels. The analysis reveals a complex network in which gender, power, and violence are intertwined and influence and modify each other. As the author exposes toxic masculine behaviors that generate violence, he looks to undermine them. Departing from M. Kimmel's idea of masculinity as homophobia, I examine how Martínez "outs" his characters by incorporating into the narrative some secret, privileged sources that provide alternative accounts of their otherwise hypermasculine lives. These background stories expose their "weaknesses," both physical and mental, and thereby feminize them in their own eyes. In a similar way, the toxic masculinity of the fictional male author that wields his power by abusing the written word as he abuses the female character in the story is exposed as a complex of insecurities accumulated by the character due to his childhood trauma. The artistic technique that Martínez uses to condemn the authoritarian male behavior is accessing his subjectivity and subverting it through a multiplicity of identities. Martínez takes over the character's "I" and turns it into a host of pronouns with a constantly shifting point of reference that distorts not only the notions of gender but also the very notion of identity. In doing so, he takes the character's affirmation of masculinity to the limit where the very idea of it becomes unsustainable. Viewed in the context of Martínez's own exilic story, the condemnation of toxic masculine power turns into the condemnation of dictatorship and authoritarianism.

Keywords : gender, masculinity., toxic masculinity, authoritarian, Argentine literature, Martínez

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