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5 2016 marks the 15-year anniversary of 9/11. While the anniversary in itself, as those preceding it, draws attention to the tragic events of that day, it also signals that as time moves on and the event itself becomes somewhat distant, reflection for the understanding of contemporary issues can be seen more critically. To that effect, Ahu Tanrisever’s *Fathers, Warriors, and Vigilantes: Post-Heroism and the US Cultural Imaginary in the Twenty-First Century* (2016) is a welcoming and insightful contribution to understanding, or
rather re-assessing, concepts such as heroism and masculinity, identity and cultural ideologies pertaining to class, gender, race in the sociopolitical and economic aftermath of 9/11 America.

The recipient of the 2014 Rob Kroes Publication Award of the European Association for American Studies, Tanrisever sets out to examine “the notion of heroism during the first decade of the twenty-first century in the United States.” As Martin Halliwell, Chair of the Jury, stresses in his preface, the concept of heroism, both problematic and pervasive, “teases out the complex gender implications of the ‘post-heroic’” and promotes a critical consideration of the forces which shape masculine identity by analyzing evident and subtle tensions “between hegemonic and subversive versions of masculinity” across a range of post-9/11 narratives. Tanrisever insightfully argues that the narrative of 9/11 has become a “gendered narrative as well as a narrative of gender” (5), hence the focus not only on heroes but masculinity as well. While the corpus of texts Tanrisever draws on is post-9/11 narratives, she also draws associations with war narratives in general, hence the juxtaposition with World War II, and the Vietnam War as well as fictional war texts. Associations are even drawn with the current ubiquitous hero genre, that of the superhero. The shift from the abstract hero concept to the gendered hero is quite telling especially with the pervasive discourse in Popular Culture regarding the lack of gender and ethnic diversity in the realm of superhero comic books and film adaptations.

In spite of the varied reactions towards the over-abundance of superhero blockbuster spectacles, Tanrisever confirms that Fathers, Warriors, and Vigilantes “illustrates [in their spectrum of manifestations that] heroes can and do matter - for cultural processes of critique, revision, resignification, and progress” (247). This echoes Angela Ndalianis’ point on how “new heroes and myths are created in response to social change or social need. Heroic action usually has a fundamental link to the welfare of the society from which the hero comes” even if that welfare is to critique said society (3). The backlash against the lack in diversity in superhero characters poses as reflective critique of just one issue that the hero concept allows one
to investigate. This notion is reverberated in the central thesis of Tanrisever’s project:

My observation that patriarchal structures and the primacy of hegemonic masculinity are both perpetuated and questioned, undermined, and subverted is no gesture of embarrassment or avoidance of a definite positioning. (244)

Rather, what constitutes this book as insightful and challenging, albeit perhaps provocative to some, is the sense of in-betweenness. Tanrisever’s concept of the post-hero tellingly draws attention to the binaries such as conservative/progressive, male/female, hero/villain but it goes against the grain by identifying the fissures, or gaps, in between. In a similar way, Robert M. Peaslee’s “Superheroes, ‘Moral Economy,’ and the ‘Iron Cage’: Morality, Alienation, and the Super-Individual” (2007) argued against superheroes simply being an ideology, and instead posited that they represent the ideological seams or gaps in that ideology (38). The revisionary superhero narrative initiated in the 1980s with the contributions of Frank Miller (Batman: The Dark Knight Returns; Batman: Year One) and Alan Moore (Watchmen; V for Vendetta) provided arable ground for re-assessing superheroes prior to and after 9/11.

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