



Sons and Daughters of Self-Made Men: Improvising Gender, Place, Nation in American Literature

Mary Paniccia Carden

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At a moment in which America seems simultaneously more closed and more open to change than ever before, *Sons and Daughters of Self-Made Men: Improvising Gender, Place, Nation in American Literature* re-examines a defining national discourse. Exploring the dilemmas of U.S. subjects positioned as inheritors?and thus as children?of the archetypal self-made Founder/Father, the author offers a critical re-evaluation of the trope of self-making as it is expressed in modern and contemporary American literature. She views "self-making" as a mode of simultaneous constriction and possibility, where the compulsion to perform to the national script leads to critical and creative forms of improvisation. In texts by Toni Morrison, William Faulkner, Ralph Ellison, Sandra Cisneros, John Edgar Wideman, and others, she finds self-making re-articulated with improvisational differences that suggest possibilities for an improvisational nation.

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