

Editors' Introduction

Criticism in the Borderlands

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We have witnessed in recent years the need for a new history of American literature, one that would include the contributions of women and cultural groups ignored by the academy. Much work still lies ahead, however, especially in the field of Chicano literature; although many men and women have entered the academy, our literature and scholarship have yet to receive full institutional support or national attention. No doubt, other fields have benefited from the widening of the literary canon, most notably women's studies and African-American studies. That these area studies of research have received the most attention from the academy and its allied publishing sector can be verified by strolling through the book exhibits at the annual Modern Language Association national convention or by noting the names of women and African-American scholars present on the editorial boards of legitimating literary journals. We encourage and support this interest in African-American and feminist scholarship, for it arises out of concrete social conditions and will eventually influence classroom teaching and the emergence of an alternative canon. However, we lament the fact that such recognition has not been achieved by Chicano, as well as by Asian-American, Native American, and Puerto Rican men and women.

As this exclusion from the national critical scene continues, Chicano culture is increasingly drawing the attention of foreign scholars as witnessed by the biennial conferences in Germersheim II1984, I1990I, Paris (I1986), Barcelona II1988), and Madrid II1992I on U.S. Hispanic cultures; the annual *encuentros* between Mexican and Chicano scholars in Mexico City and in cities along the U.S.-Mexican border; and the participation of Chicano scholars, writers, artists, actors, and film makers in conferences and festivals throughout Latin America. Indeed, the idea for *Criticism in the Borderlands* first surfaced in 1985 as a response to the growing international

interest in Chicano literature. (1)

Chicano culture, as viewed by Chicana and Chicano critics as well as by European and Latin American scholars, is an expression of a social group that has given *the* distinctive cultural feature to the American West and Southwest. If we limit Chicano or Mexican-American artistic forms to political boundaries, they have existed in oral and written form since the Texas-Mexican War (1836) with greater awareness of cultural differences from Mexico after the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48). Although colonial Novohispano and Mexican cultures in this region date back to the sixteenth century and beyond, taking into account Native American *mestizo* roots, the literature produced by these groups should be ideologically and institutionally situated within the national literatures of Spain and Mexico. A Spanish chronicler of the area which was later to form the northern regions of the viceroyalty of New Spain, like Cabeza de Vaca or Coronado writing in the sixteenth century, regardless of whatever sympathy he may have had for Native Americans, is not a Chicano but a Spaniard. A similar situation holds true for Mexican writers. While Mexican literature flourished in the northern Mexican borderlands prior to and after 1848, until recently Mexican writers and scholars, expatriates and travelers in the United States have taken an unsympathetic view of their northern brethren judging them as Anglicized, inauthentic Mexicans.

Although the "unsettled" Southwest may have been discovered and, indeed, invented for an Anglo-American popular readership at the end of the nineteenth century by easterner Charles F. Lummis in books like *A New Mexico* (1891), *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (1893a), and *The Spanish Pioneers* (1893b), greater scholarly knowledge of Hispanic culture in the Southwest accumulated rapidly early in this century through Aurelio M. Espinosa's "Romancero nuevomejicano" (1915-17) and Arthur L. Campa's "The Spanish Folksong in the Southwest" (1931). And J. Frank Dobie, instrumental in the development of Western folklore societies, was the first to teach a course on the Southwest, "Life and Literature of the Southwest," at the University of Texas, Austin, a course now taught by Chicano writer Rolando Hinojosa. However, all these early efforts stressed a virtually uninhabited landscape and an unreflected, storied Spanish or Mexican past at the expense of African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and Chicanos, many of whose ancestors had worked the Western soil for generations.

Contemporaries Lummis and Espinosa merit further examination for they greatly influenced the development of institutional studies on the borderlands in the twentieth century. In 1925, three years prior to his death, (2) Lummis boasted in Mesa, Canon and Pueblo that he had been the first to apply the generic name "Southwest," or more specifically, "Spanish Southwest," to the million square miles that include New Mexico, Arizona, southern California, and parts of Colorado, Utah, and Texas. In a span of nine years, from 1891 to 1900, Lummis published eleven books, changing what was a physical and cultural desert into a land internationally known for its seductive natural and cultural attractions. Though an amateur inclined toward self-promotion and hyperbolic writing, Lummis became the founder of the "Southwest genre," recognized by both professionals and the popular media as the undisputed authority on the history, anthropology, and folklore of the Southwest.

In 1884 upon his arrival in Santa Fe, Territory of New Mexico, Lummis discovered for his readers a culture much like the fictional characters and settings of romantic literature. Unlike his native Massachusetts, the West had an authentic folk culture of simple and picturesque souls still existing undisturbed by the modern world. So taken was Lummis by the alien culture he encountered that he adopted it as his own, learned Spanish and took the name of Don Carlos. He founded the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, promoted "Spanish" architecture, and established the Landmarks Club to revive the California missions. However, like other foreigners who make native culture their own, Lummis had a conservative and patronizing side, intent on writing about the most folkloric and romantic elements of Native American and mestizo culture. Through his first books Lummis reveals his attractions for courtly dons, beautiful señoritas, innocent Indian children, kind Mexican peons, witches, and penitents. So taken was Lummis by his "child-hearted" Spanish that he became an apologist for the Spanish conquest of the Americas. His *Spanish Pioneers* (1893b) is a vindication of the heroic padres and gallant Spaniards who brought God and civilization to the Americas.

Aurelio M. Espinosa, from Colorado, who once chaired the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Stanford University is also particularly significant, for he rose to prominence as an internationally recognized scholar at the inception of Romance

language studies-on the West Coast. His goal in scholarship was to demonstrate that the folklore of the Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest was principally and fundamentally of Peninsular origin. Using positivistic methods, he quantified parallel motifs of New Mexican songs and tales with those from different regions of Spain. We cannot deny that much Mexican- mestizo folklore is Peninsular in origin, but can one ignore altogether the different historical and social contexts that made the materials collected by Espinosa as much Mexican as Spanish. What changes had occurred in Novohispano society that affected (3) the transmission of oral tradition in the intervening years between the conquest of Mexico in 1521 and the establishment of Santa Fe in 1610 or what changes had occurred by the time of collection in the twentieth century? Of these issues virtually nothing was written until the Chicano period.

The political consequences of emphasizing the Spanish past were quite damaging. The historical fact that the Southwest was conquered Mexican territory was completely ignored. It was as if Spain had become the United States without centuries of racial and cultural mixture. Yet this interpretation of the conquest and colonization of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas is still accepted by many Anglo-American critics as the golden age of Hispanic culture in the Southwest and continues to flourish in the present in the popular imagination in literature, mass media images, Hollywood films, and in the celebration of Spanish fiesta days throughout the Southwest.

The same romantic, even quaint, view of Spanish-Mexican experience on both sides of the international border was held by many Mexican-American writers, both men and women, during the first fifty years of this century. Writers of English expression like Nina Otero de Warren (*Old Spain in Our Southwest*, 1936), Cleofas M. Jaramillo (*Shadows of the Past/Sombras del Pasado*, 1941), Josephina Niggli (*Mexican Village*, 1945), and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca (*We Fed Them Cactus*, 1954) held conventional Anglo-American views of their culture. This is a literary period that awaits further scholarly studies, and Genaro Padilla's essay in this volume is an indication that a reassessment is clearly under way.

Although we are not dismissing the various ideological discourses ~'n the

borderlands prior to mid-twentieth century, we are arguing in this volume for a Mexican-American or Chicano intellectual perspective as found in the Arizona writer Mario Suarez who wrote short stories and sketches about his Tucson barrio for the *Arizona Quarterly* (1947, 1948, 1950~). From our vantage point in the twentieth century, we can posit that such a perspective must have emerged in the borderlands in mid-nineteenth century when Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, or mestizos began to project for themselves a positive, yet also critical, rendering of their bilingual and bicultural experience as a resistive measure against Anglo-American economic domination and ideological hegemony.

For many compelling historical and sociological reasons, including overt racism, economic exploitation, and the lack of educational opportunities, it is not surprising that Mexican-American experience, thought, and writing did not receive their proper share of attention from universities prior to the Chicano movement of the sixties. We must, however, pay (4) tribute to some outstanding scholars who through their individual efforts laid the groundwork for later research and writing. Jovita Gonzalez's early study of Texas-Mexican society (1931) and collections of Texas-Mexican tales (1954), George I. Sanchez's dissertation on bilingual education (1931) and his *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans* (1941), Luisa Espinel's collection of traditional folksongs from southern Arizona, *Canciones de Mi Padre* (1946), Americo Paredes's classic work on Texas border balladry, *"With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (1958), and Ernesto Galarza's political and scholarly activism on behalf of California farm workers (1964) all speak well for individual scholarly research combined with the interests of a bicultural, working-class community, a combination that helped mold Chicano studies in the seventies. The presence of Paredes is especially evident throughout our volume, for his book, *"With His Pistol in His Hand,"* was a highly conscious, imaginative act of resistance that redefined the border, which is to say, not the "Old Spain in Our Southwest" invented by Anglo-Americans, but a historically determined geopolitical zone of military, linguistic, and cultural conflict.

The tradition of Chicano literary studies that both of us inherited when we began our teaching and research careers in the early eighties was a product of the Chicano movement of the sixties, taking shape from a cultural and an institutional politics

that called for the affirmation of a working-class, Mexican-mestizo heritage as well as for the establishment of centers of research and curricular programs in the universities and colleges of the United States. Chicano literature survived its early years of the late sixties with a canon to be discussed, debated, and questioned. And Chicano literary criticism which thrived early in ephemeral and sporadically published ethnic journals now constitutes a body of work with a variety of theoretical tendencies. As Rolando Hinojosa argues in the Foreword to this volume, this institutional success is owed not so much to the academy, but to the persistence of committed women and men who in addition to their "normal" professional duties and interests established curricular programs in Chicano literary studies.

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Criticism of Chicano and Chicana writing over the last ten years reflects important shifts in argument and commitment. This book was conceived as a complement to Joseph Sommers's and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto's ground-breaking *Modern Chicano Writers* (1979) and Vernon E. Lattin's *Contemporary Chicano Fiction* (1986). With Sommers, Ybarra-Frausto, and Lattin we share an interest in addressing the status of Chicano criticism, (5) but each anthology reveals a different ideological project, corresponding to a cultural conversation that has evolved since the late seventies over the nature of literary and paraliterary approaches to Chicano texts and culture. Sommers and Ybarra-Frausto's book was the first to postulate the existence of a distinct folk and communal tradition in Chicano literature. Americo Paredes's now classic essay, "The Folk Base of Chicano Literature," from their collection, demonstrates how folklore is of importance to minority discourse and groups because their basic sense of self is expressed in a language with an "unofficial" status. Like Paredes's article, the essays in *Modern Chicano Writers* survey the terrain of that unofficial and undocumented literary continent, but with the exceptions of Paredes's intervention and Sommers's dialectical essay on Tomas Rivera, they do so without providing the metacommentary that would prepare for a theory of Chicano literature. Lattin's *Contemporary Chicano Fiction*, as the title suggests, investigates, some seven years later, the growth of Chicano narrative in a pluralistic and somewhat theoretical manner. However, issues of race, class, and gender are only sporadically addressed, and the more complex predicament of

theories and theorists in terms of location and self-positioning are absent.

Dialogic in intention, our book gathers a range of varying ideological, feminist, and cultural studies perspectives. That is, we present Chicano/a theory and theorists in our global borderlands: from ethnographic to postmodernist, from Marxist to feminist, from cultural materialist to New Historicist critical perspectives. In addition, our book strives to construct and elicit allegiances outside the immediate sphere of Chicano studies; we do so, let us add, because ideology itself involves networks of meaning and borders through which society is knitted together. By recovering neglected authors and texts, by challenging conservative habits of mind, by opening new perspectives on American literary history, ethnicity, gender, culture, and literary process itself, our book contributes in many ways to the new, albeit incomplete, American literary histories currently under reconstruction.

Moreover, we view our book paired with the recent books by Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983 and Herrera-Sobek and Viramontes 1988) in Latina feminist studies, Arnold Krupat (1989) and Gerald Vizenor (1988) in Native American studies, Houston A. Baker, Jr. (1987) and Hazel V. Carby (1987) in African-American studies, and Fernandez-Retamar (1989) and Perez-Firmat (1990) in the new comparative American studies as a form of what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese calls a "collective autobiography" (1986, 133). We concur with her that "The canon, or the power to speak in the name of the collectivity, results from social and gender relations and struggles, not from nature" (1986, 141). The first section of our volume, "Institutional Studies (6) and the Literary Canon," addresses the problem of the American canon from perspectives as varied as narrative theory and ideology (R. Saldivar), ethnicity and multiculturalism (Leal), and women-of-color feminisms and subjectivities (Alarcon). "Representations of the Chicana/o Subject," addresses Fabiola Cabeza de Baca's and Cleofas Jaramillo's colonial discourse in New Mexico (Padilla), Alma Villanueva's revisions of the physical power of women (Ordonez), Chicana *mestizaje* and the construction of identity (Quintana), and the politics of culture in the recent short story cycles by Sandra Cisneros, Denise Chavez, and Alberto Rios (Rosaldo). "Genre, Ideology, and History" relates particular products of Chicano literature—narrative and literary criticism especially—to the variety of cultural (Calderon), social and gendered (Sanchez~, institutional and disciplinary

(Chabrami, collective local and global (Harrow) borders that these products traverse. The last section, "Aesthetics of the Border, " reaches for new critical configurations in literary criticism and cultural studies: the Chicano border narratives by Americo Paredes, Tomas Rivera, and Rolando Hinojosa as national allegories and cultural critique (J. D. Saldivar), social dramas in various corridos or ballads of border conflict (McKenna), the interesting border disputes among women of color and white feminists (Saldivar-Hull), and the ethnographic political unconscious in Mexican-American south Texas ;Limon). The volume as a whole thus aims at generating new ways of understanding what counts as culture and "theory" and who counts as (cultural) theorists.

Criticism in the Borderlands is an invitation, we hope, for readers—jPan-lAmericanists, cultural studies critics, feminists, historians, and antiracists—to remap the borderlands of theory and theorists. Our work in the eighties and nineties, along with that of other postcolonial intellectuals moves, travels as they say, between first and third worlds, between cores and peripheries, centers and margins. The theorists in this book see their text always "written for" in our local and global borderlands.

This collection, therefore, should offer an important cultural perspective absent to an international scholarly community. We view this volume as a Chicana and Chicano contribution to a new awareness of the historical and cultural interdependence of both northern and southern American hemispheres. We feel that at the present moment, any glossy version of a postmodern, postindustrial "America" must be reinterpreted against the influx of Third World immigrants and the rapid re-Hispanicization of important regional sectors of our Mexican America and the wider United States. It should also be clear from this collection that future models of "American" culture and reconstructions of "American" literary history that fail to take into account the four hundred years of a Mexican-mestizo presence in our borderlands will of necessity be incomplete. (7)