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REVIEWS

RESEÑAS

Alfred Arteaga
Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Since its inception in the 60s, Chicano criticism, as well as Chicano literature, has grown in sophistication and volume. With titles such as Ramón Saldívar's *Chicano Narrative,* Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar's *Criticism in the Borderlands,* not to mention Anzaldúa's *Borderlands,* it is not an exaggeration to suggest that we are rapidly moving into an "age of Chicano criticism," as Angie Chabram remarks (1991: 128). Alfred Arteaga's *Chicano Poetics* adds to Chicano criticism a dialogic relationship with Western criticism, and a deep preoccupation with a kind of criticism that is politically and socially relevant. As opposed to some Chicano critics who do not see how Western criticism (be it French feminism or Poststructuralism, among many other possibilities) can dictate what Chicanos find in their literature (Yabro-Bejarano 1996: 208), Arteaga, like Saldívar in *Chicano Narrative,* José Limón in *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems,* holds a dialogue with Western criticism (especially Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*), with poetic devices in Nahuatl, and with (Lesbian) Feminism to create a "hybrid" critical discourse which he alternates with his own poetry from *Cantos.* Arteaga's hybrid text moves easily between "the two alliances" of Chicano literature and criticism: Western culture and education, and deep cultural bonds with the Mexican and Latin American tradition (Héctor Calderón, qtd. by Angie Chabram 1991: 138). In *Chicano Poetics* Arteaga offers an elegant prose and an inspired poetry to flesh out the nature and importance of this hybrid identity, its formal features and meanings, together with its alliances and political implications.

In "Mestizaje/Difrasismo," the first chapter, Arteaga sets out his poetic task in writing his book of poetry, *Cantos,* as "working out poetically some

sense of how one is Chicano" (1997: 5). What follows in the book is the exploration of this sense of being Chicano, an identity which, far from being fixed, stable and univocal, is always in the process of being created. Mestizaje or hybridity is the main feature of the Chicano subject, and Arteaga elaborates on the different levels of hybridity in the Chicano body, homeland and language. The Chicano, being the result of mestizaje or miscegenation, is racially hybrid, a mestizo, half European and half Indian. As to where s/he resides, the Chicano can be seen as an immigrant border-crosser from the point of view of the United States, or as an emigrant from the Mexican point of view. None of these stable concepts of nation, however, do justice to the ambiguous territory of the Chicano. Arteaga problematizes the concept of "nation" and borderline in his exploration of the two figurations of Chicano space: Aztlán and the borderlands. In his description of Aztlán, Arteaga goes back to this mythic homeland as delineated at the 1st Chicano National Conference by the poet Alurista. What Arteaga adds to "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" is a careful explanation of the political consequences of Aztlán: the reversal of the traditional tenets of Anglo-American historiography, and the subversion of traditional categories such as who is foreign, who is deportable and who is at home in the United States. But if Aztlán sounds too much like a nationalistic and essentialist myth of origins, Arteaga offers a powerful corrective through the concept of the borderlands, and its tendency to dismantle national boundaries, as described by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera.* The last level of hybridity has to do with language, as Arteaga explains: "Chicano speech is like the mestizo body and the borderlands home: it simultaneously reflects multiple forces at play and asserts its hybridity" (1997: 16). As it appears in the poetry of Anzaldúa and Alurista, their hybrid language articulates the cultural conflicts of the Chicano.

"Heterosexual Reproduction" is a critique of Octavio Paz's essentialist vision of Mexicans as the product of miscegenation (as "los hijos de la Chingada"). Arteaga reveals the flawed logic which idealizes the Spaniards as racially pure, and goes beyond the first sexual encounter (and its analogue, "cultural production") between Cortés and la Malinche to explore a second act of hybridization as a result of Anglo-American colonialism. For, as Arteaga reminds us, "not only was Mexico conquered by Spain, but Northern Mexico by the United States." In Arteaga's analysis, Rolando J. Romero, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga have problematized and opposed this paradigm of cultural genesis and reproduction which is patriarchal and patrilineal, and which establishes the father as analogue of God and of Adam as namer and disseminator of language. In "Texts, Pro-Texts, Con-Texts: Gonzalo

Guerrero in the Chronicles of Indies," Romero presents a counter text which reconceives colonial patriarchy and the role of the father. Guerrero is the father who rejected the colonial project and became the first Spaniard to assimilate Mexican-Indian language, religion and culture. For that, his narrative is either denigrated or dropped from history. Anzaldúa also erases the figure of the father in *Borderlands.* For her, the site of new hybridizing is the border, which she describes as "una herida abierta." This open wound engenders a third country—a border culture—and a new consciousness, "la conciencia de la mestiza," tolerant and inclusive. In *Last Generation* Cherríe Moraga suppresses the figure of the father and, like Anzaldúa, she is not concerned with reproducing the body but with reproducing the body of culture.

In "Tricks of GenderXing" Arteaga explores the issue of hybridity as he focuses on the writing of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the author of *Inundación Castálida* (1698), and the ways in which she challenges the categories and parameters of the Old World. Arteaga toys with Sor Juana's Cross, that crossing which is implicit in her name, and which becomes her most effective rhetorical device. Her "crossing" appears on different levels: one of them is the "extensive heteroglossia" in her text, a mixture of "varios metros, idiomas y estilos." Spanish, Nahuatl, Latin and Afro-Spanish speech, as well as a crossing of different voices, create her particular heterotext, what Arteaga terms "a New World of literary miscegenation" (1997: 49). Her "poetics of the cross" crosses stylistic, linguistic and thematic borders and expresses the inescapable presences of the New World, the female other and the racially different.

"An Other Tongue" had been previously published as the introduction to *An Other Tongue* and it blends harmoniously into the topics of hybridity and the heterotext of Arteaga's new study. Carefully crafted, the article places Chicano poetry, which is multilingual and hybrid, in the context of US monological discourse activities. This chapter holds a dialogue with Bakhtinian theory and works as a corrective for some of its tenets, such as the assertion that poetry is formally monologic. Arteaga presents Chicano poetry as an example of a multivoiced poetry born on the borderlands which replicates the style of quotidian Chicano speech. As opposed to modernist polyglot poetry, which in Arteaga's brilliant analysis "functions as a self-referential and tautological affirmation of the natural telos" (1997: 74), Chicano poetry subverts the authoritative lines of American literature and culture and its monological tendencies. From Bakhtinian theory Arteaga makes a smooth transition to colonial discourse criticism as he focuses on the discourse practices that subjugate colonized peoples within the United

States, such as Native Americans and Chicanos. Although both Native Americans and Chicanos have been internally colonized, Anglo-America has had no difficulty in containing and marginalizing the Indian and rendering him savage and subhuman, a wild creature who would profit from the conquest. But Anglo-America has had more difficulty in arguing for the inhumanity of the Chicano: in so far as he is Hispanic, the Chicano is human. The exploration of the ways in which the Chicano subverts the traditional trope of America as Eden and the Anglo-American as Adam is thoroughly brilliant and clairvoyant: Hispanic America reminds American Adams that they were not the first on the American Eden. To contain and diminish Chicano presence Anglo-America has resorted to a new conceptualization of history, not chronological but spatial, from East to West. In this light the Chicano presence before American conquest is dismissed. Thus de-hispanized, the Chicano is depicted as a savage who had produced no literature until taught English. As a response to such monological discourse activities which minimize and contain the presence of the Chicano, Chicano poetry has opted for hybridization and linguistic "mestizaje", for a poetry of the border.

"Beasts and Jagged Strokes of Color" centres on the poetry of Lorna Dee Cervantes, Juan Felipe Herrera and Alurista as examples of a "poetics of hybridization." But before focusing on the poetry, Arteaga goes into an illuminating discussion about the border and its cultural and political implications. The border can be considered as a thin line which differentiates the US from Mexico. The definite and hard-edged limits of this thin line instill confidence in national definitions and determine national narratives or monologues of ideal, finalized selves. The logic of the thin border leads Arteaga to establish a parallel between the linearity of the border and the narration of a history understood as a narrow, unequivocal line: "like the border, the line of history defines nations" (1997: 94). This thin border contrasts with the concept of borderlands as understood by Anzaldúa as a constant state of transition, negotiation and heterogeneity. This "vague and undetermined place" is misunderstood by Mexicans such as Octavio Paz, who in *Labyrinth of Solitude* expresses his abhorrence for the "lack of definite meaning" of the Chicano as opposed to the Mexican or the US American. As contested by Alurista, Lorna Dee Cervantes and Juan Felipe Herrera, the Chicano subject is not a defect or a negation (as understood by Mexicans), nor a fixed stereotype (as understood by Anglo-Americans). As inhabitants of the border, the chicanos are not reduced to the binary oppositions implicit in the thin line of the border. The coming to be of the Chicano as played out in the poetry Arteaga analyses is unfinalized, hybridized and dialogic.

In "Blood Points" Arteaga applies some of his conclusions about the linear narrative, its implications for the analysis of two short stories by Ana Castillo and Denise Chávez, and the novels *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Zeta Acosta, and *Soldados* and *Dogs from Illusion* by Charley Trujillo. Arteaga explains how the familiar assumptions about time, space and causality, as well as the linear narration of a life which spans the traditional beginning, middle and end are suspended in contemporary Chicano literature. Narrative in all these works destabilizes the authority of the line; they deconstruct the concept of the border, of a linear history and of a home, the United States, defined by the thin line—and logic—of the border.

In the final "Late Epic, Post Postmoderns," Arteaga retakes the question he anticipated at the beginning of his study as to where to locate Chicano consciousness and subjectivity. What Arteaga calls "Late Epic," the *Historia de la Nueva Méjico,* by Gaspar Pérez de Villagrá (1610), a text that represents a continuation of the Hispanic element, a sense of *hispano* that is imbued with patriarchy and colonialism, is placed side by side with other works, by Alurista or Gloria Anzaldúa, which deny the hispano component in mestizaje and define the Chicano as Indian. Both definitions of the Chicano, as Hispano or Indio, however, attempt at constucting a unified identity which does not reflect the hybridity of the Chicano. As opposed to these two options, Arteaga presents what he calls the "Post Postmodern," *I am Joaquín,* the poem that dismantles the authoritative linearities and presents instead a series of simultaneous identities that create an unfinalized subject. Arteaga brings the themes that have articulated his discussion of hybridity and the heterotext to an eloquent conclusion that retakes the discourse of boundaries and the implications of linearity as he expresses what it is and means to be Chicano: "The Xicano is the subject of Aztlán the cultural nation but not the state and not subject to capricious borderlines. It is not a state of being but rather an act, xicando, the progressive tense, ando xicando, actively articulating the self" (1997: 155).

Chicano Poetics offers a critical discourse engaged with questions such as internal colonialism, racism, sexism and political domination, which never loses sight of the reality of the Chicano in the US. In so doing, Arteaga steers contemporary Chicano critical debate to a criticism that is socially and politically relevant, and which has no qualms about using or correcting traditional tenets of Western criticism. *Chicano Poetics* dispels the fears of a criticism that colonizes and contains the meanings of Chicano literature, for Arteaga's arguments never "dictate" what we should find in the text but dialogues respectfully with it. Arteaga's critical suggestion is one of multiple

alliances, a hybrid critical discourse "on the borderlands." The clairvoyant and crystal-clear analysis of the interconnections between literature, culture, language and racial politics makes of *Chicano Poetics* a pleasure to read, a brilliant articulation of Chicano subjectivity, and an extremely valuable contribution to Chicano criticism.

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Kristin Bluemel
***Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism: Dorothy Richardson's* Pilgrimage**
Athens (GA): U of Georgia P, 1997.
209 p.; $50.00 cloth.

In *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism,* Kristin Bluemel conducts an intelligent, detailed study of *Pilgrimage*'s classical critical interpretations such as Jean Radford's psychoanalytic criticism and Gloria Fromm's biographical reading. This enables Bluemel to find her own critical path and makes her book an excellent starting point for readers to conduct their own

critical readings. In the course of her discussion Bluemel proposes positioning *Pilgrimage* in the intersection between canonical modernist fiction and "marginal" experimental women's fiction. From a solidly founded position in feminist literary criticism, she also offers a useful insight into gender issues in her study of Woolf's celebrated description of *Pilgrimage* as "the psychological sentence of the feminine gender" and Richardson's view of *Pilgrimage* as "a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism."

In Chapter 2, "The Missing Sex of *Pilgrimage*," Bluemel applies Marilyn Farwell's notion of "lesbian narrative space" to the novel and offers a close and detailed reading of other lesbian interpretations by Lynette Felber and Carol Watts. In Bluemel's view, homoerotic desire functions in the novel as a way of presenting its "missing" sexuality. She dissipates the apparent silence about Miriam's physical and sexual life with her theory that *Pilgrimage* presents female sexuality in new and unconventional ways. A proof of the increasing number of feminist lesbian interpretations of *Pilgrimage* is J. L. Winning's dissertation "Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* as Archive of the Self," which locates issues of sexual identity in the novel and uncovers the coded exploration of gender, femininity and lesbian sexual identity.

In the chapter entitled "Science, Class and the Problem of the Body," Bluemel offers a convincingly argued comparison of *Pilgrimage* to dentistry, grounded on an article Richardson wrote about dentistry. What lies behind this comparison is the postmodern preoccupation with the body and literary criticism's interest in fleshed and incarnate concepts as a reaction against the unhoused intellect (Eagleton 1996: 69-70). Moreover, Bluemel reads *Pilgrimage* as a self-conscious commentary on the harmful myths that surround representations of women and illness. For her, *"Pilgrimage* represents science and medicine as the authoritative discourses of the period while locating 'true' knowledge elsewhere: in individual consciousness" (1997: 120).

It must be added that although Bluemel's detailed readings of some passages from *Pilgrimage* are quite sensitive, an imprecision can be traced in her statement that "Miriam eventually drives von Heber [a marriageable doctor] away because he believes in her false, performing self, in the female body that exists for others as 'an object of romantic veneration'" (1997: 91) This inaccuracy comes from ignoring the role a Jew plays in von Heber's departure from Miriam's life. This fact is disclosed to Miriam by Mrs Bailey, who tells her that von Heber has been driven away from her by Mr Mendizabal's machinations. Miriam's thoughts picture this situation in a