

Book Reviews

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Cuevas, T. Jackie. *Post-Borderlandia: Chicana Literature and Gender Variant Critique*. Rutgers University Press, 2018. 171 pp.

With *Post-Borderlandia: Chicana Literature and Gender Variant Critique*, T. Jackie Cuevas makes a critical intervention into the body of scholarship concerning Chicana/o/x LGBTQ literature. Over the last two decades, works like Catriona Rueda Esquivel's *With Her Machete in Her Hand* (2006), Richard T. Rodriguez's *Next of Kin* (2010), and Sandra Soto's *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer* have explored how queer sexuality is expressed in, policed within, and gives shape to the reading of Chicana/o/x literature. Cuevas builds upon and departs from this scholarship. Without turning critical attention away from sexuality and desire, Cuevas focuses analytical acumen toward non-conforming gender expression and performance. For Cuevas, gender nonconformity offers a different, more fundamental challenge to the social order than queer sexuality: "Fear of queer sexuality can bring out the homophobic sexuality police, but gender nonconformity can disrupt the social order by bringing one's ontological status as a categorizable human being into question" (3). The critical impulse of *Post-Borderlandia* is underwritten by a series of interlocking questions: How does gender presentation shape understandings of sexuality? What is the relationship between gender presentation and gender identity? How does one engage in gender critique without falling into the limits of gender binaries? In order to address these questions, Cuevas deploys a gender variant critique to make "gender nonconformity an explicit question in order to understand its relation to queer sexuality and Chicana identities, experiences, and representations" (4).

Cuevas opens and closes *Post-Borderlandia* with a retelling and reading of the case of the San Antonio Four, a group of women falsely accused of, imprisoned for, and exonerated for raping two young girls. Cuevas locates the crux of the prosecution (and persecution) not simply in the homophobia that targeted the Four as lesbians but on their gender nonconforming presentation. Indeed, their lawyer advocated feminine attire (i.e. dresses) to make them appear less threatening to the jury. This case exposes how gender variance and its policing are not simply rooted in literary study but impact the lives of people every day. The introduction and conclusion also explore Cuevas's concept of the post-Borderlands through an examination of Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational texts and holdings in Anzaldúa's archive at the University of Texas, Austin. For Cuevas, *Post-Borderlandia* signals a recognition that Anzaldúa's borderlands theory has become a default in contemporary Chicana studies and calls for Chicana/o/x studies to push beyond the limits and blindspots of the borderland's paradigm. For Cuevas, this means examining characters and texts that "disidentify with Chicanidad and queerness through resignifying the relationship between the two at the intersection of gender variance and genderqueerness" (11). Pairing explorations of the gender variance (e.g. San Antonio Four) and post-Borderlands theory (via Anzaldúa) gives the organization of *Post-Borderlandia* a circular feel—readers end almost where they begin.

In the body chapters, however, Cuevas moves in reverse chronological order to excavate the archive of gender nonconformity in Chicana literature. The first chapter, "Chicana Masculinities," engages the Chicana butch performances of Adelina Anthony and the Butchlalis of Panochtitlan, showing how Chicana butch should not be read through the

historical paradigm of white lesbianism. For Chicanas, butch-femme “has been a sustained way of being lesbian or queer within a predominantly working-class Chicana context” (54). The next chapter, “Ambiguous Chicana Bodies,” offers an intriguing reading of the character Turtle from Helena María Viramonte’s *Their Dogs Came with Them*. Through Turtle’s gender variance, Cuevas examines queer time in the novel and the ghosts of those excluded from dominant narratives of Chicana/o history. The third chapter, “Transing Chicanidad,” explores the novels of Felicia Luna Lemus and examines how characters are unreadable when it comes to gender constructs, thus forging a genderqueerness. The final chapter, “Brokeback Rancho,” turns to *Caballero* by Jovita González and Eve Raleigh (Margaret Eimer). Cuevas’s reading of the queer character Luis Gonzaga and the novel’s queer production accomplishes three objectives: it recovers *Caballero* as queer artifact, explores González as a contributor to a queer archive, and traces queerness in the Mexican American imaginary (103-04). Together these four body chapters work as intriguing and useful case studies for Cuevas’s theorization of gender variance in the post-Borderlands era.

With *Post-Borderlandia*, Cuevas collects an archive of gender variance in Chicana literature. By suturing these works together with thoughtful and lucid analysis, Cuevas offers readers a previously unrecognized tradition of Chicana gender nonconformity. Here, *Post-Borderlandia* is indebted to and advances the work of Emma Pérez’s *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999), exposing a history and present that may be occluded when the focus of the critical gaze is sexuality or desire and not gender variance. While readers will certainly find value in Cuevas’s analytical acumen, some may wonder which other Chicana texts could have been brought under this lens: how might a gender variant critique be marshalled to examine Chicana and non-Chicana characters and open new possibilities within Chicana/o/x cultural productions? In this way, Cuevas has done the significant work of illuminating what had long been ignored. Beyond scholarly applications, readers will find *Post-Borderlandia* useful in augmenting their teaching repertoire. I plan to use Cuevas’s analytical frame in my Chicana/o/x literature courses, and I recommend the book for adoption at the undergraduate and graduate levels for relevant Chicana/o/x studies courses—indeed, *Post-Borderlandia* is a must for classes on gender in Chicana/o/x studies and Chicana/o/x intersectionality.

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MARÍA CLAUDIA ANDRÉ

Drier, Katherine S. *Cinco meses en la Argentina desde el punto de vista de una mujer (1918 a 1919)*. Ed. María Gabriela Mizraje; trad. Cynthia M. Tompkins. Cuarto Propio, 2016. 283 pp.

Publicado originalmente en 1920 en Nueva York, el diario de viaje de Katherine Sophie Drier, plasma, desde la atenta mirada femenina, una minuciosa vivisección de la sociedad porteña de principios del siglo pasado. Según el prólogo de la editora, María Gabriela Mizraje, Drier (1877-1952) nace en Brooklyn, en el seno de una familia acaudalada de ascendencia alemana de la cual hereda un gran talento artístico y una marcada pasión por reivindicar los derechos de la mujer y del proletariado; cualidades que la llevan a recorrer varias ciudades de Europa en calidad de promotora cultural, sufragista, curadora, artista y escritora. Mizraje, además de contextualizar la crónica de Drier en lo referente al período histórico y político en el cual esta llega a la Argentina, describe los diferentes aspectos de su personalidad que