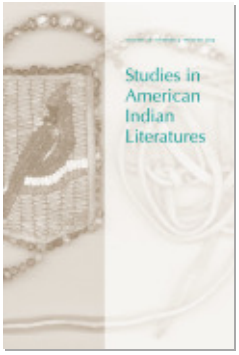
Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing (review)



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analysis. The study of American Indian literature can benefit from looking at the pieces, parts, and intentions from more than a single-author perspective with narrative meaning intentionally problematized by the identity of the interpreters.

A brief review cannot do justice to these three volumes of intertextual inquiry. Essays, published simultaneously with responses, invite readers to enter a digital landscape where texts are open to new interpretations. For those schooled in postcolonial literary and cultural studies, this new avenue provides an infinitely interesting contrast. For scholars who enter the field as "digital natives" there is an opportunity to leverage the ability to think simultaneously across multiple channels, to include multiple voices and histories in ways that can inform cultural debates. Whether you are a "digital native" or a "digital immigrant," Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin have gathered considerable material to explore.[3]

NOTES

1. Margaret Noori, "Native American Literature in Tribal Context: Anishinaabe Aadisokaanag Noongom" (University of Minnesota, 2001).

2. Anne Dunn, coll. and ed., *Winter Thunder: Retold Tales* (Duluth: Holy Cow Press, 2001), 17.

3. The terms "digital native" and "digital immigrant" have been used to differentiate between those who grew up online and networked compared to those who adopted a high use of technology later in life. For a clear explanation of these terms, see Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," from *On the Horizon* (MCB University Press, vol. 9, no. 5, October 2001), at www.marcprensky.com/writing.

Damian Baca. *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing*. Palgrave Macmillian, 2008.
ISBN: 978-0-230-60515-2. 210 pp.

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Damian Baca begins *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing* by reminding readers that "Writing systems do not

'evolve' so much as they shift and migrate across territories, technologies, and digital cultures" (7). The "digital" culture Baca explores is one of Indigenous ingenuity and narrative manipulation across geographies of space and culture. By providing a study in composition and rhetoric written from a Mesoamerican and Mexican American historical perspective, he examines the various storytelling systems and the technical details of narrative production in highly sophisticated, but underrepresented cultures. We think of murals as contemporary; he tells us of sacred scripts found in murals five hundred years old. We think of the lengthy folds of a codex existing in the past; he tells us of twentieth-century codex collaborations. Baca describes the "immense plurality that remains obscured on American Indian land" in both the present and the past (xviii).

In a move both political and rhetorical, Baca begins with a "Pronunciation Guide and Brief Chronology." Rather than allow readers to filter unfamiliar consonant combinations through the lens of their first language, he requires them to slow down and experience new sounds and learn new rules. Similarly, he begins the conversation of composition in 50,000 BCE, when pictographs began to represent thought and narrative in Piaui, Brazil. Gradually, he brings readers through time past the establishment of Mayan urban culture in 1000 BCE; past the creation of Epi-Olmec writing in 300 BCE; past the establishment of the Aztec imperial city, Tenochtitlan, in 1325; to the year 1491, a moment in time when an estimated 40 million people lived in Mesoamerica. This is the point when the existing Indigenous population experienced a 90 percent decline. However, as this book demonstrates, the continent remains connected to the scripts and practices of a culture that utilized a series of new techniques to move from the past into the present. Technology is merely the newest technique, and we are reminded that the modern Western world was once schooled by impressive ancient artistry. The wonder is not that ancient civilizations produced complex systems of understanding but that these systems were able to survive despite the onslaught of colonization.

Another asset of this text is the expansion of Mestiz@ identity, which Baca defines as "the fusion of bloodlines between American

Indians and Spanish Iberian conquerors under colonial situations" (2). What this actually refers to is a continuum of identity from those who understand their individual and communal identity as Indigenous to those who view themselves primarily as Spanish. Stories are composed across a spectrum of identity. Lived experiences are compared across time and across borders. For instance, there are ways the story is the same in the United States and Mexico, and ways in which it is vastly different. The scripts Baca cites work to problematize linguistic and literary differences. He explains: "There is no singular Mestiz@ or Mexican, Mexican-American or Chicano culture. Mestiz@s and their communities are interacting and connecting with each other and with the larger world around them, forming intricate cultural networks of persons and communities" (61). Furthermore, "as an umbrella term, Mesoamerica is employed not to suggest a sweeping generalization, but in recognition of long processes of interrelated yet diverse cultures in a constant state of transformation" (34). One of the book's primary lessons is that identity and technology are interrelated concepts dependent upon the shifting goals of communities constantly adapting.

Baca grounds his own theories in a network of scholarship about Mestiz@ rhetoric and writing. He of course includes references to cultural critic Gloria Anzaldúa, who wrote, "let's all stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent."[1] But Baca also crosses disciplines to include the thinking of art historians Donald Robertson and Elizabeth Boone Hill, whose work provides historical context for the production of texts in the midst of colonization. By including the theories of a wide range of scholars, Baca is able to show how the production of texts can be viewed as a form of resistance, survival, and self-reinvention. He shows how Mestiz@ rhetoric revises the dominant narrative of assimilation by recasting the savages as artists engaged in autobiography and documentation. Rhetoric and the production of texts, scripts, and images are confirmed as "a mediating, identity-forming activity" (8).

Codex rhetorics promote a new dialectic, a new strategy of inventing writing between worlds. Baca interprets pictorial codex

as a Mestiz@ cultural symbol and sees it as a "resistance rhetoric" that serves to revise and displace the dominant historical narrative of cultural assimilation through continuous symbolic play with pairs, doubles, corresponding expressions, and twins in pictography. The discussion of divine pairs and a dual God who is neither gender calls to mind futuristic images of infinitely intelligent androids able to understand any code. As he explores how languages are structured, Baca connects multiple cultures. The Olmec civilization developed a script with syntax and morphemes so complicated it has not yet been fully decoded. The Inca, who followed the Olmec, used the khipu cords with knots of meaning that are now sometimes compared to the binary code of computer languages. Baca makes brilliant connections between ancient Indigenous ideas and the trajectory of technology today. A primary example of this is the *Codex Espangliensis*, published in 2001 and subtitled "From Columbus to the Border Patrol." Three artists known for their manipulation of traditional script, performance, and digital ability created a single document, folded like the original codices. Baca describes this work as a "new translations of literacy" that provides a view of Mestiz@ writing which "is responsive not only to the plurality of other historically non-Western cultures across the Americas and beyond, but also to current trends in visual and digital rhetoric, trends that belatedly call for increased attention to multigenre and multimedia composition practices" (91). More than the act of inclusion, entwining the discontinuity between pictographs, alphabetic worlds, and multimedia presentations works to revise the hierarchical frame of identity.

What does this mean for the instruction of writing in a space where writing and writing instruction have been formalized and frequently aligned with national establishments? When writing is controlled by the majority, the practice and perspective of the minority become the "other," yet in these times of shifting modes of representation and production, how has the notion of the text and the technical production of texts been recast, or how could it be? Baca offers alternate models of composition instruction that broaden notions of territory, period, and nation. He proposes "a shift from

'talking about' rhetoric and writing from the perspective of those in the imperial center and their followers to 'inventing and writing from' the conceptual Mestiz@ borderlands" resulting in new discursive configurations. His proposal is not to discard Western contributions, or to merely add contributions of others, but to reread all contributions from multiple perspectives using multiple mediums and scaffolds of understanding.

NOTE

1. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Books, 2007), 24.

Leonard F. Chana, Susan Lobo, and Barbara Chana. *The Sweet Smell of Home: The Life and Art of Leonard F. Chana*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-8165-2819-6. 176 pp.

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The Sweet Smell of Home is a much-needed addition to the literature on O'odham art and culture, most of which has been focused on basket-making. While the aesthetics of O'odham basket design are evident in Leonard F. Chana's images, the Tohono O'odham artist's work is beyond the limitations of ethnographic illustration. Chana is not only knowledgeable about the O'odham Himdag (the O'odham Way) but also an eyewitness to social and community events, which consistently inspired his images. At the same time, Chana understands intimately the hardships that have beset generations of O'odham, which he recounts throughout the book, but which is especially poignant in his own personal struggle with alcohol abuse. In fact, Chana devotes a chapter to this difficult stage of his life titled "So I Was Tired of Drinking Anyways." The chapter is brief, as are all twelve chapters, yet layered with the emotional truth that can only come from knowing the desolation of the spirit firsthand. However, Chana neither preaches nor howls about his struggles and the lessons learned. Rather, his storytelling steadily main-