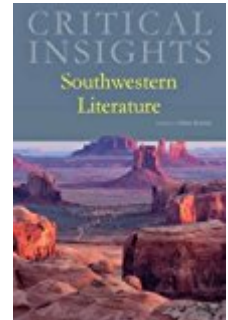


**William Brannon, ed..** *Critical Insights: Southwestern Literature*. Critical Insights Series. Hackensack: Salem Press, 2016. xxvi + 239 pp. \$105.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61925-842-6.



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The Southwest is still relevant, and this edited anthology brings together fourteen original essays to illustrate this point. Spanning four centuries of history, from Spanish colonial narratives through twentieth-century literature, the essays in this collection highlight the necessary contexts for new and original readings of the people and texts that constitute the Southwest.

Edited by William Brannon, *Critical Insights: Southwestern Literature* opens with four introductory essays that set up a series of critical contexts. Mark Busby's lead essay, "The Polychotomous Southwest," provides an overview of historical contexts, genres, and themes, and it forecasts the anthology's scope and content. Brannon follows with an in-depth discussion of the major authors and themes that constitute southwestern literature, beginning with European and Euro-American frontier narratives and evolving into Mexican American and Native American literature. In a third critical essay, T. Jackie Cuevas "expands the geographic and metaphoric boundaries of what southwestern can mean" by focusing on

Sandra Cisneros's Chicana "feminist architecture" (pp. 33, 34). Finally, Laura Smith closes this first section with a comparative discussion of four Glenn Canyon writers, highlighting the theme of environmental writing and activism in the region, and in southern Utah, especially.

The first four essays in this collection set the stage for the critical essays that comprise the "Critical Readings" section, which opens with Randi Lynn Tanglen's overview and assessment of the Indian captivity narrative. Tanglen begins with Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's 1542 *La Relación*, published almost 150 years before the first New England Indian captivity narrative. Taking as its counter-premise the New England captivity genre, the essay takes considerable stock of how women negotiate codes of domesticity, race, and gender in southwestern captivity narratives. In the end, Tanglen suggests new ways of thinking about the theme and genre of captivity in the US-Mexico borderlands. Meanwhile, Roger Walton Jones's essay on death and Larry McMurtry's novels concludes the "Critical Readings" section and brings

the anthology to a close. In between these two essays, the anthology spans an epic history of place, and it shores up in the process a troublesome history of imperialism when it comes to Native American literature.

Wilma Shires's rereading of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) follows Tanglen's essay and takes an "ecopostcolonial borderlands approach" to her novel (p. 77). While Shires utilizes and assesses the most relevant scholarship on Silko's novel to make a compelling argument about healing and place, the anthology offers no critical context for reading Native American literature. Shires's essay—or something equivalent—should have appeared in the anthology's first section.

By not including a contextual essay on Native American literature, the anthology participates in a troublesome erasure of indigenous people in the region, even though the essays take critical stock of the ways southwestern literature acknowledges and rewrites the history of violence against Native Americans. The anthology, however, pays considerable attention to Mexican American and Chicana/o literature, starting with Cuevas's critical context piece on Cisneros and including an essay on Mexican American memoirs, another on María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's 1885 novel *The Squatter and the Don*, and an essay on spirituality and eco-criticism in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1994). Following these three essays are two pieces on Willa Cather and two on Cormac McCarthy, with one essay focusing on Cather's southwestern aesthetics and the other looking at the significance of the desert and character formation in her three most well-known southwestern novels. Though the two essays take different perspectives, they seem more redundant than cutting edge, since they focus on the same three novels. Meanwhile, Maria O'Connell looks at the myth of masculinity in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1992), and Cordelia E. Barreras analyzes his Border Trilogy. Of these two essays, Barreras offers a more

compelling consideration of the two competing paradigms of place propelling McCarthy's three border-crossing novels forward.

Despite its presentation from the outset, this *Critical Insights* anthology takes the perspective of at least two strategic paradigms: one that travels westward from the East and imagines the southwestern frontier as open space, and another that migrates northward and southward between the United States and Mexico. This dual paradigm shores up another critical blind spot, which becomes apparent in the essay on Ruiz de Burton's novel. While the essay contextualizes the novel from within the purview of New Western history to argue that it counters Manifest Destiny and westward expansion, Chicana/o scholars have already made this point, beginning with Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, who recovered and edited the novel over two decades ago. More points of convergence need to take place between southwestern studies and Chicana/o and hemispheric American studies in order to expand truly the critical contexts and discussions of southwestern literature that the anthology sets out to uncover.

While the anthology certainly brings attention to the ways Mexico has filtered into the southwestern imaginary, two essays on McCarthy, compounded by two essays on Cather and a last essay on McMurtry, it overemphasizes the Anglo literary tradition at the expense of what Busby calls "a polychotomous Southwest" (p. 3). Busby's nomenclature is catchy and speaks to a diverse region of writers and literary histories, but more attention needs to be paid to the diverse viewpoints and voices of Native America and to the scholarly contributions of Chicana/o literary and hemispheric studies, if the polyvalent meanings of southwestern literature are to emerge in full form.

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