



Carlos Riobó. *Caught between the Lines: Captives, Frontiers, and National Identity in Argentine Literature and Art.* New Hispanisms Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. Illustrations. 198 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4962-0552-0.

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From sixteenth-century Spanish colonial tales of the frontier, to the twentieth-century writings of Jorge Luis Borges, and into the present day, literature from the Río de la Plata region has frequently featured the figure of the captive. Argentine captivity narratives have often served as a way for writers to explore broader societal anxieties about transculturation, *mestizaje* (miscegenation), and the construction of the national community. These narratives have often been characterized by hybridity and fluidity, not just in subject matter but also in form; they have straddled the boundaries between history and fiction, between memoir and myth, making them fundamentally ambiguous texts that invite retellings and reinterpretations in different historical moments. In *Caught between the Lines: Captives, Frontiers, and National Identity in Argentine Literature and Art*, Carlos Riobó probes the construction of Argentina's national myth of racial purity by examining the figure of the white, female, Christian captive in Argentine literary and visual culture over nearly five centuries. Riobó's analysis reveals the centrality of the captive figure within constructions of Argentine national identity, as well as the shifting meanings of the captive in different historical moments up to and including the present day.

Caught between the Lines examines how captivity narratives have served to construct but also to destabilize Argentine myths of racial purity. Riobó posits that the figure of the captive represents a reality of racial and cultural mixture in Argentine history, since captives occupied a liminal space as intermediaries between indigenous and European-descended societies. However, literary representations of captives have often "denied or attempted to deny the possibility of transculturation" in Argentina, using the figure of a chaste, sexually restrained female captive to emphasize the white racial purity of the Argentine nation (p. 45). In Riobó's words, "the trope of the captive represents two general discursive possibilities." On the one hand, by unwillingly crossing from one society into another, the captive can be made to represent the strict demarcations between racial and cultural identities. On the other hand, the captive "can represent a plurality of meanings by assimilating himself or herself into the world that was previously other" (p. 75). In other words, captives can alternately represent purity or hybridity. The choices that Argentine writers and visual artists have made in deploying the trope of the captive have depended greatly on the cultural context in which they produce their works, and the specific cultural commentary they hope to advance.

The first two chapters of *Caught between the Lines* introduce Riobó's project and its theoretical underpinnings. Chapter 1 situates the project within the vast literature on captivity narratives in North America, South America, and Argentina, showing how these narratives serve as "an attempt to redefine the social order" (p. 10). Riobó also provides a broad sketch of state-indigenous relations throughout Argentine history, showing how captivity narratives were tied to their broader sociocultural context. In chapter 2, Riobó situates his work within theoretical frameworks for understanding *mestizaje*, frontiers, and borderlands. On the topic of *mestizaje* he draws heavily from the work of the philosopher María Lugones, who sees attempts to separate hybrid figures into their constituent "pure" parts as a form of social control, and therefore sees hybridity as a form of resistance to social control (p. 28). On the question of borderlands and frontiers, Riobó draws on a variety of theoretical works, including nineteenth-century writings by Frederick Jackson Turner and Domingo Sarmiento as well as more recent texts by Gloria Anzaldúa, Mary Louise Pratt, and Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz, to show how frontiers and borderlands constitute permeable, hybrid spaces of contact and conflict.

After introducing his theoretical foundations, Riobó moves to analyzing specific captivity narratives. Chapter 3 focuses on two in particular: the myth of the sixteenth-century captive Lucía Miranda and the nineteenth-century memoirs of the captive-turned-cultural intermediary Santiago Avendaño. In both cases, Riobó's focus is how these stories have been told and retold over time, and how the figure of the captive was used either to deny or to emphasize the porosity of cultural and racial boundaries. To highlight one of Riobó's two examples, the myth of Lucía Miranda tells the story of a sixteenth-century Spanish woman who resists the advances of her indigenous captor Mangoré and his brother Siripó. Early retellings of the myth paint Lucía as a "Christian martyr" and "defender of Christianity," protecting her com-

munity's racial purity through her sexual chastity (pp. 48, 49). But in the nineteenth century, as indigenous people's role within the national community was debated, new versions of the myth explored the concept of hybridity and posited the possibility of Argentine *mestizaje*, by emphasizing Lucía's mixed Christian-Moorish heritage or by suggesting her sexual desire for the "noble savage" figure of Mangoré (p. 53). After the end of the violent military assaults in the late nineteenth century, which brought an end to indigenous autonomy in Argentina's borderlands, twentieth-century retellings of the myth returned to the one-dimensional vision of indigenous people as barbarians beyond the bounds of the national community. In these later retellings, Lucía once again takes on the role of "protecting" the nation against savage outsiders. As Riobó shows, legends like Lucía Miranda prove "to be malleable at key moments in Argentine history," and the figure of the captive herself can stand in for a variety of societal anxieties as well as future possibilities (p. 62).

Chapter 4 builds on the analysis of chapter 3 by analyzing "the figure of the captive during stages of national transition in Argentine history" (p. 71). If nineteenth-century captivity narratives written during the turbulent era of national consolidation served to affirm the Argentine state's right to indigenous land, in twentieth- and twenty-first-century retellings "the captive tradition is cut loose. Having previously been used to define the purity of the nation and the integrity of national borders, this literary tradition now transcends them freely." In contrast to their predecessors, twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers have used captives "to explode national boundaries and to play with notions of purity" (p. 89). Notably, these later retellings also recover the sexual agency of the female captive characters, using depictions of interracial desire and sexual activity to tell "us what readers suspected all along: that Argentine purity was a tightly controlled myth" (p. 98).

Chapter 5 extends the discussion of the previous two chapters but moves to the realm of visual art. In this final chapter, Riobó shows how iconic nineteenth-century images of captive taking, notably those by Mauricio Rugendas, Juan Manuel Blanes, and Ángel Della Valle, “helped to define *argentinidad* as anti-*mestizaje* and anti-transculturation,” using visual symbolism to delineate strict boundaries between “savage” indigenous people and “civilized” white captives (p. 111). But contemporary artists like Daniel Santoro and Alberto Pasolini have reclaimed and reinscribed these famous images of the nineteenth-century frontier. Much like their literary counterparts, Santoro and Pasolini have used the figure of the captive to represent malleability, hybridity, and transculturation, and to invert or deconstruct the notion of a binary between Argentine “civilization” and indigenous “barbarism.” By concluding with the works of these contemporary artists, Riobó shows that captivity narratives continue to play an important role in Argentine literary and visual culture, but also that the figure of the captive continues to adopt new cultural meanings in relation to Argentine identity construction.

Using the methodology of literary criticism, *Caught between the Lines* adds to a growing interdisciplinary scholarly conversation on race and ethnicity in Argentina. By emphasizing a historical reality of Argentine *mestizaje*, Riobó challenges the common idea of Argentina as a white nation-state or an immigrant melting pot with little to no indigenous heritage. Additionally, Riobó’s focus on the figure of the white, female, Christian captive allows the author to bring gender into his analysis of race and national identity, showing how women were alternately upheld as paragons of purity and sexual restraint and vilified as vessels of socially unacceptable racial mixing. On both ends of the spectrum, women’s sexual practices were therefore central to elite ideas about the racial and ethnic identity of the nation-state in the past, present, and future.

One of the most valuable contributions of Riobó’s book is his consideration of captivity narratives into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, long after the Argentine state declared its “Indian Problem” officially “resolved.” By examining the long trajectory of captivity narratives in Argentina, Riobó shows how the symbol of the captive continues to provoke anxiety as well as represent generative potential for Argentine writers and their audiences. This longer time scale allows Riobó to avoid characterizing Argentine national identity as static and its construction as limited to the early national period. On the contrary, Riobó shows how narratives of national belonging have continued to shift and be reformulated in light of changing political and social contexts.

Given this book’s focus on captivity, frontiers, and ethnic identity, *Caught between the Lines* would have benefited from a deeper engagement with the anthropological and historical scholarship on frontier *mestizaje* and ethnogenesis in the Río de la Plata region. At times, particularly in chapters 1 and 2, generalizations about race, ethnicity, and caste in the Spanish colonial world stand in for specific details about the region that would become Argentina. Similarly, Riobó’s engagement with frontier and borderlands theory in chapter 2, while thorough, could have been supplemented by the theoretically rich contributions of Argentine anthropologists and ethnohistorians, who have developed a vast body of literature specifically about the Río de la Plata’s porous and culturally hybrid borderlands regions. Engaging with this literature would have allowed Riobó to ground both his theoretical frameworks and his readings of captivity narratives more firmly in the particular historical realities of the region.

Caught between the Lines is lucidly written and will be of interest to scholars writing about national identity, racial formation, and borderlands studies, regardless of discipline. Both the book’s subject matter and Riobó’s clear, engaging writing style make this a great choice for an undergradu-

ate syllabus. The fact that Riobó draws frequent comparisons to the North American context, not only on the subject of captivity narratives but also on the topics of both frontier history and racial identity formation, will help orient students who are unfamiliar with Latin American or Argentine history.

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