

A California Legacy Book

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Heyday Books, founded in 1974, specializes in critically acclaimed books on California literature, history, natural history, and ethnic studies.

Books in the California Legacy series appear as anthologies, single author collections, reprints of important books, and original works. Taken together, these volumes bring readers a new perspective on California's cultural life, a perspective that honors diversity and finds great pleasure in the eloquence of human expression.

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UNDER THE FIFTH SUN

LATINO LITERATURE FROM CALIFORNIA

EDITED BY RICK HEIDE

FOREWORD BY JUAN VELASCO



from

✠ The Multicultural Paradigm

Guillermo Gómez-Peña

1989

Guillermo Gómez-Peña (b. 1955) grew up in Mexico City and came to the United States in 1978. His work often addresses current issues in politics, ethnicity, and nationality, using poetry, journalism, criticism, cultural theory, performance art, installations, and video and audio recordings. In addition to his involvement with the community art troupe La Pocha Nostra, he has been a contributor to radio programs, arts collectives, newspapers, magazines, and journals in the United States and Mexico. His long list of honors includes a place on the *Utne Reader's* 1995 List of 100 Visionaries, an American Book Award for *The New World Border* (1997), and a 2000 Cineaste Lifetime Achievement Award from the Taos film festival. He has published five books containing scripts from some of his larger projects. The following excerpt is taken from the first of these, *Warrior for Gringostroika* (1993).

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

It's 1989 in this troubled continent accidentally called America. A major paradigm shift is taking place in front of our eyes. The East Coast/West Coast cultural axis is being replaced by a North/South one. The need for U.S. culture to come to terms with the Latino-American "cultural other" has become a national debate. Everywhere I go, I meet people seriously interested in our ideas and cultural models. The art, film, and literary worlds are finally looking South.

To look South means to remember; to recapture one's historical self. For the United States, this historical self extends from the early

Native American cultures to the most recent immigration from Laos or Guatemala.

It's 1989 in this troubled country mistakenly called America. The current Latino and Asian immigration to the United States is the direct result of international conflicts between the so-called First and Third worlds. The colonized cultures are sliding into the space of the colonizer, and in doing so, they are redefining its borders and its culture. (A similar phenomenon is occurring in Europe with African immigration.)

The First and Third worlds have mutually penetrated one another. The two Americas are totally intertwined. The complex demographic, social, and linguistic processes that are transforming this country into a member of the "Second World" (or perhaps the "Fourth World"?) are being reflected in the art and thought produced by Latinos, African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Anglo-Europeans. Unlike the images on TV or in commercial cinema depicting a monocultural middle-class world existing outside of international crisis, contemporary U.S. society is fundamentally multiracial, multilingual, and socially polarized. So is its art.

Whenever and wherever two or more cultures meet—peacefully or violently—there is a border experience.

In order to describe the trans-, inter-, and multicultural processes that are at the core of our contemporary border experience as Latino artists in the United States, we need to find a new terminology, a new iconography, and a new set of categories and definitions. We need to rebaptize the world in our own terms. The language of postmodernism is ethnocentric and insufficient. And so is the existing language of cultural institutions and funding agencies. Terms like Hispanic, Latino, ethnic, minority, marginal, alternative, and Third World, among others, are inaccurate and loaded with ideological implications. They create false categories and neocolonial hierarchies. In the absence of a more enlightened terminology, we have no choice but to utilize them with extreme care.

My artistic sensibility as a deterritorialized Mexican/American artist living a permanent border experience cannot be explained solely by accepted historical notions of the twentieth-century Western vanguard (from dada to techno-performance). I am as Western and American as Laurie Anderson or Terry Allen. Yet my primary traditions are Chicano and Latin American art, literature, and political thought. We must realize that the West has been redefined. The South and the East are already in the West. And being American today means participating in the drafting of a new cultural topography.

Let's get it straight: America is a continent, not a country. Latin America encompasses more than half of America. Quechuas, Mixtecos,

①

Yaquis, and Iroquois are American (not U.S. citizens). Chicano, Nuyorrican, Cajun, Afro-Caribbean, and Quebecois cultures are American as well. Mexicans and Canadians are also North Americans. Newly arrived Vietnamese and Laotians will soon become Americans. U.S. Anglo-European culture is but a mere component of a much larger cultural complex in constant metamorphosis.

This pluralistic America within the United States can be found, among other places, in the "Indian reservations" and the Chicano barrios of the Southwest, the African American neighborhoods of Washington, Chicago, or Detroit, or the multiracial neighborhoods of Manhattan, San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Miami. This sui generis America is no longer part of the First World. It still has no name or configuration, but as artists and cultural leaders, we have the responsibility to reflect it.

Despite the great cultural mirage sponsored by the people in power, everywhere we look we find pluralism, crisis, and nonsynchronicity. The so-called dominant culture is no longer dominant. Dominant culture is a meta-reality that only exists in the virtual space of the mainstream media and in the ideologically and aesthetically controlled spaces of the monocultural institutions.

Today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture. And those who still haven't crossed a border will do it very soon. All Americans (from the vast continent America) were, are, or will be border-crossers. "All Mexicans," says Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, a Chicano theoretician in New York, "are potential Chicanos." As you read this text, you are crossing a border yourself.

☼ Underground Mariachi

Lucha Corpi (translated by Catherine Rodríguez-Nieto)

1980

Lucha Corpi was born in 1945 in Veracruz, Mexico, and moved to California at age nineteen. She has written five volumes of poetry in Spanish and four novels in English, one of which, *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992), received the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award and the Multicultural Publishers' Exchange award for best fiction. Her series of detective novels features a Chicana feminist who solves murders involving the Latino civil rights movement. She has worked as coordinator of the Chicano Studies Library at UC Berkeley, as a college instructor, and as founder and president of Aztlán Cultural and Centro Chicano de Escritores, and she currently teaches English as a second language through the Oakland public school system.

The barrel-belly guitar
awkwardly
hangs from the wall
its twelve strings mute;
the violin observes it
attentively
from the dresser
its delicate notes
hanging on silence;
and the horn, mouth down
over the table
sighs deafened.

There are no musicians
there are no singers