

REVIEW OF BEATRIZ JIMÉNEZ  
VILLANUEVA. *LA DESCOLONIZACIÓN DE LA  
SEXUALIDAD EN TRES AUTORES CHICANOS*.  
ALCALÁ DE HENARES: SERVICIO DE  
PUBLICACIONES DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE  
ALCALÁ, BIBLIOTECA BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,  
2024.

CARMEN GÓMEZ-GALISTEO  
UNED  
[cgomez@flog.uned.es](mailto:cgomez@flog.uned.es)

Received 17 June 2024

Accepted 14 February 2025

At the same time that Chicano literature was experiencing a boom of popularity among readers and critics alike, the presence of homosexuality in Chicano literature was a topic that was largely neglected and barely mentioned. It was not until 1986, after the publication of Bruce-Novoa's seminal essay "Homosexuality and the Chicano novel," that it was brought into focus. Bruce-Novoa found that "the Chicano movement is strongly male oriented, if not thoroughly male chauvinistic" (69), which accounted for the dominance of heterosexuality in Chicano literature and criticism.

Since then, there have been numerous studies of homosexuality in Chicano literature, but they have mostly focused either on Chicano gay men or Chicana lesbians. Viego and Breining restricted their analysis to male homosexuals in Chicano literature, from the perspective of semiotics in the latter's case whereas Esquibel's *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians* or Toda Iglesia's "Lesbianismo y literatura chicana: la construcción de una identidad" dealt with lesbian Chicanas. Jiménez Villanueva's *La descolonización de la sexualidad en tres autores chicanos* is unique for two reasons—to start with, because it explores both homosexual Chicanas and Chicanos, through the works of great names in Chicano literature such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga but also

through *City of Light* by John Rechy, an early Chicano writer whose work has been often overlooked. The other reason why this is a pioneering book is because this is the first work to examine homosexuality from a decolonizing perspective. Moreover, homosexuality is explored from a double decolonization; on the one hand, by exploring the pre-Columbian Native concepts of homosexuality and, on the other, by examining how space is renegotiated in Chicano literature depending on the individual's sexual orientation.

In the introduction, Jiménez Villanueva sheds light on the fact that “las identidades marginales negocian su identidad dentro de una sociedad homofóbica heredera del proceso colonial” (11). Diverse (that is, non-heterosexual) sexual practices existed in the precolonial period but were silenced after the arrival of Europeans. Chapter 1 constitutes the theoretical framework of this work. Establishing a distinction between sex and gender following Judith Butler and Foucault, it is revealed that the public space is usually understood as being neutral, since sexuality is supposedly confined to the private sphere. However, in practice, public spaces are actively heterosexual (and sometimes even homophobic) and marginal sexualities need to fight to find room for themselves in the public sphere.

This is a marked contrast with how homosexuality was viewed in the pre-Columbian period. In native societies, homosexuality was far from hidden. The very notorious existence of the *berdaches* (also called two-spirited people) was recorded by Spanish conquistador Cabeza de Vaca (Jiménez Villanueva 37). The existence of these people, who combined female and male roles, behavior and dressing practices, served Cabeza de Vaca well, who used them as a model to create a new identity for himself during his time in America (Gómez-Galisteo), as he could not assume his prescribed role of victorious male conquistador. Analyzing homosexuality in Chicano literature is further complicated by the fact that, as Bruce-Novoa pointed out (69), the Chicano Movement history shows it as a predominantly male movement. Women's fight to be recognized within the movement was even more complicated if they were lesbians. Native American studies, post-structuralist, queer and urban theories, help to vindicate lesbian Chicanas in the face of Chicano heteropatriarchy. Going back to America's native roots is particularly interesting because “el proceso de colonización en America supuso un cambio organizativo, estructural y social que subyugó las identidades no heterosexuales” (Jiménez Villanueva 45).

Chapter 2 is devoted to Texas-born Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) and her use of indigenism as a means to decolonize Chicano literature. Anzaldúa embraced Mesoamerican goddesses to represent Chicanas and to criticize “la discriminación y el maltrato de las sexualidades desviadas dentro de la cultura chicana” (Jiménez Villanueva 60). In Anzaldúa, these alternative sexualities are represented in different manners, but most notably by the goddess Coatlicue, who allows her to reclaim the concept of sexuality in native American cultures. Curiously, Anzaldúa adopts the sexuality concepts of Toltec culture, with its balance of female and male energies, even if her whole decolonizing project is based on Aztec culture. This is born out of necessity, as the Aztecs had a very negative view of homosexuality.

Chapter 3 deals with Cherrie Moraga (1952-) and her proposed queer Aztlán to embrace not only her own homosexuality but also culture, religion, family and the Chicano movement. For Moraga, her homosexuality led to the realization that one’s family is constituted not only those who are related by blood, but that family is a term that can come to mean one’s chosen family, using her own family with her female partner as an example. Moraga defines herself as “tlamantinime,” a wise spiritual guide but also a prescriber of new codes for our own times. If Anzaldúa turned to Toltec culture and the goddess Coatlicue, Moraga makes use of Aztec culture and more specifically, of Coyolxauqui, Coatlicue’s daughter, to advocate for female empowerment.

Chapter 4 vindicates John Rechy (1931-) as a Chicano author, as he has been more often than not identified as a homosexual writer, but not as a Chicano author. In *City of Night*, Rechy’s description of how homosexual desire is sated in public spaces such as parks or movie theaters connects with the need to claim a gay identity in public spaces and to make this identity visible and acknowledged. Yet, despite their common attempt at getting the homosexual identity recognized in the Chicano community, Rechy’s treatment of homosexuality is different from Anzaldúa’s or Moraga’s in that he does not make use of other (native-American) cultures in his exploration of homosexuality in Chicano literature.

To conclude, we can say that this book is a welcome addition to the study of Chicano literature, and must be celebrated for its accessible approach to such a complex topic. *La descolonización de la sexualidad en tres autores chicanos* comes to fill a gap in Chicano scholarship. Yet, as Jiménez Villanueva states in the final chapter,

there is still much to be written on the much-neglected topic of homosexuality in Chicano literature.

#### **WORKS CITED**

- BREINING, Daniel. "Identity through Literature of Gay Chicanos." *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2006, pp. 45-61.
- BRUCE-NOVOA, Juan. "Homosexuality and the Chicano Novel." *Confluencia*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1986, pp. 69-77.
- ESQUIBEL, Catrióna Rueda. *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*. University of Texas Press, 2006.
- GOMEZ-GALISTEO, M. Carmen. "Subverting Gender Roles in the Sixteenth Century: Cabeza de Vaca, the Conquistador Who Became a Native American Woman." *Gender and Sexuality in Indigenous North America, 1400-1850*, edited by Fay A. Yarbrough and Sandra Slater, University of South Carolina Press, 2011, pp. 11-29.
- TODA IGLESIA, María Ángeles. "Lesbianismo y literatura chicana: la construcción de una identidad." *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2010, pp. 77-105.
- VIEGO, Antonio. "The Place of Gay Male Chicano Literature in Queer Chicana/o Cultural Work." *Discourse*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1999, pp. 111-31.