

Priscilla Solis Ybarra. *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment*. U of Arizona P, 2016, pp. 264.

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Much (necessary) research has been written on Mexican American and Chicana/o literature (a difference in terminology based mainly in chronology, as used in the reviewed work). Nevertheless, Priscilla Solis Ybarra acknowledges in her book *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (2016) that not much has been published on the environmental issues present in this literary tradition (23-24). As Ybarra claims in the Preface, environmental writing and criticism, and I would add thinking, is traditionally associated with people who spend time in “nature,” practicing outdoors sports such as hiking or kayaking (xi). It is for that reason that numerous Mexican Americans, born and raised in urban centers or in farmworker communities, do not seem to fit the mold (xi-xii). Nevertheless, in the United States, Hispanics (the majority of which are Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os) seem to be the ethnic group that is most concerned with climate change. That concern seems to have deep roots that go beyond given explanations, such as Latinas/os disproportionate exposure to toxic substances or egalitarian sentiments (3-4). Her book thus aims to unearth “a genealogy of values and practices maintained in Mexican American and Chicana/o culture ... to write a history of ‘goodlife writing’ ... [which] embraces the values of simplicity, sustenance, dignity, and respect” (4).

Ybarra starts by situating her work in an ecocritical framework, which I would have expanded to an environmental humanities framework, for I believe such a project, in its multidisciplinary, transcends ecocriticism. She moreover grounds her research in decolonial theory with a particular emphasis on the work of Walter D. Mignolo, stressing the need to recognize the roots of environmental degradation and socio-environmental injustice in modernity and coloniality. Through the analysis of a rich and varied corpus, she progresses chronologically through a series of Mexican American and Chicana/o texts, some of which are lesser-known writings and/or have never been regarded from an environmental angle. In her progression, Ybarra shows the environmental relevance of said literature, which goes beyond exposing environmental injustices—a strategy common in Chicana/o literature—and “also testifies to alternative, decolonial environmentalisms, evident within Mexican American culture” (20).

The first two chapters develop the so-far little-explored environmental angle of literary works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—the latter often regarded as devoid of politics—, which certainly do not belong in the usual nature writing tradition. Ybarra starts by exploring different “incisive social critiques” (62), which criticize the land dispossession of Mexican Americans after half of Mexico’s

nineteenth-century territory was annexed by the US at the end of the US-Mexico war in 1848. She continues with an analysis of the human-nature relations in early twentieth century literature, “the way coloniality affects Mexican American identity and relation to the land” (69), in line with Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ idea of the “coloniality of being” and in contrast to the coloniality of knowledge, the usual focus in Chicana/o literary scholarship. The following couple of chapters revise well-known Chicana/o struggles in the mid-to-late twentieth century: the land claims initiated by *La Alianza Federal de Mercedes* (The Federal Alliance of Land Grants) and the migrant workers struggles for socio-environmental justice. She does so from a new angle, focusing on texts that, according to her analysis, go beyond land reclamation and land ownership, transcending possession and arguing instead for Chicanas/os traditional communion with nature. Chapter five continues to apply this line of thought, together with a queer perspective, through three works by prolific writer Cherríe Moraga.

The corpus of the analysis firmly sustains Ybarra’s main argument that the Mexican American and Chicana/o communities have long established socio-environmental values that show in their literary manifestations. Most interestingly, it does so without focusing exclusively on the usual examples of environmental justice literature, skimming over Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God* (1994) and going briefly over Helena María Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995). She moreover revises classics such as Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), Tomás Rivera’s *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* (1995) or Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Her attention to gender aspects is an added value of the book. Without making the book explicitly about gender, she mostly analyzes the work of female writers, which in most cases—as in the early twentieth century works—connect environmental knowledge with the economic system and the legacy of modernity and coloniality, while challenging traditional gender roles. Her conclusion expands all of these issues into a heterogeneity of environmental approaches and actions in the twenty-first century. Ybarra’s book-length study *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* is therefore a must read for anyone with an interest in the field of Chicana/o studies, and its intersection with ecocriticism and the environmental humanities. Ybarra’s book will hopefully be the first in a long tradition of academic explorations of Mexican American and Chicana/o socio-environmental writing. In fact, some other works have already been published on the topic since the publication of her work, and Ybarra herself is one of the editors of the recently published volume *Latinx Environmentalisms: Place, Justice, and the Decolonial*, co-edited with Sarah D. Wald, David J. Vázquez, and Sarah Jaquette Ray.

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