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Drawing Expansive Narrative Boundaries*

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Enrique García. *The Hernandez Brothers: Love, Rockets, and Alternative Comics*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2017.

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Abstract

Review of Enrique García. *The Hernandez Brothers: Love, Rockets, and Alternative Comics*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2017.

Keywords

U.S. Latino comics, postmodernism, sexuality

Enrique García. *The Hernandez Brothers: Love, Rockets, and Alternative Comics*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2017. 192 pp.

Enrique García's contribution to the academic conversations surrounding the Brothers Hernandez's cultural productions is historically focused on how the 1950s Comics Code Authority created the conditions for the alternative comics, and underground comix, out of which *Love and Rockets* emerges. García further contextualizes Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez's parody of the superhero genre that ultimately came to dominate the U.S. comic book marketplace as a result of the Comics Code Authority's restrictions on sexuality and violence. By bringing together Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of the carnivalesque, pastiche, and parody; Linda Hutcheon's scholarship on postmodernist culture; and Frank D'Angelo's understandings of adaptation, García underscores the role of the imagination in narrating and representing ethnicity. That is, he proposes that *Love and Rockets* is not so much concerned with depicting the processes of identity construction or the ideologies of resistance that were the main preoccupations of 1960s Chicano cultural productions, but rather that ethnicity and identity function as tools for further narrative development. He asserts: "For the most part, their comics have overcome the nostalgia for the creation of identity that was so important in the 1960s, and their Latino characters are not necessarily always virtuous but are often prejudiced toward other ethnic or social groups. They feel comfortable with their Hispanic heritage and function well within the cultural markers of both Latin America and the United States. Bilingualism is not an issue for them. Neither is citizenship or national belonging" (7). For García, *Love and Rockets*' concerns with identity, resistance, and liberation occur within the context of sexuality. García's reading of sexuality and its function within the series serves to address reader criticism of the series' depiction of sexuality as singularly exploitative or pornographic. García understands the depiction of explicit sexuality as a form of queering and complicating of the seemingly static concepts of ethnicity, femininity, and resistance.

Importantly, García points to potentially exploitative depictions of female sexuality in order to signal the series' often parodic intertextuality with U.S. hegemonic superhero narratives, Mexican comics (such as Yolanda Vargas Dulché's *María Isabel* and Rius's *Los supermachos*), and U.S. alternative and underground creators like Robert Crumb. Thus, for García, the series' representation of explicit sexuality intervenes in established comic book genres as it parodies the hypersexualization of Latina/o characters in other forms of media. In reference to Gilbert Hernandez's "BEM," for example, García writes, "This particular employment of Latino culture and sexuality is interesting because it rarely appears in this type of fantasy/science fiction setting, and here it serves as a parody of the notion of stereotypical Latin sensuality that used to pervade old-

fashioned American musicals. This is probably the earliest time in Gilbert's narrative where one can identify his whimsical but bizarre portrayal of sexuality that some readers find offensive" (47). García deploys intertextuality, which he links to the concepts of postmodernism, the carnivalesque, parody, adaptation, and appropriation, as a guiding concept for uncovering and understanding three decades of historical, political, and creative media influences. This approach lends the series its depth while simultaneously presenting a challenge to contemporary readers whose exposure to comic books may be predominantly shaped by the superhero narratives enmeshed within U.S. popular culture and the 1950s Comics Code Authority.

The Hernandez Brothers is accessible to undergraduate and graduate students, particularly those without experience in comic books as either a personal source of entertainment or as objects of textual or cultural analysis. Readers familiar with comic books will find García's text useful for how it brings together comic book scholars and postmodern theorists. Additionally, García provides breaks between chapters comprised of brief discussions and analyses of stories not discussed in the chapters themselves, such as the collaboration between Mario and Gilbert Hernandez titled "Chiro the Indian." These sections serve to further introduce the reader to the range of the Brothers Hernandez's creations. Each chapter is self-sustaining, which allows the book to be effectively used as a whole or in sections, and the concluding chapter's interview with Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez exemplifies this potential. Read sequentially, the concluding chapter reflects on García's overarching discussions, given that the Hernandez Brothers reflect on García's scholarship; yet read on its own, the final chapter serves not only to introduce readers to main points of discussion in García's book, but also to provide them with a sense of the breadth and depth of the Brothers Hernandez's creations.

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