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Carlos Riobó. Caught between the Lines: Captives, Frontiers, and National Identity in Argentine Literature and Art. U of Nebraska P, 2019.

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Abstract

Review of Carlos Riobó. *Caught between the Lines: Captives, Frontiers, and National Identity in Argentine Literature and Art*. U of Nebraska P, 2019. xii +180 pp.

Keywords

Southern Cone, Argentina, frontier, captives

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North American colonial captivity narratives are a well-studied genre in the United States. Usually written by the former captives themselves upon their return to so-called civilization, these tales highlighted redemption and religious providence, such as in the case of Mary Rowlandson's *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) and were very popular with readers. Less studied are the captivity narratives of men and women in the Spanish American region which comprises Argentina today, perhaps because there are so few of them relative to their North American counterparts. However, the conspicuous absence of captivity narratives in Argentinian literary history does not correlate with the fact that many men and women were captured by indigenous peoples during the colonial period and until the *Conquista del Desierto* 'Conquest of the Desert' (which effectively exterminated thousands of indigenous communities) in the late nineteenth century. Carlos Riobó's volume, *Caught Between the Lines: Captives, Frontiers, and National Identity in Argentine Literature and Art*, addresses the absence of captives in the historical record and their presence in literature and art from the colonial period to the twenty-first century in Argentina. Engaging with post-colonial studies, contemporary philosophy, and cultural studies, Riobó demonstrates that historical captives were denied their voice because to allow them to speak would have represented a case in favor of *mestizaje* at a time when Argentina was constructing itself as a white nation. Paradoxically, the figure of the captive was appropriated to convey specific ideological stances regarding national identity at times of political upheaval in the country from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

The main argument of the book, introduced in the first chapter, is: that captivity narratives in Argentina were used to display a logic of separation and *mestizaje* as "two conflicting ways of understanding borders," either as a diving line or as a contact zone (1). By proposing to focus on captivity tales and their shifting relationship to separation and *mestizaje* during various moments in Argentina's history, the author poses an alternative to the civilization and barbarism binary that has dominated conversations of nation building since Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo*. This chapter also provides historical background on captivity narratives in colonial Spanish America and in colonial North America as well as a history of captivity tales in Argentina.

Building from the historical overview of the previous chapter, Chapter 2 examines the concepts of *mestizaje* and purity from the U.S. and from Latin American perspectives. Riobó attends to María Lugones's essay on purity, impurity, and separation to problematize the positionality of the hegemonic voice in discussions of race, *mestizaje*, and culture, and to Benedict Anderson's imagined

communities and Mary Louise Pratt's contact zones to conceptualize borders and frontiers as spaces of interaction and creation of a *mestizo* consciousness. It is in the discussion of the possibilities of the frontier where Riobó recuperates certain aspects of Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" and its "cultural *mestizaje* that is purely American" (39) as well as engages with Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands and the new mestiza consciousness. He argues that borderland *mestizos* have the most cultural capital because of their ability to cross borders and function in three spaces: their place of origin, their place of captivity, and the contact zone between them.

In chapters 3 and 4, Riobó tackles the literary representations of the captives throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapter 3 is divided into two main sections: the first section details the sixteenth-century legend of Lucía Miranda and the second section examines the first-person account *Memorias del ex-cautivo Santiago Avedaño*. The chapter traces the rewritings of both narratives during the nation-building moment by Eduarda Mansilla and Rosa Guerra, showing the shifting concerns regarding *mestizaje* and transculturation depending on the political climate and affinities of each author. Chapter 4 examines the engagement with the captive in the Argentine literary canon and compares its role in the works of authors such as Esteban Echeverría, José Hernández, Jorge Luis Borges, and César Aira, to name a few, at times of national transition. Riobó goes back to Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to ask whether the captive can have a voice. Although female captives were considered white, Riobó makes a convincing case for their subaltern status even if they were not racially different from the hegemonic voice of the creole male author in charge of building the nation as white through writing.

The final chapter centers on artistic representations of the captive's body and its use to project purity. The painters Juan Manuel Blanes, Ángel Della Valle, and Mauricio Rugendas, who created iconic works, were influenced by the orientalist paintings of their European referents in their construction of captives as martyrs and victims. Their representations sought to clarify Argentina's national identity as white, and therefore, incongruous with *mestizaje*, imbuing their works with deeply seated anti-transculturation sentiments. The persistence of their work would be challenged in the late twentieth century by two artists, Daniel Santoro and Alberto Passolini, who reinterpreted the canons of Argentinian visual art for contemporary audiences.

The volume's attention to the figure of the captive from the colonial period to the twenty-first century in Argentina adds complexity to the study of captivity narratives in the Americas. Comparative cases from the colonial period in North America are presented in almost every chapter, drawing out an interesting hemispheric approach to the subject. Future studies could build upon Riobó's work by engaging with the figure of the captive in the North American case beyond the

colonial period, for instance, in the Western genre in literature and film. Ultimately, *Captivity Narratives* contributes to a growing body of literature on Southern Cone studies aimed at U.S. literary scholars and it will undoubtedly prove valuable to scholars of nation formation, visual narratives, race and gender studies, hemispheric studies, as well as frontier and subaltern studies.

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