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Cecilia Josephine Aragón. *Borderlands Children's Theatre: Historical Developments and Emergence of Chicana/o/Mexican-American Youth Theatre*. Routledge, 2022. Paperback £39.99, Hardback £145.00, eBook £33.99. 158 pages. 22 B/W illustrations. ISBN 9780367559199 (Pb); ISBN 9780367559045 (Hb).

Cecilia Josephine Aragón's *Borderlands Children's Theatre: Historical Developments and Emergence of Chicana/o/Mexican-American Youth Theatre* brings together several increasingly prominent research agendas in contemporary theatre studies, such as theatre for young audiences (TYA) (Brenner et al., 2021; Gallagher, 2022; Busby et al., 2024), borderlands theatre (Moreno, 2015), and Latinx theatre (Boffone et al., 2022), alongside numerous other explorations of the medium as a vehicle for self-representation, community building, and political critique within various marginalized settings. Beyond these intersecting branches of theatre studies, Aragón's book is firmly rooted in Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), particularly in its theorization of the psychosocial condition of inhabiting the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and its articulation of the "new mestiza" as a transformative figure.

The introduction establishes the primary objective of the study: to "give voice" (1) to Chicana/o/Mexican-American¹ youth's involvement in the theatre realm – both as performers and audiences – and thus fill a notable research gap with implications across the aforementioned fields. The opening pages also illuminate the author's positionality, showing how her academic interest in the topic is deeply informed by her lived experiences as a Chicana theatre practitioner, scholar, and critic who shares a "borderlands identity . . . with a consciousness grounded in cultural and historical differences" with the protagonists of the book (3).

Chapter 1 engages with the broader disciplinary contexts of analysis, providing brief historical overviews of children's theatre and Latina/o theatre for young audiences (LTYA) in the United States (10-21). Drawing on a substantial selection of secondary sources, the first two sections of this chapter trace the professionalization of children's theatre throughout the twentieth century – from a marginal form once dismissed as unworthy of scholarly attention to a legitimate field – and examine the more recent critiques of its lack of diverse cultural representation and its perpetuation of reductive colonial tropes. Despite the flourishing of LTYA across playwriting, production, programming, and academic scholarship in the past few decades, Aragón underscores the need for an investigation of “youth roles, representations, and participation within a historical performative framework” (20). The final section shifts the focus to developmental psychology, arguing that Western constructs fall short in capturing the specificities of childhood and youth as experienced by Chicana/o subjects positioned at the intersection of several cultures, languages, and mythologies (21-26).

Tracing the history of Chicana/o young people's involvement in the theatre, Chapter 2 highlights a variety of performative traditions, from the Indigenous rituals of the pre-Columbian era, to the Spanish Colonial period (1510-1821), to the bilingual folk *pastorelas* of the Southwest Hispanic Theatre (1821-1930) and the touring companies' commodification of child actors, to the activist *teatros* serving “as political, social, and cultural weapons aimed at resistance to a dominant oppressive society” (66) during the Chicana/o Movement (1960-1980). The development of educational youth theatres and programs extending the influence of El Teatro Campesino (Teatro Urbano, Teatro De Los Niños, Teatro De Los Barrios, or the student-based La Compañía de Teatro Bilingüe and Teatro Desengaño Del Pueblo) is considered in conjunction with the 1971 founding of the national association El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán (TENAZ). Also emerging from this historical survey is an argument about shifting conceptions of youth's cultural value and an increasing awareness of the function of theatre as a site of identity formation in the borderlands.

Chapter 3 synthesizes the theoretical discourses that have informed Aragón's research, particularly some of the pioneering figures of Border Studies, such as Américo Paredes, Gloria Anzaldúa, José David Saldívar, and Renato Rosaldo (71-80), as well as psycho/social theories of the development of ethnic selfhood in children and youth, especially Jean Phinney's three-stage model (80-85). Aragón advocates for the usefulness of this twofold framework in clarifying "the cultural and psychological specificity of Chicana/o identity" (71), with its processes of acculturation, assimilation, bilingualism, biculturalism, among others.

Bridging theory and practice, Chapter 4 showcases brief readings of six plays by nationally recognized Chicana/o playwrights. This application of theory to practice includes a discussion of the journey of young female protagonists in search of an enhanced understanding of their hyphenated identity, either by reconnecting with their Mexican background, as in Silvia Gonzales S.'s *Alicia in Wonder Tierra* (87-90), or by proudly preserving and even adapting the cultural practices of their family and community, as in Rudolfo Anaya's *Farolitos of Christmas* (90-96). Both physical and metaphorical border crossings underpin Josefina López's *Simply María or The American Dream* (104-109) and José Cruz González's *The Highest Heaven* (96-101). In the former, María migrates from Mexico to Los Angeles and begins to interrogate the gender roles and cultural myths in which she has been socialized; in the latter, Huracán, the main character, takes the reverse journey as he is deported during the Great Depression, experiencing displacement and othering in both countries. Two other plays examine the politics of educational settings, revealing the challenges faced by Chicana/o students, from the racist attitudes of Anglo teachers in Luis Valdez's *No saco nada de la escuela* (101-104), to struggles with literacy and English curricula in Carlos Morton's *The Drop Out* (109-116). Eminently suited for American Studies classrooms, this six-play corpus foregrounds young characters negotiating geographic, cultural, and psychological borders, while grappling with the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and class in the construction of their subjectivity.

Chapter 5 adopts a hybrid structure, incorporating excerpts from interviews with the theatre makers discussed in the previous chapter and

an outline of future lines of inquiry in the field. The interview fragments centre on the dramatists' childhood memories of engaging with theatre, from *pastorelas* to Shakespeare to puppet-making, and their reflections on the seminal role of the Chicana/o Movement as "a conduit for cultural artistic expression" (124), which prompted them to begin writing for their communities. Also addressed are the difficulties of securing production opportunities for LTYA in mainstream professional theatres. Including an annex with the full transcripts of several interviews could have further enriched the chapter, providing readers with deeper insight into the playwrights' creative paths. The final section maps out potential avenues for further research, with a focus on several underexplored aspects, such as the ideological dimension of youth drama programs facilitated by social service organizations, the impact of LTYA plays as assessed through audience response studies, and multicultural children's narratives of border crossing. The closing pages also chart some emerging directions, such as new playwriting initiatives, festivals, and performance pieces, pointing to the ways in which LTYA continues to create "spaces and voices for the development of education, entertainment, and most importantly, community building" (138), thereby solidifying its place in the larger landscape of American theatre.

In recent years, the Chicana/o youth experience has been increasingly visible on American stages, in a wide range of settings, genres, and forms, from the poetic realism of Benjamin Benne's *Alma* (2022) and the eclectic style of Quiara Alegría Hudes and Erin McKeown's musical *Miss You Like Hell* (2018) to community-based pieces such as Motus Theater's *Do You Know Who I Am?* (2013), which has turned into a regional arena for community dialogue on immigration reform. The vibrancy of this ever-expanding corpus makes Aragón's book particularly valuable for an understanding of the deep-rooted traditions that have paved the way for contemporary theatre making. Through its theatre-inflected perspective, the study advances the critical discourse on Chicana/o cultural practices, building on the legacy of José David Saldívar's *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997), which illuminated the richness of the borderlands through the multifocal lenses of music, literature, ethnography, and the visual arts.

While the analysis is grounded in the specificity of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, its insights extend beyond this setting, offering a framework for examining how theatre can serve as an effective tool of artistic expression and social critique among marginalized young people. *Mutatis mutandis*, the vital questions raised in this monograph – about identity, *mestizaje*, performance, representation, community, agency, belonging, resistance, childhood, and youth – resonate in other transnational contexts in which TYA has performed a similar cultural and political labour. Thus, this book will appeal not only to scholars and educators in Theatre Studies, Chicana/o Studies, American Studies, and Border Studies, but also, more generally, to practitioners working with underprivileged youth to enact social change through theatre.

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Note:

¹ In what follows, this review abides by the terminological choices of the author, e.g., “Chicana/o,” “Latina/o,” and the hyphenated “Mexican-American.”

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