



Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America by William Anthony Nericcio

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(1947), “Freyre collapses master/slave relations with the ‘natural’ juxtaposition of plantation architecture with indigenous fauna” (46). She cites several apologies for Lima, such as that of Jorge de Souza (1983) and of Marilene Felinto (1995), and his reading of the French sociologist Roger Bastide (64). Isfahani-Hammond redeems Bastide’s *Poesia Afro-Brasileira* (1943) by explaining that he “identifies literature as the natural arena for social transformation” whereby black writers can overcome oppression by writing the trauma, even though “Africa” [is not mentioned; or rather] ... [I]t is the natural condition of discourse produced in a mutable, heterogeneous society” (65). In this chapter Isfahani-Hammond excels at consolidating her argument and providing nuanced and convincing revisions of the debates.

Chapter 4, “Joaquim Nabuco: Abolitionism, Erasure, and the Slave’s Narrative” or “Abolitionism in the Americas” begins with a reference to the musical CD “Noites do Norte” (*Northern Lights*, 2000) in which “Caetano Veloso pays homage to the Brazilian abolitionist, Joaquim Nabuco, in a manner that reflects numerous problems associated with the memory and marketing of slavery and abolition in Brazil” (83). Isfahani-Hammond argues that this prolongs “a Freyrean conceptualization” (84) and uses the Caetano CD to juxtapose the way slavery is romanticized in Brazilian cultural memory, while it is not done in the United States (Hesse: “Forgotten Like a Bad Dream,” 2002), although both are expressed in redemptive terms. In contrast to “Noites do Norte,” she mentions Spielberg’s “Amistad” (1997): “Notwithstanding the enormous disparity between the hyperdetermined visibility of slavery in Brazilian popular culture and its relative absence in the United States [...] the ultimately *feel good* quality of (*Amistad*) reinforces Western culture’s proprietorial memory of slavery as *the memory of its abolition*” (86). However, the Brazilian plantation is not “an egalitarian interracial synthesis [but rather] . . . the site for the appropriation of blacks’ identity by the postseigniorial strata” or the Northeastern *senhor* posited by Nabuco and Freyre as the white negritude of the title (113).

Chapter 5, “From the Plantation Manor to the Sociologist’s Study: Democracy, Lusotropicalism, and the Scene of Writing” closes the book with a look at the transfer of the academic writing space as the new “plantation” (121).

Although it proposes to move beyond “history” and the limiting discourse rooted in a neocolonialist bias, the language of the book sometimes feels confining as it readdresses these terms. Yet Isfahani-Hammond does achieve her goal of explaining “how Freyre employs culture, nature, and the atmosphere to exclude sociohistorical *mestiços* from Brazil’s nonbiological African/European synthesis” (121). This challenges that paradox that, ultimately, belies the present state of “Brazil’s ‘hybrid’ polity” (154).

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“I have noted that some recent forays in critical theory have led to erudite, if disappointing, intrigue where critical caginess devolves willy-nilly into borderline wishy-washiness” (85).

Never short on passion or *ganas*, *Tex[t]-Mex* is full of criticism regarding recent cultural artifacts, using the iconic Speedy Gonzales as a point of departure into ubiquitous images of Mexicans in America like those in advertisements and cinematic representations. However, it is a little bewildering why William Anthony Nericcio waits until his second chapter to note what makes his highly anticipated oeuvre *Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the “Mexican” in America* different from other recent scholarship. Nericcio attacks with velocity and veracity, dazzling the reader with familiar yet shocking imagery, while exposing what Nericcio terms “seductive (because they are familiar), popular hallucinations of ‘Mexicans’ in the cultural spaces of the Americas” (16). Baring the deconstructionist torch, Nericcio illuminates the entrenched racism other Latin and Chicano texts address; at the same time he assembles a critique that bridges pop culture simulacra with canonical texts like those of Chicano essayist Richard

Rodriguez. Addressed to the current generations weaned on popular culture, *Tex[t]-Mex* meets students on common ground, but carries them away in a gyre of sardonic scholarship and hypnotic visual imagery.

While a collection of articles on differing media like film, cartoons, advertisements, and essays runs the risk of fragmentation, the stereotypical image that applies to both Frito Bandito and Gonzales bare striking resemblances to the disgust with which the *mestizo* half-breed in Orson Welles's film *A Touch of Evil* is regarded. Layers of oppression are unraveled in a way that is accessible to neophyte scholars. But Nericcio superimposes another dimension of scholarly exploration vis-à-vis the visual rhetoric in mainstream advertising aesthetics. Firmly grounded in theory, Nericcio unpacks his perspective on the impact of such depictions on the collective psyche with the aid of traditional, non-bracketed texts of Fanon, Said, and Nietzsche.

In the second chapter, Nericcio draws from Gayatri Spivak's translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and delves into name theory and the conscious decision of Latin-American film star Rita Hayworth to change her name from Margarita Carmen Cansino. Hayworth's outward manifestation of internalized self-loathing continues as she physically changes from a brunette to a blond. Transitioning from his discussion of "alienation as celebrity" (95) to his personal disdain, Nericcio also meditates on the notion of the simulacrum that allows him to recognize Speedy Gonzales as merely a signifier of the one-dimensional "hallucination" that perpetuates inequality within the collective unconscious. The analysis of Speedy Gonzales is a fitting scholarly counterpart to the likes of Native American writer Sherman Alexie's personal essay, "I Hated Tonto (Still Do)," which also addresses the theme of perpetuated internalized self-loathing through pop culture.

Nericcio's analysis does not stop at commercial logos or film icons. Prophetic of the current fetishism of celebrity, Nericcio turns the spotlight on the current gossip magazines that often dictate and reinforce hegemonic ideology. Nericcio addresses a cover story on *The Globe* that attempts to put Fidel Castro at the 1992 LA riots. The use of *The Globe*, which may be acknowledged as something incongruous within the academy, remains forebodingly apt, given the shift in public taste which privileges the information disseminated through new media gossip blogs and on-line magazines. Whether the *Globe* article was meant to be whimsical or incendiary, *Tex[t]-Mex* points out how the hegemony undermines the serious racial implications of the LA riot.

While Nericcio supplies expert and innovative analysis, his tone may rub readers rather harshly. Given that content is influenced by structure, the repetition of the bracketed [t] draws attention to the rhetorical device. Because the bracketed [t] is often included in the phrase "tex[t]-mex" (highlighted within the title itself), and also an oft-repeated motif, the bracketed [t] could potentially undermine the universality of Nericcio's theories. The bracketed [t] represents a *tejano* *sabor* that possesses a machismo-like presence, which dictates a wry tone, disenchanting a reader coming from a non-*tejano* background. Nericcio's reliance on this particular rhetorical device could potentially cause the reader to wonder whether it is being used to solidify tenuous connections.

Although the stylistic apparatuses of the brackets and dashes can feel heavy-handed, Nericcio addresses this issue like any historicist worth his salt. In a self-deprecating acknowledgment of what he calls "a tad precious and so very 1980s," Nericcio opens his text admitting that his use of the bracketed [t] makes him guilty only of being a product of his time (15). Like a tempting *habanero* chile that explodes in a series of slow burns, *Tex[t]-Mex* lures readers in with hypnotic visual imagery, but packs decisive blows that will no doubt inspire some of the most resistant students to research concepts that Nericcio addresses. *Tex[t]-Mex* takes the reader's consciousness through the looking-glass as an honorary member of Nericcio's inner circle, laughing to hold back the tears evoked from reality's twisted matrices on the other side of the one-way mirror.

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