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The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art by Vera Norwood and Janice Monk

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art* by Vera Norwood and Janice Monk

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congregated as a solidary but ebullient scholarly tribe unmercifully erased. Truly fantastic.

In the same fashion, the superb taboo-breaking discussion of death in a children's book, Clara Juncker's analysis of Lindgren's *Brothers Lionheart*, which ought to have provoked thought and plenty of debate, seemingly took place in an eerie vacuum. One article on the topic of the fantastic in the fine arts, Charlotte Stokes' insightful treatment of Max Ernst's *Rêve d'une petite fille*, would seem to be unreasonably little. Also, one would like eventually to see other specialists and, above all, practitioners of more recent approaches, attracted to the fantastic in order to enrich it, if indeed to clarify it should forever remain elusive: an added handful of reader response criticism (barely touched upon by contributors); a pinch of speech act theory (unmentioned here); a tiny whiff on science fiction versus IDS; and lots more of film and media sociology criticism in general, of which we have only one entertaining sample here, the survey of twentieth-century *Frankenstein* versions by Steven Earl Forry.

The second problem haunting such volumes is equally glaring and by no means limited to this publication alone, and so I would like to mention it for the soul-searching of our almost infinitely perfectible profession: it looks as though no one is really responsible for printing errors; the publisher does not provide a copy editor; nor is the general editor equipped with one, it seems; occasional scholars never proofread their galleys; or else the individual authors end up being overwhelmed by the myriad mistakes an American printer is able to cram into a short text: three times *enmascarados* (a pretty funny pun) in Cynthia Duncan's scantily proofread essay on Carlos Fuentes' "Los dioses enmascarados." And, what might equally be a "mere" copy editor problem, while this paper's introduction had promised to look into "these Mexican writers," the analysis limits itself to two short stories and their single author. In short, editing should never be left to the computer.

UTE MARGARETE SAINÉ

Northern Arizona University

VERA NORWOOD and JANICE MONK, eds. *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987. 281 p.

I recall as a graduate student in Connecticut reading *Death Comes for the Archbishop* for the first time. It puzzled me deeply: What was this book about anyway? What happened? Much later, after I had made at least fifteen trips up and back along the Rio Grande from El Paso to Albuquerque, across the Jornada del Muerto and through the Southwest's emptiest and most noble landscape of storms, had eaten the greasy stuffed chilis at Chope's Bar in Mesa, New Mexico, had slept out under the owls in Canyon de Chelly, gotten lost in the Chuskas above Lukachukai, sat on the highest rock in the Franklins,

and jogged along every mile of acequia madre in El Paso's Upper Valley—I thought I knew. After all, hadn't I "discovered" La Conquistadora, diminutive, hard, pure Castillian, in her nave one day when I turned left before the altar of Bishop LaTour/Lamy's Church of San Francisco in Santa Fe? But this book, *The Desert is No Lady*, a collection of eleven essays by female scholars, draws me back to these landscapes with a mind's eye opened and freshened by a new history.

What every writer and all the editors in this collection understand is that the American Southwest is not simply a landscape; it is complexly one. Actually the northern reaches of the vast Sonoran and Chihuahuan desert zones which stretch a thousand miles into Mexico, the Southwest is a live metaphor in U.S. political geography, a dry Walden Pond in which writers from the one-armed Colonel Powell, who first saw the full length of Grand Canyon, to Cather and Edward Abbey have all seen deep reflections of human meaning and possibility. In this book the full range of art and expression is explored from travel diaries, wood carving, weaving, pottery, and other sculpture to poetry, novels, and photography. Every ethnic constituency (even men) is touched upon, so that finally a vision of extraordinary richness and depth, the consequence of work in many media by extraordinarily gifted and persistent women over many centuries, emerges.

There is no fat in this collection, though it runs to 275 compressed pages. Every essay carries its own weight. While there is some introductory theorizing by the editors about the "scholarly arena of landscape study" with appropriate quotes from D.W. Meinig, E.C. Relph, and G. Nash, the real spirit that broods over these studies emerges from the groundbreaking (a masculine landscape metaphor if there ever was one) books of Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her*. The theoretical focus and mission of the book is stated thus by the editors: "Feminist scholarship has demonstrated that to understand women's perceptions and experiences we must consider the influences of time, place, class, ethnicity, and life stage." The essays themselves are remarkably free of jargon and academic cant; every one is stuffed full of information and analysis of specific artifacts, whether poem or tapestry—even the notes are an education. "The Mind's Road: Southwestern Indian Women's Art" by Nancy Parezo, Kelley Hays, and Barbara Slivac, for example, is the most efficient and effective introduction to Native American cultures and art in the Southwest I have ever read, anywhere. The contributors themselves include Native Americans and Chicanas; the title, *The Desert is No Lady*, is drawn from a line by poet Pat Mora, now Director of the University of Texas at El Paso's Centennial Museum.

The ordering of the essays, however, is flawed, seriously, and contradicts the message of its individual contributors. As read by these critics, the Southwest landscape is about the revision of Anglo-American male canons of history and art in favor of "the vision of the freedom women have located in [it]." What a disappointment, then, to find the book in two parts with the first addressing "the two prominent Anglo responses to the region," beginning with Alice Corbin Henderson, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Mary Austin, and Willa Cather and the second taking up the "cross-cultural examination of women's creative

expressions.” But in New Mexico, it is precisely Dodge Luhan, Cather, Nancy Newhall, Laura Gilpin who are “cross-cultural,” not Maria Martinez, Nampeyo, Gloria Lopez Cordova, Leslie Silko, or Luci Tapahonso. The ordering reflects an Anglo, “Northeast” geopolitical vision in which Anglo “discoverers” and Anglo analytical discourse come first. Admittedly, the discussion of Georgia O’Keeffe, Nancy Holt, and Michelle Stuart comes in the penultimate essay, and nearly all the Chicana and Native American artists are recent or contemporary, but the structuring metaphor of a landscape consciousness that begins with Alice Corbin Henderson’s 1920 book of poems, *Red Earth*, runs clearly aground in the discussions of Hispanic folk art and Native American aesthetic canons. I would have begun with the essay on “Southwestern and Indian Women’s Art” and followed an order of real history, not the order of Northeast literary tour guides and gallery flyers. But then, I’m sure Yale means well and did the best it could.

WILLARD GINGERICH

St. John’s University

MARIA LUISA NUNES. *Becoming True to Ourselves: Cultural Decolonization and National Identity in the Literature of the Portuguese-Speaking World.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1987. 94 p.

In *Becoming True to Ourselves*, Maria Luisa Nunes analyzes, as her subtitle says, the process of “cultural decolonization and national identity in the literature of the Portuguese-speaking world.” As a Luso-Brazilian scholar and “a product of Portuguese colonialism as well as being a second-generation American” (x), Nunes is highly qualified to deal with the topic. The ultimate scope of the study is to reveal the relationship between cultural decolonization and national identity with respect to Portugal, Brazil, and Portuguese-speaking Africa, starting with the Cape Verde Islands and Guinea Brissau and proceeding to São Tomé and Príncipe, followed by Moçambique and Angola. The approach the author chooses highlights the complexity of the process and, although the political implications are not thoroughly dealt with, the extensive bibliography and the relevant conclusions are thought-provoking and well worth reading.

In the introduction, Nunes mentions that one of her most recurring doubts is the extent to which fascism influenced the Portuguese character. In the subsequent chapters, character and identity are constant concerns and the historical and social realities are skillfully dealt with. Few references, though, are related to political issues, and her initial question about fascism remains unanswered. Although the author’s purpose is to reveal the process of decolonization and identity through the analysis of literary works of art, it seems to be difficult to dissociate the political from the sociohistorical scene.

In addition, despite the accurate inclusion of relevant authors, two names seem not to receive due consideration in the analysis of Brazil: Machado de Assis and Gregório de Matos. The reason Machado de Assis, considered the