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Review of Beyond Bounds: Cross-Cultural Essays on Anglo, American Indian, & Chicano Literature By Robert Franklin Gish

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Good writing transcends boundaries, says Robert Franklin Gish in this cross-cultural inquiry into Anglo, American Indian, and Chicano literature. Beyond Bounds grew out of Gish's willingness to risk “the disdain of advocating . . . 'Buffalo Chip Lit'” to test the notion that “no one ethnicity, no one group . . . offers the ultimate ‘truth’ of tourism, seen most metaphorically as the ‘tourism’ of mortality.”

Part One, “Anglo Visitors,” examines the early twentieth-century writings of Charles Lummis, Erna Ferguson, Harvey Ferguson, and Witter Bynner, visitors to New Mexico who were unabashed supporters of Anglo conquest. Yet they recognized they were newcomers to an ancient land and grew to respect the Indian and Hispano cultures. Gish finds in these Anglo writers a reverence for what D. H. Lawrence called “the spirit of the place,” what Charles Lummis called “the land of poco tiempo.”

Part Two, “Indian Voices,” examines the novels of James Welch and the poetry of Ray A. Young Bear. Both provide insiders’ views of their unique American Indian experiences. Both affirm their Indian roots by capturing their mythic pasts. Welch’s first novels (Winter in the Blood and The Death of Jim Loney) reveal his characters’ angst. In The Indian Lawyer he depicts an American Indian
whose attempt to integrate himself into the
ccontemporary cultural democracy of state poli-
tics ultimately leads him to find strength by
seeking out the power of his cultural past. Poet
Ray Young Bear asks us to listen to the ca-
dence of his poetry as a means of remembering
the ancient ways.

In Part Three, “Chicano Vistas,” Gish re-
turns to the then-and-now of his New Mexico
roots. He examines the fiction of Rudolfo A.
Anaya and the poetry of Jimmy Santiago Baca.
With an “epiphany of landscape” in Bless Me,
Ultima, Heart of Aztlán, and Tortuga, Anaya’s
characters are steeped in the ancient land of
Aztlán in our time, drawing sustenance from
the energy of the place. Among the cast of char-
acters are La Llorona, La Curandera, and La
Bruja, persona birthed in the indio-hispano
synthesis of the Chicano experience, personi-
fying a mythic heritage from which strength
can be drawn. Gish draws inspiration for his
work from poet Jimmy Santiago Baca who
exemplifies that “writing, at its best, transcends
all borders. It collapses the borders between
people and becomes gift giving.”

Gish’s effort to enter the disparate experi-
ences of Anglo, American Indian, and Chicano
writers is an admirable one, as is his endeavor
to give “Buffalo Chip Lit” its proper place on
the shelf of American literature.

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