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Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States. By Claudia Sadowski-Smith

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reinvoked in the conclusion's reference to "a complicated" Native relationship to alcohol, and enacted to some extent in chapters 1 and 2—for a more nuanced approach to Indian experiences with alcohol (2, 165). Ishii writes, "a focus on alcohol as simply a problem threatens to objectify the Cherokee people who consumed it, incorporated it, abused it, regulated it, and opposed it" (167). Readers will wish that, in this case, she had profited from her own wisdom.

That said, however, Ishii's book has much to recommend. It would certainly work well in an undergraduate classroom and will take its place on my ever-growing shelf of books devoted to the eminently worthwhile project of explicating and evaluating Cherokee responses to the nineteenth century's challenges and opportunities.

*Joshua Piker*

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**Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States.** By Claudia Sadowski-Smith. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008. 208 pages. \$57.50 cloth; \$20.00 paper.

In her book, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*, Emily Hicks asks, "If writing is always a rereading, is not reading always a rewriting?" (1991, 11). Although literary critics had explored the topic for decades, Hicks's rigorously nonessentialist deployment of theory, historiography, and literary criticism set the standard for "border theory" in 1991. *Border Fictions* by Claudia Sadowski-Smith also focuses on the ragged edges of American culture and politics. By using the methodologies of ethnography and comparative literature, Sadowski-Smith examines the narrative record of spaces where countries and communities collide at national and personal levels. Her work is continental, important, and new in many ways. A few topics were not mentioned, and there is a great deal of politics in this volume of literary criticism, but for the most part, she pushes readers to "reread" the stories of the borderlands and to think differently about identity and community.

The "borders" examined by Sadowski-Smith are the political and historical result of US empire building. Her focus is primarily on the northern area where the United States meets Canada and the southern divide between the United States and Mexico. Although these areas appear to be well defined, she argues they are fragmented environments where economic, cultural, and political distinctions are magnified.

The "fiction" examined includes novels, short stories, autobiographies, and drama. She does not limit herself to a single genre, gender, or ethnicity and mentions in several places the ways in which stories of these borderlands become emblematic retellings that apply more broadly to entire communities, time periods, or events. She also notes which texts were published in the author's first language and traces their distribution to show how they often only gain recognition when translated into the "official" language of the

empire as a representation of writing by an ethnic minority. This pattern of requiring demonstration of assimilation in order to speak as one from another culture is pernicious and worthy of examination. In several of the chapters Sadowski-Smith challenges the notion that identity can be controlled, asking readers to consider ways identity can be on the one hand proscribed but not always accepted or on the other hand practiced but not always recognized.

Her discussions include work by well-known authors Leslie Silko, Gloria Anzaldúa, Carlos Fuentes, and Thomas King. However, she also introduces readers to the work of Karen Yamashita, Kelly Rebar, Clark Blaise, Guillermo Verdecchia, Rosina Conde, and many other voices from the border. One of the book's best features is her careful inclusion and analysis of widely popular texts sold by large publishers and texts with a much smaller distribution, in some instances self-published chapbooks and novellas. She also critiques the way these "border fictions" have been sold to readers and understood by the marketplace. For instance, Leslie Marmon Silko was marketed first as a "southern writer" recommended by men. Later, her writing was sold as the work of an "ethnic woman." According to Sadowski-Smith, these changes in perception of the indigenous voice, specifically the slow acceptance of Silko's highly political book, *Almanac of the Dead*, underscores "the radical nature of the novel and its defiance of the established categories of identity that continue to guide the reception, production, and marketing of literary texts in the United States" (75). Finding the radical stories that describe sites of change and resistance is the reason Sadowski-Smith recommends border reading. She demonstrates how the border is a line that can be crossed repeatedly and for many reasons, as individuals and their nations work to define themselves.

The political landscape of the borderlands is vast and ever changing, which is one reason an update like the one provided by Sadowski-Smith is important. As Scott Michaelsen and David Johnson wrote in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, borders are the sites of shifting boundaries, changing diasporas, and continued colonization and confinement of various groups people. The places where nations divide are home to what Mary Louise Pratt calls contact zones. *Border Fictions* is one of several more recent volumes examining these "contact zones" against the backdrop of twenty-first century—post 9/11 America. One comparable title, *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands* by Jesús Sánchez, Jesús Benito, and Ana María Manzanás, looks at recent border fictions for new cultural, linguistic, and semiotic spaces but only along the southern US border and primarily one ethnicity. Sadowski-Smith offers a review of the next generation of Chicana/Chicano writing as well as the view of the border from the vantage point of several Native nations whose indigenous cultural and political identities are often blurred by the two more dominant groups in the Southwest.

Native identity is also part of Sadowski-Smith's review of literature from the northern borderlands. The 5,000-mile US-Canadian border has been the site of much Native crossing and redefinition from as early as the 1400s. Eventually it became known as a "medicine line," a means of erasing, hiding, or confounding preset identities. The same border is also discussed as the

site of circuitous entry for those who fall out of favor as immigrants when the nation has economic or security concerns. Sadowski-Smith explains that the connection can become extremely complex as Latin Americans travel to Canada in order to enter the United States and Chinese writers move from Montreal to San Francisco. She finds an “inter-American” framework used by authors to convey the constant manipulation and re-creation of identity in a number of plays and stories about life between nations.

Not mentioned in her book are the numerous boundaries between sovereign nations, which could be examined as an interior frontier rendered less visible but never actually erased as sovereign nations were established in the early 1900s. Perhaps this is an example of how Sadowski-Smith’s work can be deployed by specialists in other areas to continue the conversation of identity, citizenship, and complex zones of contact.

Reading *Border Fictions* is much like being shown a new way to make a basket (which in Native culture is a form of high art and in American culture is an idiom used to describe a task for a simpleton). Sadowski-Smith’s basket is the former, a complex vessel, woven of several themes as indicated by the subtitle “Globalization, Empire, and Writing.” Strands of realism, travel, justice, economics, and imagery all are visible as they blend in the literature. “Border fictions,” she says “require new interdisciplinary models of academic inquiry that bring together approaches from the humanities and social sciences to address questions of globalization, U.S. empire, and nationalism of the hemisphere” (143). If her goal was to use a model of interdisciplinary inquiry to begin an important conversation, she succeeds. The only problem is that the book does leave the readers wanting more.

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**The Comanche Empire.** By Pekka Kalevi Hamalainen. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 500 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

*Comanche Empire* is not simply a history of the Comanche people; it is a reanalysis of the history of the entire Southwest. Pekka Hamalainen makes a strong case for the existence of a vast indigenous empire that has been all but ignored by historians. This book will be of great interest to readers interested in Native American history and the American Southwest; it will also appeal to those interested in borderlands history, the Mexican-American war, and critical geopolitics. Hamalainen presents a provocative reordering of the conventional narratives of the Southwest, and his book is nothing less than the history of an “American Empire that, according to conventional histories, did not exist” (1).

Hamalainen’s work is a significant addition to the literature of the Southwest in that it reorients the state-centered notions of power that dominate histories of the region. This new telling of Comanche history demands a fresh assessment of conventional notions of “state.” According to