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[Review of the book: Retrato do Brasil em Cordel (Portrait of Cordel in Brazil) by Mark Curran]

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producción transnacional y la globalización de la cultura. Hay, en cambio, muchos elementos que distinguen positivamente al libro de Bermúdez Barrios en relación con otros que se han venido publicando en los últimos años. No se observan aquí los desequilibrios habituales en las antologías de este tipo. Todos los ensayos revelan un profundo conocimiento tanto de los filmes analizados como de sus contextos de producción y recepción. La perspectiva metodológica es admirablemente ecléctica, acomodándose siempre al objeto de análisis y alejada, por tanto, de los clichés teóricos tan comunes en gran parte de la crítica literaria y cinematográfica.

Latin American Cinemas nos descubre algunas de las producciones más fascinantes del cine latinoamericano de las últimas décadas y lo hace desde una perspectiva atractiva y novedosa. Es sin duda una magnífica contribución a los estudios cinematográficos, culturales y de género en Latinoamérica. El libro será de gran interés para diferentes tipos de lectores y útil en distintos contextos didácticos. Para los especialistas en las cinematografías de Latinoamérica, ofrece una gran variedad de perspectivas metodológicas (mayor que la existente en otras antologías similares). Para aquellos interesados en las últimas corrientes del cine latino, complementa la visión de muchos manuales que tiende a no ir más allá del siglo XX. *Latin American Cinemas* puede, asimismo, ser de gran utilidad en los seminarios avanzados sobre estudios culturales que incorporen algunos de los filmes analizados en cada uno de los capítulos.

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Curran, Mark. *Retrato do Brasil em Cordel*. Cotia, SP: Ateliê, 2011. Pp. 368. ISBN 978-85-7480-538-2.

Mark Curran's *Retrato do Brasil em Cordel* attempts to give the reader a "snapshot" of Brazilian culture and society through the lens of *Literatura de Cordel*, a literary art form of printed booklets, often sold in street markets in Northeast Brazil. The stories are written in simple verses, composed by hundreds of street musicians and word artists. Curran explains how this popular literary tradition originated in Europe and later continued in Brazil in the late nineteenth century. Most importantly, he clarifies how *Cordel* flourished in the early twentieth century. In the introduction, he states that *Cordel* took a severe hit with the advent of radio and television as the major forms of entertainment for working-class people. Nevertheless, this traditional art form has since resurfaced in urban environments among middle-class poets who use the internet for the dissemination of their art.

The book is entirely written in Portuguese and has nonstandard, larger-sized pages, which allow for the reprint of the colorful booklet covers, alongside explanatory notes by the author. It is divided into ten chapters, following a format also found in *Cordel* literature. The topics of more than one hundred booklets include religious, political, historical, and fantasy themes. This review will provide a description of the content of the chapters, followed by an assessment of Curran's expert analyses. Chapter 1 (or "album") is titled "Deus no alto e aqui embaixo: Nisto acreditamos." It focuses on booklets dealing with God and religion. The subtopics discussed are "good and evil," "the apostles," and "the apocalypse." Chapter 2 is "As Manifestações" and focuses on the various religions in Brazil, such as the Afro-Brazilian *candomblé*, the Kardec Spiritualism, and the Catholic faith. Chapter 3 is "O que não se deve fazer: A recompensa do pecado" and focuses on booklets covering the moral topics of prostitution, adultery, and political corruption, among others. Chapter 4, "Um modelo de vida: Os heróis de Cordel," deals with Brazilian folk heroes, such as the Northeastern *cangaceiro*, as well as the celebrated heroes of Asian and European traditions, namely *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and the *Knights of the Round Table*. Chapter 5 examines booklets dealing with difficulties of life in general and is titled "A vida é uma luta, a vida é uma odisséia." The booklets are about the harsh realities of the drought-stricken Northeast, as well as the plight of Northeastern migrant workers in the Southern cities and in the Amazon. Chapter 6, "Temos nossas distrações," focuses on leisure,

with topics that involve double entendres and relationships between men and women. This style of *Cordel*, called *Gracejo*, deals with comical stories that involve everyday events with often satirical undertones. Chapter 7, “Há um mundo grande lá fora,” deals with world wars and international conflicts.

According to Curran, *Cordel* literature is the greatest social “translator” of current events, made available for lower-class people. This is observed in chapter 8, “A vida está cada vez mais difícil.” The booklets included there deal with the rights of men, women and children; gays and other marginalized groups; violence in the streets and against the environment. In fact, the topic of feminism is presented in one booklet using *Gracejo* style by a well-known *Cordel* artist, Maxado. This topic is aptly discussed by Curran, who reminds us that the audience for these booklets was once mostly socially conservative, lower-class men who rejected the so-called foreign ideas of women’s rights. For post-feminist, present-day professional women, these verses are not comical at all; in fact, they are disturbingly reminiscent of a time when comedy was achieved by making fun of women and their “condition.” This criticism is somewhat expressed by Curran, but could be better supported theoretically. Finally, chapter 10, “Isto não é o fim,” deals with utopian themes, the idea of Heaven and Earth, and ends with the transcription of an entire booklet called “Tudo Na Terra Tem Fim.” Its poetic use of repetition and philosophical stance is rather moving and is captured precisely by Curran, who seems to be fonder of this particular style of *Cordel*, that is, politically and philosophically themed poems.

From a more critical perspective, the chapters seem to overlap religious themes at times (chapters 1 and 2) and sociopolitical topics at others (chapters 7 and 8). These chapters could perhaps be better titled. Also, Curran could have included more social theory in his expert analyses of the booklets. That said, the author is able to bring to the forefront a disappearing art form that has, nevertheless, persisted despite technological changes in society. Curran’s book is based on his lifelong love for *Cordel* and includes hundreds of booklets collected by him since 1966. The book perfectly encapsulates *Cordel* and gives scholars and non-academics an excellent summary view of this great art form from Brazil.

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De Maeseneer, Rita, and Patrick Collard, eds. *Saberes y sabores en México y el Caribe*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. Pp. 356. ISBN 978-90-420-3044-2.

Rita De Maeseneer adopts a new term, “gastrocrítica,” to study the multiple connotations of food in cultural contexts and literary texts. Although food is the essential ingredient, it is the large measure of imagination and in-depth research of the fourteen essayists that makes this collection about the “saberes y sabores” of Mexico and the Caribbean so satisfying.

Divided into two well-organized sections, each with seven essays and concise abstracts, the volume functions like two books in one, presenting food in both Mexican and Caribbean historical, social, literary, and cultural settings. As if to stave off anticipated accusations that food is an unworthy topic, De Maeseneer’s introduction pointedly rejects what she and Jennifer Ruark have termed “scholarship-lite” literature that incorporates recipes to promote a feminist agenda, citing *Como agua para chocolate* by Laura Esquivel as an example, and eschews the easy use of “gastronomic imagery” in texts destined for mass consumption, stating: “[E]n esta edición hemos procurado no transitar por esta senda *light*” (10). The self-congratulatory implication that this volume’s gastrocritical approach is more sophisticated than previous “light” fare seems unwarranted. If “food” is at the core of gastrocriticism and a new subgenre is emerging, then all manner of approaches and primary texts should be considered and tolerated. Literary and cultural tastes vary, but a well-conceived critical method can and should yield equally respectable results.