

**Moreira, Paulo.** *Literary and Cultural Relations between Brazil and Mexico: Deep Undercurrents*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 271 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index.

Paulo Moreira's *Literary and Cultural Relations between Brazil and Mexico: Deep Undercurrents* is animated, in the words of its author, by a desire to "giv[e] visibility to cultural contacts between Mexicans and Brazilians as an example of contacts within Latin America. Calling these contacts deep undercurrents of Latin American culture goes beyond giving a name to what was mostly invisible and inaudible; it is about creating a space for a field of knowledge to come into existence" (179). Moreira's book makes a solid contribution to the emerging field of Luso-Hispanic studies, which responds to critic Jorge Schwartz's call in "Abaixo Tordesilhas!" (1993) for deeper, more equitable literary and cultural exchange between Brazil and Spanish-speaking Latin America—and by proxy, between Portugal and Spain. Examples of scholarship in this area include Earl Fitz's pioneering *Rediscovering the New World* (1991), and more recently, Silviano Santiago's *As raízes e o labirinto da América Latina* (2006), a comparative study of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Octavio Paz that Moreira discusses at length, and Moreira's own *Modernismo localista das Américas* (2012), which analyzes the short fiction of João Guimarães Rosa, Juan Rulfo, and William Faulkner.

In his introduction to this book, Moreira explains his rationale for focusing on Mexico and Brazil specifically, as opposed to adopting a more panoramic approach. He observes that the two countries are "two cultural giants in Latin America, two of the most insular countries of the continent that have had the chance to build fully developed national literary systems based on a sense of cultural identity" (5). In other words, Mexico and Brazil's geographic size and cultural heft have allowed notions of national exceptionalism to take root. This has aided the process of national canon formation, but has also obscured the surprisingly large number of texts, films, and other cultural expressions produced cooperatively by Brazilians and Mexicans, and in many cases, by Brazilians residing in Mexico or Mexicans residing in Brazil. These conditions, to my mind, provide solid grounds for a country-to-country comparison of the sort Moreira proposes. Further, Moreira convincingly argues that our mental conditioning toward national literary and cultural exceptionalism and toward comparisons of Latin America with Europe or the United States (when such comparisons are permitted at all) has further obscured the extent of Brazilian-Mexican exchange. Thus:

the assumption of chronic mutual ignorance no longer holds true. When what are considered fragmentary, occasional exchanges and ephemeral efforts of a few exceptional, solitary figures are examined side by side, one realizes that the cultural relations between Brazil and Mexico are actually quite substantial. They have simply been kept outside the distribution of what is sensible, [and] thus have been impossible to apprehend in more than fragmentary fashion. (4)

Despite largely restricting itself to twentieth and twenty-first century Brazil and Mexico, Moreira's book ranges broadly across textual and cinematic genres, and between authors and cultural actors. Chapters focus on topics such as twentieth-century Brazilian and Mexican poetry, Érico Veríssimo's travel writing on Mexico, the influence of Juan Rulfo on João Guimarães Rosa and of the films of Mexico's "Golden Age" on Nelson Pereira dos Santos, and director Paul Leduc's adaptation of Rubem Fonseca's fiction. Moreira makes a number of astute observations concerning individual writers and texts, and broader literary and theoretical issues. For instance, Moreira argues for Ronald de Carvalho, a continentally minded writer and political conservative, as an important contributor to Brazilian *modernismo*. In so doing, he is correct to chide critics who promote "the idea that political conservatism and the literary vanguard are incompatible, and that those who jumped on the *modernista* bandwagon but sustained a conservative critical stance were 'falsas vanguardas'" (35). Moreira also offers economical but evocative descriptions of Alfonso Reyes and Juan Rulfo's literary style, writing of the "relaxed, conversational tone [which] infuses Reyes's erudition and formal inventiveness with unpretentious readability" and "a Rulfian walking of the line between a lapidary poetic language of mythical tones and an attentive observation of the harsh reality of an exhausting struggle against natural misery and human misery" (39, 89). Further, Moreira's analysis of Mexican poet Carlos Pellicer's "Suite Brasileira—Poemas Aéreos," inspired by Pellicer's acrobatic flights over Guanabara Bay, is very skillful. And finally, Moreira observes significant shortcomings in Silviano Santiago's admirable but flawed *As raízes e o labirinto da América Latina*—namely, Santiago's lack of contextualization in his chapters devoted to Octavio Paz. Moreira also astutely judges two of Santiago's chapters "somewhat shortsighted but also brilliant" (114). This judgment, in my view, can stand in for Santiago's book as a whole.

Regarding broader critical issues, Moreira interrogates the notion—advanced by Reyes among others—that Latin Americans are "natural-born comparatists" (103). Moreira distinguishes between the European and North American comparisons that have traditionally guided Latin American writing on national and regional identity (i.e. José Martí's "Nuestra América") and Brazilian-Mexican collaborations as examples of "the mostly untold story of horizontal (south-south) contacts across a multilingual, multicultural continent" (8). As Moreira demonstrates, texts such as Érico Veríssimo's *México—História duma viagem* (1957) are constructed not so much on the basis of irreconcilable oppositions, as in Martí's distinction between *nuestra América* and a U.S.-identified *la otra América*, but rather in terms of uncanny encounters with "an ambiguous, somehow familiar Other," and "the particular gaze of a foreigner who is also a fellow Latin American" (6, 38). Finally, near the close of his book Moreira suggestively describes Alfonso Reyes's *Romances del Río de Enero* (1933) and Paula Abramo's *Fiat Lux* (2012), both of which were poetry collections written by Mexicans with deep connections to Brazil, as examples of *Brazilian* literature. This refreshing idea, that a text's nationality is not always stable or reducible to the passport

carried by its author or the language of its composition, opens the category of Mexican literature to books like Verissimo's *México—História duma viagem* and Ronald de Carvalho's Mexican-themed poems and articles, just as it opens Brazilian literature to titles by Reyes, Carlos Pellicer, Abramo, and others. Further, it acknowledges the vitality of literary and cultural "undercurrents" that transcend political borders, which Moreira dedicates himself to exploring in his book.

Before concluding, I am obliged to mention that the text of *Literary and Cultural Relations between Brazil and Mexico* would have benefited from a more thorough proofreading. This observation aside, Moreira's *Literary and Cultural Relations between Brazil and Mexico* is a solid piece of scholarship, which will interest scholars of Brazilian, Mexican, and Latin American literature, and particularly those interested, like Moreira, in challenging the notion that "mutual ignorance" continues to characterize the reciprocal gazes of the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking Americas.

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