

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

In *Literary and Cultural Relations between Brazil and Mexico: Deep Undercurrents*, Paulo Moreira explores an often overlooked sub-domain in Latin American studies. In fact, one might initially ask how and why Brazil and Mexico are to be put side by side. After all, the two countries do not participate in well-established areas of study in Latin America, like the South Cone, the Caribbean or the Amazonian region. Nevertheless, as Moreira shows, the two countries have been developing a broader set of exchanges than the insufficient number of comparative studies between them might suggest.

One of the most interesting aspects of Moreira's study is that he is not as interested in similarities and convergences involving Brazilian and Mexican cultural contexts as he is committed to investigating concrete, direct cultural exchanges between them. In this sense, its proposal and its outcomes are significantly different from the recent influential study by Silviano Santiago, *The Roots and the Labyrinth of Latin America*, where Santiago presents points of contact between Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's and Octavio Paz's fundamental essays of national interpretation, but does not indicate an actual dialogue between them.

By dialogue, Moreira refers not only to visible, explicit connections, but also traces or possible resonances of one cultural context within the other: "Latin America is shaped as well by what I call deep cultural undercurrents, which have always silently floated across national and linguistic borders, which cannot be magically abolished, only silently bypassed." (p. 172) Consequently, the choice to focus on two countries instead of embracing Latin America as a whole works, as noted by the author, as a strategic way of giving these "deep undercurrents" more room. Thus, such relations encompass Alfonso Reyes' specific writings on Brazil, such as "Brasil en una Castaña" as well as a hint from Juan Rulfo's main motifs in a short story by João Guimarães Rosa set in Bogotá, or the presence of Mexican objects in the setting of Beto Brant's film *Delicate Crime*, which also features the Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg as one of its main actors.

If I take two out of three of the examples above from literature, it is because the book itself pays special attention to literary exchanges. This is already explicit in the title, where the “literary relations” are detached from the broader term “cultural relations” so as to emphasize the predominance of chapters focused on literature. The book includes six of them, whereas three are devoted to cinema and two mix literature with visual arts and music. If this uneven distribution is justified by the title and by Moreira’s professional focus on literary studies, it also leaves the reader curious about musical exchanges after the Bernardelli family in late 19th century and early 20th century, as well as whether similar relations can be found in the realms of theater and dance.

On the other hand, the historical span and the diversity of authors and works covered by Moreira traces an impressive panorama. Starting with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s comments on Antonio Vieira’s *Sermons*, it offers an extensive exposition of Brazilian and Mexican writers, who, from early to mid 20th century, visited the other country, wrote about it and made important connections in its literary scene. The protagonists include names such as Ronald de Carvalho, Carlos Pellicer, Alfonso Reyes, Luis Quintanilla, Jaime García Terrés, Gabriel Zaid, Hugo Gutiérrez Pacheco, Francisco Cervantes, José Emilio Pacheco, Érico Veríssimo, Juan Rulfo, and João Guimarães Rosa. From travel diaries, novels and poems to the bringing of a Cuauhtémoc statue to Rio de Janeiro in 1922 and sociopolitical evaluations by Mexicans on Brazil and vice-versa, a lively history of cultural connections and mutual expressions of admiration comes to the fore. Moreira balances the authors’ lives and works with a sound, economic use of historical data and more interpretative passages. For instance, he discusses the trope of the “cordial man” in Brazilian thought after tracing its first appearance back to an article by Ribeiro Couto included in Alfonso Reyes’ journal *Monterrey—Correo Literario*, while describing Reyes’ profile as an intellectual and his activities in Brazil.

After a long, well-documented chapter on Silviano Santiago’s *Viagem ao México* and *The Roots and the Labyrinth of Latin America*, the last chapters turn to cinema. More specifically, to that of Brazilian filmmakers Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Beto Brant, the former in his homage to the Mexican melodrama in *Cinema de Lágrimas*, the latter in his direction of Ehrenberg in *Delicate Crime*. Another

chapter is devoted to Paul Leduc's Mexican adaptation of Ruben Fonseca's short stories in *El Cobrador—In God We Trust*, whereas the final chapter approaches contemporary productions in visual arts and poetry by artists such as Gabriel Orozco, Damián Ortega, Angélica Freitas and Paula Abramo, among others.

The remarkable number of major figures from both Brazil and Mexico present in Moreira's study may lead the reader to ask why these contacts have received such little attention from scholars so far. Moreover, the author's move to write about major figures creates a certain sense of immediacy for the reader with only a vague knowledge of Mexican and Brazilian cultural and literary traditions, at the same time as it leaves open the possibility of investigating many other less famous, yet equally fruitful relationships.

Finally, it is worth noticing Moreira's self-positioning regarding his material. Throughout the book the reader learns, for example, that he comes from the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais (like Silviano Santiago and Guimarães Rosa), and towards the end the author adopts a more personal tone to explain how his professional career led him to the issues he discusses and investigates in the present book. Critically, this move distances him from a frigid critical approach such as the one found, for instance, in the character of the art critic in *Delicate Crime*.

In conclusion, *Literary and Cultural Relations between Brazil and Mexico* opens new paths of study in Latin American studies by developing a complex, vibrant panorama of connections between the two countries, in an invitation to let these deep undercurrents become wide, "shining" rivers.

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