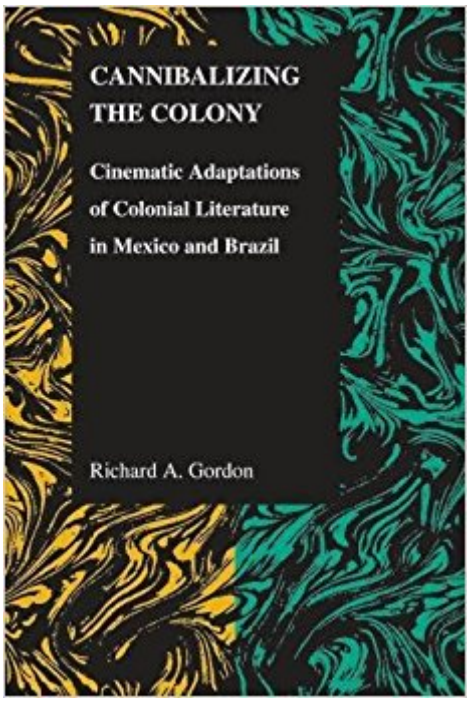
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Cannibalizing The Colony: Cinematic Adaptations Of Colonial Literature In Mexico And Brazil (Purdue Studies In Romance Literatures)



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Synopsis

The years 1992 and 2000 marked the 500-year anniversary of the arrival of the Spanish and the Portuguese in America and prompted an explosion of rewritings and cinematic renditions of texts and figures from colonial Latin America. Cannibalizing the Colony analyzes a crucial way that Latin American historical films have grappled with the legacy of colonialism. It studies how and why filmmakers in Brazil and MexicoÃ¢â ¬Â•the countries that have produced most films about the colonial period in Latin AmericaÃ¢â ¬Â•appropriate and transform colonial narratives of European and indigenous contact into commentaries on national identity. The book looks at how filmmakers attempt to reconfigure history and culture and incorporate it into present-day understandings of the nation. The book additionally considers the motivations and implications for these filmic dialogues with the past and how the directors attempt to control the way that spectators understand the complex and contentious roots of identity in Mexico and Brazil.

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Romance Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 1, 66--69, 2013 RichardÃ Â Gordon.Cannibalizing the Colony.Purdue: Purdue University Press, 2009. 264 pp. As the author affirms in the introduction, Brazil and Mexico are perhaps the countries with aÃ Â richer legacy regarding the visual representation of colonial literature and colonial culture inÃ Â the screen. The films chosen as corpus for this study go from a classic early sound feature likeÃ Â Humberto Mama’s

DescobrimentoÃ Â do Brasil (1937)Ã Â to a digital post-cinemaÃ Â productionÃ Â likeÃ Â Caramuru (2002), directed by Guel Arraes. The other two films for Brazil include a classic of theÃ Â late era of Cinema Novo, Nelson Pereira DosSantos' Como era Gostoso o Meu Frances (1971), inspiredÃ Â on Hans Staden'sÃ Â testimonial of captivity vVarhaftige Historia (1557), and a fictional recreationÃ Â of colonial contact between Portuguese and Tupf peoples, Lucia Murat'sÃ Â Brava Gente BrasileiraÃ Â released in 2000. On the Mexican side the chronology of the works covered is less encompassing butÃ Â definitively pertinent to the subject and vision of the book. The earliest work studied is theÃ Â controversial film Nuevo Mundo (1976), directed by Gabriel Retes. The most recent is a fictionalÃ Â reconstructionÃ Â of seventeenÃ Â centuryÃ Â convent life focusingÃ Â onÃ Â a femaleÃ Â poet and thinkerÃ Â (notÃ Â unlike Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz),Ã Â Ave Marfa, directed by Eduardo Rossof (1999). The other twoÃ Â Mexican productions studied include the expensive and long adaptation of the Alvar Nunez Cabeza deÃ Â Vaca chronicle Naufragios (1542) in the first fiction film of documentarianÃ Â Nicolas Echevarrfa, Cabeza de Vaca (1991), and Salvador Carrasco's Spanish-Mexican coproduction La Otra ConquistaÃ Â (1998). These eight films are analyzed according to a set of interestingÃ Â methodologicalÃ Â strategies.Ã Â First, "cannibalism"Ã Â is used as an encompassingÃ Â metaphor centralÃ Â to the creation of culturalÃ Â artifacts and cultural identitiesÃ Â in Latin America in general and, as GordonÃ Â argues, especiallyÃ Â relevant for Brazil and Mexico in particular. Second, anthropophagicÃ Â practices are studied both asÃ Â historiographicÃ Â occmrencesÃ Â and as visual representationsÃ Â or allusions in Como era gostoso and inÃ Â Cabeza de Vaca. But perhaps the most important contribution of the book is the nuanced threading ofÃ Â cultmal, historicaL sociological, and cinematic issues revisited in an attempt to assess a filmÃ Â legacy that, until now, has seldom been studied as a corpus in a comparative context. Although I found myself disagreeingÃ Â with some of the proposed interpretationsÃ Â offered in Cannibalizing the Colony, I fully appreciate the care with which the arguments were constructed,Ã Â avoiding the dismissals against "colonial films" typical of some strict historiographic readings inÃ Â which movies are always accused of "bastardizingÃ Â History." On the other side of the spectrum, the book also avoids the facile summarizing exercises of some film critics who are not interested in goingÃ Â throughÃ Â a rigorousÃ Â readingÃ Â of bothÃ Â the visualÃ Â renditionÃ Â of a historicalÃ Â eraÃ Â and the actual text on which the films adaptationsÃ Â are based.Ã Â In fact,Ã Â where actual colonialÃ Â texts are adapted for the screen, Cannibalizing the Colony goes directly to the pages and finds the visual approximation given by the director paragraph by paragraph and scene by scene. This is the case of the analysis

of Mama's Descobrimento and Echevarrfa's Caheza de Vaca. In the first chapter,Gordon cites and discusses specific passages of Vaz de Caminha's Carta ao Rei Dam Manuel to trace the ideological and cultural negotiations effected by the film images vis-a-vis one of the most important documents of Brazilian colonial history, since this text narrates the first encounter of Alvares Cabral with the inhabitants of the Bahia de Guanabara in 1500. First, the chapter offers a detailed discussion confronting paragraphs of the letter in relation to editing and mise-en- scene elements in several sequences of the film. Then the chapter discusses the elisions, conflations, and modifications made by Mauro's adaptation of the original chronicle. The rest of Chapter 1 offers an explanation of the sociological importance of the film released in 1937 when Getulio Vargas' Estado Novo was still under material and symbolic consolidation. Gordon explains with clarity how the film fitted well the investment of the regime in reconfiguring the cunent national identity. In that sense, Mauro's images helped the regime in its search of a new sense of Brazilianess that tried to reconcile the Portuguese and indigenous heritage for the popular imaginary of a modern multiracial nation (40). I see this step-by-step analysis going from historiographic to cinematic discourse, then to the cultural and sociological context of film production and spectatorship, as one of the most valuable aspects of the book.Ã Â most of the five chapters give well-balanced discussions of films in this sense, but not all. Chapter 3 presents a comparative reading of the seventeenth century book of songs and prayers to the Virgin of Guadalupe known as the Nicar1 Mopohua (1642) and two contemporary Mexican films depicting the evangelizing mission of the colonial church, Nuevo Mundo (1976) and La Otra Conquista (1998). The mythology surrounding the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the most revered figure in Mexican Catholicism, is examined under what I have called elsewhere as "'denunciatory film discourse." This denunciatory condition affected the circulation of Retes' film Nuevo Mundo, which was briefly released in 1976 and then banned by state censorship until its re-release in 1992. Salvador Canasco's La Otra Conquista (1998) had better luck as a commercial film in the late 1990s. Gordon characterizes both films as "antiadaptations antiadaptations" for the counter-hegemonic stance taken by the images regarding the emergence of the indigenous virgin. According to Cannibalizing the Colony, Retes represents this foundational moment of colonial religiosity as part of a deliberate strategy of controL manipulation, and subjugation of the growing mestizo population of the New Spain. This chapter is very effective in describing many of the tensions and still-standing contradictions in the adoption of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the central symbol for Mexican mestizo identity as a supposed "'autochthonous" figure (81). However, after the complex analysis and clever compmisons between both films and the Nican Mopohua to explain the evolution and apparent flexibility of the myth of Guadalupe, the book comes short of explaining

some contextual elements of the Mexican film production of the 1970s when Nuevo Mundo first appeared. As it is well-known, the 1970s saw a resurgence of Mexican cinema due in great pmt to an unusually strong official backing for the industry. With actual support from the authorities, many young directors went on to criticize different aspects of Mexican society, exposing police brutality or corrupt political and cultural institutions-indeed a dmÃ Â ing use of the camera unheard of in the history of Mexican film until that point. Thus, in my opinion Retes commitment to a strong denunciatory rhetoric in Nuevo Mundo (confirmed in later films like Bandera Rota [1976] and El Bulio [1992]) not only was aimed to criticize colonialÃ Â eligiosity, but also was a metaphor to pass scrutiny on the authoritarian and violent tendencies of the Mexican state and its allies. This indirect criticism was made in reference to the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968, and the subservient attitude taken for the most part by the Mexican Church toward the events. Cannibalizing the Colony misses the opportunity to comment on the contextual conditions of the exhibition of these Mexican films as it was done in Chapter 1 in the case of Mauro's adaptation ofVaz de Caminha's chronicle in Brazil. The most engaging discussion regarding the colonial legacy and the cinematic depictions of cannibalism comes in Chapter 2. In this chapter, Alvar N1:ifiez's Naufragios (1541) and Echevanfa's conesponding cinematic adaptation Caheza de Vaca (1992) are discussed in comparison with the Brazilian texts, the adaptation of Hans Staden's chronicle of captivity (1557) and its widely known parodied version in Pereira DosSantos film Como era Gostoso o Meu Frances (1971). In the latter case, Gordon's argument for conceiving film versions of Latin American historiography as "anthropophagous adaptations" is solidly advanced and successfully proven. Gordon argues that Latin American historical films consume historical texts and their symbols to propose new images that could serve in the "digestion" of colonial legacies and help in the reconfiguration of contemporary identities. The author builds an agileÃ Â nd engaging argument to analyze the extent and power of the anthropophagic metaphor proposed by Oswald de Andrade in Brazil in 1928 in his Manifesto Antropofago. However, the pertinence of this concept as a central element in contemporary Mexican cultural processes is less convincing. In this chapter entitled "Exoticizing the Nation in Caheza de Vaca (1991) and Corno era gostoso o meufrances (1971)" GordonÃ Â rgues that both films make use of a strategy of "'self-exoticizism" to de-center and destabilize cultural assumptions regarding the indigenous origins of the nation in order to anthropophagically reconfigure modernÃ Â egemonic identities. But the comparison of both films corresponding to two different cultural moments in these two nations seems to leave some loose ends, specifically in the case of Mexico. In Chapter 2, Gordon proposes that in Echevarria's film, a free and stylized interpretation of Alvar Nunez's narrative,...

Richard A. Gordon, The Ohio State University, works in the areas of Hispanic and Portuguese language literatures, cultures and film studies, and comparative studies. His research intersects with colonial and post-colonial studies, centering on Brazilian and Spanish-American historical cinema. He is currently writing a book that evaluates the role that films about slavery have played in shaping national identities in Cuba and Brazil. His articles have appeared in Hispania, MLN, Luso-Brazilian Review, Letras Peninsulares, Colonial Latin American Review, and Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies.

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