

Brazil, Lyric, and the Americas. Charles A. Perrone, University Press of Florida, 2010. 250pp.

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Writing from New York City, evocative playground of much of the Brazilian poetry Charles Perrone outlines in *Brazil, Lyric and the Americas*, it is difficult to avoid reveling in the “shared interests in hemispheric awareness, the means of expression of Others nearby, [and] the views of neighbors” (187) at the book’s core. With an emphasis on lyric, which he defines as poetic contribution in a multi-media dimension, Perrone sets out to demonstrate that contra the stereotypes of a languid Brazil, so distant from its neighbors in South and North America, the country has long been involved in connecting, sharing and recycling their works. He begins with a chapter on literature and then muses about film, popular music, and the epic poet before concluding with a chapter on Tropicália, Brazil’s internationalist musical movement of the 1960s. Perrone compares the latter to a recent movement of similar thrust, the *mangue beat*, or “swamp pop-rock” (166), of Chico Science. His writing is lyrical and romantic and influenced by poetic images, both textual and pictorial (of which there are quite a few in the book).

Perrone, a scholar of Latin America music, poetry and film, draws on Arjun Appadurai’s concept of “scapes” to demonstrate the success of Brazilians’ “textual, practical and diplomatic conversations with foreign interlocutors” (5). He shows, for example, how poets like Mário de Andrade cleverly forecast the role of North American cinema in global relations (“[The cinema of (the) America(s) will inform]”) (70), how Adriano Espinola mimicked and played with the forms of e.e. cummings, and he discusses the era-traversing sparring of Jorge Luis Borges and poet Luciana Martins.

Perrone understands hemispheric poetic ties and their complicated desires to set apart North and South America while reifying their historical connections. Similarly, he pays close attention to the dense exchanges between Spanish and Portuguese speakers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Indeed, Walt Whitman’s epigraph serves as the clearest indicator of Perrone’s antecedents:

“Welcome, Brazilian Brother – thy ample place is ready;

A Loving Hand – A Smile from the North”

He likewise takes inspiration from Osvaldo de Andrade’s famous poem, the “Cannibal Manifesto,” which ordered the Brazilian Modernists to consume other cultures, languages and media in a creative attempt to outgrow Brazil’s ostensible backwardness vis à vis Europe and North America.

Perrone’s uses of concepts like hybridity (6) and Deleuze’s “deterritorialization of acquired goods” (163) frame his emphasis on territorial and cultural exchanges, and the transnational movements they entail. Hence it might surprise the reader that in spite of this emphasis on the pan-Americanity of Brazilian lyric his slim book relies so sharply on the United States and the academic and economic theories that emerge from it and its Western counterparts. Perrone’s theoretical and literary sources, then, begin to reveal their contradictions when thinking about race and class. For example, Perrone pinpoints an Afro-diasporic voice that, for him, expresses a kind of North/South African-American solidarity when he speaks about poetry about U.S. jazz. What kind of solidarity is

Perrone discussing here? Is he thinking about the kind proposed by scholars like Appadurai – international “scapes” of unifying media – or about more political and social elements therein? Brazilian scholars both inside and outside Brazil have long discussed the difficulty of pinpointing one definition of Blackness that crosses borders, from Paul Gilroy’s seminal – but ill-received in Brazil – attempt to define a “Black Atlantic” to contemporary anthropologists like J. Lorand Matory, Livio Sansone and Olivia Maria Gomes da Cunha who argue against unified Brazilian categories of race and class.

Perrone’s poets, moreover, are mostly white, upper-class Brazilians writing from a privileged vantage point in Brazilian state capitals. They communicate with counterparts in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Mexico City, and the USAmerican hubs of New York City and New Orleans. Likewise, today’s consumers of Brazilian poetry and music trend toward relatively privileged urbanites, a tendency skewered in “Cannibals, Mutants and Hipsters: The Tropicalist Revival,” in Perrone’s own earlier edited volume on Brazilian popular music (Harvey 2001). This urban emphasis, so common in analyses of intellectuals and elites of South and North America, has its own hidden contradictions. Are cities really representative of the countries where they’re based? How much do the histories of Latin American cities and their counterparts around the world shape current residents? How do the forced migrations of slavery and economic hardship both within Brazil’s *sertão* hinterlands and outside its borders question or stretch the celebratory nature of migration and hybridity posed so often by scholars of the North?

The elision of historical sociopolitical structuring and their contemporary bonds is not uncommon; poetry as a published venue remains principally a vocation of the monied and well-educated. As a remedy, Perrone tries to tap into internet media to show how non-elites are contributing to the hemispheric exchanges he so wonderfully paints in his chapter on the internet site Banda Hispânica. Nevertheless, guided by these poets and by the theorists of the nation he invokes, Perrone’s ability to wrestle with globalizations’ contradictions remains limited. “The kind of globalization logic that dilutes national identities and seeks to stamp a seal of superficial uniformity around the globe,” writes Perrone addressing a literary scholar, “should .. be combated” (162). What if instead of combating it by using the works of those poised to benefit from it, we think about those who benefit less? Returning to New York City, what kind of globalization logic allows so many to live heterogeneously while subscribing “freely” to the idea of living under one unified nation, the United States? Perrone has contributed an opening salvo by thinking through the different media that constitute cultural diplomacy, and we can look forward to understanding how newer literacies allow others to speak and the North to listen. A smile from the north, Perrone has showed, can also become an ear from the north.

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