Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica

Volume 1 | Number 15 Article 15

1982

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Citas recomendadas

West, Dennis (Primavera 1982) "Bye Bye Brazil," *Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica*: No. 15, Article 15.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/inti/vol1/iss15/15

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BYE BYE BRAZIL

Bye Bye Brazil (1980), a comedy written and directed by Carlos Diegues, follows the adventures of the one-truck Caravana Rolidei (a misspelling of "holiday") across Brazil. The mastermind of this "underdeveloped" carnival is Lord Cigano (José Wilker), a poorly educated but astute and flashy magician, pseudo clairvoyant, and showman. His supporting cast includes the sexy, long-legged rumba dancer Salomé (Betty Faria); an accordionist, Ciço (Fábio Júnior), whose stoic face recalls the young Buster Keaton; Ciço's wife, Dasdô (Zaira Zambelli); and a Black strong man and human flamethrower (Príncipe Nabor). When the troupe loses its strong man and its truck, Lord Cigano sets his woman, Salomé, to work as a prostitute. In Belém the two couples finally part company, and Ciço and Dasdô go off in search of a new life in Brasilia. An insert title announces that time has passed, and then we watch Ciço and his wife perform as musicians in a Brasilia dance hall. This performance is interrupted when Lord Cigano and Salomé arrive in the caravan's new vehicle: a modern, neon-lit truck, which features dancing girls in a rear compartment. Lord Cigano proposes that the musicians join the company for a tour of Rondônia, but Ciço resists the temptation and elects to remain at home. The movie ends à la *Orfeu Negro:* Lord Cigano conjures up the sun - i.e., life goes on - as the Caravana Rolidei speeds off towards faraway Rondônia.

Diegues has spiced this minimal picaresque plot with a four-cornered love affair involving both of the caravan's couples. Several torrid love-making scenes feature nude actresses and actors; such sequences seem to have become *de rigueur* in contemporary Brazilian commercial cinema.

To make *Bye Bye Brazil,* Diegues and his filmmaking team traveled 15,000 kilometers across the Northeast, the North, and the Central Plateau. As a result, the film at times resembles a travelogue; its attraction is enhanced by Lauro Escorel Filho's lush color cinematography. In order to show viewers the look of a region, the filmmakers present both broad views - such as a helicopter shot which follows a truck through the Amazon forest - and closer shots which focus on typical objects. A montage sequence early in the film consists of brief shots which flash images - boats, pottery, market goods - typical of a town along the Sâo Francisco River; viewers are thus introduced to the locals before their attention is drawn to the actions of the central characters. Local color is woven into the plot; a sequence in Belém treats the audience to a tour of the picturesque Ver-o-Peso Market as the protagonists search for the red-light district.

Regional types abound; and the *sertanejos,* Amazon Indians, and others are played by local non-actors. We see regional customs, such as a procession of backlanders praying for rain, as well as national pastimes; e.g., the Brazilian penchant for betting. The film not only conveys the look of given regions and their inhabitants, but also their authentic sounds. On the banks of the Xingo River, Cruari Indians sing a ritual song as a farewell to the troupe's strong man. Authentic regional music, played by local musicians, is effectively used to establish setting and atmosphere.

A text appended at the end of Bye *Bye Brazil* dedicates the film to the Brazilian people of the twenty-first century. Diegues has explained that in his film he attempts to register a particular moment in his country's history; namely, the rapidly changing present - when the old Brazil of the ox cart is disappearing and the new jet-age nation is emerging. *Bye Bye Brazil* suggests that this transitional period is a very difficult one for the nation's poor and dispossessed. During most of their travels, the principal characters encounter few employment opportunities other than carnival work or prostitution. An old *sertanejo* explains that in the backlands an intractable socio-economic system and a hostile climate have conspired against the inhabitants: periodic droughts and the concentration of land in the hands of a few owners have combined to drive poor people from the area. When Dasdô and Ciço arrive in Brasilia, shots of the city's slums reveal that governmental social services have failed to keep pace with the needs of the thousands of migrants who flock to the capital weekly.

In the Amazon region, the culture of native peoples disintegrates in the face of modernization. Along the highway, a group of Indians meets the Caravana Rolidei and requests a ride to the nearest city. The camera, in medium shot, travels over the members of this indigenous group in order to register the Westernization of their attire; the camera comes to rest on the face of an old woman clutching a transistor radio to her ear. This old woman wishes to fly in an airplane, and an Indian lad carries a toy plane that he has fashioned. The airplane motif is a fitting symbol of the Indians' overly optimistic attempt to fit themselves into the national scheme of economic growth. Like the Pacific Islanders who established the Cargo Cult, these Indians await the airplane bearing the wonderful products of modern technology. When the Indians arrive in the city, however, they find that the only airplane ride available would transport them to a remote, foreign-owned paper mill, where Indian laborers receive lower wages than other workers.

The most inspired aspect of *Bye Bye Brazil* is its illustration of the costs of modernization. Majestic shots of the Rolidei truck traveling the tree-lined

Transamazonian Highway suggest the grandeur of this construction feat, while one brutal image - a close shot of a crushed and bloody armadillo - symbolizes the ecological price of the project. The struggle between the modern and the traditional is most thoroughly expressed in the treatment of the mass media and entertainment. This struggle is emphatically announced at the start of the film, when pop music amplified on the Rolidei loudspeaker system drowns a traditional piece being played by a rustic band. In a poor town in the sertao, Lord Cigano meets Zé da Luz (Jofre Soares), an itinerant projectionist who shows his 16mm print of Gilda de Abreu's melodramatic *O Ebrio* (1946) in remote settlements untouched by electricity and television. Like Zé da Luz, Lord Cigano is finding that television's ever-growing power is lessening the appeal of old-fashioned, unsophisticated entertainment, so that he must seek out towns free of *espinhas de peixe* (television antennas).

The unblinking television audiences in *Bye Bye Brazil* are hypnotized by mediocre programming; some passive viewers even watch the test pattern on the screen. At the end of the film, Diegues ingeniously illustrates television's grip on the Brazilian mind: in their dance-hall performance in Brasilia, Ciço and Dasdô play behind several television sets which simultaneously broadcast their performances - as though it could not be real or valuable unless televised. Television no longer simply projects sound and images; in the new Brazil, television has becomes necessary to validate reality and, indeed, to make it real.

As Brazil enters the jet age, foreign cultural models, disseminated by the media, increasingly influence the national cultural scene. The film's sound track reflects this growing influence, and popular English-language and Portuguese-language songs vie for preeminence. Neither the Chico Buarque-Roberto Menescal team, which composed the theme song, nor the American singers wins this musical duel; Brazilian music and American music peacefully coexist, each influencing the other. However, Diegues playfully hints that Brazil will not easily shed its national inferiority complex and emerge from the shadow of the United States and the other developed countries. In one of the finest scenes in the film, Lord Cigano causes «snow» to fall during a show in the *sertâo;* he then claims that it is snowing just as it does in the developed nations. However, as «I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas» is heard, one spectator observes that the snow tastes like grated coconut.

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