Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments by Susana Nuccetelli
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El libro de Mata es un ambicioso proyecto que afronta exitosamente el examen de la relación ciencia-literatura en el vanguardismo latinoamericano. La lectura cuidadosa de los textos y el excelente manejo de los recursos históricos, científicos y literarios se concretan en una argumentación clara apoyada en innumerables fuentes y en la integración explícita de la obra artística al proyecto teórico. El aspecto menos satisfactorio radica en que el minucioso trabajo de recopilación de información y la acertada presentación de temas despierta la expectativa—no siempre satisfecha—del acceso a un nivel más profundo de diseción del texto literario. Por supuesto, como se anuncia en la introducción, este estudio es una primera aproximación que sienta sólidas bases y constituye un valioso recurso para futuros proyectos. El examen de la interrelación entre los diversos fenómenos culturales y la escritura literaria proporciona una herramienta útil para lectores interesados en la incidencia de los efectos de los procesos sociales en las opciones estéticas de los escritores.

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The wide field of Latin American Thought, possibly the most genuine area of Latin American culture, has been the subject of frequent scrutiny by scholars. It has been commonly identified with the evolution of the Latin American essay, with particular attention to works of a political or sociological nature dealing with an approach to national identity. It is not surprising, then, that Latin American Thought has been historically exemplified by the most seminal works of the pensadores. An established understanding of this huge body of literature (in the wide sense of the word) is that it aimed (and it still does) at responding to some interrelated questions: What is Latin America? Who are we? What are we doing in the world? How can we shape or change our existence in Latin America?

This conceptual consensus implies that the Latin American thinkers acknowledge the project or the factual existence of Latin America and its nations as separate from Iberia and distinct from the United States. Either by political or intellectual means, they also desired to influence its evolution. This established code implies that Latin American Thought has not chosen as its main goal the deciphering of the most essential answers to the questions of what is human existence, but rather, in a more precise and modest agenda, what is the human condition in Latin America. This notion also includes the understanding that the methodology employed in searching for some answers does not need to be exclusively scientific, but it also could be intuitive and essayistic.

The classic works meeting these criteria are still a must for any student. Books by Peter Earle, William Rex Crawford, Manuel Jorrín and John Martz, Martin Stabb, Leopoldo Cea, Nikolaus Werz, and Leslie Bethel, to name a few, supplemented by compilations by Harold Eugene Davis and Alberto Buela, and the more recent works by Alejandro Villegas and Ofelia Schutte, have contributed to constructing an interdisciplinary field (it includes novels, especially the ones dedicated to national identity, and even the works of poetry by Dario and Neruda) of solid recognition in the interpretation of Latin America.

Frequently, the study of the most relevant works of Latin American Thought does not include the conceptual consideration of such as “philosophy,” nor it is merely treated as an ancillary scholarly approach. Moreover, customarily, the insertion of pre-independence and even pre-Columbian works is not considered as an integral part of the essential body of study, but only as predecessors (most especially the pre-independence period). Susana Nuccetelli, in the path of philosophy scholars Risieri Frondizi and Jorge Gracia, takes to heart the ambitious and systematic task of reading some of the most lasting examples in the philosophical context, challenging the view that universalism is not divorced from the basic search for national identity.

In addition to providing an introduction to the history of ideas in Latin America (more than the personalistic intellectual history), her aim is to trace a different panoramic approach to
philosophy by capturing the essence of Latin American philosophy (in the sense of Thought) as “different.” In more concrete terms, the book tries to explain “how well-established philosophical traditions gave rise in the New World to a characteristic form of thought not to be found in other cultures” (xxv). More precisely, the author examines “how Latin Americans have thought about general philosophical issues belonging to metaphysics, philosophy of science, cross-cultural psychology, feminist epistemology, ethics, and social and political philosophy” (xxv-xvi). This is not an easy task, considering the complexity of the conceptual framework and the pioneer nature of the wider time span covered.

For the above reasons, extremely demanding is her goal of incorporating into this debate the epistemic practices of the Indians, different angles of Mayan culture (chapters 1, 2 and 3), and the subsequent clash of cultures (chapter 4). More in tune with distinguished predecessors, the author deals very successfully in comparing the scholastic tradition imposed on Latin America and its most aggressive questioners (chapters 5 and 6), with Acosta and Sor Juana, Bolívar and Sarmiento, as respective stars of each period before and after independence.

A special gift for the students of recent periods of evolution of Latin American Thought are the parts dedicated to the comparison with the North and the rest of the world (chapter 6), and an innovative chapter on identity and ethnicity (chapter 7), centering on the work of Rodr?guez-Mangual and Mariátegui. It concludes with some inviting open questions on the debate between “Latin American philosophy” and “philosophy in Latin America,” as well as dealing with the mixing of races, and the correctness of a collective name (Hispanics, Latinos, Ibero-Americans).

As a practical suggestion for following this book, college students (graduate and undergraduates) may benefit by intercalating Nuccetelli’s chapters with the reading of original sources, while casual readers wishing to follow the more traditional post-independence concept of Latin America Thought may elect to scan the last chapters as an introduction and then study in a more in-depth way the first part.

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La vida y obra de Lydia Cabrera han sido motivo de numerosos estudios, especialmente poco antes de su fallecimiento en 1991. En este libro reciente, Rodríguez-Mangual se propone explorar una perspectiva revisionista de la autora cubana. Con esta aclaración, ahonda en el aporte de Cabrera en la construcción de la identidad cultural cubana. En el examen introductorio, aclara que la escritura cabreriana despliega una alternativa al proyecto nacional llevado a cabo por su cuñado Fernando Ortiz. Afirma que la obra de Cabrera desestabiliza el discurso antropológico tradicional que le precede.

En el primer capítulo se lleva a cabo un bosquejo de la obra de Fernando Ortiz en su primera época. La investigadora admite que el etnógrafo relega a los afrocanos a un papel subordinado en la historia de la nación. En su estudio sobre Los negros brujos de Ortiz, admite la existencia del paradigma occidental que considera al negro como un ser inferior, maleante y hasta criminal. Discrepa con acierto que el discurso antropológico de Ortiz, sobre todo en relación con la familia, la sexualidad y la religión, está lleno de lagunas. Alega que en este texto se excluyen las observaciones de los informantes debido a la presunción positivista que la caracteriza.

En otro apartado dedicado a los ensayos de Ortiz del segundo período, se subraya la adhesión del etnólogo al activismo político. Con este cambio de orientación ideológica, Ortiz intenta darle pertenencia al espacio físico y cultural del africano, basado en el concepto de la transculturación, pese a que continúa su monólogo de dominio autorial con el “discurso antropológico blanco” (53).

El capítulo segundo abarca con precisión lingüística El monte de Lydia Cabrera. Se centra en la religión, la magia y la superstición como categorías temáticas centrales, aunque la escritora