The UMass Dartmouth MA & PhD Program in Luso-Afro-Brazilian Studies and Theory

The Department of Portuguese, in collaboration with the Departments of Art History, Educational Leadership, History, Political Science, Sociology/Anthropology, Teaching and Learning, and the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture, cordially invites you to the MA thesis defense

The Ambivalence of Civilization in a Psychoanalytic Reading of Brazilian Literature* by MA candidate Peter Sufrin

Tuesday, July 31, 2012, 3:00 PM
LARTS 397D (A&S Dean’s Conference Room)

* This presentation will be in English.

Abstract. The ambivalence of civilized ideals such as law, love, and order is a recurring theme in a psychoanalytic reading of Brazilian literature. These “civilized ideals” are present in the canon, and usually, but not always, meet with success. Furthermore, the possibility of an invigorated literary canon is likely through the psychoanalytic interpretations of Brazilian writing of the 20th and 21st centuries. Freudian theory posits the transformation of repression into community and civilization in Civilization and Its Discontents, as well as the embrace of conscience in Totem and Taboo, and the realization of dialogue in The Interpretation of Dreams. In the case of Lacan’s Écrits, communication and sex provide the outlet for pain, while Zizek reveals the notion of oppression transmuted to self-expression. Although the Holocaust temporarily destroyed the notion of Freudian civilization, the emergence of ideals based on beauty, dialogue with disillusion, sex, love and family reveals the productive and progressive nature of Brazilian writing (e.g., Sagarana, The Apple in the Dark, Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands, Écrits, Budapest, and Losses and Gains). Clearly, a more humane way of coping with the “personal” agenda becomes apparent in post-1945 literature and theory. Specifically, spanning the canon of Brazilian literary works, Andrade’s Macunaima creates civilization out of aimlessness, and Queiroz’s The Three Marias rejects religion for the intonation of modernity. Lúcia Motta’s Apple in the Dark transforms disillusion into ethical punishment, while Amado’s Dona Flor and her Two Husbands reveals the consummation of sex in love. Budapest by Chico Buarque is highly pessimistic, but offers the opportunity of civilization through dialogue. Finally, Lya Luft’s Losses and Gains offers the potential for channeling tragedy into optimism. The nexus between psychoanalysis and canon in the manifestation of the fundamental reality of ambivalence reveals the possibility for the triumph and failure of civilized ideals in Brazilian literature.

Peter Sufrin holds a Bachelor’s degree in History from the State University of New York at Buffalo, an MA in History from Boston University, and an MA in Diplomacy and International Relations from Seton Hall University. Starting in September, he will be working at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, a think tank in Washington, DC, with a focus on Brazilian foreign policy.

MA Committee
Prof. Christopher Larkosh (adviser)
Prof. Dário Borim Jr.
Prof. Victor K. Mendes

Contact: Prof. Christopher Larkosh, clarkosh@umassd.edu, x6291

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