Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Carlota Joaquina: Princesa do Brasil. by Carla Camurati; Bianca de Felippes; Melanie Dimantas; Angus Mitchell

Darien J. Davis

The American Historical Review, Vol. 102, No. 3. (Jun., 1997), pp. 937-938.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-8762%28199706%29102%3A3%3C937%3ACJPDB%3E2.0.CO%3B2-F

The American Historical Review is currently published by American Historical Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/aha.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

http://www.jstor.org
Fri Mar 9 10:42:19 2007

object of debate as are the means by which they will accomplish their goals. Mathilde, for example, may have been raised according to Rousseauean pedagogy, but she does not accept the philosopher's views on female domesticity; she answers Ponceludon's assertion that women by nature belong at home by reminding him that nature is also responsible for the swamps that plague his province. Similarly, we see a king who "delights in all things technical" yet is offended by a joke that makes light of a proof for God's existence. For Ponceludon, Mathilde, and Louis XVI alike, the philosophy of the century is not a coherent entity to be accepted or rejected outright; it is composed of sets of ideas that are appropriated according to need.

More than a fine introduction to court society and the Enlightenment, *Ridicule* evokes a rich cultural world that will reward the most active of viewers. Although the film's depiction of politics and social structure is simplistic, its main characters are not fossilized stand-ins from history. They live and breathe their century, fashioning themselves in a way that reflects the broadening and often contradictory impulses of the age. Only such a textured approach could allow viewers, at the end of the film, to feel sympathy for the marquis de Bellegarde, who has fled his country's revolution for the fresh air of England, at the same time that they identify with Ponceludon and Mathilde, who have stayed behind to drain the swamps of France and help to build a new nation.

Michael Kwass
Yale University
Laura Mason
University of Georgia

Carlota Joaquina: Princesa do Brasil. Produced by Carla Camurati and Bianca de Felippes; directed by Carla Camurati; written by Carla Camurati, Melanie Dimantas, and Angus Mitchell. 1994; color; 101 minutes. Distributor: Luso-Brazilian Books, P.O. Box 170286, Brooklyn, NY 11217, phone (718) 624-4000 or 1-800-727-LUSO.

Faced with an imminent Napoleonic invasion in 1808, the Portuguese royal family, led by Prince João VI, pretender to the throne, and his young Spanish wife, Carlota Joaquina, fled to Brazil, where the court would remain for thirteen years. The crown's sudden appearance in Brazil had a dramatic impact on the country's economic, social, and cultural life. The move guaranteed Brazil's elevation from the status of colony to that of kingdom and earned the country a new capital (Rio de Janeiro), as well as a number of important national institutions, including the Bank of Brazil and the National Library. But the royal family's idiosyncratic behavior in their newly adopted land shook up the Brazilian social structure and gave birth to a series of legends that have been passed on from generation to generation.

The memory of Princess Carlota, in particular, has also inspired historical monographs (Marcus Cheke, *Carlota Joaquina, Queen of Portugal*, 1947), drama (Roberto Athayde, *Carlota Rainha*, 1994), and fiction (João Felicio dos Santos, *Carlota Joaquina—A rainha devassa*, 1968). The daughter of King Charles IV of Spain and Queen Maria Louisa of Parma, Carlota was betrothed to the eighteen-year-old Prince João of Portugal when she was only ten. Although an extremely intelligent child, Carlota was also, according to her contemporaries, "perhaps the ugliest royal personage that has ever existed" (Cheke, 8). Despite her physical shortcomings, Carlota became a passionate, artful woman who contrived to wield power on both sides of the Atlantic.

Attracted to this enigmatic and unusual Iberian monarch who lived in Brazil at a crucial period in its modern history, director Carla Camurati has chosen to recreate the Portuguese crown's residence in Brazil (1808–1821) from a comical if not farcical perspective. Although the film takes its name from the Spanish infanta who eventually became queen, it is not a traditional film biography. Rather, Carlota's life becomes the prism through which Camurati explores the social and cultural life of Brazil in general, and Rio de Janeiro in particular, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Camurati reconstructs Carlota's life with the help of a Scottish narrator, who relates the story to his young cousin with all the drama and exoticism of a tropical fairy tale. His embellishments are not without historical foundation, however, as the film manages to create a pathetic yet believable portrait of the royal family based closely on historical data.

A visual feast, the film is divided into three main chronological stages: Infanta Carlota's preparation to travel to Lisbon to meet her future husband (Spain, 1785), the life of the royal family in Lisbon prior to the Napoleonic invasion (Portugal, 1789–1807), and the trials and tribulations of the royal family in Brazil (1808–1821)—the major focus of the film. In accordance with the views of several historians (in addition to Cheke, see Luiz Edmundo, *A Corte de Dom João no Rio de Janeiro 1808–1821*, 1939–1940, and Bertita Harding, *The Amazon Throne: The Story of the Braganzas of Brazil*, 1941), the film portrays Carlota as a rather homely woman with an insatiable sexual appetite and a lust for power who was surprised to see so many blacks and Indians in Brazil. Her aggressive manner, use of obscene language, and the informality with which she treated her servants provide ample material for satire. The film likewise ridicules Prince João as a kindhearted buffoon and describes the Brazilian aristocracy as indolent and pretentious.

Nineteenth-century Brazilian history might also inspire tragedy: a disgraced Portuguese crown fleeing to its colony, a Brazilian society deeply divided by race and class but dependent on African slavery. In this film, however, viewers will detect a Brazilian tendency to downplay racial and sexual conflict and a refusal to take oppression too seriously, the latter manifested in other films such as Carlos Diegues's *Xica da Silva*

(1975) and Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1968). As with most secondary works, the film says as much about the present as it does about the past. It depicts, for example, modern Brazilian attitudes toward the Portuguese, who are often stereotypically celebrated for their tolerance but ridiculed for their foolishness and lack of intelligence. However, the film has no villains or heroes; it overflows with historical personalities who are as pathetic as they are endearing. Its sarcasm and mocking tone, which invoked the anger of the modern descendants of the Portuguese monarchy, nonetheless helped make this a popular film with Brazilian audiences.

Despite several gratuitous stereotypes (Carlota almost always dressed in red, and references to unbridled sexuality and racial mixture in Brazil, for example) and a few historical blunders (the gross simplification of the foundation of the Bank of Brazil, and Carlota's sexuality as a driving force of João's foreign policy), Camurati succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro and provides piercing insights into the social and cultural dynamics of the period. Although Carlota found refuge from war in Brazil, she ultimately rejected the land, its people, and its customs. When she left Rio's shores in 1821, she reportedly exclaimed, "from this land I do not want to take a grain of sand." In staging this and other historical scenes, Camurati employs satire to forge an irreverent dialogue with the past while encouraging her audiences to laugh.

DARIÉN J. DAVIS
Middlebury College

FORGOTTEN SILVER. Produced by Sue Rogers; written and directed by Peter Jackson and Costa Botes. 1995; color; 52 minutes. Distributor: First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014, phone (212) 243–0600, fax 212–989–7649.

According to its promoters, when *Forgotten Silver* first aired on New Zealand television, many viewers believed that they had found in Colin McKenzie—a forgotten film pioneer and the subject of Peter Jackson and Costa Botes's mockumentary—a new national hero. A variety of devices such as vintage photographs, yellowed newspaper clippings, film stills, and—what is the film's most striking special effect—grainy and damaged black-and-white "archival footage" culled from McKenzie's *oeuvre* all serve to authenticate him as a historical personage. But *Forgotten Silver* actually presents a dual narrative, balancing the reconstruction of McKenzie's life with the story of his rescue from obscurity by Jackson. The recovery of McKenzie's life and work gains a sense of urgency from the use of recognizable documentary techniques such as handheld filming, voice-over narration (by Jeffrey Thomas), and the inclusion of interviews with known film personae (actor Sam Neill, film historian Leonard Maltin, and Miramax co-chairman Harvey Weinstein). These techniques create the impression that we are not so much witnesses to history itself as to its remaking.

Beginning with McKenzie's early technological experiments—he invents the first tracking shot by rigging a hand-held camera to a bicycle—and ending with the gala premier of his restored four-hour epic *Salome* (edited to a scant three hours), *Forgotten Silver* rewrites film history as McKenzie's biography and, to a large extent, a history that belongs to New Zealand. Not only is McKenzie credited with the invention of the first feature-length film (*Warrior Season*, 1908, also the first talkie) and color processing (test shot, Tahiti, 1911), but computer-enhanced imaging of his footage reveals that Richard Pierce, a fellow New Zealander, actually beat the Wright Brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk by nine months.

At first glance, *Forgotten Silver* appears merely to present history as the product of accident: Jackson's chance discovery of McKenzie's work gives the lie to conventional film history. Yet the plethora of "firsts" claimed by McKenzie argues that much of history actually occurs "elsewhere" and that this "elsewhereness" itself is hardly accidental. To begin with, McKenzie's nationality overtly contests Hollywood's centrality to the evolution of cinema. The film thus gleefully engages in the kind of revisionist claims made by various minority groups that prominent historical figures were actually gay, black, or otherwise "different."

The issue of contemporary identity politics combines with New Zealand's awkward position on the cultural map to raise two questions: "When is difference different enough?" and "When is difference too different?" On the one hand, New Zealand is not Hollywood, and this makes it possible to read the recovery of McKenzie as historical revision. In this context, New Zealand is different enough. But *Warrior Season* falls into obscurity—and with it, McKenzie's claim to the first talkie—on account of its extreme difference: its dialogue is entirely in Chinese.

In a second dismissal of otherness, McKenzie is jailed for screening color test footage of bare-breasted Tahitian women (which the all-male commission views repeatedly during its thirty-seven-hour deliberation). But the scandalous footage recalls the travel shorts produced by the Lumières, the photography of *National Geographic*, and, to a lesser extent, the films of Robert Flaherty (such as *Nanook of the North*, 1922). Its difference, in other words, is all too familiar. By revealing the pervasiveness of Western exoticism and by exposing the historical specificity of its objects, *Forgotten Silver* turns the viewers' attention to the subject of spectatorship: laying bare its cultural contingency and the politics of its desires.

Despite *Forgotten Silver*'s apparent challenge to conventional film history, it inevitably depends on landmark films and film legends to validate its own authority. McKenzie's *Salome* echoes D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and Cecil B. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments* (1924); Colin is at once Orson Welles