

Book Review/Reseña

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***Arte y deporte en Hispanoamérica: La cultura deportiva en la literatura y el cine.* Bruno Nowendsztern and Ana Silvia Cervantes, eds. Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2025. xviii, 227. \$76.00 (paper).**

This book is a gem. In addition to the introduction, there are twelve chapters evenly divided into sections on *fútbol*, history, and national identity; gender and discrimination in sport; sport as a theme in narrative fiction; and life, body, and writing beyond sport. In the introduction, Bruno Nowendsztern offers a wonderfully tight seven-page analysis of shifting ideas on how sport has been understood over the past century with reference to the work of scholars that have charted that transformation from Johan Huizinga to Eduardo Archetti. A primary goal of the volume is to introduce important new methodologies and analysis in the field. Each chapter has been expertly chosen and edited to produce that desired result.

Kathleen Cunniffe Peña contributes two outstanding chapters. In “Deportes, ritual y posesión: el espíritu de lo fantástico en dos cuentos deportivos de Cortázar y Bolaño,” she considers Julio Cortázar’s “Segundo viaje” (1982) and Roberto Bolaño’s “Buba” (2001) comparatively with a focus on the fantastic and otherness in athletic competition. In “Segundo viaje,” a boxer travels to the United States to take revenge on a rival while in “Buba,” an African athlete struggles on a European sports team. Cunniffe argues that the two works establish an aura of uncertainty around both narrators and readers. In the end, a reader cannot be sure whether events described are superstitions of the narrator or others, or the result of supernatural forces. Cunniffe finds in both works an appreciation for the often-fleeting moments of brilliance of an athlete that may well draw on the fantastical. In “Mujer boxeadora: identidad de género como espectáculo y lucha en *La Yuma* (2009),” she shifts focus to the film by Florence Jaugey that follows a Nicaraguan fighter through an enigmatic ending where the boxer finds work in a circus, as a curiosity. Here, Cunniffe is concerned with the performance of gender in the movie and how the boxer’s struggle reflects larger challenges for Nicaraguan women. She finds that, in the end, the solution to the athlete’s problems cannot be found in normative Nicaraguan

society, fraught with danger, but rather in circus life, often associated with the transgressive.

The links in film between violence, sport, identity, and society also form the starting point for Miguel A. Cabañas's "Fútbol, pasión y nación: el deporte ante el conflicto armado y la violencia narco en Colombia." First and foremost, this is a wonderful introduction to thirty years of television and film interpretations of the place of fútbol in Colombia. Inevitably, the chapter lands on the 1994 Colombian national team which underscored both tragedy—in the murder of the player Andrés Escobar after his own goal that sunk the team's World Cup of Soccer fortunes—and triumph, in Colombia's remarkable unbeaten run in the first round of that tournament. Cabañas is drawn to Sergio Cabrera's film *Golpe de estadio* (1998) which reflects on how the 1994 World Cup impacted Colombians' hope for peace and reconciliation after generations of civil war. Beyond that film, large parts of Colombian cultural production at the time were dedicated to the idea that ex-guerrilleros might be reintegrated into civil society by way of fútbol as a unifying national force. By contrast, the television series *Goles en contra* (2022) was more focused on the structural violence of the nation's past. The killing of Escobar by organized crime figures represented a victory of that violence over the potential for unity as manifest in Colombia's incipient affection for the team.

Two chapters reflect on films from the English-speaking world. In "*Sugar*: la ficción desmitificadora del sueño americano en la narrativa del béisbol," Alfredo Hernández writes that *Sugar* (Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, 2008) is distinct from many feature films on baseball; it subverts the "American dream" theme common to such sports features to criticize the romanticization of America's pastime while exploring the bitter reality of the search for a professional career by young Dominican players. This is a terrific primer for anybody interested in US American baseball culture that includes concise overviews of the scholarship on how the so-called American dream has evolved, the portrayal of that dream in film, and two key examples of that culture in Hollywood: Brian Helgeland's *42* (2013) and Craig Gillespie's *Million Dollar Arm* (2014). Hernández's criticisms of the two latter films are razor sharp. The experiences of minority athletes are manipulated in a way that masks discrimination and the range of problems such players face in charting successful careers. By contrast, *Sugar* becomes revelatory in its grim account of the cultural and psychological strains placed on Dominican players in the United States, the economic strictures faced by athletes with family responsibilities outside the US, and the alienation of US American society.

Ana Silvia Cervantes's chapter, "Peleas como chica: la representación del género y la latinidad en *Girlfight*" is equally poignant in addressing the way Karyn Kusama's *Girlfight* (2000) presents traditional dividers of masculine and feminine in US Latino communities. The film takes on gendered roles in society, boasts a heterodox feminist

protagonist, and is framed by a patriarchal social construct. This is clear in the perpetuation of violence, the author argues, as an essentially masculine trait, adopted by women only under exceptional circumstances. The film reproduces gendered stereotypes in public spaces and intimate locales such as the home, the gym, and the school. “En este sentido,” Cervantes writes, “considero que no es una película en donde se reivindique la mujer ni se rompan los roles de género.”

For both those wishing to catch up on the best scholarship in this field, and for those newly intrigued by sport and culture, this volume is essential reading.

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