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– *The Dictator's Seduction. Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo*, by Lauren Derby. Duke University Press, 2009.

On 3 September 1930 a devastating hurricane razed Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. Some ninety per cent of its buildings were destroyed. Almost three thousand people were killed and tens of thousands were left homeless. Just a few weeks before the disaster, the young captain Rafael Trujillo had become president on the waves of an orchestrated revolution. The hurricane provided Trujillo with a golden opportunity to show his dynamism and at the same time, to consolidate his power. He transformed himself into the efficient saviour of the city while acquiring a firm grip on the elites and popular masses. Carrying out the rescue operation and reconstruction of the city under an umbrella of 'caring paternalism', he laid the foundation of a dictatorship that would last until 1961 and which would remain unparalleled in Latin America.

The Trujillo dictatorship has always attracted a great deal of attention. Earlier academic literature focused on the political and economic underpinnings of the regime. The general public was more fascinated by the colourful and often bizarre elements of the personalist rule of Trujillo and his family members. The acclaimed novel by Vargas, Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat*, may be seen as a recent example of this. Lauren Derby has now written a beautiful book which attempts to combine these two perspectives. It does not ignore the more bizarre and extreme characteristics of the Trujillo dictatorship, but analyses them in the context of the general cultural history of the Dominican Republic. This allows her to steer free from the one-sided views that see the duration of the regime as the exclusive result of terror and repression.

The book is constructed around six more or less separate case-studies, some of which have been published before. Most of the chapters are little jewels in their own right and may be read as autonomous essays on an extremely fascinating period of Dominican modern history. After two introductory chapters, Derby tells the story of the hurricane and its aftermath. She shows how the natural disaster opened the way for Trujillo to increase his grip on Dominican society. Not for nothing did the reconstruction after the hurricane become one of the founding myths of the Trujillato. Making a jump in time, the following chapter describes the ill-named Feria de la Paz y la Confraternidad del Mundo Libre, which the regime organized in 1955. The Feria was accompanied by a new spree of construction works on the western outskirts of the city. It was meant to present the achievements of the Trujillo regime and to show that the Dominican Republic had taken its place in the league of modern nations. It also offered a platform for the public presentation of his sixteen-year old daughter Angelita. Derby concludes that these events were the culmination of the 'theatre state' that Trujillo had brought into being.

The next two chapters focus on the man Trujillo himself. First Derby shows the elaborate and psychologically intricate ways in which Trujillo exacted total loyalty from his people. The whole of society was programmed to continuously heap praise upon their generalissimo. The smallest slip of the tongue could mean degradation or worse. Trujillo was obsessed with masculinity and he was renowned for an insatiable desire for young women. However, he did not always present himself as the exemplary macho. Rather, as some of the beautiful photos in the book seem to demonstrate, he often looks like a somewhat neurotic and effeminate man. In a

very entertaining chapter on Trujillo's corrupt and promiscuous family members, Derby also devotes some very telling pages to Trujillo's obsession with clothing. He wore many different uniforms and demanded that all his associates wear very formal and immaculate attire. As Derby makes clear, this art of dressing up also had its racial connotations. Part of the mystery surrounding him was the result of this ability to disguise and transform himself.

The last two chapters describe the aftermath of the long reign of Trujillo. Derby illustrates how, even after his assassination, his person continued to incite love and terror among the Dominican population. For many of his more humble citizens he remained ever the *Benefactor de la Nación*, as one of his epitaphs ran. For others, he was an object of terror, a devil with supernatural powers that could harm them beyond the grave. One can begin to understand this popular sentiment by reading Derby's chapter on the messianistic cult of dios Olivorio. Here Trujillo as myth fades into the background, but the chapter clearly shows the popular undercurrent that shaped his regime.

Derby has written a provocative book that will certainly find many readers. In addition to the insights it gives in recent Dominican history, it can also be read as a plea for a new kind of cultural studies. Derby focuses on the creation, manipulation and representation of images as instruments in social and political power struggles. In doing so, she succeeds in bringing together various strands of thought and methodological approaches. She intelligently combines different (documentary) sources and convincingly uses fiction to support her analysis. This allows for a true 'cultural' analysis of the period. Her focus on the city of Santo Domingo enables her to describe the architectural and spatial transformation which was such an important aspect of Trujillo's political project. By emphasizing the gendered and racialized nature of the regime, Derby rightly distantiates herself from taking an overly political view of it. Her analysis on the nature and consequences of the regime focuses on its social and cultural embedding, and on the ways in which the regime can also be seen as an expression of Dominican political and social culture. With great wit and originality she magnifies small shreds of evidence and converts them into general conclusions. Some of these conclusions may be questioned or criticized, but there is no doubt that her book provides us with a very original, adventurous and highly readable analysis of a crucial period in Dominican and, we may add, Latin American history.

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– *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata. The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priista, 1940-1962*, by Tanalís Padilla. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Some time ago the *Instituto Cultural Autónomo 'Rubén Jaramillo'* in the town of Jojutla (Morelos) proudly displayed a meters-long painting in the tradition of the great Mexican muralists that depicts and interprets a century of peasant struggles in Mexico, and that graphically represents one of the key arguments of the book under review here. The painting has peasant leader Rubén Jaramillo at the centre, between Zapata on the left and references to the more recent Zapatista rebellion in