Despite All Adversities: Spanish-American Queer Cinema is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on Latin American film and queer studies. As the introduction states, the anthology was “conceived for use by instructors and students of the college and university courses on Spanish-American cinema,” while at the same time seeking to “maintain intellectual sophistication” (5). The volume strikes the balance successfully. The chapters offer nuanced, in-depth film analyses that are also clear, intellectually generous, and accessible to the general reader. The themes explored give a sense of the diversity of current queer cinematic production: they range from queer subjectivity and desire to gay authorship, bisexuality and lesbian experiences, and relations with families and the nation.

The volume boasts major scholars in Latin American queer and film studies. The sixteen chapters focus on one film each (with only one exception), which allows for thorough analysis and increases the volume’s appeal as a resource for instructors and students. A few essays are devoted to canonical queer films such as El lugar sin límites (Arturo Ripstein, 1978), Señora de nadie (María Luisa Bemberg, 1982), Doña Herlinda y su hijo (Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, 1985), and Fresa y chocolate (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1993), while others discuss more recent but well-known films such as No se lo digas a nadie (Francisco J. Lombardi, 1998), Plata quemada (Marcelo Piñeyro, 2000), and La virgen de los sicarios (Barbet Schroeder, 2000) – the last three all based on commercially successful novels. The chapters by David William Foster on Señora de nadie, Daniel Balderston on Doña Herlinda y su hijo, Cristina Venegas on Fresa y chocolate, and Claudia Schaefer on El lugar sin límites provide outstanding analyses of these classic films and succeed in breathing new life into discussions of works about which much has been written already.

Many of the essays cover relatively recent films, ranging from 2000 to 2007. Paul Julian Smith explores the question of gay auteurism in Julián Hernández’s Mil nubes de paz cercan el cielo (2004). Debra Castillo on XXY (Lucía Puenzo, 2007) and Andrés Lema-Hincapié on Plata quemada unfold the multilayered textures and resonances of these films. Similarly, David Oubiña develops a rich and insightful reading of Lucrecia Martel’s La ciénaga (2001). These essays are intellectually rigorous and make strategic use of ideas by Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler without overusing film theory or critical jargon – a comment that may be extended to the whole collection. The volume has a unity of tone that goes beyond
the common theme of sexuality and that results from a historically and
geographically situated approach to cinema.

It is perhaps not surprising that eight of the chapters are devoted to
films from or connected with Argentina, a country with a highly developed
film industry and significant gay and lesbian visibility. Four essays deal
with Mexico, while the remaining chapters cover films from Cuba,
Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. The editors note the very limited body of
Spanish-American cinema with lesbian themes, which is reflected in the
collection. However, the chapters by Cecelia Burke Lawless on the French-
Venezuelan film by Fina Torres, Mecánicas celestes (1995), and by María de
la Cruz Castro Ricalde on the Mexican films Así del precipicio (Teresa
Suárez, 2006) and Todo incluido (Rodrigo Ortúzar, 2009) represent
important contributions in this regard.

There are also very valuable discussions of lesser-known films. An
interesting case is La venganza del sexo (Emilio Vieyra, 1967), which Esteve
Riambau describes as a “horror fantasy” film from Argentina that mutated
into a “sexploitation film” when distributed in the US market. Robert Deam
Tobin explains how Anahí Berneri’s Un año sin amor (2005) reconfigures
our received ideas about homosexuality, HIV, and S/M leather culture in
Argentina. In her analysis of Mecánicas celestes, Burke Lawless explores
questions of space and transnationalism through the protagonist’s journey
from Venezuela to France and the film’s turning inside-out of the
Cinderella story.

The volume achieves a unity of tone and style through historically and
geographically situated discussions and through strategic decisions such as
devoting an entire chapter to each film and focusing exclusively on
fiction films. Queer experiences are not treated as universal but rather as
strongly embedded within national, cultural, and filmic traditions. This is
not to say that the essays overlook the critical importance of global
networks both for the characters and for the process of film production
itself. The impact of globalization and transnationalism is especially
evident in Chris Perriam’s chapter on the Spanish-Argentine film En la
ciudad sin límites (Antonio Hernández, 2002) and in Dieter Ingenschay’s
analysis of Ronda nocturna (Edgardo Cozarinsky, 2005), which he sees as
an homage to Buenos Aires’s nocturnal character as well as its queer
culture by Cozarinsky, a writer and filmmaker based in Paris and Buenos
Aires. Transnationalism also plays an important part in discussions of La
venganza del sexo, Mecánicas celestes, and Todo incluido, as mentioned
above. The anthology is a testament to the vibrancy of queer cinema in
Spanish America and demonstrates how it has come of age “despite all
adversities,” as the title suggests. There is no doubt that this collection is
destined to become an indispensable point of reference for Latin American
While return to the home country by several groups of émigrés has often been the subject of inquiry in post-colonial literatures and migration studies, it has only recently begun to be addressed in American literary studies. Social mobility, economic opportunity and favorable post-Cold War geopolitics have turned immigrant artists and writers into potential “returnees” and homecoming has become a salient issue in the art and writing of recent decades. Iraida H. López’s timely volume addresses the understudied issue of return and the politics and poetics of homecoming in several recent Cuban-American works of the “one-and-a-half generation” by adeptly inserting them in the post-Revolutionary history of the Cuban diaspora. While in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, Cuban-American authors like Reinaldo Arenas and Magali Alabau approached the desired return as a dystopian experience, changes in the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba in the 1990s and the subsequent viability of brief visits to the island have brought the possibility of returning to the forefront. The progressive coming to terms of writers and artists with their exile predicament and their willingness to re-connect with family and friends in Cuba accounts for the proliferation of fictional and autobiographical works dealing with real or imagined returns.

The volume is a well-researched contribution to Cuban and Cuban-American studies that inquires into the “roots and routes” of Cuban diaspora in a style that is at once personal and carefully sensitive to the nuances of each author’s relationship to the homeland. López untangles the complexities of the ethos and pathos of Cuban exile by addressing the emotional underpinnings of the changing, discontinuous relationship between the Castro government and the various U.S. administrations in the last five decades, all of which are necessary to understand the diversity of the politics and poetics of return. Homecoming in Cuban-American writing and art is framed within theories of diaspora and transnationalism, two slippery terms that are frequently conflated in the critical idiom of post-colonial, migration and American ethnic studies. The author expresses appropriate concern regarding the ease with which these theories become