

logical challenges from the colonial period through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Carmen Ramos's review of the implications of a gender perspective for studying Latin American history is crisp and persuasively applied to the case of Mexico in the twentieth century.

The four essays on literature underline Dore's point, made in her introduction, that postmodernism reflects the increasing fragmentation of Latin American society. If Marxism helped create a political unity of the "working class," defined in economic terms, contemporary politics is increasingly a contest of diverse identities, and race, gender, and sexual preference compete with class as foci of solidarity and political mobilization. Jean Franco's chapter shows how queer theory and practice can be subversive, but does not suggest rallying points for political change. How novelist Luisa Valenzuela used imagery that crossed gender boundaries as a weapon of political opposition is explored by Claudine Potvin. Deborah Shaw reviews the arguments for and against self-consciously gendered writing in the works of several contemporary authors, and William Rowe examines themes of the body and shame in the work of Peruvian poet Carmen Olle.

These essays in literary criticism examine the broad question of women's identities in contemporary Latin American writing, but they do not produce the debate on the implications of postmodernism for Marxist gender analysis promised in the editor's introduction. Nanette Redclift's closing chapter, which analyzes how the material and the discursive elements of women's power and powerlessness are linked, does address these issues, but leaves the reader wishing that the other contributors had focused more directly on them.

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*Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America.*

Edited by SCOTT MAINWARING and MATTHEW SOBERG SHUGART. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. ix, 493 pp. Cloth, \$64.95. Paper, \$22.95.

A good deal of ink has been spilled recently over the issue of presidentialism versus parliamentarism in Latin America. The debate was begun by Juan Linz, an expert on Spain, and carried forward by Arturo Valenzuela, a specialist on Chile, where the debate over this issue was, in fact, quite vigorous for a time. Now, Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Soberg Shugart have weighed in with a heavy volume that, one would hope, would put this issue to rest. Unfortunately, the authors conclude with a call for "more studies" and the promise of another book.

For most Latin Americanists, the institutional issue of presidentialism versus parliamentarism is not of the highest priority. Most scholars in the field tend to focus on Latin America's economic problems, social issues, cultural changes, and foreign relations. When we add political issues to the list, the focus is likely to be on political party

weaknesses, interest group imbalances, and governmental inadequacies, not presidentialism or parliamentarism. This debate harks back to the constitutional engineering, actually the constitutional gimmicks, that constitution-writers and American political scientists wrote about in an earlier pre-1950s epoch. Then, the field focused on formal-legal (including constitutional) aspects of politics to the exclusion of more dynamic factors and, with respect to Latin America, specifically sought to limit *continuismo* and such strong executive power that verged on dictatorship by introducing semiparliamentary features in the constitutions of Latin America. Of course, institutions are important and one needs to get them right, but no one nowadays thinks that such constitutional tinkering will solve Latin America's problems or even that a formal-legal approach is the best way to deal with the issues involved. As the editors themselves eventually recognize, the nature of social cleavages, the level of economic development, the quality of leadership, and political culture are also of critical importance in affecting how democracy works.

The early literature was strongly critical of presidentialism and fervently in favor of parliamentarism. Linz and his collaborators have argued the following points: 1) that presidentialism is less flexible than parliamentarism and, therefore, is less supportive of democracy; 2) that presidentialism is more prone to immobility and gridlock; and 3) that presidentialism has a "winner-takes-all logic" that is unfavorable to democracy. To their credit, Mainwaring and Shugart present a more balanced and realistic argument, suggesting that presidentialism often offers greater choice to voters, provides electoral accountability, assures greater congressional independence, provides for fixed terms, and may inhibit "winner-takes-all" politics.

In addition, parliamentarism and semiparliamentarism in Latin America have usually meant government-by-committee, the absence of clear leadership or responsibility, and the lack of a strong center to hold the polity together. Historically, many Latin American countries have been plagued by a lack of associability, weak institutions, economic underdevelopment, and sometimes chaotic sociopolitical conditions. In these conditions, a strong executive is seen as needed to help provide unity and keep the country from falling apart. To be fair to the Valenzuela school, the associational and organizational void is now beginning to be filled and democracy sufficiently consolidated, so perhaps countries like Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay can afford to have a debate over parliamentarism and maybe even move in that direction. But for the other countries, the fear of disorder and possible disintegration is such that they prefer presidentialism, and it is significant that in every Latin American country where parliamentarism-presidentialism has been debated, presidentialism won out.

Fortunately, Mainwaring and Shugart are careful, serious scholars, and they have produced an excellent book on the subject that broadens the sterile presidentialism-parliamentarism argument to one that also focuses on political parties, elections, and democratic consolidation. They also emphasize the vast differences—constitutionally, politically, and sociologically—among the Latin American countries. Their contributors, for the most part, also offer strong chapters: Mainwaring, himself, on Brazil; Ronald

Archer and Shugart on Colombia; Brian Crisp on Venezuela; John Carey on Costa Rica; Jeffrey Weldon on Mexico; Mark Jones on Argentina; Julio Faúndez and Peter Siavelis on Chile; and Eduardo Gamarra on Bolivia. Unfortunately, there is no chapter on Uruguay, where the debate as well as the experience with the presidentialism versus parliamentarism debate has been among the most important, and none on the Caribbean or other Central American countries. An introduction and conclusion by the editors help tie the book together, and there is an especially useful appendix that presents a summary of constitutional provisions in all the Latin American countries.

We need to put this debate to sleep and one wishes to be able to report that the authors have delivered the *definitive* book on the subject. The Mainwaring-Shugart volume does, in fact, do that. But, unfortunately, they have promised us still more.

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*The Riddle of Cantinflas: Essays on Hispanic Popular Culture.* By ILAN STAVANS. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. Photographs. Illustrations. Notes. Index. ix, 157 pp. Cloth, \$45.00. Paper, \$19.95.

Cultural studies now exercise considerable influence among Latin Americanists who originally trained in literature. Not only does this interest respond to a series of considerations that make it necessary to decenter literature as the paradigm of culture, but it also corresponds to the fact that while details of Latin American culture may be studied in other disciplines, they are done so in a limited fashion, and it has devolved upon people in language and literature to take an extended interest in song, filmmaking, theater, graphic humor, dance, photography. What most motivates the scholar, however, is the need to interpret larger issues of cultural production than is possible by attention only to literature.

Stavans admirably exemplifies the literary scholar as cultural critic. *The Riddle of Cantinflas* is a series of mostly short essays, many of which appeared in general interest and cultural publications during the past ten years. Cantinflas is, therefore, only one of the cultural phenomena Stavans addresses in this format. Others include the singer Selena; the Chicana fiction writer Sandra Cisneros; recent Mexican films; Comandante Marcos of the Chiapas conflict; Elena Poniatowska's book on Tina Modotti, the Italian photographer who worked in Mexico; and the graphic artist José Guadalupe Posada—in short, a medley of topics that make the book more useful as a sampler of diverse forms of cultural production and what might be said about them rather than as a monograph sustained by any specific interpretive hypothesis and theoretical model.

What Stavans has to say is a mixture of the sort of urbane, intelligent commentary one might expect to find in a book review appearing in *The Nation* or *The New Republic* and negative criticism. The latter does not mean criticism that is negative in the sense of negating the value of a text or a manifestation of cultural production. Rather, it means looking beyond the surface of a text, which is presumably “good” by some set of