

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

standards of the person who wrote it and of the publisher who brought it out expecting it to appeal to a significant buying public, to see the underlying presuppositions of its production, its aporia, its silences, its rhetorical sleights of hand. This does not mean that Stavans is not negative in a basic way: he directs some very pithy barbs against Sandra Cisneros's writing and the sort of liberal enterprise he views responsible for canonizing her as *the* Chicana writer. And anyone who cringes at the mere mention of Selena's name, appalled by the cheap sanctification of this trite singer, will delightfully savor Stavans's sarcastic comments. A particularly useful example of this approach is his discussion of Frida Kahlo (of the now somewhat fading Fridamania) vs. Benita Galeana, a political activist closely attached to the Communist party in Mexico, with which Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera, were involved. Stavans's essay is subtitled "unparallel lives," and his interest lies with demonstrating why Kahlo has been converted into a "mythical figure" and why Galeana is virtually forgotten. Were this more than a note, Stavans might have found time to analyze some of his own presuppositions, and he too conveniently forgets why Kahlo is important to a feminist agenda.

This leads me to a final observation about what I think is a very lovely collection of notes, whose main use is to showcase some of the topics that require more theoretically grounded analysis. At times Stavans tends to get rather smarmy, as though meaning to enhance his engagement with the allegedly highly sophisticated audience that reads the sort of publications where many of these notes first appeared. Space prevents me from going into the issue of how Latin American literature is getting covered in United States intellectual forums other than the circuit sustained mostly for professional academics, but this is a matter that requires the cultural critic to engage in some metacommentary that might have provided a nice complementary conclusion to this collection.

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*Struggles for Freedom: Essays on Slavery, Colonialism, and Culture in the Caribbean and Central America.* By O. NIGEL BOLLAND. Belize Chronicals Series, no. 4. Belize City: Angelus Press, 1997. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. 334 pp. Paper.

This important collection of essays brings together newly edited materials and previously published work by the author on the English-speaking Caribbean. Bolland, a sociologist, aims to look at the economic, political, and cultural forces that have shaped Caribbean societies from colonial times to the present day. Divided into four sections—"Colonial and Creole Societies," "Colonization and Slavery," "From Slavery to Freedom," and "Class, Culture and Politics"—*Struggles for Freedom* is diverse in its approach and subject matter. In the introductory essay, "Creolization and Creole Societies: A Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History," Bolland makes clear that "creolization" constitutes a central dynamic of Caribbean social history, and this assertion reverberates throughout the book.

Bolland begins part 2 by looking at the colonization of Central America and the