
Review: Review Essay: Latin American Cultural Studies

Reviewed Work(s): The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader by Ileana Rodríguez: Nuevas perspectivas desde/sobre América Latina: el desafío de los estudios culturales by Mabel Moraña: The Exhaustion of Difference; The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies by Alberto Moreiras: Carlos Monsiváis: Culture and Chronicle in Contemporary Mexico by Linda Egan: Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019) by Serge Gruzinski: Tropics of Desire; Interpretations from Queer Latino America by José Quiroga: A Queer Myth for the Nation; The State and Gabriela Mistral by Licia Fiol-Matta

Review by: David William Foster

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- The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*. Ed. Ileana Rodríguez. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. 459 pp. 0-8223-2701-5; 0-8223-2712-0 (paper).
- Nuevas perspectivas desde/sobre América Latina: el desafío de los estudios culturales*. Ed. Mabel Moraña. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio; Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2000. 514 pp. 956-260-185-4 (paper)
- Moreiras, Alberto. *The Exhaustion of Difference; The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. 350 pp. 0-8223-2726-0; 0-8223-2724-4 (paper).
- Egan, Linda. *Carlos Monsiváis: Culture and Chronicle in Contemporary Mexico*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2001. xxvi + 276 pp. 0-8165-2137-9.
- Gruzinski, Serge. *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019)*. Trans. by Heather MacLean. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. 284 pp. 0-8223-2653-1; 0-8223-2643-4 (paper).
- Quiroga, José. *Tropics of Desire; Interpretations from Queer Latino America*. New York: New York UP, 2000. xv, 286 pp. 0-8147-6952-7; 0-8147-6953-X (paper).
- Fiol-Matta, Licia. *A Queer Myth for the Nation: The State and Gabriela Mistral*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002. xxix + 269 pp. 0-8166-3963-9; 0-8166-3964-7 (paper).

Perhaps the first well defined profile for Latin American cultural studies involved the attempt to accommodate the concept of “subaltern studies” to the case of Latin America. Building on the concept of subalternity as developed by the South Asian Subaltern Studies groups (most famously known through Gayatri Spivak’s critique of their proposals contained in her much cited “Can the Subaltern Speak” and subsequent essays), the Latin American Studies group, whose work goes back now over a decade, developed a series of proposals that would offer a significant shift in the focus of Latin American studies (see “Founding Statement: Latin American Subaltern Studies Group,” *Boundary 2* 20.3 [Fall 1993]: 110-21; special issue on *The Postmodern Debate in Latin America*).

This shift is two-fold: on the one hand, it meant—in line with a fundamental axiom of contemporary cultural studies—understanding cultural production (itself a contested site as to what “culture” includes, or at least, how to bracket specific cultural practices, if the concept even continues to be useful) as part of larger process in the exercise of the power and rights of symbolic representation: cultural production is one (often privileged and selectively legitimated) symbolic practice whose full sociohistorical function can only be understood if it is seen in terms of larger issues involving the creation of meaning and the exercise of power through symbolic representation in a society.

Second, it is crucial to understand how the control of symbolic representation determines necessarily the speaking subjects of a society are and what constitutes all of the parameters of their speaking: what it is “proper” to speak about and what the permissible discourse practices of the speaking are. Subaltern Studies, as an intellectual and academic practice, involves as much the discovery of a record of subaltern speakers (from a cultural history point of view, works that have been produced but ignored, marginalized, repressed, destroyed) as the analysis of the complexities regarding the insertion of subaltern voices (themselves an unstable and shifting sphere) in the sociohistorical record: the concessions and compromises of the intersection of the subaltern and hegemonic practices of production, the representation of subalterns by hegemonic practices, the perception of the incursion of subaltern voices as a possible subversion of the hegemonic by

the subaltern (e.g., when a subaltern voice seems to “take” over a text in often surprising and unsuspected ways). In short, what is fundamentally involved is the proposition that history be rewritten from the multiple vantage points that can be called “subaltern,” as much by the subaltern subjects themselves as by those who would assume a political and ideological commitment vis-à-vis the subaltern.

The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader includes analyses and position statements by the most important figures involved in this area of Latin American studies: Ileana Rodríguez (the organizer of the volume), John Beverley (very much a godfather of the movement), Marc Zimmerman, Alberto Moreiras, Sara Castro Klarén, Doris Sommer, Walter D. Mignolo, Gareth Williams, Javier Sanjinés C., among others; significantly, several are from the Pittsburgh-Duke axis whose programs have consistently provided models for the field. But it is also heartening to see how many other academic programs are represented by the affiliations of the contributors, as one way of understanding how vital this repositioning of Latin American studies has become. Particularly valuable is the essay by Ranajit Guha, one of the key figures of South Asian Subaltern Studies. “Subaltern Studies: Projects for Our Time and Their Convergence” contains the following programmatic statement:

What is at stake in the deconstructive model of subaltern studies in a sense of the subaltern as a subject that is not totalizable as the “people-as-one” of nationalist or populist discourse . . . but which nevertheless acts in history and has effects on power. In this view, hegemony, any form of hegemony, is simply a screen onto which elites or would-be elites project their anxiety about being displaced by a heterogeneous, multiform popular subject that always escapes being “represented” . . . completely by the political. . . . (52)

If there is any criticism to be charged against the Rodríguez volume, it is that, while two papers do speak of gender, by which they mean “women” in an apparently congealed and unanalyzed social sense, the project of subaltern studies represented here has not evolved sufficiently to include any other significant form of gender subalternity. This is particularly evident in Marcelo Bergman’s and Mónica Szurmuk’s essay on “Gender, Citizenship, and Social Protest: The New Social Movements in Argentina,” as though the important work being done since the return to constitutional democracy (and even before in some spheres) by lesbians, gays, and transsexuals were not a part of the “new social movements” in that country.

For those looking for a solid text to use in a class on Latin American cultural studies, whether as an adjunct to a more conventional course on literary/critical theory or, as is becoming frequent, a substitution for the latter as part of a commitment to affirm the urgency of replacing a literature-based program with one that is culture-based. Moreover, the volume is profitably used in conjunction with the one edited by Ileana Rodríguez in order to stress the importance of moving beyond text-based studies (now highly problematical in their identification), to the study of the largest issues possible in terms of the processes of symbolic meaning in Latin American societies.

The organization of the volume is excellent and lends itself to a very clear progression of backgrounds and issues in the organization of a course. Thirty-five essays are grouped into eight sections: Globalización y multiculturalidad; Estudios culturales latinoamericanos: aperturas y límites; Crítica, ideología y estudios culturales; Memoria y territorialidad; Márgenes sociales, género, ciudadanía; Intelectuales, esfera pública y políticas culturales; Culturalismo y crítica del canon; Saberes locales, movimientos sociales y construcción de sujetos; there is a postscript by John Beverley. Many of the essays were written originally for this volume; some are related to previ-

ously published work and/or ongoing research agendas of the scholars included. There are those scholars who are associated with the consolidation of Latin American cultural studies in the past twenty years, like John Beverley, Marc Zimmerman, Ileana Rodríguez, Mabel Moraña, Nelly Richard, Alberto Moreiras; some of these names are represented in the Ileana Rodríguez volume, while Moreiras's book is commented on below. Others have come out of more traditional literary studies, although most have been known over the years for their sociopolitical commitments that explain why cultural studies now stands as the most appropriate sphere of their work: Jean Franco, Hernán Vidal, Debra A. Castillo, Sara Castro-Klarén, to name only a few in each category. The displacement of a strictly literary emphasis is represented by the inclusion of the art historian José Teixeira Coelho Neto.

Literature is always present—this because the simple fact is that, as much as we may wish our students had more a comprehensive grasp of Latin American societies and diverse cultural productions, literature is the culture base most readily to be depended on in languages and literature departments. But the enormous value of a collection such as this one is that it provides the opportunity to move beginning and even advanced graduate students, in the sort of course taken early in a graduate studies career, away from literature and toward major issues in cultural production. For this reason, the organization of the volume shies away from one alternative approach, which is to complement the study of literature with the study of other specific forms of cultural production that may or may not be taught in other universities disciplines, such as film, music, plastic arts, theater, television, and the like. Such a volume would be useful, but that is not the one Moraña has produced. Rather the goal has been to discuss the overarching issues of cultural production, as demonstrated by the eight section divisions.

In general, the materials of the volume are well balanced. Certainly, although there is not complete gender equality among the list of contributors, one can be immediately struck by how well women scholars are represented. Unfortunately—and despite the participation of women scholars—this volume demonstrates the endemic inability/disinclination/principled avoidance of gender issues, despite the inclusion of a fragment of Castillo's work on border prostitutes in the section on "Márgenes sociales, género, ciudadanía" (a rather heterogenous conglomeration, one might add). And since gender issues understood in terms of feminism are eschewed, it is no surprise that queer studies are nowhere to be found, despite the inclusion in this section of an essay by Brad Epps, who has done major work on Juan Goytisolo and other gay/homosexual/queer writers of Spain. Such issues are briefly alluded to in his treatment of the politics of immigration and immigration restrictions. Thus, those faculty members who chose to use the Moraña compilation as the core of a course on contemporary Latin American cultural studies would do well to supplement it with a selection of 4-6 essays on the diverse facets of gender studies—say, maybe essays drawn from the fine Mexican journal *Debate feminista* or garnered from various sources. One possibility might be the volume *¿Qué son los estudios de mujeres?* (Ed. Marysa Navarro y Catharine R. Stimpson [México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultural Económica, 1998]), although it is important to note that the volume is made up of Spanish-language translations of material written originally in English, and the purpose of both volumes is to avoid simply "applying" Anglo-American/French theorizing to Latin America. I know of no similar volume of research written originally in Spanish and Portuguese, although some very fine and interesting original work is now being done in the area in those two languages.

A final note: the Moraña volume is written in Spanish and uses "América Latina" in the title, yet all of the essays are in Spanish and none is in Portuguese (although Portuguese is Teixeira Neto's native language) and Brazil is virtually absent from consideration. At the level of intel-

lectual sophistication this volume represents, it is not unreasonable to suggest that scholars and students should—and perhaps would—possess an equal level of linguistic sophistication, such that essays written directly in Portuguese could be included. I think it is a legitimate cultural studies goal to argue for an appropriate integration between Spanish-speaking Latin America and Brazil, such that Brazil does not continue to be either the caboose of Latin American Studies or a radically autonomous realm from that inhabited by those who insist only on reading Spanish (the autonomy of Brazilian Studies is underscored by the Existence of BRASA, the Brazilian Studies Association).

Moreiras is part of the cultural studies faculty at Duke, and his work is included in the Rodríguez anthology. Moreiras's own contribution to these debates is in returning to the difficult questions of Latin American regionalism, but no longer in terms of the abiding question as to whether it is legitimate to speak of a unified field designatable as "Latin America" (a postulation attractive to various points on the political spectrum). Rather, Moreiras is concerned to identify how one can discover in Latin American cultural production, and the critical reflection it provokes (critical being as much the adjective here of criticism, in the academic, professional sense, as it is of critique, in the intellectual sense), an oppositional stance to globalism.

Moreiras's essays are marvelously subtle in all of the questions they raise with regard to how Latin American literature can and may be different (with all of the ambiguities these modals allow for), and as against what they are different, less in the Derridean sense than in the standard semiotic sense: what are the plays of difference that enable the identification of a Latin American cultural production and a Latin American opposition to globalization. Moreover, Moreiras carries this argument beyond the immediately accessible notion of whether there is a Latin American cultural production capable of mounting an opposition to the underdifferentiation of globalism to consider it in the context of how the very study of Latin America, whether from abroad or from "within" Latin America, is conditioned by the processes of globalization, one of the strongest being the American university system promoting the study of Latin America/Latin American cultural studies. Some of the biggest names in the field (a good portion of whom are Latin American by birth) pursue Latin American cultural studies within not inconsiderably funded U.S. academic corporations, and it would be no exaggeration to say that well over half (and, indeed, perhaps much, much more) of the annual bibliography of Latin American studies emanate from such U.S. academic forums, and additionally, a growing body from Western Europe.

Cultural studies—especially along the lines of the documents in the Rodríguez volume—are often criticized for never actually getting around to talking about cultural production. This is painfully evident in Walter D. Mignolo's rather solipsistic *Local histories/Global Designs; Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000]—solipsistic in the sense that it involves personalized accounts of the intellectual development of the individuals involved in the field, which they, in turn, clearly see themselves as modeling. Such an accusation is, however, decidedly unfair: we do not lack for analyses of textual production, as a quick check of the amount of references that appear yearly on any major text reveal. What we are lacking are the intellectual underpinnings for talking about texts and, more importantly, for justifying in the first place talking about the texts. Always implicit in cultural studies is a return to the twin questions: Why produce culture? and Why study culture? And equally always implicit in cultural studies is the reply, Because culture is a contested site of empowering symbolic representation, and Criticism examines how that empowerment does, or does not, take

place—always understanding also that criticism and theorizing are themselves other forms of cultural production.

Nevertheless, it is still refreshing that Moreiras grounds his examination of the difference—the differentiating and the differential—of Latin American cultural production with reference to specific texts. These are not, to be sure, close readings of selected texts toward illustrating some overarching category of literary production. Rather, they are examples of textual practices that illustrate the very large issues about cultural production and the practice of criticism Moreira is interested in exploring. Toward this end, I particularly liked his intervention in the by now messy debate over testimonial literature because of the ways in which he questions or decenters the notion that there is a framable reality about which it is possible to provide a testimonial identifiable as such within our institutional practices. This is an issue substantially different from the Menchú/Stoll controversy, which has turned on how reliable the “truth” is that Menchú claims to be telling.

Menchú is the only woman writer who seems to have attracted any sustained attention from the quarters of cultural and subaltern studies represented by these books under review. The irony of the elision of gender—of the feminist, the queer, and even the examination of masculinism itself (i.e., masculinist studies)—is evident in the way in which Moreiras quotes several times from the introduction of *Bodies that Matter*, by one of the foundational figures of queer studies, Judith Butler. Yet Butler’s theoretical propositions are degendered in order to put them to the service of the examination of indigenous difference. The irony lies not in the accommodation of Butler’s ideas: it would be absurd to allege they cannot be made to do service in quarters other than gender difference. Rather, the irony lies with the fact that the grounding principle of subaltern studies is the recovery of subjects that resist assimilation into govern hegemonies, a definition that ought to extend—and yet is something that appears to fail to take place—to oppositional feminisms and antiheteronormative queerness.

Egan’s book on Carlos Monsiváis is long overdue, as it is difficult to understand why there has taken this long for someone to provide a comprehensive overview of his enormous contributions to Mexican culture and to the study of Mexican culture. Monsiváis’s contributions are clearly twofold. On the one hand, Monsiváis is engaged in a wide-ranging analysis of contemporary Mexican cultural production, particularly—but not exclusively—the culture that has been produced with reference to Mexico City. Moreover, Monsiváis has focused himself preferentially on popular cultural issues. Although he has exercised a considerable influence in correcting the record with regard to the literary movement known as the Contemporáneos (especially in breaking the code of silence of academic critics as concerns the extensive homoerotic dimensions of their writing and public personas), Monsiváis has focused mostly on popular culture, and in this way he has mediated the often raucous divisions in Mexico Studies concerning the relative importance to be assigned to so-called high or elite culture and the advisability of paying respect to the staggering output in Mexico in the arenas of popular culture, whether weighted in terms of the traditional and the folkloric, in terms of the (often cheaply) commercial, or in terms of subaltern resistance hegemonic institutional culture.

Mexico has every reason to promote its accomplishments in the realm of international artistic circles, in literature as well as any other arts category imaginable (even if Mexico has not had quite as many Nobel Prizes in literature as it might wish to aspire to). Yet, the enormous pressure to pay academic and official heed to these accomplishments (which often tend to concentrate on culture produced in the twentieth century, with due consideration for the period of the Baroque)

has meant that the marvelous accomplishments in film, popular music, television, magazines and comic books, arts and crafts, and the like, although they are omnipresent as constituents of daily life in Mexico, rarely attract sustained and principled cultural analysis. Or, as in the case of film, only “high art” may receive sustained analysis, while the vaster and more popular dimensions are ignored or dealt with superficially.

At the same time, Monsiváis is himself a major producer of cultural texts. As the major contemporary chronicler of Mexico City, one of the fascinating (almost morbidly so) megalopolises of our current day, customarily—and dubiously—honored as the largest city in the world. Monsiváis has, in his approximately a dozen published collections of essays (in addition to numerous prologues and collaborations, notably in forums like *Debate feminista*), dealt with all an impressive panorama of the complex diversity of life in the Mexican capital. The acute irony of his scrutiny and the precision of his ability to focus on eloquent detail and yet see the larger social and political implications of those details have provided for some of the most satisfyingly entertaining and yet intellectually profound essays ever written about Latin American urban reality. (Americans wishing to know more about Monsiváis would well do better nowadays to read his essays than most of Fuentes’s fiction, although it is regrettable that so little of Monsiváis has been translated, and then not always adequately.)

It would be difficult to distribute Monsiváis’s texts between one column devoted to his chronicles of life in Mexico City as literary texts and another devoted to critical analysis of Mexican cultural production, because both categories draw from each other. Moreover, the intellectually audacious stands of Monsiváis’s writings are meant to be profoundly disruptive of the routine work of seeing culture in his society. Two examples serve to make this point: 1) his insistent recovery of the homoeroticism of the *Contemporáneos*, which is only part of a larger project on the history of sexual mores and ideologies in Mexico, including the establishment, once and for all, of a record of the sexually queer in Mexico; and 2) the defense of the customarily lamented chaos of urban life, driven by the facile formula to the effect that the larger the city, the more chaotic its life is, and the greater degree to which that chaos should be deplored. *Los rituales del caos* (1995) is a defense of the texture of life in contemporary Mexico City and a systematic resemanticization of the term “chaos,” toward demonstrating, moreover, that chaos is what is most productive and glorious about life in the megalopolis.

Eagan’s monograph is a systematic survey of these two sides to Monsiváis’s writing—that of the journalist and that of the literary author—and she does an admirable job with the vast amount of material she provides an accounting of. Inevitably, a certain amount of institutional academicism creeps into Eagan’s discourse, and if there is any point on which to fault her it is in not dealing with what is one of the most significant dimensions of Monsiváis prominence in Mexican culture at this juncture of its history, which is the relationship between his attention to the history of sexual Otherness in Mexico, his own personal sexual history (after all, Monsiváis is “todo un personaje” in the everyday anecdotal life of Mexico City), and what there is of gay or queer camp at the core of his *écriture*. Nevertheless, Eagan’s monograph is very useful as the long-needed introduction to this author’s work, and while it exemplifies on the one hand a traditional “author and works” approach to a major literary figure, it is on the other hand the showcasing of one enormously influential model for cultural studies in Mexico and Latin America.

In addition to publishing some of the finest original work in Hispanic cultural studies, Duke University Press is also bringing out, in a series entitled *Latin America Otherwise: Languages,*

Empires, Nations translations of distinguished works published in other languages, as much studies published originally in Spanish in Latin America as in other Western languages. Gruzinski's examination of baroque images relating to the conquest of Mexico and their various reinscriptions in modern Mexico was originally published in French and seems to have had little circulation among Mexicanists, at least in the United States. Its availability now in English should make it more accessible (one assumes that the translation into English of major Latin American cultural studies will serve primarily, by contrast, the interests of non-Latin Americanists, for whom Spanish is not a readily available research resource).

Gruzinski's historical sweep is nothing if not audacious, and it extends from the time of the Conquest to the circulation of Hispanic/Mexican images in Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*, in which the overall apocalyptic vision includes a version of the American hysteria over a Mexican takeover of the U.S. Southwest, with the Los Angeles of Ridley's film serving as ground zero of the brown menace (it is commonly said that, in demographic terms, the four largest cities of Mexico are Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Los Angeles).

Gruzinski's use of the rather high-volume word "war" in his title is the consequence of the enormous stakes, in terms of symbolic representation and its consequences for social power, in the wielding of images in Mexican society. Mexico may be no different from other societies in terms of such "wars of images," but the particular intensity of the collision of images traditions in perhaps one of the culturally richest countries of the Americas is. Gruzinski does not refer to Todorov's *The Conquest of America* (originally published in French in 1982; English translation, 1984), in which that cultural theorist promoted the idea of a conquest by the Spaniards, not by arms (at least not wholly and exclusively), but by semiotics: the Spaniards were more able to grasp and to manipulate the sign systems of the Aztec others, but the latter fatally collapsed Hispanic difference into their own codes, which led to their loss of the war of images/semiotics. But there is a lot that is Todorovian as it traces the synergetic relationship between the images of the Hispanic Baroque and Aztec culture, and then as that relationship becomes ever reinscribed in the distinctive cultural moments of modern Mexico, picking up along the way the incursion of American popular culture. This process is eloquently iconized in the cover image of the paperback edition, where a traditional image of Our Lady of Guadalupe—itsself long recognized as the master icon of the Mexican Mestizo accommodation between the Catholic Hispanic and the pre-Columbian indigenous (cf. Anita Brenner's 1929 classic, *Idols behind Altars*, also not cited by Gruzinski)—has the head of Marilyn Monroe substituting for that of the Virgin Mary/Tonantzín, although it could well have been Madonna. Readers will find more of a history of the Baroque image in Mexico than the recurring reinscriptions mentioned above: that is, there is more analytic emphasis placed on the former images than on the cultural production deriving from the latter, which could well be pursued, in addition to the obvious realm of painting, in photograph and graphic art like Mexico's extensive record of comic books (cf. Rius's many uses of the standard stock of Mexican Baroque images in his highly original cartoon art), not to mention in Mexico's vast filmography. But this a valuable contribution because of the way in which it enhances the need for cultural studies to look at forms of cultural production other than literature.

Quiroga's study, which appears at first glance to be about gay culture in Spanish-speaking Caribbean societies (with one chapter devoted to the Mexican poet and dramatist Xavier Villaurrutia), is an extremely important contribution to the study of gender in Latin America, precisely because it attempts to go beyond the fossilizing and ultimately quite dangerous category of "gay writing" to explore the culture-specific ways in which homoerotic desire is encoded in cultural

production. It is unfortunate that the subtitle of the work includes the phrase *Latino America*, which points towards Latino writing in the United States and/or toward Latin America, when in reality the dominant focus of the book is on the Caribbean and the extension of Caribbean culture in Latino culture in the United States (i.e., Ricky Martin mostly). Geographic designations for Spanish writing in the Americas are tricky, as are those for ethnic groups in the United States: even “Spanish-speaking” becomes notably problematical in the case of the latter. However, Quiroga’s book is held together by a certain continuity of non-U.S. Caribbean culture. Other Latino groups in the U.S. are not represented here (indeed, the Library of Congress subject tracings in the Cataloging-in-Publication information do not acknowledge the presence in the book of U.S. Latino culture), and it would be hard to envision writers from Argentina, Peru, or Brazil being included here either.

But now that I have my objections about the misleading subtitle of the book out of the way, I wish to acknowledge that I think this is one of the most important works written on homoerotic cultural production in Latin America to date. Quiroga’s basic proposition is straightforward: “gay” and “queer” are terms drawn from U.S. and Western European movement politics, and some of the most important figures in Latin America culture associated with homoerotic desire have little pertinence to those politics. It is unquestionable that some contemporary Latin American writers have tied into so-called First World movement politics, especially in the major urban centers of Latin America, as witnessed by gay pride events in those cities and the “out” nature of writings by, for example, Luis Zapata, Caio Fernando Abreu, Néstor Perlongher, Jaime Bayly, Glauco Mattoso, Osvaldo Sabino; Manuel Puig and Pedro Lemebel may not be completely assimilable to the First World movement politics model, but they have certainly been embraced by it. “Lesbian” works quite differently, but, then, we know that women’s history is substantially different. Yet Quiroga’s point is the same for the women cultural producers examined in his essays: First World definitions, whether specifically identified as “lesbian” or whether characterized by the broader word “queer” (or by “gay” as a [semi-] Spanish-language equivalent of “queer” serve to elide the material cultural constructs of the representation—the understanding, the articulation, the textual embodiment—of homoerotic desire in Latin America.

But Quiroga’s characterization goes well beyond the important axiom regarding the need to retain a sense of the material sociohistorical parameters of cultural production, because much more than just the proposition that the lesbian or queer are enunciated in different ways in Caribbean society. Rather, they may well not be enunciated at all—at least, not in ways that would make them recognizable within the ideological parameters of First World movement politics. Quiroga, thus, rightly decries what now exists as a critical record on many Latin American writers that assimilates them to one or another of the models for study homoerotic cultural production available in scholarship on U.S. writers and that surveys the writing of Latin American writers with a critical optics allowing them to see—and only see—those features that make them gay etc. as understood by the models of movement politics. This is particularly obvious in the case of a popular performer like Ricky Martin, who defies the need of identity imperatives to make it clear, once and for all, whether he is gay or not. But Quiroga’s point is that what Martin is—what he does as a performer—cannot be encompassed by the stabilizing identities of gay:

Ricky may choose to claim his ethnic difference in order to gloss over details of his sexuality, but what he is doing, I think, is keeping alive the different constituencies that watch his performance. In this context, this is a more progressive project than the one presently entertained by the self-proclaimed engineers of the gay audience. To come out at this

point, to rupture the diversity of the viewing public, is to participate in a project that . . . may turn out to be a more insidious variant of capitalism than the one already in existence within a globalized economy. In this one, the oppressed become the oppressors, selling artifacts to the oppressed in order to entertain marginalization for the sake of profit. That Ricky chooses not to become the latest Latino doll for the already constituted moneyed gay and lesbian nomenclature [*sic*] is something I applaud. (189-90)

Of course, Ricky Martin is a rather easy cultural product to untangle, and he is one that raises immediately questions of capitalist profit in ways that Lydia Cabrera or Virgilio Piñera do not. But the point is still the same: the lesbian is part of late capitalist cultural politics that excludes most of Latin America, excepting some centers of metropolitan cultural production that are not represented in this study: I have written elsewhere about how we can understand American gay theater—i.e., Argentine productions—on Corrientes in Buenos Aires, but that is a long way from the material Quiroga examines. Yet there is another perspective, at least one that has to do with U.S. Latino culture: Ricky Martin is not the only American performer who has trouble with the gay label, but yet seems to do much to appeal to parameters of a gay identity; compare the cases of U. S. actors like Kevin Spacey and Tom Cruise, and the Brazilian musical performer Caetano Veloso also comes to mind in this regard).

In the end, what Quiroga ends up showing is that gay—and, perhaps, lesbian, although the radical difference of women's history comes back to haunt the attempt to theorize lesbian away—is, on any cultural grounds—a highly suspect and ultimately not very useful term. Quiroga overtly endorses a queer methodology (28), and if queer is understood to constitute anything that separates itself from the imperatives of patriarchal heteronormativity, then such a stance can serve to cover quite a bit of cultural ground, from the high art of Villaurutia's poetry and Cabrera's and Piñera's fictional writing; to the *bolero* sensibility of Olga Guillot and the performance persona of Ricky Martin, La Lupe, and Luis Miguel; to films like *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* and *Fresa y chocolate*. Quiroga provides an impressive coverage of Caribbean homoerotic culture, or of the erotic that is often but not always homoerotic, since the erotic in itself may be essentially antipatriarchal to begin with. And it is no accident that the cartography of queer Caribbean culture that Quiroga provides just happens to look quite a bit like Caribbean culture in general. Quiroga avoids engaging in dangerous and exoticizing propositions to the effect that "all Caribbean culture is queer by definition," which is a sensation that arises very much from the writing of some authors—Luis Rafael Sánchez, who is, regrettably, barely mentioned. Yet, one cannot help but observe that, while this is not a review of the canon and a lot of canon authors remain unmentioned, *Tropics of Desire* covers a significant inventory of major cultural producers, which is all the more reason to regret the absence of Luis Rafael Sánchez or Severo Sarduy; the latter is certainly a major queer cultural producer. Arenas is also only mentioned in passing, and Arenas is an interesting phenomenon, since he has come to be assimilated to an international gay culture, in part because of the dreadful film version of *Antes que anochezca* and despite his own serious reservations of the gay movement as he saw it from New York. Cabrera Infante might also have been profitably explored.

Fiol-Matta's study on Gabriela Mistral is, in many ways, the most interesting, and perhaps most significant, of this group of studies. This is not to minimize the importance of the collections of papers on cultural studies and subaltern studies. Yet, it is, to a large extent more of the same: the fields are now, if not an integral part of Latin American studies, at least a component that cannot be ignored. And now there is a certain amount of reduplication going on, in the sense

that, except for the controversy surrounding Rigoberta Menchú, one these scholars are unquestionably framing in feminist terms, the commitment remains solidly invested in masculinist culture—even when it means deconstructing the masculinist state. Indeed, the adjective “masculinist” is hardly (to be) used, as it would mean recognizing the gender subalternity—feminist and queer domains—that the very masculinism of these studies has yet to question their lack of attention to.

Fiol-Matta’s monograph is interesting along a number of axes. In the first place, it confronts squarely the queer dimensions—that is, the nonpatriarchal and antipatriarchal elements—of both Mistral’s public and private persona and her writings. Note that it is not a question of attributing lesbianism to Mistral, a lesbianism of which there is a lack of documentary proof (one might get a bit testy about the demands for documentary proof: how can you demand documentary proof of a phenomenon most areas of historical documentation systematically ignore and even purge?) and, most eloquently, a systematic and sustained collective repudiation of among Chilean and other scholars. Lesbianism can be defined in a number of different ways, and in a number of ways that are different from male homoerotic relations, and the matter has been addressed in varying ways by recent scholarship on Eleanor Roosevelt, with whom Mistral (without attributing any erotic significance to the fact) had an important friendship with. One cannot rehearse here the complex ways in which women have defined lesbian relationships among themselves, and Fiol-Matta herself does not enter into this terrain.

But Fiol-Matta does confront the queer dimensions of Mistral and how the principal areas in which her writing is of artistic, cultural, and social significance are those that relate to her configurations of a “queer motherhood,” a crucial oxymoron (or, at least, one that is apparently oxymoronic) for the examination of the relationship between iconic women and the state. For Fiol-Matta, what is paramount is the way in which Mistral’s queer persona served the interests of the Chilean state:

Some people consider Mistral’s image as being asexual or repressed. Others have compared her physicality to that of the nun. I don’t agree with either assessment; for me, Mistral was masculine and was seen in her own time as being mannish[, and this study] interprets the circulation of her sexual indeterminacy and speculates as to its possible ends. Mistral was not conventionally feminine, nor was she passing as a man—but she was not androgynous or asexual either. She was a prime example of what Judith Halberstam has usefully conceptualized as “female masculinity.” (xxvi-xxvii)

It is important to underscore how Fiol-Matta’s study is not an examination of Mistral’s relationship to Chile: this not a biography of Mistral’s life as an exemplary Chilean one or how she represented Chile in her poetry. Rather, it studies how Mistral was used by the State and how her poetry became a part of Chilean national discourse, serving a diversity of ideological positions and government administrations (most recently, the Pinochet neofascist regime, which changed the name of the national publishing house in her honor, dumping the indigenous name it had been given by the overthrown socialist government of Salvador Allende). Chilean society has traditionally been one of the most homophobic in Latin America. There have been changes since the return to constitutional democracy, but Chile still remains probably the most homophobic among the Southern Cone countries. So one be surprised at why Chilean society would wish to monumentalize the gender nonconformity—i.e., the queerness—of Gabriela Mistral. But the point is that the projects of nationalism seek resonances in iconic figures and symbolic representations that contribute to their self-sustaining and self-perpetuating ideologies, and the essential masculinism

of Mistral's persona and her writings reinforced these ideologies. By contrast to other women writers who may evince an oppositional feminism that seeks to delegitimize patriarchal masculinism—e.g., Elena Poniatowska in Mexico, Ana Lydia Vega in Puerto Rico, Clarice Lispector in Brazil—Mistral's gender nonconformity gibed with the dominate discourse of the Chilean state: Mistral comes across as the quintessential Lacanian phallic mother, although Fiol-Matta does not invest in so many words in this characterization.

Halberstam's concept of a "female masculinity" certain takes a side-step from feminism, and its is questionable whether or not female masculinism is necessarily queer: after all, phallic women are always comfortable at the centers of masculinist power (e.g., Margaret Thatcher, Eva Perón, Golda Meier) because they appear to confirm in their own voice the absolute legitimacy of the discourse of that power. Sexuality, eroticism, homoerotic desire need to be denied Gabriela Mistral, as both a public persona and as a poetic voice, because *that* is what would have really queered her chances to be a part of the official Chilean canon. Thus, one might wonder whether Mistral is really useful in an agenda of queer social or cultural politics, just as much as it is even more questionable whether she is useful for a feminist agenda. The real importance of Fiol-Matta's study is not to have settled this matter in a completely convincing fashion, but rather to have brought gender, and gender dissidence, to the forum of a discussion about the expropriative uses by the state of cultural production and the individual cultural producer's collaboration with the projects of the state.

David William Foster, Arizona State University

Corpa Vargas, Mirta. *Eva Perón en el cristal de la escritura: Mabel Pagano, personaje literario y postrauma*. New York, Washington, D.C./Baltimore, Boston: Peter Lang, 2000. 136 pp. ISBN 0-8204-4497-9

Mirta Corpa Vargas's slim volume on the historical and literary images of Eva Perón examines the multifaceted approach to understanding the legendary figure that the author Mabel Pagano undertook while writing her novel *Eterna*. Corpa Vargas's study is heavily influenced by psychological-social theories for understanding identities and behaviors, and she blends these views with literary analyses in order to understand the complexities of the novel, which was published in 1982 but failed to receive much critical attention. Corpa Vargas divides her investigation into three chapters and frames these three with an introduction and a concluding chapter, and though the basic approach is straight forward, the internal structure appears to be labyrinthine at times. The heavy use of theory is not as evenly balanced with textual analysis, and as a result Corpa Vargas's argument twists and turns for many pages before it connects again with the novel. However, despite the abundance of framing theories, Corpa Vargas does present the reader with an interesting angle for examining the paradoxical figure of Evita.

In her first chapter "Al escribir la vida de una mujer," Corpa Vargas concentrates on deciphering the term "biografía novelada" which Pagano applies to her work *Eterna*. For Corpa Vargas this denomination is critical for the understanding of Eva Perón's image in this particular novel because the hybridized genre of historical novels creates an uneasy resting place for the Historical figure (the real Eva Perón) and the historical figure (the fictional Eva Perón) within the same work. According to this analysis, Pagano achieves a synthesis by developing the plot through two voices: the narrator who divulges the historically correct information, and the voice