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## Comentario Editorial

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### *The Origins of Central American Narrative*

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On behalf of the entire editorial committee, we are very pleased to present the 9<sup>th</sup> volume of *Brújula* as the first volume of the journal to be made available exclusively as an online edition. This volume is devoted to the beginnings of narrative production in Central America, starting in the 1870s, and stretching to the *vanguardista* period of the 1920s. While we have little doubt that the cultural production of the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has a clear place in contextualizing the works of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century writers, this period provides a very developed field of study in its own right, and we feel that the overall thematic concerns of this issue, as well as the thoroughly considered and well-developed arguments and information provided by this issue's contributors, will give additional appreciation for this period and region in Latin America's cultural history.

There is little question of the increased presence of Central American literary and cultural studies within the past few decades, through the criticism of scholars throughout both the region and the world. The growth of conferences and the publication of books and articles dedicated to Central America provides evidence of the newfound dedication to studying its cultural production. At the same time, the study of Central American literature and culture in many ways has the feel of a recently-formed discipline, even despite being the home of the recognized father of the *modernista* movement, and of Latin America's second Nobel prize laureate, the first to win the award for narrative production. This issue of *Brújula* should make clear the need to restructure the canon of both Central American and Latin American literatures (beyond the works of Rubén Darío and Miguel Ángel Asturias) in particular as taught in the United States. The influence of Darío should not be discounted in terms of understanding the development of *modernismo* in Latin America, yet in this same way, the literary and cultural history of Mexico, the Caribbean, and South America can scarcely be written in full without the influences and interactions of diverse Central American literary figures. Guatemalans José Milla and Enrique Gómez Carrillo provide some of the earliest approaches to literary narrative from anywhere in Latin America; writers from throughout Central America, including Rafael Arévalo Martínez, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Max Jiménez, and Rogelio Sinán, were essential to the emergence of Latin America's *vanguardista* movement in the 1910s and 20s; Rubén Darío and Francisco Gavidia provided a clear aesthetic influence on writers from the Caribbean and Mexico, including José Martí; and the multiple crossings and influences that have been occluded with time surely merit a similar place in the cultural history of the Americas.

Central America's history is undoubtedly complex, marked by events that have constantly unified and divided the nations and peoples of the isthmus. Its cultural production reflects this complexity, and we feel it essential to put into

greater focus the works and events that allow us to comprehend the political, social, and aesthetic forces that span the history of the region. What is evidenced by this volume is the diverse number of lines that are crossed by the writers and works included here, even at a very early stage in Central America's literary history. The focus on indigeneity and the crossing of racial lines has been a constant in Central American literature and culture as far back as can be traced, yet its treatment by writers from throughout the isthmus reveals exceptionally nuanced approaches to "el problema social del indio," to use Miguel Ángel Asturias's phrase; the crossing of gender lines is pronounced in the very early stages of Honduran literary production, as is apparent from Ericka Parra's article; and the truly transnational nature of literary production from the mid-1800s and on becomes a recurring theme within this issue, and one that remains prescient today. The following contributions should undoubtedly increase our understanding of this period, and demonstrate the remarkable approaches that can be taken in working with this field.

We are exceptionally grateful to have the participation of noted Central American critic and author Arturo Arias to open this issue with his article "Articulando modernidades heterogéneas: producción literaria centroamericana a fines del siglo diecinueve y principios del veinte." In this article, featured in the *Perspectives* section, Arias traces the roots of the *modernista* movement in Central America through the writings of a representative selection of authors from across the region. Arias pays particular attention to the literary production of Rubén Darío, Rafael Arévalo Martínez, Froylán Turcios, Francisco Gavidia, and Carlos Gagini, and discusses the effects of the *unionista* movement, the *generación del 98* in Spain, and the prevailing discourses of race and gender on these writers. Arias approaches these writers in terms of the constant pulls of metropolitanism and provincialism, of the conflicts of masculinities and race, and of the diverse projects of nationalism that recur throughout this time period. The

overwhelming presence of Darío is clear throughout, yet Arias is careful to establish both the at times positive and at times negative influence he had upon other writers, yet also the ways in which other writers, such as Gavidia, provided an influence over Darío's production. Overall, this *Perspectives* article provides a strong introduction to the themes of nation, race, gender, and aesthetics that run throughout this issue, showing the efforts of writers from this period to mediate their conceptions of Central America through the necessarily heterogenous and transnational region they inhabited.

In the *Archivo* section, Carlos Cañas Dinarte presents the first officially commissioned map of an independent El Salvador, created in 1858 by the German engineer Maximilian von Sonnenstern. As Cañas writes in his accompanying article, this map was created twenty four years after the first official attempt to depict the cartography of the nation, then a part of the República Federal de América Central, though this earlier map was lost as a consequence of the political and military conflicts of the 1830s. Cañas describes the specific details found on von Sonnenstern's 1858 map, and provides a clear sense of the historical background that conditioned the making of it. Of particular interest is the truly multinational nature of this project, commissioned by the relatively nascent Salvadoran government, by a German engineer and cartographer residing in Nicaragua, and printed by a British publisher. This piece puts into clear focus the inherently transnational nature of early Central American cultural production, even in the case of a document so tied to a specific nation, and carries over into the transnational concerns raised throughout the various sections of this issue.

Opening the *Enfoques* section, Adrian Kane's article, "Humor, Irony and Surrealism in Luis Cardoza y Aragón's *Maelstrom: Films telescopiados* (1926)" begins by highlighting the scarcity of criticism available regarding earlier Central American texts. The focus of his reflection lies on the Spanish American avant-

garde, specifically on *Maelstrom: Films telescopiados*, a lesser-known text by one of Guatemala's most prolific twentieth-century authors, Luis Cardoza y Aragón. Through the use of humor, irony, and surrealism as elements of play, Kane underlines "the way in which the text undermines dominant intellectual discourses and literary conventions" (55). He also emphasizes the fact that for Cardoza, aesthetics, and specifically innovative artistic forms, cannot be separated from social revolutions, similarly pointing out that in Guatemala, avant-garde literary movements were part of larger cultural movements directed in favor of a democratic state. Guatemalan intellectuals of the time viewed Surrealism as a movement deeply rooted in the subconscious that could reveal a greater understanding of humanity, as well as the ability of the Surrealist movement to challenge the *status quo*. Kane observes the disjointed structure of *Maelstrom*, and considers it an example of Cardoza's trademark style of blurring genres. He turns to Breton's theories to strengthen his own argument regarding Cardoza's inclination to believe that Surrealism is not merely escapism, but rather an attempt to reconcile dreams and waking reality, and, for Cardoza, a means of overcoming the positivist influences of his time.

In her article "Caballos tropicales y otras fieras: crítica y límites del discurso crítico de Rafael Arévalo Martínez," Claudia García interprets the works of the Guatemalan author as expressions of psycho-zoomorphic and portrait narration techniques. More specifically, she reads Arévalo Martínez's works as a critique, from the inside, of the bourgeoisie as the class which was most indebted to the dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Despite this, García argues, these texts do not question the foundation of the liberal project, but rather build solidarity with it. Consequently, excluding completely the indigenous population, referring to the *mestizo* only with disdain, and occluding any feminine protagonist. Citing the work of Marta Casaús, García underlines the

power (established through participation of various social and philosophical networks) of Guatemalan intellectuals during the 1910 and 1920s.

Verónica Ríos's article, "De conflictos y ambigüedades: estrategias de representación del héroe costarricense Juan Santamaría," proposes an intriguing and well-developed reading of Costa Rican national hero Juan Santamaría as a popular figure whose life story following his death is reappropriated and resignified by the country's economic elites. In particular, Ríos reflects on how and why Santamaría was made into a national hero, and how Costa Rican literary elites (members of the "Olympus" generation) responded to such a resignification of a popular figure.

Ericka Parra's article, "El personaje de *Blanca Olmedo*: cuando escribir era 'oficio de hombres,'" places the novel *Blanca Olmedo*, by Lucila Gamero de Medina, into the social and political context of the 1910s. Her reading focuses on the role of the institutions of religion and education, and their reception by the protagonist, who, in Parra's words, "resulta una metonimia del discurso al derecho a la libertad de credo, el acceso a la cultura científica y educación laica para las mujeres" (133). The argument provides a clear space for the writings of Gamero de Medina within the larger context of female writers throughout Latin America during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Flora Tristán, and Clorinda Matto de Turner.

Working through the same time period in El Salvador, Ricardo Roque-Baldovinos includes his article "Una incurable tristeza de raza: La figura del indígena en la literatura salvadoreña (1880-1910)." In his argument, he establishes the indigenous class as an ambiguous social signifier for writers of the time, upon which the formation of political and national projects were written, and traces the resulting discourses through poetic, narrative, and journalistic works preceding and following the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The article highlights the re-appropriation of indigenous myths in line with biblical symbols to

promote programs of modernization, as well as the use of the indigenous body as an idealization of a bucolic past. Overall, Roque's article details the tenuous position of the indigenous population, as both figuratively present and effectively invisibilized through the literary production of this period.

Marta Casaús's article, "La representación del indio en las generaciones literarias del 10 y del 20 en Guatemala," closes the *Enfoques* section, and provides a comparative analysis of the works of two major Guatemalan authors in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Carlos Wyld Ospina and Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla. In this article, Casaús presents a link between the political stances of the authors in question, and their treatment of the indigenous population, largely in the works *El autócrata* and *La tierra de las Nahuyacas*, by Wyld, and *Madre Milpa*, by Samayoa. Her reading of their texts highlights Wyld's attempts to redeem the place of the Indian in Guatemalan society, while arguing against the more commonly held idea of Samayoa as an intellectual who wrote in positive terms about the indigenous population, and she places this discourse plainly within the context of the nationalist and theosophist movements that were prevalent in Central America in the first half of the past century.

For this issue's *En Route* section, we asked professors Julia Medina, Yajaira Padilla, and Yansi Pérez to reflect upon their experience as Central American scholars within their institutions. We were particularly interested in hearing about how they incorporate the teaching of non-canonical texts to the discussion of the Latin American literary canon, their perception of students' reception of non-canonical texts, whether they had encountered any difficulties within their departments by introducing non-canonical literature, and how they positioned themselves for the job market in terms of presenting themselves as Central Americanists, Latin Americanists, or generalists. Medina writes of the benefits of teaching non-canonical texts, despite this being more work for the instructor, and the great reception her students have given the less well-known Nicaraguan

authors. Similarly, Padilla remarks that teaching in the periphery of Latin American Cultural Studies has the potential to reach students and engage them in fields that might otherwise be inaccessible to them. Lastly, Pérez candidly writes of both her concern and relief at encountering an academic position as a Central Americanist. In all of these cases, their training as Central American scholars and the teaching of a little known literary tradition has proven beneficial for their students and for the institutions where these professors have taught.

The *Arte Factu* section's artist and commentator is Beatriz Cortez. The portraits featured in this section, "César" and "Rigoberto," are part of a collection of oil pastels titled *American Dream Blues*. These portraits, Cortez explains, bring visibility to the Central American workers of the Physical Plant Management at the campus of California State University, Northridge who usually pass unnoticed. The simple title of each portrait and the meticulous depictions of the way each employee wears the official uniform assert the worker's individual identity, resisting erasure or exclusion from the campus community.

This issue's *Topographies* section features the interview "Problematizing a Century of Central American History, Geography, and Subjectivity: A Conversation with Ana Patricia Rodríguez," which occurred in November 2010. In this discussion with Brian Davisson and Karina Zelaya, Professor Rodríguez discusses her views regarding Central American literary production and criticism. She acknowledges that we are currently at the beginning stages of articulating criticism on the Central American region, and thus, much of the work done by Central Americanists has focused on the contemporary period. Rodríguez also brings attention to the need for revisiting the different historical periods in the region itself, and she furthermore remarks that it is important that approaches to this field keep in mind trans-isthmian and transnational relations, as they have played a decisive role in shaping the different countries and subjectivities that comprise the Central American isthmus. As for the earlier

points of Central American cultural production, she comments that it is crucial to engage this period in order to build a comprehensive archive of Central American texts and authors that over time have been neglected, forgotten, or simply not well-known outside of their own national boundaries. In this same way, in working with the contemporary period, we must not exclude Central American cultural production that originates outside of physical national boundaries.

The books reviewed in this volume's *Traversía crítica* represent a great contribution to the field of Central American Studies as they present new critical approaches for studying the Isthmus, new archival material, revisions of the Latin American canon, in the literary field, and recollection of oral histories that question the official historical record of the region. Jeffrey Gauld and Lauria Satiago's *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (reviewed by both Elizabeth Skwiot and Andrew Kerr) offers an interdisciplinary study that through the employment of oral histories revisits and revises earlier twentieth century Salvadoran history, re-examining the events that led up to El Salvador's *Mantanza*, in 1932. Karen Poe's *Un decadentismo creativo* (reviewed by Bernal Herrera) represents an intellectual history project that reconfigures the Latin America literary canon that focuses on the "decadentista" narratives, simultaneously highlighting Central American contributions to this canon. Ana Patricia Rodríguez' *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literature and Culture* (reviewed by Oriel María Siu) proposes a *transisthmian* reading of Central American cultural production since its independence in the 19th century. Roberto Guzmán Marín's *Un viaje poco conocido: la visita de Elías al-Mawsili, sacerdote caldeo iraquí, a la America Colonial (1669?-1680)* (reviewed by Sandra Sandborn) presents a historical and critical analysis of the writings of Elías al-Mawsili, an Arab-catholic priest, consequently giving the reader an insight into the crossings of a Christian-Arab and colonial

American world. Juan Carlos Vargas' *Tropical Travel. The Representation of Central America in the Nineteenth Century. Facsimiles of Illustrated Texts (1854-1895)* (reviewed by Ana María Ferreira) comprises a detailed study of late 19th century travel narratives of North Americans in Central American; this work also provides extensive archival work material that includes a copy of the accounts narrated in its original language and illustrations that accompanied them.

Overall, we are very excited to present this volume, made possible by the contributions of a very distinguished group of scholars devoted to Central American literature and culture at various stages of their professional careers. We feel that it will provide a valuable resource in contextualizing the production of Central American writers and critics, both in its beginning stages a century and a half ago, and in the present period. We would like to thank the Hemispheric Institute on the Americas for providing financial and logistical support for the journal since its inception. We are likewise very grateful for the work of an exceptional editorial committee, in providing support throughout the editorial process, and in making possible the online publication of the journal for the first time. For this, we would also like to thank the Davis Humanities Institute for providing us with web hosting. We felt that making *Brújula* available as an internet resource would facilitate its use by scholars from throughout the United States, Latin America, and the rest of the world. In this way, it is our hope that the works of both established and up-and-coming scholars will be easier disseminated and received by those working in the field.