



The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays

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The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays Edited by Ilan Stavans "Like the novel and the short story, the essay is free-minded, ambitious, and seems to satisfy many needs at once," writes Ilan Stavans. "It entertains, it enlightens, it obfuscates, it confesses, it laments... What it cannot do, though, not even when it desperately tries to, is hide the truth: its texture is too crystalline, too genuine to hide the unhideable; and since essayists are lonely voices crying in the wilderness, their argument generates discomfort and is often censored by the powers that be. But Latin America has never been about silence."

For most English-speaking readers, however, even those familiar with the remarkable fictions flowing out of Latin America, the essay has been silent--invisible and unavailable. Now, in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays*, Ilan Stavans has broken that silence dramatically with an anthology that is as vast, as varied, and as fascinating as the region it represents. While retaining much of the flavor of Latin American fiction--the dazzling metaphors, richness of language, and sheer imaginative bravado--these essays give us the more intellectual, critical, and self-reflexive side of the dreaming mind that has so thoroughly entranced the literary world. From Baldomero Sanin Cano's lacerating critique of Theodore Roosevelt to Ezequiel Martinez Estrada's reverential reading of Thoreau; from Pablo Neruda's passionate Nobel acceptance speech to Mario Vargas Llosa's penetrating analysis of the destruction of the Incas; from Isabel Allende's and Carlos Fuentes's personal accounts of their writing to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's playful repudiation of the umbrella and Rosario Ferre's complex assessment of the role of the translator, this volume gives us the whole spectrum of concerns that have animated some of the greatest writers of our time. Of course, the political struggles that have afflicted the region for centuries--the "endemic dictatorships resembling tropical fevers," as Augusto Roa Bastos calls them--exert a constant pressure on the writing gathered here. Indeed, it is the attempt to understand the effects of history and politics on personal, cultural, and literary identities that makes these essays so compelling.

Enrique Anderson Imbert asserts that "the history of the essay does not show us a limbo of indecisive people or apprentices, but an emphatic assembly of spirits who felt confident, ingenious, and aware." With selections by Andres Bello, Jorge Amado, Julio Cortazar, Clairce Lispector, Octavio Paz, Ariel Dorfman, Manuel Puig, and many others, *The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays* is just such an assembly of spirits who deepen our awareness not only of literature but of the magical and terrifying truths of the human condition.

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