

ELS250.xxxx Latin American Fiction in Translation

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Instructor's Information

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Office Hours:

Class Schedule:

Course goals and objectives

Catalog Course Description: This course explores the thematic and stylistic variety of contemporary Latin American fiction in English translation. Students will explore the themes of dictatorship, struggle with nature, class and race relations, mestizaje, social and political unrest and alienation through the analysis of representative short stories, novellas and films. Experimental and fantastic fiction will also be considered. Students will learn about the literary movements that influenced writers in question.

Section Description: This course covers basic themes in the twentieth and early twenty-first century Latin American fiction, especially the short story. We will read stories from Latin American social realism, *costumbrismo*, cosmopolitanism, the *avant garde* and magic realism. We will view films based on major Latin American novels that deal with race, gender and class relations in Latin America, as well as purely experimental fictional works that dabble in the fantastic.

In this course you will:

☑ **Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.**

Students will read, reflect and respond to issues in the twentieth and early twenty-first century reflected in the literature. These issues include racial relations; the preterition of women and their use of the "inferior function" or manipulation to assert themselves; the collusion of the structures of power and their resorting to violence and censorship to preserve their privileges; the strict "double standard" regarding sexual freedom for women but not men; the absolute intolerance for any kind of behavior that deviates from norms established by the oligarchs in power; the major changes brought about by the Mexican and the Cuban revolutions and resulting backlash. We will also explore

purely aesthetic and fantastic works grounded on the study of mysticism and theories about the unconscious, as well as quantum philosophy. Secondary sources will be consulted during class activities and as part of the written and oral assignments.

☒ Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.

Students will be engaged in analyzing the literature and the movies and evaluating the evidence and arguments made in the literature that they read in the form of class and group discussions. These sources include articles about the changes in racial relation over the past half century, including graphics; reading sections of the theory of the fantastic by Tzvetan Todorov; reading sections of Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the archetypes and the collective unconscious and the concept of synchronicity; viewing interviews with CUNY Prof. Michio Kaku about the philosophical implications of quantum physics and its position on time travel and parallel universes.

☒ Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.

Students will produce two papers and one oral power point presentation on topics related to issues that were implicitly or explicitly presented in the literature and movies that they have read or seen.

☒ Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the relationship between the individual and society, including, but not limited to, anthropology, communications, cultural studies, history, journalism, philosophy, political science, psychology, public affairs, religion, and sociology.

Students use historical, cultural, and literary methodologies and theories to understand the social and political movements and issues in the 20th and early 21st century, as per the theories and authors mentioned above.. Class activities and assignments will deal with narrative and characterization techniques, narrative structure, Freudian concepts such as the Oedipus complex and the “mother/courtesan syndrome,” Jungian concepts of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, quantum mechanics as it relates to the surrealist concept of “objective chance,” and Luce Irigaray's feminist concepts of “sharing the world,” among others.

☒ Examine how an individual's place in society affects experiences, values, or choices.

Students will analyze the life and views of the characters in the literary works they read, and the views of various writers, and examine the impact of their views on individuals and societies in the 20th and early 21st century Latin America. Specifically, students will reflect and write about the repercussions of the values of former slave-holding societies even after abolition and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They will also examine the ways in which women worked around the limitations imposed on them by male-centered societies.

☒ Articulate ethical uses of data and other information resources to respond to problems and questions.

Students will explore major critical theories from various perspectives (race, gender, multiculturalism) in order to compare and contrast central issues recurring in the works read and seen in class. These critical perspectives will provide a basis to develop a critical view of works within the political, social and economic realities of the time.

By the end of the semester, you will be able to

- ☐ **Identify and discuss key authors, issues, and concepts related to Latin American literature and cultures, and relate them to universal themes and major psychological and philosophical currents also present in world literature;**
- ☐ **Recognize the characteristics of relevant social and political movements, such as Latin American social realism, cosmopolitanism and magic realism, and relate them to major Latin American social and political upheavals such as the Mexican, Bolivian and Cuban revolutions;**
- ☐ **Identify and describe the most representative works of Latin American fiction that deal with race, gender and class relations in Latin America;**
- ☐ **Develop critical analyses of the form and content of major works in Latin American literature based on various theories and perspectives, such as postmodern theory and criticism of the fantastic, Freudian and Jungian psychology, and quantum physics.**

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| Textbook, grading, and other class logistics |
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Textbooks: Roberto González Echevarría, *The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories*. Oxford University Press, 1997. Gabriel García Márquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981).

Suggested Films:

- Blow Up* (Antonioni, 1966; based on a story by Cortázar)
- Weekend* (Godard, based on a story by Cortázar)
- Eréndira* (Guerra, based on a story by GGM)
- A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* (Birri, based on a story by GGM)
- Love in the the Time of Cholera* (Based on a novel by GGM)
- Oriana* (Directed and scripted by Fina Torres)
- The Belle of the Alhambra* (Based on a story by Miguel Barnet)

Grades: Your final grade will be evaluated as follows:

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| Midterm..... | 30% |
| Final..... | 30% |
| 2 papers @ 15%..... | 30% |
| Oral PPP..... | 10% |

Note: As part of the course requirements, you are required to deposit two assignments in your ePortfolio.

Grade distributions: **A:** 95-100%, **A-:** 90-94%, **B+:** 86-89%, **B:** 83-85%, **B-:** 80-82%, **C+:** 76-79%, **C:** 73-75%, **C-:** 70-72%, **D+:** 66-69%, **D:** 63-65%, **D-:** 60-62%, **F:** -59 %, **WU:** Unofficial withdraw (\approx F), **W:** Withdraw

Syllabus ELS 250 Latin American Fiction in Translation Weekly Syllabus

| Week | Content |
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| Week 1 | <p>☐ Introduction to modern Latin American fiction: trends, themes and influences from abroad. GE: Intro, 3-23; Darío, "The Empress of China": 105. Woman as toy and trophy.</p> <p>☐ The artist and the sheltered woman in film: <i>Letters from the Park</i> (Director: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba, 1989, based on a story by Gabriel García Márquez).</p> |
| Week 2 | <p>☐ Modernism and the bizarre: Quiroga, "The Feather Pillow": the influence of E.A. Poe, Guy de Maupassant and Nikolai Gogol in Latin America.</p> <p>☐ <i>Cecilia</i> (Humberto Solás, 1981, based on the novel by Cirilo Villaverde) Class, race and gender in colonial and post-colonial societies. The intrinsic immorality of a slave-holding society. Villaverde and his forty years in New York City.</p> <p>☐ Discussion #1</p> |
| Week 3 | <p>Discussion #2</p> <p>☐ Magic realism: Film version of Isabel Allende's <i>The House of the Spirits</i> (Germany/Denmark/Portugal, 1993; directed by Bille August).</p> |
| Week 4 | <p>☐ The bizarre continued: Felisberto Hernández, "The Daisy Dolls": 165. Freudian "Mother/Courtesan syndrome"</p> <p>Discussion #3</p> |
| Week 5 | <p>☐ The women tell their story: Bombal, "The Tree":233; Ferré, "When Women Love Men": 462. Lispector, "The Crime of the Mathematics Professor":400. Luce Irigaray' concept of "sharing the world"</p> |
| Week 6 | <p>Discussion #4</p> <p>☐ MIDTERM. SCREENING: Rebellious women: <i>Carmen</i> (Saura, 1983). The universal archetype of the <i>femme fatale</i>.</p> <p>☐ ePortfolio deposit #1 due</p> |
| Week 7 | <p>☐ <i>Oedipus Mayor</i> (Triana, 1993)l. Universal archetypes (continued). The writers of the "boom": Donoso, "The Walk": 367; Cortázar, "The Night Face Up": 337. "Axolotl." Quantum physics and the possibility of time travel and parallel worlds. Michio Kaku: <i>Parallel Worlds</i>; Brian Greene, <i>The Elegant Universe</i>.</p> |

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| Week 8 | <p>☐ Discussion #5</p> <p>☐ Gabriel García Márquez (Nobel Prize, Colombia, 1982), <i>Chronicle of a Death Foretold</i>. Survival in a “macho” society: Jung’s “inferior function.”</p> |
| Week 9 | <p>☐ The "boom" continued: Fuentes, "Chac Mool." Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious: memories of the ancestral past.</p> |
| Week 10 | <p>☐ Discussion #6.</p> <p>☐ Asturias (Guatemala,1967), "The Legend...":242; <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> (México: Alfonso Arau, 1994, based on the novel by Laura Esquivel). Memories of the ancestral past (continued).</p> |
| Week 11 | <p>☐ ePortfolio deposit #2 due. Borges, "The South". The past regained: Borges and Proust.</p> |
| Week 12 | <p>☐ Review for the final. Student Power Point Presentations</p> |
| Week 13 | <p>FINAL EXAM</p> |

Policies

Classroom policies: The following policies have been instituted to ensure an optimal learning experience for all students:

- Please arrive on time.
- Please prepare for each class meeting by completing all writing/reading assignments beforehand.
- Please turn your cell phone to silence during class.
- Please turn off your cell phone during the exam and the quiz.

Valuing LaGuardia’s Diversity: As a college community we represent a world of perspectives on race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and nationality, to name a few. I concur with **the College’s Declaration of Pluralism**, if you have any suggestions in helping me to create a welcoming classroom environment, please tell me.

Rules for Personal Conduct: You are expected to obey the rules and regulations of the College about conduct. Disorderly or indecent behavior is not appropriate in a college setting. It is a violation of college rules and is not acceptable.

The student attendance policy: As stated in the college catalog: "Attendance in class is a requirement and will be considered in the evaluation of student performance. Instructors are required to keep an official record of student attendance. The maximum number of unexcused absences is limited to 15\% of the number of class hours. Note: Absences are counted from the first day of class even if they are a result of late registration or change of program" (117).

The academic dishonesty policy: As stated in the catalog: "Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in the City University of New York and is punishable by penalties ranging from a grade of 'F' on a given test, research paper or assignment, to an 'F' in the course or suspension or expulsion from the College. Academic Dishonesty includes:

- Cheating
- Plagiarism
- Internet Plagiarism
- Obtaining Unfair Advantages
- Falsification of Records and Official Documents
- Misconduct in Internships (117)

Policy on assigning the grade of Incomplete: As stated in the college catalogue: "The Incomplete grade may be awarded to students who have not completed all of the required course work but for whom there is a reasonable expectation of satisfactory completion. A student who is otherwise in good standing in a course defined as complying with the college attendance policy and maintaining a passing average but who has not completed at most two major assignments or examinations by the end of the course may request an incomplete grade. To be eligible, such a student must provide, before the instructor submits grades for the course, a documented reason, satisfactory to the instructor, for not having completed the assignment on time. Instructors giving IN grades must inform students in writing of the conditions under which they may receive passing grades. Departments may designate certain courses in which no incomplete grades may be awarded." (120).

Declaration of pluralism: The Education and Language Acquisition Department embraces diversity. We must respect each other regardless of race, culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability and social class. For detailed information regarding the policy, please refer to Student Handbook 2011-2012 (p.89).

ELS250 ASSIGNMENTS AND CLASS ACTIVITIES

Papers

Your papers should be 3-5 pages long and structured as follows:

- A. Introduction of your thesis
 - B. Supporting examples, with direct quotations from the text, documented in parenthetical notes, or references to the films
 - C. Conclusions based on your analysis
- Secondary sources must be properly documented.

Paper 1. Compare and contrast feminine characters in the stories and films discussed during the first 5 weeks in terms of a) social standing b) free will c) "the inferior function" d) polarization of roles as mother/lover.

Paper 2. Discuss how national and global trends and themes are shown in THREE writers or films **from part two of the course (since the midterm)** selected by you.

Oral Presentation (6-8 Minutes):

Prepare a 6-8 minute PPP based on a story in the anthology or a film based on a Latin American classic NOT DISCUSSED IN CLASS. Your presentation should identify

- a) the author/director
- b) the year of publication/film
- c) the style/ movement/critical reception
- d) brief (1 min max) summary of the plot
- e) main characters
- f) why you chose this story/ what you learned from it

You will be evaluated on:

- a) poise, presence, eye contact, delivery..... 30%
- b) spelling, graphics, accuracy of information35%
- c) incisiveness of your analysis and conclusions.....35%

CLASS ACTIVITIES

Activity #1 Latin American Studies acknowledge five major areas defined by geography, ethnicity, history, cultural heritage and/or language. These areas are:

1. Mexico and Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama)

[Nahua and Mayan civilizations]

2. The Spanish Caribbean (Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico) [Plantation societies and strong African influence]
3. The Andean Regions (Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay) [Inca and other regional empires; emeralds and precious metals]
4. The Southern cone (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay) [Nomadic cultures that resisted Spanish colonization; strong Italian, British and French influence after the 19th century]
5. Brazil [Colonized by the Portuguese; largest nation and one of the richest areas in Latin America; formerly an empire itself]

During the first two weeks, we have read stories and viewed films that reflect concerns from two of those areas: the Caribbean and the Southern cone. Working in groups of four, discuss the following [Each group will be assigned a story or a movie]:

1. Where is the author/director from?
2. When did he write/direct the story/film?
3. What is the main idea in the story/film?
4. How has the author addressed (or not) the major problems in his place and time?
5. What is place-specific and what is universal about the themes developed in the story/film?

Each group will address these questions in reference to the assigned story/film and report to the rest of the class. Keep notes to be used in for first ePortfolio assignment due the week of the midterm.

Activity #2: The House of the Spirits/ The Daisy Dolls

GROUPS 1 & 2: *The House of the Spirits*

1. When was the novel first published and why was it so important?
2. Describe *magic realism* and find examples of it in the film.
3. How does the film depict political changes in Chile over the twentieth century through the three generations of women (Clara, Blanca, Alba)?
4. What is the political background to the final section in the novel/film dealing with torture and persecution of dissidents?
5. Discuss the roles/choices of women portrayed in the film: Clara, Férula, Tránsito/Blanca.
6. How were marriages arranged in the film, and how does Esteban react to his daughter's decision to reject her French suitor in favor of Pedro?

GROUPS 3 & 4: *The Daisy Dolls*

1. How does Felisberto fit into twentieth century literary movements in Uruguay and Latin America? Describe the characteristics of *surrealism* and *expressionism*.
2. How is the writer's musical training reflected in the structure of the novella and the use of juxtapositions? Define the following musical terms: sonata form, counterpoint, theme and variations.
3. Would you describe this novella as a) science fiction b)fantastic c) grotesque or d) all of the above. Justify your choice.
4. The theme of humans creating other humans or human-like machines by artificial means arose around the time of the Industrial Revolution and the advances of modern science (late 18th century).

How does this story compare to *Frankenstein*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* or other works in film and literature? What is the final outcome in all of them? What message is implied?

5. What do you think is the difference between "erotic", "porn" and "grotesque"? Define your terms and try to place the novella in one of these categories.

6. How does the novella make a statement about a) the role of women in Latin American society b) the dark side of technology and c) the dark side of human sexuality?

Activity #3: CARMEN (SAURA, 1983)

GROUPS 1 & 2:

1. Find information about Prosper Mérimée's novel *Carmen* (1845).

2. Find information about Georges Bizet's opera of the same name (1875)

3. Why do you think the French author and composer chose Spain as the location and nationality of their heroine?

4. Find out about the archetype of the *femme fatale* and explain how Carmen fits into this category.

5. Find information about other iterations of the story of Carmen in film: *Carmen Jones*, *The Loves of Carmen*, *Karmen Gei*.

6. Why do you think the director (Carlos Saura) felt justified in telling the story once again? What had changed in the Hispanic world by 1983?

GROUPS 3 & 4:

1. What is Antonio looking for? Can you trace any parallels between his search and that of Recaredo ("The Empress of China") or Horace ("The Daisy Dolls")?

2. How is Carmen different from heroines in other stories and films we have discussed?

3. How do gypsies relate to conventional society and how does society react to their peculiar way of life? How do gypsies compare to many indigenous peoples of Latin America?

4. Does Antonio love Carmen? Does Carmen love Antonio? How would you define their "love" for each other?

5. How does Carmen subvert traditional male/female roles in a personal relationship?

6. Is Carmen a villain? Would her behavior be condemned if she were a man?

Activity #4: OEDIPUS MAYOR (*EDIPO ALCALDE*, TRIANA, 1993)

GROUPS 1 & 2:

1. What was the purpose of Greek tragedy in its original context?

2. How does Sophocles, the author of *Oedipus Rex*, differ from his predecessor, Aeschylus?

3. Can you mention any other famous versions of *Oedipus Rex*?

4. What major changes does García Márquez incorporate into his version of the original play?

5. Why do you think the director includes so many scenes of violence and sex in his version of the play? Do you think they are justified or gratuitous?

6. Why does the director deliberately choose an international cast?

GROUPS 3 & 4:

1. Why do Triana/García Márquez recontextualize the play as relating to Colombia's period of "La Violencia"? What brought about this period? What was "El Bogotazo"?
2. What is Oedipus's "tragic flaw"?
3. Comment on the contrast between Oedipus and Tiresias in terms of their ability to "see."
4. Why does Oedipus gouge out his eyes?
5. What is the symbolism of the black horse in the film?
6. Comment on a) Creon as the "eternal politician"; b) the human propensity for violence throughout history. Do you think Creon's position is appropriate?

Activity #5: *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*

GROUPS 1 & 2:

1. Identify the following characters: Bayardo San Roman, Angela Vicario, Pura, Pedro and Pablo Vicario, Santiago Nasar, Ibrahim Nasar, Placida Linero, Flora Miguel, Petronio San Roman, Alberta Symonds, Victoria Guzman, Divina Flor, Father Carmen Amador, Clotilde Armenta, Cristo Bedoya, Widower Xius, Maria Alejandrina Cervantes
2. Why is Angela returned on the night of her wedding? Does she blame the right person for her disgrace?
3. What is the brothers' duty according to the code of honor?
4. Describe the **characterization technique** for the following characters, including **"tag names"**: Angela Vicario, Bayardo San Roman, Santiago Nasar, Placida Linero, Pura Vicario, the Vicario brothers.

GROUPS 3 & 4:

5. Describe Bayardo's courtship of Angela. Why does he choose her? Compare Angela to his mother, Alberta Symonds.
6. Describe Santiago's relationship to his mother. Why does the mother close the gate on her son towards the end?
7. Why does Angela write to Bayardo? What kind of development does she experience through her writing? Is there a progression in the content of the letters?
8. Why does Bayardo come back to Angela?
9. How do you explain that everyone in town knew about the planned killing of Santiago and no one prevented it?
10. Mention two examples of **foreshadowing** at the beginning of the novel.

Activity #6: *Like Water for Chocolate* (Mexico: Alfonso Arau, 1992; based on the novel by Laura Esquivel, 1989). Traditional Latin American women, while openly denied free will and assertive roles in society, managed nevertheless to "get their way" by resorting to "the inferior function" or, occasionally, if the times allowed it, to open rebellion. Discuss how the following characters work around daunting circumstances to "get their way": a) Tita; b) the Mother; c) Rosaura ;d) Gertrudis.

2. The men in the movie react differently to traditions that affect the women they love (or are forced to marry). Compare and contrast the major male characters in the movie: a) the Father; b) Pedro Múzquiz; c) Dr. John Brown; d) Juan (the rebel leader).

3. Discuss why cooking is so important in the book/movie. How is cooking related to "transformation" and "sublimation"? Is there a firm or a fluid line separating "realism" and "magic realism" regarding the transformative character of food? Do you find a major link between libido and food/eating disorders?