

SPAN 373/573
Contando *historias* y escribiendo *la historia*:
The Historical Novel in 20th-Century Latin America
(CRN 18637/18666)
FALL SEMESTER 2015
SUNY-Geneseo Department of Languages and Literatures
MW 4:00 5:15 in Welles 117

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Office Hours:
Monday 11:00am 12:30pm and
Wednesday 12:45 2:15pm
and by appointment

Final exam: Thursday, December 17, 3:30 6:30pm in Welles 117

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Since the first *relaciones* of discovery and conquest, the act of writing in Latin America has always constituted a delicate balancing act between recounting historical events and storytelling, confusing the domains of novelists and of historians. Beginning in the 1960s and 70s, novelists of the Latin American “boom” began to question the accepted, official narratives passed down from their literary predecessors, many of which were being used to prop up corrupt, repressive regimes. The 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s encounter with the Americas in 1992 provided another opportunity for authors to revisit and interrogate a particularly striking moment in Latin America’s troubled past, while recent struggles to establish stable democracies in the region have afforded a new generation of authors the opportunity to reflect on the national myths upon which they are founded.

The word “*historia*” in Spanish has an ambivalence when compared to its English equivalents in that its two apparently conflicting meanings “history” and “story” are inextricably intertwined. The suggestion of a narrative, fictional aspect in history is thus, in a sense, already encoded in the language. Aristotle claimed in the *Poetics* that history has the responsibility to be true, even if unbelievable, while literature has the responsibility to be believable, even if not true. What shall we believe, then, when it becomes impossible to distinguish between the two?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this class we will read four novels, as well as selections from other texts, that exemplify production of historical fiction in the last quarter of the 20th century in Latin America. Though each text will be read and discussed for its own literary merits, we will always seek to link the discussion back to the following broad course objectives.

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Distinguish analytically between different motivations underlying the production of historical fiction in Latin America;

2. Read, write, and speak knowledgeably about the importance and consequences of Latin American historical fiction;
3. Evaluate the problematic interplay between the ambiguity of historical events, allowing for the manipulation of historical memory by those in power, and the impact such memory has on ideology and desire in the present;
4. Contextualize the production of historical fiction within the socio-political and cultural needs and concerns of modern Latin American nations;
5. Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the thematic and aesthetic decisions that authors of historical fiction made, and how these decisions affected the literary tools they deployed in crafting their work.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Carpentier, Alejo. *El arpa y la sombra* (9788842063361) 1979
- Ibarguengoitia, Jorge. *Los pasos de López* (9789682710254) 1982
- Vargas Llosa, Mario. *La historia de Mayta* (97888466321983) 1984
- Del Paso, Fernando. *Noticias del Imperio* (selections available on MyCourses) 1987
- Solares, Ignacio. *Madero, el otro* (9789708120661) 1989

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

This course is fundamentally designed to get you reading, writing, and discussing historical fiction in its many contexts. Your success in the course will be evaluated in terms of these goals. The following assignments are intended to stimulate your thinking, structure in-class conversations, and mark your progress over the course of the semester.

PLAGIARISM WORKSHOP

You must attend a plagiarism workshop (see <https://www.geneseo.edu/library/library-workshops> for workshop dates and times). You will need to provide documentation that you have attended a session at some point in the last four semesters. Attendance at a session is not worth “points” toward your final grade, but is absolutely required. **Do not jeopardize your success in this course** if you have any questions about either of these offenses, please come and talk to me.

DAILY EXPECTATIONS — PARTICIPATION AND PREPARATION (15%)

Attendance: Daily attendance is essential for succeeding in this course. We cannot effectively build a coherent narrative of the history or its appearances in literature if there are holes in our story! You are allowed two absences on non-evaluation days during the semester with no penalty; each additional absence will reduce your final participation grade by 1 point.

Preparation: You are responsible for thorough preparation of daily assignments (as indicated on the calendar) **before** class. Good preparation includes reading and making an effort

to understand the texts in a way that will enable you to participate actively in class discussions. Most importantly, class can be more enjoyable if you are well-prepared!

Participation: You are not expected to be a scholar of Spanish American literature – if you were, you would not be taking this course! You will, however, be asked to think in new ways about texts whose historical and political contexts and motivations may be unfamiliar to you, and whose aesthetic qualities may strike you as confusing or complicated. **Your participation grade will depend both on your willingness to take risks and speak up, ask questions, participate in classroom activities, treat your own ideas and those of your classmates seriously and with respect, and speak exclusively in Spanish.** Remember that there is no dialogue unless we are capable and willing to consider, qualify, and build on one another's thoughts. **The best ideas and most striking insights often result from the synthesis of multiple unfinished thoughts and observations.** Please refer to the document of class participation for a variety of valid options for contributing to class discussion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (10%)

While I will provide analytical questions for *El arpa y la sombra* as models, you will be responsible for posting an analytical question on the course forum for **one class session per week** about the subsequent novels and other literary readings. You will also be responsible for responding to at least one question posted by me or one of your peers **before each class session**. Questions must be posted by 7:00am on Mondays or Wednesdays; responses by 3:00pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Your thoughtful questions and answers help me structure class around the aspects of the texts that jump out at and interest you, and ensure that you come to class with something to contribute to the conversation! Your questions and responses will be graded as follows:

- 3 analytical question, thoughtful response, posted on time
- 2 analytical question posted late, cursory or late response
- 1 comprehension question or no question, cursory or absent response

REACTION PAPERS (15%)

You will be responsible for turning in a total of six 400–500 word double-spaced reaction paper in Spanish on the text we are currently reading. These reaction papers may include a reflection on your immediate response to the text, any aspect(s) of the texts that you find particularly important or confusing, or anything that strikes you as interesting. You may also respond to topics or questions I will distribute to guide you in your readings, dig deeper into any of the analytical questions submitted by you or your classmates, or respond to our in-class discussion. Your reaction paper should **be analytical in nature** and **not** simply provide a synopsis of the reading, restate a classroom discussion, or discuss whether you liked the novel or not.

You will not be evaluated on how “correct” your analysis is, but how seriously you treat the task of analysis, and how clearly you present your ideas. I encourage you to take the time to write these reflections *before* the class in which we discuss the texts in question. Thoughtful reflection prior to class will help you articulate your thoughts more clearly during class discussions!

Your reaction paper may take the form of a traditional written paper, though if you have ideas for exploring analysis through other media, such as audio and video, please talk to me!

MINI-ENSAYOS (15%)

You will write a total of two short, 3-4 page essays throughout the semester containing an analysis of some aspect of two of the novels that we read in class. You may write about any topic that would be acceptable for a reaction paper; in fact, these assignments may be completed by expanding reaction papers into more formal and analytically rigorous essays.

MIDTERM (15%)

There will be a written midterm exam, which will include identifications, short responses, and short essays on topics we have discussed in class. A portion of this exam will be closed-book and will take place in class, while the rest will be open-book, open-note, and will be completed outside of class. You may be asked to analyze the novels that we have read on their own merits, compare multiple novels, or connect the novels with the time period they discuss or in the context of the socio-political climate in which they were produced. The specifics of the exam will be covered as the midterm approaches.

FINAL PAPER (10%)

The final paper will consist of a 5-7 page analytical paper on an original topic analyzing any historical novel, whether we read and discussed it in class or not. I have included a list of historical novels to choose from in the bibliography section of this syllabus. The final paper will form the basis for the oral presentation, and you will have an opportunity to revise it based on the feedback you receive during your presentation. At several points throughout the semester, you will be asked to turn in small portions of this assignment, each of which will count for 1% of the grade you receive on your paper.

ORAL PRESENTATIONS (20%)

During our final exam session, each student will give a 15-minute oral presentation, in the style of an academic conference presentation, on his or her final paper topic. The presentations should be performed without notes and with the aid of an effective and complementary audiovisual presentation (e.g. PowerPoint). Guidelines for this presentation will be shared on Google Drive. At several points throughout the semester, you will be asked to turn in small portions of this assignment, each of which will account for 2% of the grade you receive on your presentation.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

GRADED WORK

All work listed on the calendar is due on the day it is listed, unless I indicate otherwise. You will be reminded of upcoming deadlines every Monday by email. Late work will be penalized a full letter grade per day late. Be sure to read and follow all instructions, proofread your work carefully, and rigorously attribute ideas cited from other sources.

MAKE-UP WORK

Because attendance is required and thorough preparation essential, you are responsible for all course work. The calendar is detailed for this reason. If you have any doubts about what you might have missed, contact a classmate or make an appointment to see me during my office hours. I am generally flexible, but work delayed because of an unexcused absence will not necessarily be rescheduled.

DICTIONARIES

I am not a dictionary! If you'd like to look words up during class, please bring a dictionary (or a smartphone with access to a dictionary).

CELL PHONES

Please make certain that your cell phone won't ring or vibrate during class, especially if you will be using a smartphone to access online dictionaries. Respect the energy and preparation of your classmates. Rings, vibrations, and texting will not be tolerated in class.

CONTACTING ME

The best way to communicate with me is generally by email. I will do my best to respond promptly, but please be patient after 5:00pm and on weekends and holidays. **However, if you have a question about an assignment, please speak to me after class or make an appointment to meet with me during my office hours.** I am often in my office outside of classtime, and would love to chat even outside of office hours (as long as my door is open).

ACADEMIC HONESTY

We will observe the Academic Honesty Policy and its related process as stated in the most current *Undergraduate Bulletin* and in the *Student Handbook*.

The Department of Languages and Literatures takes cheating and plagiarism very seriously! Do not jeopardize your success in this course due to misunderstanding the nature of these offenses – if you have *any* questions about either, please come and talk to me.

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES MAKE-UP EXAMINATION POLICY

The Department of Languages and Literatures authorizes make-up examinations **only** for **documented** reasons involving personal medical or family emergencies or due to participation in College team sports or legitimate academic events (e.g., Model United Nations, scholarly conferences). If such documentation is provided, it is up to the instructor's discretion to grant a make-up exam or to excuse the student from taking the exam without penalty. If the instructor approves a make-up exam, its content may significantly differ in format from the scheduled exam. If the student's performance in the course up to the date of the missed exam makes it impossible to pass the course, even if taking a make-up and scoring 100%, no make-up or special arrangements will be offered. The Department considers make-up exams a **privilege**, not a right.

ACCOMODATIONS

SUNY Geneseo will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented physical (including pregnancy), emotional or learning disabilities. Students must contact the Director in the Office of Disability Services (Dr. Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, 105D Erwin) and their faculty to discuss needed accommodations as early as possible in the semester.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES POLICY

All electronic devices should be silenced and out of sight during class unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. Exceptions will be made for students who bring proper documentation justifying their need to use such devices in class. Students who don't abide by this rule will be verbally reminded of it for a first incident and asked to leave the classroom in the event of a second incident.

TITLE IX STATEMENT

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find a number of resources at geneseo.edu/affirmativeaction/students. Reputable off-campus resources include [Know Your IX](#), [End Rape On Campus](#), [SurvJustice](#), the [Clery Center for Security On Campus](#), and [Not Alone](#).

A FINAL NOTE

My goal is not only for you to succeed in this course, but to enjoy it enough that your interest in the language extends beyond the bounds of the classroom. Every group of students is different; **if you feel that any aspect of the course is not working for you, I encourage you to share your concerns with me, and even help think of possible solutions.**

Likewise, if you are having difficulty with the material, the workload, class discussions, or any other aspect of the course, please do let me know so we can ensure that you get the most out of the time you put in!

If you are struggling in this class or are concerned about your grade, you should meet with me during office hours immediately. Problems addressed early in the semester can often be solved by adjusting study/work habits!

FINAL GRADE BREAKDOWN

	A	94-100	A-	90-93
B+	B	84-86	B-	80-83
C+	C	74-76	C-	70-73
	D	60-69	E	0-59

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