Politics, Writing and the Nobel Prize in Latin America

IDSEM-UG 1711, Gallatin School of Individualized Study, NYU
Interdisciplinary Seminar, Fall 2015

Professor Linn Cary Mehta 139 East 79th Street
English and Comparative Literature, Columbia U. New York, N.Y. 10075
Course will begin promptly M/W 3:30- 4:45 p.m. Cell: (917) 328-8418
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Office hours will be M 2-3 and W 1-2 p.m. and by appointment. I am also available to meet after class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
In the course of the 20th century, seven Latin American authors have won the Nobel Prize: Gabriela Mistral (1945); Miguel Angel Asturias (1967); Pablo Neruda (1971); Gabriel García Márquez (1982); Octavio Paz (1990); Rigoberta Menchú (Peace Prize, 1992); Mario Vargas Llosa (2010). Together, they give us a chance to consider some of the major literary and political movements in Latin America leading to the present. The poetry of Mistral and Neruda reveals the successive influences of surrealism, communism, and socialism, up to the eve of the Pinochet coup in Chile; through novels and autobiography, Asturias and Menchú explore very different aspects of the indigenous struggle in Guatemala; the novels of García Márquez in Colombia and Vargas Llosa in Peru embody different aspects of magical realism; and Paz, in Mexico, in his poetry and essays, represents a country that is a literary cornerstone of Latin America. We will consider a few authors who almost received the Nobel Prize and why they did not – in the case of Borges, for political reasons, and Roberto Bolaño, who might have if he had lived long enough. We will conclude with one of Bolaño’s novels as representative of the generation of Latin American literature after magic realism.

The Nobel Prize website provides a starting point for background on each of the Nobel laureates: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/. This seminar will give us the opportunity to delve into the relation of their writing to the political context of their respective times and countries, and consider how and why the Nobel Committee might have chosen to honor these authors rather than others.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Use interdisciplinary research to ground literary works in their political and historical contexts
- Analyze and contextualize the content and structure of literary works through close reading
- Translate critical reading into elegant and persuasive expository writing
- Deepen interdisciplinary perspectives through class presentations and discussion
SYLLABUS

WEEK #1
9/02 W Introduction to Latin American texts
with selections from Nobel Prize Speeches

WEEK #2
RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ (1959 - )
9/09 W I, Rigoberta Menchú (chapters 1-20 – to page 152)
Read Popul Vuh (excerpts)
9/11 F Optional trip to the Metropolitan Museum to see Mayan art (3:30 p.m.)

WEEK #3
9/14 M Finish I, Rigoberta Menchú (chapters 21-34 – 154-247)
Begin The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy, Background (1-57; scanned)

9/16 W I. Group Presentation on Guatemala: History and Politics, 1970-present
II. Divide into groups to debate The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy:
1. Perspective of Menchú herself
2. Perspectives of Stoll and Rohter
3. Critics of Menchú
4. Defenders of Menchú

In each group, read relevant articles and prepare opening statements.

WEEK #4
MIGUEL ANGEL ASTURIAS (1899-1974)
9/21 M I. Prepare responses and finish debate on The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy

II. Intro to Miguel Angel Asturias
Read selections from “HOMBRES DE MAIZ” (Men of Maize, 1949)
and Legends of Guatemala (1930; tr. 2011)
Relate to Popol Vuh reading
II. Group Presentation on Guatemala: History and Politics, 1821-1970

Read Asturias, *The President (El señor presidente, 1946)*

*Part I: The 21\(^{st}\), 22\(^{nd}\), and 23\(^{rd}\) of April (7-73)*

WEEK #5

ASTURIAS, CONT.

9/28 M

Asturias, *The President*

*Part II: The 24\(^{th}\), 25\(^{th}\), 26\(^{th}\) and 27\(^{th}\) of April (77-194)*

Analysis of novel in terms of political and historical background.

ESSAY #1 DUE BASED ON YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE MENCHU CONTROVERSY

9/30 W

III. Group Presentation on Colombia: History and Politics, Colonial - 1899

Finish Asturias, *The President*

*Part III: Weeks, Months, Years (197-287)*

WEEK #6

COLOMBIA

10/05 M

Gabriel García Márquez stories from *No One Writes to the Colonel (El Coronel no tiene quien le escribe)*: “Big Mama’s Funeral” (scanned).

10/07 W

IV. Group Presentation on Colombia: History and Politics, 1899 - 2015

Begin Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien Años de Soledad* (1967), 1-103

WEEK #7

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ (1927 - 2014)

10/12 M

ACADEMIC HOLIDAY

10/13 T

“Legislative Day”: Monday classes meet on Tuesday

Read Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien Años de Soledad* (1967), 103-181
10/14  W  Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien Años*, 181-315

**WEEK #8**

**GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ (1927 - 2014), cont.**

10/19  M  Finish Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien Años*, 315-417

Discussion of *Cien Años* with Germán Jaramillo

10/21  W  **JORGE LUIS BORGES (1899-1986) – WHY NOT?**

V. Group Presentation on Argentina: History and Politics, 1899-1986

Jorge Luis Borges: selected short stories and upcoming play

**WEEK #9**

**GABRIELA MISTRAL (1889-1957)**

10/26  M  VI. Group presentation on Gabriela Mistral’s Context:

*Chile and Mexico; Her Life and Times, 1889-1948*

Read the *Locas mujeres* Poems of Gabriela Mistral, 1-91

Selected essays and early poems (scanned); and in *Madwomen*

“La Otra” (30), “La abandonada” (34), “La fugitiva” (62),

“La que camina” (74), “Mujer de prisionero” (84), “Una piadosa” (90).

10/28  W  The *Locas mujeres* Poems of Gabriela Mistral, 91 - 147

**WEEK #10**

**PABLO NERUDA (1904-1973)**

11/02  M  *The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems*, 1-63 and extracts from *Canto General*, 68-106 (in the *Selected Poems*)

VII. Chile: History and Politics, Colonial - 1948, using *Canto General* (I-V) as your guide
11/04  W  
*Neruda: Canto General* and later poems, 106-196

**VIII. Chile: History and Politics since 1948, focusing on Neruda’s death and the Pinochet Coup**

11/08  Sunday  
6:30 p.m. *Cita a Ciegas (“Blind Date”)*

A play with Germán Jaramilo based on Borges at the

*Repertorio Español*, 138 East 27th Street, New York, NY 10016

Tel. 212-225-9999 - See more at:

http://repertorio.nyc/#/performances

**WEEK #11**

**OCTAVIO PAZ (1914-1998)**

11/09  M  
Read Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* [Selections scanned]

**IX. Group Presentation on Mexican history to 1948**

11/11  W  

and other individual selections;

**X. Group Presentation on Mexican history since 1948**

**ESSAY #2 DUE BETWEEN 11/11 – 11/18 BY EMAIL**

**WEEK #12**

**MARIO VARGAS LLOSA (1936-)**

11/16  M  
**XI. Group Presentation on Peru: History and Politics, 1899-2015;**

Begin Mario Vargas Llosa, *Death in the Andes* (1996) (1-142)

11/18  W  
Mario Vargas Llosa, *Death in the Andes* (Part II: 142-276)
Guest for Mario Vargas Llosa: Prof. Nicholas Birns, The New School

**WEEK #13**  
**21st CENTURY LITERATURE: NOBEL PRIZE, POLITICS AND WRITING**

11/23  M  Finish Mario Vargas Llosa, *Death in the Andes*  
FINAL PROJECT TOPIC DUE NOW OR OVER THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/25  W  HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!

**WEEK #14**  
**ANOTHER WHO DID NOT GET THE NOBEL PRIZE: BOLAÑO**

11/30  M  Begin Roberto Bolaño  
Read *The Last Interview*, Intro and Interviews I & II (9-67)

12/2  W  Begin *The Savage Detectives*, Part I (1-139)  
PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL ESSAY DUE (and/or initial version for comments)

**WEEK #15**  
**ROBERTO BOLAÑO (1953-2003)**

12/07  M  Complete *The Savage Detectives*, Part I (1-139)

12/09  W  Read *The Savage Detectives*, Part III (589-648)  
View film: Your choice or “La virgen de los sicarios”  
(based on the novel by Fernando Vallejo)

12/11  F  Gathering at 139 East 79th Street at a convenient time.
WEEK #16

ROBERTO BOLAÑO (1953-2003)

12/14 M

Conclusion; and, as much as you can,

*read The Savage Detectives, Part II (141-588)*

**FINAL ESSAY DUE (Final Version by 12/17)**

SIGN UP FOR PRESENTATIONS (IN PAIRS):

I. Guatemala: History and Politics, 1970-present
II. Guatemala: History and Politics, 1821-1970
III. Colombia: History and Politics, Colonial - 1899
IV. Colombia: History and Politics, 1899 - 2015
V. Argentina: History and Politics, 1899-1986
VI. Gabriela Mistral’s Context: Chile and Mexico; Her Life and Times, 1889-1957
VII. Chile: History and Politics, Colonial - 1948, using *Canto General* (I-V) as your guide
VIII. Chile: History and Politics since 1948, focusing on Neruda’s death and the Pinochet Coup
IX. Mexican history to 1948
X. Mexican history from 1948 to the present
XI. Peru: History and Politics, 1899-2015
XII. Sources for group research and presentations:

Biography, history, journalism, letters, diaries, testimonials, videos, other art forms

Build a website using as many sources as you can on [Google docs]: list your sources; use links; write up what you find (1) in outline form for your presentation and (2) in narrative form in relation to the novel(s) or poetry that relate to each country and period.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Grading/Requirements
Attendance/Participation throughout (including online responses) 20%
Group Presentation (in pairs) 10%
Presentation Website 15%
First Essay (2-3pp) Wed 25 Sept 10%
Second Essay (5-7pp) Fri 15 Nov 20%
Third Essay (8-10pp) Wed 11 Dec 25%

Attendance/Participation
Regular attendance, punctuality, and engagement with the readings are keys to being an active participant. As such I will expect you to be present and on time at each of our class sessions. For your benefit and mine, I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. Should you need to miss a session, let me know ahead of class by email, as I will not consider retroactive explanations and each unexcused absence will incur a two point reduction from your final grade (with a maximum of five). After five unexcused absences, you will receive an “F” for participation/attendance. More importantly, though, I will expect you to come to class prepared, which of course means that you have read/seen/heard the work assigned in advance of each class, and are ready to participate in discussions about the materials. Please take this course only if you think you will be able to handle a reading load of about a novel a week.

Group presentations (in pairs)
You may choose a partner, with whom you will be responsible for researching and preparing material on the history and politics of a particular country, region, and/or period. Your research will result in a 20 minute presentation in class (about 10 minutes each) supported by a website with links and commentary that you will assemble. The presentation will represent 10% of your grade, and the finished website with commentary and analysis will account for another 15%.

Responses (by text)
I will ask each of you to write not weekly responses, but responses to each of the eight major novels or collections of poems that relate it to the historical, political, and economic context addressed in the presentations. The responses should be about a page (one or two paragraphs) in length. They can take the form of questions and analysis of whole works or parts of works, or responses to questions raised by other students. You should aim to make specific interdisciplinary connections between each work and its context. These should be posted on the discussion board while we are reading the work or, at the latest, within a week of finishing the work. These required responses will not be graded separately but will become a part of your overall participation grade.

Essays #1, 2, and 3
The first essay will be 2-3 pages long and based on your interpretation of the Menchú controversy. You should email me (Lcarymehta@gmail.com) your essay by Wednesday, September 25\textsuperscript{th}. You may also drop off your essays in the mailbox outside my office (1 Washington Place, Rm. 622) if you prefer.

The second essay is a longer analysis of a single work of fiction or poetry. It can take off from one of your responses or a part of presentation that particularly interests you. This
essay should be 5-7 pages in length (double spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 point font, Times New Roman or comparable font) and is due the week of Nov 11th.

Once the second essay is done, or as you are writing it, I will ask you to submit a topic to me for your third and final paper, which should include more in-depth research on a particular topic or set of connections between one or more novels or poetry and their context. I would like to see a basic outline or prospectus for your final essay before you begin to write it. The final essay should be 8-10 pages long, and is due a day after the final class; if you wish, you may hand in a draft or part of a draft for feedback during the last two weeks of classes, and I will give you comments promptly.

Extra Credit
Over the course of the semester, the instructor may make extra credit opportunities available to students. These may include attending relevant talks, performances, films, expositions, etc, followed by brief 1-2 page reaction essays submitted on the Discussion Board tab of the course website. Students are also encouraged to recommend any events that strike them as relevant to the course. Each extra credit opportunity will add one point to a student’s final grade, with no more than three points possible.

Late Submissions/Incompletes
Students can ask for extensions and will receive them at the instructor’s discretion, though any late submission will incur a half grade drop unless the delay results from documented medical reasons or family emergencies. Only requests made in advance of the deadline will be considered. Assignments submitted late without previously alerting the instructor will not be graded. The last day to submit all your work is 17 December. If you anticipate being unable to meet this deadline, you should contact the instructor immediately and request to receive an Incomplete, which will be granted at the instructor’s discretion and only with a previously approved plan to complete outstanding work.

Academic Integrity
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website for a full description of the academic integrity policy: (www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)

REQUIRED TEXTS (from NYU Bookstore, 726 Broadway, (212) 998-4678):

I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala by Rigoberta Menchú,
- Elisabeth Burgos-Debray and Ann Wright (Jun 1984).
  Verso, 2009; $15.61; Kindle and used ($ .01)
The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy
- Arturo Arias (Editor), David Stoll (Contributor).
  Univ. of Minnesota Press; used from $1.80 and new from $16.63
Miguel Angel Asturias (1967):
- *The President* (*El Señor Presidente*, 1946), Frances Partridge (Translator). Waveland Press, 1997; $16.50; used and new from $4.50

Gabriel García Márquez (1982):
- *The General in His Labyrinth* (*El general en su laberinto*, 1989). Vintage, 2003. $13.13; used from $4.01; and
- *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien Años de Soledad*, 1967). Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006. $9.03; new and used from $4.67

Mario Vargas Llosa (2010):

Gabriela Mistral (1945):

Pablo Neruda (1971):
- *The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems* (Bilingual Edition) (English and Spanish Edition). City Lights Publisher, 2004. $11.53 or used ($6); and

Octavio Paz (1990):

Roberto Bolaño:
- *The Savage Detectives: A Novel* (*Los Detectives Salvajes* 1998), tr. Natasha Wimmer Picador, 2008. new from $5.43; used from $0.68

OPTIONAL TEXTS


Miguel Angel Asturias (1967):
University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993. Used from $29.91 (will scan extracts).

Octavio Paz (1990):
*The Labyrinth of Solitude: The Other Mexico, Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude, Mexico and the United States, the Philanthropic Ogre* by Octavio Paz. Grove Press, 1994. $11.64 or used from $3.98 (will scan extracts).
