Politics, Writing and the Nobel Prize in Latin America

IDSEM-UG 1711, Gallatin School of Individualized Study, NYU
Interdisciplinary Seminar, Fall 2016

Professor Linn Cary Mehta
139 East 79th Street
New York, N.Y. 10075

English and Comparative Literature, Columbia U.
Cell: (917) 328-8418

Course will begin promptly M/W 3:30-4:45 p.m.
Office: 1 Washington Place #614

Classroom: GCASL Room 265
Office phone: 89151

Global Center for Academic and Spiritual Life – 238 Thompson Stre
e-mail: lcarymehta@gmail.com (or lcm8@nyu.edu)

Office hours will be M/W 2-3 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 Ángel 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 magical realism.

The Nobel Prize website provides a starting point for background on each of the Nobel laureates: http://www nobel prize.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
9/07 W  Introduction to Latin American texts
         with selections from Nobel Prize Speeches

WEEK #2  RIGOBERTA MENCU  (1959 - )
9/12 M   I, Rigoberta Menchú (Intro and chapters 1-11 – to page 92)
         Read  Popol Vuh  (excerpts)

9/14 W   I, Rigoberta Menchú (chapters 12-20 – to page 180)
         Possible screening of “Finding Oscar,” a film co-produced by Scott
         Greathead, on Wed., September 14, or Monday, Sept. 19th,

WEEK #3
9/19 M   Finish I, Rigoberta Menchú (chapters 21-34 – 180-290)
         Begin The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy, Background (1-57; scanned)

9/21 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
9/26 M   MIGUEL ANGEL ASTURIAS  (1899-1974)
         I. Prepare responses and finish debate on The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy
II. Intro to Miguel Ángel Asturias

Read selections from “HOMBRES DE MAIZ” (Men of Maize, 1949) and Legends of Guatemala (1930; tr. 2011)
Relate to Popol Vuh reading

9/28 W

II. Group Presentation on Guatemala: History and Politics, 1821-1970

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

Part I: The 21st, 22nd, and 23rd of April (7-73)

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

WEEK #5

ASTURIAS, CONT.

10/03 M

Asturias, The President

Part II: The 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th of April (77-194)

Analysis of novel in terms of political and historical background.

10/05 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

10/10 M

COLUMBUS DAY (“Discovery” of “América”)

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

10/12 W

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

Begin Gabriel García Márquez, Cien Años de Soledad (1967), 1-103
<table>
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<tr>
<th>WEEK #7</th>
<th>GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ (1927 - 2014)</th>
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<tr>
<td>10/17 M</td>
<td>Read Gabriel García Márquez, <em>Cien Años de Soledad</em> (1967), 103-181</td>
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<td>10/19 W</td>
<td>Gabriel García Márquez, <em>Cien Años</em>, 181-315</td>
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<td>Discussion of <em>Cien Años</em> with Germán Jaramillo</td>
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<th>WEEK #8</th>
<th>GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ (1927 - 2014), cont.</th>
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<td>10/24 M</td>
<td>Finish Gabriel García Márquez, <em>Cien Años</em>, 315-417</td>
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<th>10/26 W</th>
<th>JOSE LUIS BORGES (1899-1986) – WHY NOT?</th>
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<td>V. Group Presentation on Argentina: History and Politics, 1899-1986</td>
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<td>Jorge Luis Borges: selected short stories</td>
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<th>WEEK #9</th>
<th>GABRIELA MISTRAL (1889-1957)</th>
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<tr>
<td>10/31 M</td>
<td>VI. Group presentation on Gabriela Mistral’s Context:</td>
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<td>Chile and Mexico; Her Life and Times, 1889-1948</td>
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<td>Read the <em>Locas mujeres</em> Poems of Gabriela Mistral, 1-91</td>
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<td>Selected essays and early poems (scanned); and in <em>Madwomen</em></td>
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<td>“La Otra” (30), “La abandonada” (34), “La fugitiva” (62),</td>
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<td>“La que camina” (74), “Mujer de prisonero” (84), “Una piadosa” (90).</td>
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<td>11/02 W</td>
<td>The <em>Locas mujeres</em> Poems of Gabriela Mistral, 91 - 147</td>
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<th>WEEK #10</th>
<th>PABLO NERUDA (1904-1973)</th>
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<td>11/07 M</td>
<td><em>The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems</em>, 1-63 and</td>
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<td>extracts from <em>Canto General</em>, 68-106 (in the <em>Selected Poems</em>)</td>
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VII. Chile: History and Politics, Colonial - 1948, using *Canto General* (I-V) as your guide

11/08 T  VOTE!

11/09 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

11/13 Sunday  Sunday, November 13, 2016 2:30 PM (or Sat., November 26, 2016 3:00 PM)

A play with Germán Jaramilo based on Vargas Llosa’s novel,

**LA TÍA JULIA Y EL ESCRIBIDOR** (Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter)

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)

11/14 M  Read Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* [Selections scanned]

IX. Group Presentation on Mexican history to 1948


X. Group Presentation on Mexican history since 1948

*ESSAY #2 DUE BETWEEN 11/11 – 11/18 BY EMAIL*
WEEK #12  
MARIO VARGAS LLOSA (1936-)  
11/21 M  
XI. Group Presentation on Peru: History and Politics, 1899-2015;  
Begin Mario Vargas Llosa, *Death in the Andes* (1996) (1-142)  
11/23 W  
HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!  
FINAL PROJECT TOPIC DUE NOW OR OVER THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK #13  
21st CENTURY LITERATURE: NOBEL PRIZE, POLITICS AND WRITING  
11/28 M  
Mario Vargas Llosa, *Death in the Andes* (Part II: 142-276)  
Guest for Mario Vargas Llosa: Prof. Nicholas Birns, The New School  
11/30 W  
Finish Mario Vargas Llosa, *Death in the Andes*

WEEK #14  
ANOTHER WHO DID NOT GET THE NOBEL PRIZE: BOLAÑO  
12/05 M  
Begin Roberto Bolaño  
Read *The Last Interview*, Intro and Interviews I & II (9-67)  
PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL ESSAY DUE (and/or initial version for comments)  
12/07 W  
Begin *The Savage Detectives*, Part I (1-139)

WEEK #15  
ROBERTO BOLAÑO (1953-2003)  
12/12 M  
Read *The Savage Detectives*, Part III (589-648)  
12/14 W  
Conclusion; and, as much as you can,  
read *The Savage Detectives*, Part II (141-588)  
12/16 F  
Gathering at 311 East 140th Street at a convenient time.
View film: Your choice or “La virgen de los sicarios” (Fernando Vallejo)

12/17  Sa  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

Sources for group research and presentations:
Biography, history, journalism, letters, diaries, testimonials, videos, other art forms
Put together a Power Point using as many sources as you can. Post it on the class Discussion Board: list your sources; use links; write up what you find (1) in outline form for your presentation and (2) with commentary on 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 10%
First Essay (2-3pp) Wed 28 Sept 10%
Second Essay (5-7pp) Fri 11 Nov 20%
Third Essay (8-10pp plus prospectus) Sa 17 Dec 30%

*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 10%.

*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 28th. You may also drop off your essays in the mailbox outside my office (1 Washington Place, Rm. 614) 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 **10-12 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](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html))

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

*You may choose to read in English or in the original Spanish -- many of these books are available in Spanish in Kindle editions.*

- **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)
- **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):
- *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**

*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):

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).
