

QUEER SPECTACLES IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE LATIN AMERICA

(1880s-1930s)

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Cover Magazine. Berlin Ibero-American Institute. Bibliotheca Criolla Robert Lehmann-Nietsche. Germany, 1930s.

Course description

The recent appeal and success of queer theory as a critical epistemology in the social sciences and humanities lies in its deconstruction and reorientation of gendered and sexualized codes rooted in colonial taxonomies of difference. The queer project has shown how nineteenth-century Western medical science produced binary systems of corporeal classification— male/female; man/woman; heterosexual/homosexual; able/crippled; civilized/colonial— to deprive non-normative forms of life of full human status and fix a modern conception of humanity in the figure of Man. Queer studies enable the desedimentation of heteronormativity, Humanity, and whiteness by taking into account the stories of dissident

subjects who refused to comply with the prevailing definition of «the normal» in the history of liberal humanism.

This graduate-level course introduces students to critical debates concerned with understanding the meaning and applications of queerness and discusses a range of approaches to counter-sexual formations, racial imaginaries, cognition, and political mobilizations. Focusing on the cultural production of fin-de-siècle Latin America and the Caribbean, we will investigate the somatic constructions of the «perverse» in diverse semiotic experiments, including novels, plays, *crónicas*, and clinical studies. We will particularly seek to gain a comprehension of why queer bodies became pathological characters during the emergence of eugenic movements for the protection of the «national race» in the region. Using crosscutting thematic grids from textual analysis, critical race theory, queer and trans* studies, students will engage primary sources on a variety of disciplinary traditions. The course will be taught in Spanish. Reading and informed participation are essential requisites. The final grade will reflect performance in term papers and assignments.

Learning outcomes:

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

- Develop skills in critical reading and writing through regular weekly engagement with different forms of narrating and staging queerness in turn-of-the-century Latin America.
- Recognize that the cultural history of queerness has been told by means of a number of different literary and non-literary genres, including medicine, law, art, and literature.
- Assess the role of diverse sources as modes of storytelling, discursive production, and ideological constructions of queerness, race, and cognition in Latin America.
- Engage with the critical possibilities of queer, crip & trans* studies to disrupt and deconstruct the heteronormative colonial impulse.

Grading

Attendance and participation (15%). Being present every week is crucial for meeting the requirements to succeed in the course. As this class is a seminar conducted in Spanish, it is expected that students will be well prepared to discuss the readings for the day. It is highly encouraged to speak in Spanish. However, English can be used whenever needed. Speaking in English will not reflect negatively in the final grade.

Seminar presentations (15%). Each student will give a presentation on one or more than one of the texts selected for the course. The presentation can be done in English or in Spanish. The purpose of the report is not simply to summarize the text but to analyze it, ask questions, and have an open discussion. The presentation should be about 15 minutes long and include the following components: a brief explanation of the central ideas of the text; a more detailed analysis of a part of the text (a sentence or paragraph) paying attention to the language and key concepts; two or three questions that arise from reading the text; and the elaboration of a theory, idea or project from the reading, possibly (but not necessarily) in relation to other texts read in the seminar. The use of audiovisual media is always optional. Please let me know in advance to order the equipment. If you have any questions about the presentation, it is advisable to consult with me during office hours or by email.

Response papers (15%/ 5% each). 500 words in Spanish or English, to be submitted on the days indicated in the syllabus. The response paper is a reaction to the texts, or to one of the texts read for the corresponding day. Please email me the paper before the start of the class.

Final essay research proposal (15%). It is a 4-5 pages double-spaced document written in Spanish that includes: 1) one or two central questions that will be explored in the final essay, with an explanation of its relevance; 2) an explanation of the text, or of the texts to be examined, and of your particular interest in this text (or texts); 3) a thesis (what is the main argument going to be?); 4) provide an outline of the steps to be followed in the essay; 5) a bibliography, in which the relevance of the sources is explained (1-2 sentences), and how they will be used in the essay.

Final essay research presentation (10%). Each student will make a presentation of about 5 minutes about their final essay. The presentation can be done in Spanish or in English. It will include a discussion of the main argument, the relevant text (s), the questions posed, and any doubts that may arise. Presentations will take place in the last two classes of the semester. It is important to listen well to everyone's reports and to ask relevant questions and provide feedback. Questions and comments for others will be taken into account in the final grade of each student.

Final essay (30%). A text of 15 double-spaced pages written in Spanish. Please include the bibliography and follow proper procedures of citation. Using the MLA 8th ed. system is preferred. It is advisable to start the work early and consult with the instructor during office hours. Final essay due date: TBA.

Required texts

The readings and primary sources are available on the Quercus course website. Students will need to purchase the novel *Débora* (1884) by Tomás Michelena. (Himpar, 2020).

Classroom policies

Feeling welcome: I am committed to maintaining an inclusive and welcoming classroom, a space for the critical and civil exchange of ideas. I believe that recognizing that we have different backgrounds is beneficial for our learning, and I ask that everybody engage with empathy towards those with a different viewpoint than one's own. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity. This course is a critique of how colonial taxonomies of race, gender, and sexuality produce bodies. Such production entails violent methods that have an effect in the materiality of bodies that do not conform to "the norm." In this sense, the material covered will include topics that may trigger negative reactions. Our task will be to do a critique of violence to create an inclusive and diverse environment that is equal for all.

SCHEDULE

Week 1. Queerness, Disability, Biopolitics. The Body, a living archive that makes the monsters speak.

*Objectives: To examine key concepts in the field of queer theory. Keywords: Monstrosity, Technology, Gender, Sexuality, Colonialism, Culture, the System of Sexual Differentiation, Trans**

Readings

Disrupting Normativity

- Paul B. Preciado. *Yo soy el monstruo que os habla*. 2020. Selections.
- Teresa de Lauretis. *Technologies of Gender*. 1987. Introduction.

After Hysteria?

- Britney Spears: Full Statement Against Conservatorship. 2021.

Week 2. Neuro-Dramas: Hysteria, Hallucinations, Bovarysm

Objectives: To explore the literary tropes and dramatic aspects of nervous diseases in the nineteenth century. Keywords: Charcot, Hospital, Psychiatric Power, Freud, Psychoanalysis, Latin America, Hysteria

Readings

from 1900 *A Fin de Siècle Reader* (Note: these readings are very short excerpts. They are meant to introduce you to the clinical language of the time and its narratological structures)

- Jean-Martin Charcot. *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*.
- Sigmund Freud. *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*.
- Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud. *The Case of Fraülein Anna O*.

- Enrique L. Abogado. “Un caso de histeria delirante curada”, *Archivos de Psiquiatría y Criminología*. 1907. (Mexico). Short selection.
- Didi-Huberman, *La invención de la histeria*, 1982. Selection.

Week 3. Necro-topographies of the Flesh. The «Race» of Homosexuals. (Response paper 1 due)

Objectives: To study the intersections of race and sexuality in the Latin American naturalist novel. Keywords: Blackness, Lombroso, Sexual Inversion, Nation, Modernity

Readings

- Adolfo Caminha. *Bom-Crioulo* [*El buen negro*]. 1895. Disponible en español y portugués. (Brazil)

- Toni Morrison. "Black Matters". *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (1993).
- Paul B. Preciado. "Terror anal". Guy Hocquenghem, *El deseo homosexual*. 1972. Trad. Geoffroy Huard de Ia Marre. Melusina, 2009.
- **OPTIONAL:** Guy Hocquenghem. "El combate homosexual." *El deseo homosexual*. 1972. Trad. Geoffroy Huard de Ia Marre. Melusina, 2009.

Week 4. Marimachos & the Spectre of Sappho

Objectives: To investigate the somatic constructions of female deviance in the naturalist and post-naturalist era. Keywords: Regionalism, Vanguardists, Sapphism, Marimachos, Greek love, Cosmopolitanism

Readings

- Rómulo Gallegos. *Doña Bárbara*. 1929. Selections. (Venezuela)
- Federico Gamboa. *Santa*. 1903. (Mexico)
- **OPTIONAL:** Otto Miguel Cione. «Panorama». *Luxuria: la vida nocturna de Buenos Aires*. 1936. Ercilla, 1936. (Uruguay)

- Jack Halberstam. "Perverse Presentism: The Androgyne, the Tribade, the Female Husband, and Other Pre-Twentieth-Century Genders." *Female Masculinity*. 1998.
- Monique Wittig. «No se nace mujer». (1980). *El pensamiento heterosexual*. 1992.
- **OPTIONAL:** Gayle Rubin. «Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries». 1992.

Week 5. The Uterine Machine. Adultery (as Assisted Reproduction). (Response paper 2 due)

Objectives: To delve into the archive of literary discourses on biopoliticized reproduction. Keywords: Biopolitics, Reproduction, Adultery, STDs, Proto-eugenics, Fin-de-siècle

Readings

- Rafael Cabrera Malo. *Mimí*. El Pregonero, 1898. Selecciones. (Venezuela)
- Alberto Weisbach y José González Castillo. *Gracia plena*. 1919. (Argentina)
- **OPTIONAL:** José Ingenieros. "Adulterios múltiples por obsesión de la maternidad". [Patología de las funciones psicosexuales]. *Archivos de psiquiatría y criminología*, 1910. (Argentina)

- Penelope Deutscher. “Sacred Fecundity: Agamben, Sexual Difference, and Reproductive Life.” *Telos* (New York, N.Y.)2012.161 (2012): 51–78. Web.

Week 6. Captive Trans* Bodies. Scientific Racism & Ungendered Flesh

Objectives: To historicize the practices of self-construction of a trans identity in the fin de siècle.*

Keywords: Transvestite, homosexuality, sexual inversion, pederasty, clinic, Blackness, Ungendered Flesh, Cuba

Readings

from 1900 *A Fin de Siècle Reader*

- Magnus Hirschfield. *Sexual Anomalies: The Origins, Nature, and Treatment of Sexual Disorders*. 1905.

- Luis Montané y Dardé. “La pederastia en Cuba”, en *Primer Congreso Médico Nacional*, La Habana, Imprenta A Álvarez, 1890. (Cuba)

- Benjamín de Céspedes. “La prostitución en la ciudad de la Habana”. 1888.

- Snorton, C. Riley. *Black on Both Sides: a Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Selections.

- Hortense Spillers. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics*2 (1987): 65–81

Week 7. Eugenic Dramas: The Theatre of Disability. (Response paper 3 due)

Objectives: To discuss the multiple eugenic anxieties over the productive and reproductive capacities of bodies in the fin de siècle mind. Keywords: Onanism, Substance Abuse, Homelessness, Urbanization, Sexual Inversion, Family

Readings

From 1900 *A Fin de Siècle Reader*

- S. Clouston. *Clinical Lectures on Mental Diseases*. 1896.

- Emilio Lola. *El degenerado*. 1910. (Argentina)

- José González Castillo. *Los invertidos*. 1914. (Argentina)

- Judith Butler. “Queer.” *Cuerpos que importan: sobre los límites materiales y discursivos del “sexo”*. 1993. Trad. Alcira Bixio. Paidós, 2002.

- Susan Antebi. *Embodied Archive: Disability in Post-Revolutionary Mexican Cultural Production*. 2021. Introduction.

Week 8. The Traffic of Bodies. Prostitution, Migration, White Supremacy

Objectives: To study the commodification of pleasure and the role of prostitution in processes of family and national formation. Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, Migration, Whiteness, Degeneracy, Eugenics, Nativism

Readings

- Donna Guy. *El sexo peligroso*. 1991. Introduction.

- Nicolás Olivari. *La canción de los vientres infecundos. Novela realista del amor en los hombres del mar*. Los realistas, 1923. (Argentina)

- Silvia Federici. *Calibán y la bruja. Mujeres, cuerpo y acumulación originaria*. 2004. Selections.
- Michel Foucault. *El poder psiquiátrico*. 2003. Selections.

Week 9. No class-Fall Reading Week

Week 10. After Freud: Schizoanalysis

Objectives: To examine de making and unmaking of sexuality in Psychoanalytic critical projects. Keywords: Freud, Oedipus Complex, Heterosexuality, The Clinic, Madness

Readings

- Hermilio Valdizán. *Cuentos de enfermos*. Selections. (Peru)

- Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. «Tres textos de Freud». *El Anti-Edipo. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*. 1972. Seminar Presentation.
- Slavoj Žižek. *Sex and the Failed Absolute*. Selection. 2020. Selections.

Week 11. Dandies & Homosocials

Objectives: To examine the performance of masculinity as a social marker of privilege and coercion. Keywords: homosociality, masculinity, femininity, posing, spleen, dandyism.

Readings

- Tomás Michelena. *Débora*. 1884. Himpar, 2020. (Venezuela)

- Molloy, Sylvia. “La política de la pose”. *Las culturas de fin de siglo en América Latina*. Ed. Josefina Ludmer. Beatriz Viterbo, 1994.
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia University Press, 1985. Introduction.

Week 12. Research Presentations.

Week 13. Research Presentations.