

The University of Toronto  
Department of Spanish & Portuguese

## LITERATURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN SPANISH AMERICA



### Course Description

THIS COURSE offers a detailed study of key moments and texts in Spanish American culture from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on such topics as the creation of new nations, *indigenismo*, Caribbean anti-slavery literature, and the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions. In cultural productions engaged in representing social change in Latin America, melodrama has been a traditional mode to narrate political and social struggles, particularly in literature and film. But why is social change usually presented as the persistent struggle of good and evil? Why is the revolutionary typically portrayed as either a hero or a villain according to conflicted ideological views that respond to specific historical contexts? This course will especially examine how the classic melodramatic structure heroism-vs-villainy was exploited by writers and filmmakers to tell the history of social change and revolutions in modern Latin America. Emphasis will be given to

1800s Independence movements and the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions of the twentieth century.

Students will examine materials of culture such as films, novels, short stories, manifestos, letters, and biographies about iconic figures, including Simón Bolívar, Juan Manuel de Rosas, Facundo Quiroga, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, Frida Kahlo, Eva Perón, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Lula Da Silva, and Hugo Chávez. Students will critically explore the political and ideological roots of binary characterizations—liberator/demagogue, freedom-fighter/bandit, saint/demon, and revolutionary/dictator—that became traditional formulas in the making of political and social narratives about Latin America.

### **Transnational Perspectives**

This course explores iconic figures in the history of Modern Latin America from the perspective of Latin American writers, filmmakers, and academic scholars. But Latin America is a geopolitical unit that since the nineteenth century had a definitive place in ‘The United States’ cultural imagination and in its hemispheric political and economic interests. In this sense, we will situate American media representations, discuss stereotypical depictions of popular icons, and consider the role of interconnected cultural productions in the complex bilateral relations between North and South. Many of the materials address historical issues that impacted on global politics. We will study the liberal revolutions of the nineteenth century, the Mexican revolution and the irruption of the masses in the political arena, the Cuban revolution and Cold War anxieties over the phantom of Communism, and the rise of neoliberalism. Many of the sources that we will read in the course are as concerned about bringing into being a certain kind of future as they are about interpreting the past. One of the threads helping to provide coherence to the course is a concern with the melodramatic construction of ideal national communities through the expulsion of evil and villainy.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

Through short response papers, seminar class discussions, and a final research paper, students will be able to:

- Practice critical reading and writing through regular weekly engagement with different forms of telling histories of the melodramatic iconicity of social change and revolution.
- Recognize that history has been told by means of a number of different genres.
- Approach cultural productions critically, recognizing the arguments being made.
- Write in more powerful and convincing ways, using evidence to support their own arguments concerning events in and interpretations of the past.
- Assess the role of literature and film as modes of storytelling and mythical construction of political and social events in Latin America.
- Identify how viewpoints vary according to the artists’ class, gender, ethnicity, and national identification.

## Course requirements

- Attendance: 10 %
- Class participation and discussion sections in Canvas: 20 %
- Research presentation: 15%
- Midterm paper, podcast, Instagram book review flyer, or vlog: 25%
- Final paper: 30%

**Attendance & participation:** students are expected to be present and on-time for each class. Active reading and engaged participation in discussions are required.

**Research presentation:** students will give a brief introduction in Spanish or in Portuguese of their final research project at the end of the term.

**Canvas discussion posts:** Before each class, students will post a short response of at least 200 words to the readings assigned for that particular day. The comments and questions written by the students will help to give an orientation to our conversations. Please post your response in Spanish at least two hours in advance before each class. Canvas discussion posts will be required starting week 2 onwards.

**Midterm paper, podcast, Instagram book review flyer, or vlog:** You will write a short paper in Spanish (5-6 pages; double spaced) on a chosen topic. I will provide two or three essay prompts that will allow you to choose diverse theoretical approaches to explore the primary sources selected. The paper will be graded according to the rubric provided. It is due at the beginning of week 6. You can also engage with a less traditional type of assignment: you can create a podcast of 30 minutes in which you discuss one of the iconic figures studied in the first section of the course. You can choose a recent book about Latin America and write a 10 slide Instagram flyer review. Or you can do a creative Vlog. Whatever your choice, you need to book an appointment to discuss your topic during office hours.

**Final paper:** The final paper will enable you to use skills that have been acquired and practiced during the quarter. It should be based on a topic of your choice. It should be no more than 8 pages long in Spanish (double spaced). The topic of the final paper should be chosen after consulting with me in office hours or by email. The final paper will be graded according to the rubric provided. It is due at the end of the semester.

## Required texts

The readings and primary sources are available on the course website.

## 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.

## SCHEDULE

### **Week 1 Civilization & Barbarism: A Framework of Cultural Understanding of Latin America?**

#### Readings:

- Essay: Bush, Matthew. *Pragmatic Passions: Melodrama and Latin American Social Narrative*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2014. Introduction.
- Novel: Gallegos, Rómulo. (2012). “La devoradora de hombres.” Chapter in *Doña Barbara*. [1929]. University of Chicago Press. (Venezuela)

### **Week 2 The Unthinkable: The Haitian Revolution and Caribbean Anti-Slavery Literature and Historiography**

#### Readings:

- Essay: James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1989. Selections.
- Critical Study: Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1995. Selections.
- Novel: Carpentier, Alejo. *The Kingdom of This World*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975. Short Selections in Spanish.

### **Week 3 Wars of Independence: Simón Bolívar and Liberalism' Revolutionary Epic**

- Film: *Bolívar soy yo*. Dir. Jorge Alí Triana. 2002.
- Short Story: Borges, Jorge Luis. “Guayaquil.” *El Informe de Brodie*. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1970.
- Historical Document: Carta de Jamaica. 1815. Bolívar, Simón. *El Libertador: Writings of Simón Bolívar*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. Selections.

### **Week 4 Caudillos and Civil Wars: Juan Manuel de Rosas and Facundo Quiroga**

- Film: *Camila*. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. 1984.
- Short Story: The *Slaughterhouse*. Esteban Echeverría. 1871.
- Painting: *The South Matadero*. Emeric Essex Vidal. 1820.

### **Week 5 Caudillos and Revolution: Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, and the Mexican Revolution**

- Film: *Viva Zapata!* Dir. Elia Kazan. 1952.
- Optional Film: *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*. Dir. Bruce Beresford. 2003.
- Historical Document: *Plan of Ayala* (1911). Emiliano Zapata.
- Short Story: “They Gave us the Land.” *The Burning Plains*. Juan Rulfo. 1953. In Spanish.
- Paintings: The Mexican Revolution. Diego Rivera. José Guadalupe Posadas. David Alfaro Siqueiros.

### **Week 6 Racialization: *Indigenismo*, Gaucho Literature, Whiteness, and *Mestizaje***

- Poem: Hernández, José. *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro*. (1872). Selections. Ediciones Ateneo. (Argentina). In Spanish.
- Essay: González Prada, Manuel. “El problema indígena”. In Foster, D. W. (2014). *Literatura Hispanoamericana: Una Antología - An Anthology*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315785196>. (Peru)
- Essay: Sarmiento, Domingo Faustino (1915). “La raza blanca.” *Conflicto y armonías de las razas en América*. 1883. “La Cultura Argentina.” (Argentina)
- Essay: Vasconcelos, José (1997). *The Cosmic Race: a bilingual edition* (Johns Hopkins paperbacks ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter I. (Mexico)

### **Week 7 Eccentrics and Queers: Frida Kahlo, Love, Gender, and the Mexican Revolution**

- Film: *Frida*. Dir. Julie Taymor. 2002.
- Historical Document: *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait*. F. Kahlo. 1995. Selections in Spanish.
- Paintings: Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky. F. Kahlo. 1937.

### **Week 8 Eva Perón, Saint & Demon: Class, Gender, and the Politics of Representation**

- Film: *Eva Perón: The True Story*. Dir. Juan Carlos Desanzo. 1996.
- Testimony: *My Message*. Eva Perón. 1952.
- Short story: *Esa mujer*. Rodolfo Walsh, 1965.
- Photography: Pinéldes Fusco. 1951. Plaza de Mayo. October 17<sup>th</sup>, Loyalty Day.



### **Week 9 Romanticism Revisited: Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, Hollywood, and the Cuban Revolution**

- Film: *Che*. Dir. Steven Sodebergh. 2008.
- Historical Document: *Socialism and Man in Cuba*. Ernesto Guevara. 1965.
- Photography. *Guerrillero Heroico*. Alberto Korda. 1960.

### **Week 10 The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo: Antigone and Dictatorship in Latin America**

- Film: *The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*. Dir. Susana Muñoz and Lourdes Portillo. 1985.
- Historical Document: *Letter of a Writer to the Military Junta*. Rodolfo Walsh. 1977.
- Photography: *Primera ronda*. 1977.

### **Week 11 The Pink Tide: Lula Da Silva, Melodrama, Messianism, and Mass Politics I**

- Film: *Lula, Son of Brazil*. Barreto. 2009.
- Editorial: *El horizonte de la integración latinoamericana*. Lula Da Silva. 2014.
- Editorial: *Brazil's Lula: Saint or sinner?* Katy Watson. 2018.
- Photography: Lula Da Silva and the Masses. Various pictures.

### **Week 12 The Pink Tide: Hugo Chávez, Melodrama, Messianism, and Mass Politics II**

- Film: *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*. Kim Bartley & Donnacha O’ Briain. 2003.
- Speech: *Anti-Imperialism and the Bolivarian Revolution*. Hugo Chávez. 2004. Youtube.
- Photography: Hugo Chávez’s Funeral.

### **Week 13 ‘Nasty Women’: Reproductive Justice, the Green Wave, and the Abortion Debate in Argentina**

- Critical Essay: Uslenghi, Alejandra. "La biopolitización de la procreación." *Crítica de la razón reproductiva. Los Futuros de Foucault* by Penélope Deutscher. Eterna Cadencia, 2019.
- Video: Darío Sztajnszrajber: “El aborto es una cuestión política, no metafísica.” Youtube.
- Pictures: La marea verde argentina: «El derecho al aborto lo ganamos en las calles». Open. Democracy.

## Week 14 Research Presentations



*Battle at San Domingo*, a painting by January Suchodolski, depicting a struggle between Polish troops in French service and the slave rebels and freed revolutionary soldiers. Source: Wikipedia.

	Argument	Evidence	Mechanics
Excellent A to A+	A clear, original, persuasive, and sophisticated argument with a provocative thesis which takes a clearly defined position relating to the topic	Makes excellent use of evidence; interprets and uses evidence with sensitivity to the nature of the text(s) and of historical contexts.	Well-written, elegant and clear with appropriate documentation. No spelling errors or punctuation errors, including apostrophes.
Very Good B+ to A-	Well-organized, with a clear and coherent thesis statement and argument; may need to be encouraged to ask more difficult questions.	Very good use of evidence with clear understanding of the nature of the evidence and its historical context.	Well-written on the whole, though there may be some passages that are unclear or require further explanation; good use of citations, etc.
Good B- to B	A clear thesis and argument, though not necessarily a particularly original or creative one; some attempt to synthesize or draw conclusions.	Good use of evidence, clear understanding of the basic elements of the texts under discussion and their uses; no major problems of interpretation.	Some problems of spelling, grammar, word choice or style, though not sufficient to entirely obscure the points being made; basic scholarly apparatus intact.
Fair C- to C+	Some effort to develop a basic argument, though it may be unevenly or inadequately developed; banal approach/question (or one that simply restates discussions we have had in class).	Some use of evidence; some problems of understanding or interpretation.	Confusing or vague, requiring a real effort on the part of the reader to guess at the arguments being made or their implications; problems with spelling, grammar, word choice and style.
Poor D or Fail	No clear thesis or argument/ purely descriptive; argument is a-historical and polemical.	Fails to use evidence from the text adequately or competently; inappropriate or misunderstood examples; significant problems of understanding or interpretation.	Poorly written, significant problems with grammar and word choice, difficult to understand or follow basic claims; failure to properly identify or cite passages quoted.