



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1997 Volume I: Twentieth Century Latin American Writing

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## Latin American Short Fiction

Curriculum Unit 97.01.07  
by Jeannette Rogers

This curriculum teaches Latin American literature to middle school students. In place of treating as prerequisites the history of Latin America, her religions, ancient and modern, and the complex literary styles of magic realism and the fantastic, these and other strands are presented sequentially through examples first of literature which is familiar and then Latin American literature. Although these and other themes are always present in Latin American literature, it is not necessary to be an expert to recognize them, and learn about the specific references in any given work.

I teach Spanish I in middle school. My students are ages eleven to fourteen, grades sixth through eighth. I have a few Hispanic students and a very few whose roots are Asian. The majority are Americans of African and/or European descent. My curriculum is Spanish: the language, customs and culture. Behind this lies the all important goal to expand the horizons of the young, to help them come to accept that different is not inferior.

I have chosen to use Latin American literature for my curriculum unit, as distinct from Latino or Spanish literature. Latin American literature is written in Spanish or Portuguese by people who live in countries where those languages are spoken: in the Caribbean Basin, in Central and South America, and in Mexico. Latino literature is written in English, or the bilingual idiom sometimes called Spanglish, by people who trace their heritage or identify themselves as Hispanic with roots to Spanish speaking peoples and countries, but who live in the United States. Spanish literature refers to that which is written in Spanish by Spaniards. Spanish Language or Hispanic literature is sometimes used to refer to literature written in Spanish by people from any Spanish speaking background who write in Spanish. My students often find this confusing; they tend to equate language, culture and race; hence "Spanish" comes to mean Latino, particularly Caribbean-Hispanic American. They ask how Picasso can be Spanish if he is white. I will return to these issues in my discussion of cultural clash and racism.

Our understanding of America is changing from the 19th century melting pot to a 20th century cultural pluralism. Instead of "E pluribus unum (out of many one)" we are recognizing that we are a nation of many heritages, and our diversity provides understanding unavailable from a narrower base. Perhaps in the 21st century our identity will become more global; as nations extend their economic radii to include neighboring countries, as in NAFTA and the European Common Market, we will begin to understand ourselves as citizens of the world. For now, I am eager to teach my students to be citizens of the new world, the world that hosts immigrants from every part of the globe, from the first arrivals 40,000 years ago to those arriving today. We share a history of leaving behind a mother culture and adapting what we recall to fit where we have come.

Some of us believe that we have forgotten more than we remember. Some of us are struggling to recall, to hold onto our ancient roots. All of us are learning how to live with others whose ancient memories are different.

Learning about those differences has always fascinated me. Speaking a second language has been part of the journey. Part of understanding ourselves is recognizing that we don't need to limit ourselves to English only, that allowing ourselves to use another idiom enriches us, opens the world to us, does not weaken our knowledge of place, of belonging. We the educated, the educators, have the task of reducing cultural isolation, prejudice, bias and ignorance precisely by pointing out the endless variety of culture in a diverse population. We do not fear what we know. Diversity itself must become the face of our familiar.

I have learned in this seminar that my own experience and knowledge of Latin America is directly valuable in my teaching. If my students understand what I have done and what I believe, their own learning will have more meaning.

My passion for Latin America began with my first knowledge of the Spanish language, the soft rocking sound of southwestern USA Spanish speakers. It permeated my mind at an early age and left a neural pathway which has since been busy with new attractions. I first saw a picture of Machu Picchu when I was fifteen. I did very poorly in school in Spanish: memorizing verbs out of context was beyond my commitment, but I could not forget the tantalizing mystery of Peru. When I was in college, suffering through *Do-a Barbara* and Borges in Spanish, I had two experiences which shaped my future. It was the time of my great hero, Cesar Chávez, who led the migrant farm workers' movement in California. He was a non violent resistance fighter who eventually died from complications resulting from his numerous hunger strikes, but not before he had made America notice the plight of the farm workers. If he had spoken to his constituency in the language of the majority culture, he would have a day named after him. He was the first great leader of civil rights for Latinos. That summer I spent working in West Denver in a Chicano community center, running youth programs. I learned about Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales, a former boxer who became a political activist and the writer of one of the first bilingual poems to describe the roots of Latino identity, entitled "Yo Soy Joaquín/I am Joaquin." I began to understand a new part of Latin American/Latino dynamics. That summer there were marches in Denver about Mexican American rights and plights. I remember the chant was "Sock it to me Chile power, ooh, ah." That was my first protest march, led by Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales. I also went to my first funeral, a small child killed in a fire in her apartment. I understood that her death was related to bad housing and distant landlords.

The following summer I joined an organization called Amigos de las Américas, whose mission it was to inoculate the children of Central America against smallpox, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus. We nineteen year olds were trained for three weeks and sent in pairs into small villages in Honduras to vaccinate school children. I shudder at the thought of what damage we may have done. We were told that the Amigos program had successfully halted an epidemic of childhood disease, with a high mortality rate. For me it was so devastating an experience that I could not bear to think about it. I turned away from the reality, although I wrote my senior thesis on the Alliance for Progress in Honduras in 1970.

In 1973 the film *State of Siege*, directed by Costa-Gavras, was released. It told the story of the Tupamaro guerrilla movement in Uruguay, and the involvement of the CIA in training those who tortured the resistance. Yves Montand and Costa-Gavras came to New Haven, to the Lincoln Theater, now known as the Little Theater at ECA. After the showing they answered questions from the audience. I began to recognize the complex relationship between the USA and Latin America. It was a bad time in Latin America, the 70's. I had a friend who was one of the few Americans among the thousands of Chileans arrested and held in the soccer stadium

in Santiago when the Allende regime collapsed under the lies and murder of the military. The movie *Missing*, is about this epoch. What it does not tell is the power of fear to paralyze. My friend was paralyzed from his experience. There are things so frightening that we cannot bear to know their reality. I was to learn this later.

I finally went to South America in 1978. The first stop was Machu Picchu. It is all and more than it has been described. I was on my way to Paraguay to live with Doctor Joel Filártiga, and his family, who ran a clinic in the *campo* treating the Guarani speaking *campesinos* for the myriad diseases of rural poverty, not the least of which was intoxication from breathing the insecticide they used on their cotton crops. It was not macho to use a mask, so they breathed full force the chemicals made by American companies and labeled NOT FOR SALE IN THE US. Joel Filártiga, the doctor, was a black sheep member of the upper class. His mother was a ranking member of the Colorado party, the party of the dictator Alfredo Stroessner. Joel felt a compulsion to speak his mind. He worked too closely with those who suffered under the dictatorship to remain blinded and silent. Eventually an ambitious and jealous police officer believed he would gain from silencing Filártiga. He took the Filártigas' seventeen year old son and tortured him until he died. Instead of shutting up Joel, it was as though a damn had burst. He spoke and wrote and drew his rage and agony in international view. He was arrested and beaten three times. He became a case of Amnesty International, and eventually sued—and won the case against—the torturer in US court. A very inaccurate movie was made of this story by Sergio Toledo, 1991, *One Man's War*, starring Anthony Hopkins. I was there with them about a year after Joelito had died. The family was, in antiseptic North American terms, dysfunctional. We were there as witnesses, to protect by our presence against any further reprisal by the authorities. We learned to be paranoid; we were questioned in subtle ways. We did not know whom to trust. The truth became an inconstant. We were encouraged to doubt Filártiga, who was obviously unbalanced by the death of his son. There was no solid reality, no fact, no story which told us how to proceed, what to count on. At 1:00 one morning, Nidia, Mrs. Filártiga, came to us and told us to get up and dress; the police had come. We went out into the subtropical night, lit by the heavy moon, to the patio which extended back to the patients' rooms which opened onto it. The compound was drenched in sultry light; you could see the green boundary, and the shadows surrounding. They were soldiers, perhaps sixteen years old. They held Uzi machine guns, with tube barrels like French horns. "It is a pleasure to meet you," said the police chief, with the easy manners of Latin diplomacy. "May we have your papers, please. There has been some trouble. Nothing for you to worry about. You can come to the police station on Monday to get your passports."

They took Joel that night. He was back in the morning, not much worse for wear. He said that there had been a bomb, or that the police said that there had been a bomb, that they thought his car had been used by the guerillas, that the engine was still warm, that the police said there was a bomb as an excuse to round up the usual suspects. We got used to not knowing, an experience we were learning is common in worlds like the one we were visiting.

The police did not give us our papers on Monday. They said that the papers had been taken to some army barracks in a nearby town. We decided to go to the US embassy in the capital. We took the two hour bus ride in, walked to the phone company and phoned the embassy. The consul was available. We told our story at the embassy. The ambassador, appointed by President Carter, was Robert White, a valued diplomat who was later adroit in Nicaragua and other Latin American hot spots, with a forceful response to human rights violations. He heard our story. It took a few hours for Ambassador White to arrange for our papers to be returned to us. He was curious to hear our story.

For a few days I felt protected as though the rules I had grown up with were still in force, as though some wise parent had intervened in a childhood squabble and set the table straight again. But soon I began to be afraid.

It wouldn't be difficult for us to disappear. We belonged to no community, except the family Filártiga. We knew other Americans in Asunción, but our association with a persona non-gratis made their immediate lives difficult as they lived and worked with the upper classes of the town. They suspected us and we suspected them. Who really was giving what information to whom? And what information was worth exchanging anyway? We felt so insignificant, uninformed and unofficial that we were of no use to anyone. And yet we were the target of an uneasy curiosity. Only Ambassador White seemed unconcerned about us. We decided to leave. I felt defeated by the bullies. I felt inadequate even to the task of bearing witness. I returned to the United States, depressed at my sense of failure, disengaged from the American scene, culturally shocked. It helped to find Latin Americans who had come from Argentina or Chile or Nicaragua who knew what we were talking about. It hurt deeply to meet Americans who had been in Paraguay and believed Filártiga to be a fraud, perhaps the most successful of the campaigns to silence him. It helped a lot to hear that two weeks after we had left, Ambassador White, in his state car with flags flying, drove out to Ybycu' to visit the Filártigas in their rural clinic. Perhaps our little uproar was bearing witness enough. To my knowledge the family has not been bothered again. And now Stroessner is dead.

Even in the USA the sense of conspiracy and distrust persisted. The Filártiga family has many friends and relatives in the New York area. Like many countries with an oppressive government and an impoverished people, there are as many Paraguayans out of the country (three million) as there are in Paraguay. This community embraced the Filártigas and sought to help them. They learned that two of the principle players in the death of Joelito were in the New York area. Amnesty International became involved in the Filártiga case, as it had come to be called. Using a nineteenth century law which had been drafted to provide protection against piracy the Filártigas were able to bring suit against Amerigo Pe-a. The law provided that if both parties were in the USA, a foreign national could bring suit against another foreign national for crimes committed outside the United States. Dolly Filártiga moved to New Jersey and took her brother's murderers to court. The Filártigas did win the suit for six million dollars, although none of that would ever be recovered. Pe-a disappeared. Who can know how much embarrassment or inconvenience the Stroessner regime had in the face of this man, Dr. Joel Filártiga, who would not be silenced.

About three years later, when I had an eighteen month old daughter and was carrying my second, I was asked if I would teach Spanish in a middle school in New Haven a few hours a week. I began the long struggle to motivate my students, to understand what Spanish had to do with their lives, and what the curriculum I was asked to teach had to do with mine. In our seminar this year, our leader—Teacher—has challenged us to look closely at what appears obvious. She has taught us not to teach the biographies of writers before we teach their writings. It is not their lives which have made them famous, but the effect their words have had on the lives of others. If you want to teach biography, she told us, teach your own. Explain to your students what this literature means to you. Tell them about yourself, and why you teach Spanish. As you explore the writings with your students, questions may arise about the authors, about why they wrote what they wrote. Perhaps then biographical information may be relevant.

I want my students to understand from learning about Latin America what political activism is. I want them to know, especially my African American students who are sensitive to prejudice, to being coerced or ignored by the dominant culture, I want them to know that there are real things to fear, and real ways to fight. I want them to know I recognize their alienation. I want them to understand what it means to be resistant to political oppression. I want them to think about the differences and similarities between Tupac Amaru and Timothy McVeigh. I want them to know about non-violence and passive resistance and civil disobedience, about civil rights and human rights. I want them to believe in hope, and the righteousness of the underdog. I want their values to be a source of strength to speak honestly for themselves.

Many curricula units have been written about Latin America; some are mentioned in this paper. Others can be found in the indices of the Institute. I have included descriptions of mine because they are part of the background from which I write this paper.

This is my fourth seminar on Hispanic culture, all through the vehicle of literature. The first was taught by Roberto González Echevarría on "The Modern Short Story in Latin America," particularly the works of Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez, (87. .01). I wrote about "The High Road of Saint James (El Camino de Santiago)" by Alejo Carpentier. My study of the story resulted in an annotation of the historical and symbolic references used by Carpentier. The story is an allegory of pilgrimage at the time of the conquest of the Americas, beginning in Spain and travelling to Cuba. The world of 16th century Spain is illuminated as the protagonist travels from Compostela to the West Indies.

In 1991 I participated in Howard Lamar's seminar on "Regions and Regionalism in the United States: Studies in the History and the Cultures of the South, the Northeast and the American Southwest" (91. .01). I researched the history of European-Indian relations in the southwest, beginning with the prehistoric Anasazi and continuing through the Indian Wars of the late 19th century with the destruction of the Chiricahua and the resettlement of the Navajo after Bosque Redondo.

In 1992 I participated in a second seminar led by Roberto González Echevarría, this time entitled "Writings and Rewritings of the Discovery of America" (92. 02999). My readings led me to the conflict between Spain and Portugal for possession of South America. Again my interest was on the impact of the collision of two worlds, Europe and America, which had developed separately, and with societal values which sustained their disparate cultures so contrasting, conflicting and polarized that disaster must occur when finally they met. This point of impact, or to use the science fiction term, first contact, fascinates me. I am still exploring it. I want my students to wonder about it.

In our seminar this year on 20th century Latin American writing we have discussed our readings as particularly Latin American in the omnipresent themes of politics and religion which shape the lives of the protagonists. The energy of creation is still fierce; politics, like the earth, is volcanic, and religion is a life force. Political opposition is expected, popular, and does not shirk from human cost. Mythology from Precolumbian peoples is not a quaint and distant story, but an active religious inheritance from ancestors.

North Americans find Latin American politics confusing. We may criticize our own political system as self serving, creating jobs for politicians, and we may not feel that government is immediate to our lives, except in the irony of its failure to provide certain services in contrast to its inability to fail to collect our money, but we don't translate our frustration into motivation. Passionate politics feels immature, unstable. We have a hard time finding any similarity between violence in the United States and violence in Latin America. Perhaps we are right. They are not alike. North American violence surprises us because we believe that we have the best country on earth, and that our problems can be solved in the polls. We think Latin American violence is avoidable: if only *they* had education and a democratic constitution; if only *they* weren't so excitable . . . But we learn from Octavio Paz that North Americans do not see what they don't want to exist. And we do not see the contradiction between our own lack of faith in the political system and our outrage at Americans who turn to violence.

We must acknowledge that in a pluralistic culture we must protect a diverse collection of rights and varied values equally. We must teach culture without offending; protect the environmental without violating the rights of property owners; defend religious freedom including the absence of religion. We must mediate between the religious beliefs of those who bestow the right to life with conception and those who construe

rights at birth. What have responsibilities to affirmative action. In a society with one value system, these debates are short lived; majority rules. But we no longer live in a society with a majority. **All** cultures in America are minority. 90% of all migration in the world is into the USA. By 2005, Hispanics will outnumber African Americans (public radio). We are coexisting minority cultures and our survival depends on a commitment to mutual understanding which begins with the co education of our children.

Multiculturalism and diversity are jargon in the public schools, coined years ago to represent the effort of the American educational system to combat institutionalized racism. Their intent is to teach children and families of the dominant culture to value minority cultures and traditions. Sometimes this feels unbalanced, unfair. Why, it is asked, do minorities, *they*, get special attention and *we* don't? It is intrinsic to being the dominant culture that "normal" be recognized as that which is most prevalent. As long as this is true, the dominant culture literally does not see the world around it. Even a very large culture becomes insular without the influences of "other". The global village is a string of separate and suspicious villages until the villagers begin to know and accept the traditions of their neighbors as variations on the human condition.

With this understanding we teach languages other than English. We begin with food. We learn the names of tapas in Spain and that Mexican cuisine isn't limited to what fits in a tortilla. I find my students parochial, even though they live in a cosmopolitan, though small, city. They are suspicious about the unfamiliar. So I translate the customs as well as the words, make the traditions parallel. When we eat tapas, the students bring pepperoni and peanuts. Their discomfort about greeting by kissing on the cheek can be reduced if they pair this with their own acceptance of football players patting each other in congratulation, or grandchildren kissing their grandparents. If they are appalled that gifts brought by the Magi are placed in shoes in exchange for the straw that children had left for the camels, I remind them about the gifts they receive in their Christmas stockings in exchange for the cookies and milk Santa Claus has eaten. When they see themselves reflected in another culture they begin to recognize that we are all the more alike for our differences.

I have said that several representative themes are found in Latin American literature. It is the story of a dominant culture, or stories of many cultures with similar conflicts, which struggle to identify themselves, children of native American mothers with European fathers, spouses of kidnapped African slaves, Asian or European refugees of yesterday, parents to children of all races blended to become one race, *la raza*, inheritors of powerful opposing religious systems, archaic roles of gender and class, all with an eye unblinking to the violence of human existence.

The work of some of Latin America's great literary geniuses, such as Horacio Quiroga, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel Garc'a Márquez, Octavio Paz, and Juan Rulfo will be included. I intend to present the stories in English, as my goal is to make comparison readily accessible. Readings in the original Spanish and using the stories to practice translation can be used with more advanced students.

## OBJECTIVES

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Students will read Latin American literature to understand the impact of history and religion, ancient and modern on the peoples of Latin America.

Students will compare texts to understand that history is recorded through the eyes of humans and therefore must be read with an eye toward recognizing that the recorders have made choices in their work.

Students will learn that politics is not merely speeches on television, but the dramatic and important shaping of national events.

Students will discuss the role of language in the determination of social class.

Students will understand the terms magic—real and fantastic as describing styles of Latin American literature.

Students will compare and contrast their own lives with the lives of characters in Latino literature.

Students will clarify their understanding of the terms: Latino, LatinAmerican, Hispanic, and Spanish.

Some students will travel to Mexico.

## ACTIVITIES

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### Religion, Ancient and Modern

Religion has been a powerful force in Latin America for thousands of years. It played a major role in the conquest, particularly in Mexico, where the prophecies foretold the arrival of fair haired people who may have been the return of the god, Quetzalcoatl, or may have brought the end of the Fifth Sun, or modern world of the Aztec nation.

The Spaniards arrived with a mandate no less powerful than the peoples they met. After eight hundred years of occupation by Muslim invaders, their final expulsion in 1492 brought an enormous religious fervor which resulted immediately in the expulsion of all non-Catholics from Spain, and the search for new souls to convert to the only true church. This passion was fueled as well by the growth of the protestant movement in Europe. Spain was intensely religious. The gold taken from the New World was to be used for the purpose of religious expansion and the augmentation of the weakened Catholic church. There was no sense, as we have in modern anthropology, of the intrinsic value of culture and belief systems.

The religious blend which resulted from this collision was created at the cost of many lives, huge destruction and time. It makes a fascinating story. In the literature of Latin America religious themes are common, ancient, blended and modern. To teach these ideas several steps are involved. The first is the ancient beliefs.

The two great cultural systems of Latin America before Columbus were the Andean culture which was dominated by the Inca in the fifteenth century, and MesoAmerica, of which the Aztecs held control. Creation myths and stories of the celestials are available for both areas. When choice arises I will teach Mesoamerica because Mexico is the focus of the last activity: travel.

In the story of their origin, The Aztecs, or Mexicas as they called themselves, had wandered for a long time looking for the symbol of the feathered serpent to show them where to build their city. They had come from the mythical Aztlan, on the Pacific coast south of Acapulco, and wandered into the Valley of Mexico. There they saw an eagle in a cactus, eating a snake. Quetzalcoatl had found their home. The story is written many times. One of my favorites is by Rudolfo Anaya, *Lord of the Dawn: the Legend of Quetzalcoatl*. Anaya is Mexican American, that is to say that his ancestral roots are in Mesoamerica, even though his life is in New Mexico. The Hispanic southwestern United States was part of and settled by Mexicans up until the war of

1848. To Anaya this is not a quaint story of the ancient gods, but a story of the beginning of his people.

For further understanding, use Bernal D'az del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* ; Miguel Leon Portillo, *Broken Spears* ; Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror* ; and Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* .

An example of precolumbian religion in modern writing can be found in Elena Garro, "The Fault of the Tlaxcaltecas," a story of the fall of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital and the site of the modern Mexico city. Another reference is a poem, published in a bilingual edition, by Rodolfo Gonzales "Yo Soy Joaquin." It is an epic poem about Chicano identity traced back to Aztec heritage.

I have chosen two stories to explore religion post-Columbian. The first is the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She is the patron Saint of Mexico, a vision to a poor Indian, Juan Diego, who was finally able to convince the power of the church to build a church more accessible to the poorer worshippers. Again there are many versions of this story. I plan to tell the story to my students and then read it aloud in Spanish. I will use a text called *Realidad y fantas' a* , which also contains "El origen de los Aztecas."

My second story is more ambitious. Borges has a story called "The Gospel According to Mark," which takes place in rural Argentina. The characters in the story take quite literally this beautiful biblical account of the life of Christ, and as it happens in fantastic literature, what is imagined comes true, often with a somewhat gruesome ending. In order to understand this story, the class will first have to read the story in its original form from the Bible, sections of which can be read in Spanish.

## **History and Politics**

A second major theme of Latin American literature is history. History is rich and exciting and can be confusing. The precolumbian history of Mesoamerica, the layers upon layers of civilization, stretches back five thousand years at least, before the Aztecs came to power. Aztec domination of Mesoamerica, though powerful in a way which is reminiscent of the Roman Empire, lasted a short two hundred years, and ended brutally with the Spanish conquest. A curriculum unit has been written about Tenochtitlan and Teotihuacan (96.06.09).

One of the most intriguing aspects of the conquest is the person Malinche, interpreter and mistress to Cortes. She spoke several languages because she was the daughter of Aztec nobility, sent off to live in the Yucatan. I intend for my students to contrast the legends of Malinche and Pocahontas.

These two famous historical women represent parallel legends in Mexico and in the USA about the role of the native in the conquest of their lands by the Europeans. In the myth of Pocahontas, the daughter of the Indian chief protects the English soldier from death at the hands of the suspicious tribe. She later marries him and the two worlds coexist, with her marriage to Captain Smith. Malinche also helped and loved the invading European. Sometimes her story is told as a political maneuver for her smaller tribe to be protected from or to gain retribution against the stronger Aztecs. Sometimes she is a harlot, smitten by the beauty of the fair haired Cortes. She is a slave, a gift, a skilled translator. But the myth always leads to Malinche, willing or no, as the woman who led the enemy to the heart of the Aztec nation, Eve, the ultimate traitor.

A legend is a story told about history, but not limited to historical accuracy. In both cases, Pocahontas' and Malinche's, the tribe did not survive. In both cases the desire of the European was, in fact, for the wealth of the native peoples, in gold or land. And in fact though the destruction of Tenochtitlan was more dramatic, the destruction of the woodland tribes of the Atlantic was more complete. The legend of Pocahontas tells a pretty story of cooperation, like the first Thanksgiving. The legend of Malinche tells of a nation founded on betrayal, a



people whose existence was forged in the collision of two societies which could not cooperate.

The centuries following the conquest have led to different fates for the people represented by these two women. In the United States the Indians were pushed out, assimilated and decimated. The 19th century stories of The Indian Wars and the Trail of Tears (91.01.01) are a devastating revelation of the single minded westward expansion, without regard for the lives or rights of people who already lived there. Unlike the sack of Tenochtitlan it is not a fast and total destruction, but a pattern of decades of small destructions and defeats. Now in the late 20th century we have turned our awareness to the value of other cultures, and as a nation are protecting the people we were heartlessly destroying one hundred years ago.

It happened very differently in land settled by the Spanish. While the British came to establish colonies free from the tyrannies of the crown, the Spanish came for the glory of the crown and especially for the Church. They came for gold and for souls. Unlike the British they did not come with families to begin homesteading. They found wives and lovers among the people they conquered and began a new race. Mexico especially is a land of mestizos, of European and Indian ancestry.

How this is explored with North American children depends on their age. Different scholars describe Malinche in various ways. Octavio Paz makes the conquest violent and sexual. This is not present in the same way in Bernal D'az del Castillo, who says, " I should know; I was there. I knew her mother." In *Broken Spears* there are clear indications of deception, but as with all the others, one must consider the source. Carlos Fuentes in *Buried Mirror* has another slant. The most complete seeming and least impassioned was in Cecil Robinson (see Bibliography). But, as Paz would say, he is North American and does not see what he does not want to exist. One wonders if the correlative for Paz is to see what he wants to exist.

Recent units on Pocahontas are available from the Institute. In 1996, a seminar on Race and Culture yielded two (96.03.01 and 96.03.06). These explore the development of the legend of Pocahontas irrespective to the paucity of historical fact.

The history of Latin America invariably leads to modern political struggle, violent and non-violent. Much of Latin America still lives in a classist society of haves and have nots. A particularly poignant story is "Es que somos muy pobres (It is that we are very poor)" by Juan Rulfo. Poverty leaves no alternatives.

García Márquez' most recent book, *News of a Kidnapping* , is about the Colombia drug cartel's attempt to silence its enemies by kidnapping leading journalists. The strategy is eerily like those of the dictatorships of the 1970's in Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, for example.

Peru is rife with examples of political struggle with roots in the cultural collision of the conquest and the continued existence of a classist/racial duality. In Peru, largely as a result of geography, in a country of desert and jungle split in half by the enormous Andes Mountains, there still exist two incompatible cultures. One is the nation of the coastal lowlands, of cities and modern conveniences, of commerce and competitive economics. The other is the culture of the indigenous peoples who live in the heights of the Andes and the interiors of the jungles in the traditions of their ancestors. Their economy is communal, their life style ancient, traditional, impoverished. There has always been an undercurrent of tension between these two worlds. Jose Maria Arguedas wrote a powerful novel , *Deep Rivers* , which explores this intolerance. *The Story Teller* by Mario Vargas Llosa is about stone age people deep in the rainforests of Peru, on the verge of extinction. A symbolic and dramatic movie, *La Muralla Verde*, written and directed by Armando Robles Godoy in 1970, is a bold statement about the vanity and power of the political military government and its disregard for the basics of survival.

In the experience of my students a boundary exists between people according to their complexion, particularly heritage from African ancestors. The Hispanic people they know are largely of Puerto Rican ancestry, and experience these same boundaries. As a result non-English language dominance tends to be equated with complexion in their minds. Perhaps they are exactly right: prejudice, rejection of Other, can stem from any difference, linguistic, racial and cultural are only a few. It is one of my goals in this section of the curriculum to untangle these threads so that they may be compared.

When the Japanese Embassy in Lima was invaded in December 1996 I talked with my students about it. Many angles to follow up arose; some appear totally random, but caught the attention of the students. Tupac Amaru is a homonym with toopack (Two Pack?), the rap singer who also lived and died a life of violence led in resistance to his sense of exclusion from the majority culture. These two very different forms of protest can be contrasted in discussion. Issues of what is being protested, and how the cultural majority react will bridge two seemingly unrelated events. The derivation of the names will be a starting point.

The available literature of politics is endless. Pablo Neruda in *Canto General* mentions the political history of most of Latin America in his paean to her. Using selections from this book and the lovely, if historically inaccurate, 1995 Italian film by Michael Radford, *Il Postino* will give students a good sense of the romance and passion of Neruda. Many outstanding films on Latin American politics may be appropriate. *State of Siege* by Costa-Gavras leaps to my mind because it was the first I saw, and because the Uruguayan struggle might be called the first of the modern human rights battles in which the USA was implicated on the side of violation. Costa-Gavras has out a new movie called *Conspiracy Theory*, 1997, which may help students find this material familiar.

Elena Poniatowska wrote *Massacre in Mexico* about non-violent student protest which ended in a massacre of the protesters by over zealous forces at the time of the Mexico City 1968 Olympics. It was the same year as the shooting of four student protesters at Kent State University in Ohio.

Seminars from previous years which may prove useful in teaching Latin American history include: Society and Literature in Latin America, (82.05), History as Fiction in Central and South America, (85.04), Writings and Rewritings of the Discovery of America, (86.02 and 92.02), The Latin American Short Story, (87.01), Autobiography in Latin American Literature, (90.01), Ancient Americas (94.02).

### **Minority Status and Speech**

What is “proper” speech? An issue which attracts my adolescent students is the problem of the vernacular, resurfacing again in Ebonics. They identify partly in resistance to the adult world, and partly as a reflex defense of what they see as an attempt to obliterate minority culture. It is an opportunity to teach what we mean by dialect, what we know of the survival of speech patterns from Africa in her descendants in our classes. It is also a chance to reroute the question of “Why can’t they learn English.” In *Deep Rivers*, Arguedas deals with the issue of Quechua, a language thought untranslatable into Spanish until recently. Parallels can be found in the slang of our students, which equally “lose something in translation.” The discussion could include comparison of idioms they know (*que tal*) and some they don’t (*Fulano*, it’s raining cats and dogs). The University of Chicago *Spanish-English Ingles-Espanol Dictionary* has a section of these. For a more complete understanding of Arguedas read the afterword by Vargas Llosa. *Deep Rivers* is a challenging book, but many sections of it are pertinent to this unit.

Another angle on “proper” speech is illustrated by writers such as Junot D’az, Ana Lydia Vega, and Gloria Anzáldua. In academic circles the bilingual idiom they use is still homeless, yet an increasing number of

writers is publishing in it, in response to growth of the popularity of this mode of speech. Students can consider the question who invents speech, and who writes dictionaries. They will also recognize language use as a source of acceptance—or rejection.

Arguedas, as well as many other writers, attacks the problem of minority status, but he experiences the conflict as a genetic member of the dominant society (Peruvian aristocracy) raised in minority culture (Quechua) to the degree that he is not accepted by or comfortable in either. Can our students imagine themselves in these shoes? In “Dances with Wolves” a woman has lived with the Sioux so long she does not remember her first language, English. She fears being removed from her home by force by the westward expansion. What happens if a person identifies with a culture despite superficial or physical disparity? Bernal D’az speaks of Spaniards who had assimilated in the Americas during the discovery and had no interest in returning to their previous lives when the conquistadors came across them.

### **Magic realism and Fantastic Literature**

Magic realism is the term used to describe the tradition in Latin American writing which does not separate rational reality from dreams, imagination, metaphorical or symbolic or mythical happenings. Ancestors may be in conversation with their descendants, people may turn into animals, nightmares and dreams come true, metaphors blend into themselves. North American writing is more likely to distinguish between these, allowing rational conscious tangible measurable happenings to be more real or determinant or important than writers using “magical realism.” Of course, if you are García Márquez or Borges you might add at this point that North Americans only accept what they want to accept of reality, a logical conclusion of Cartesian thought. This, however has no impact on reality, any more than blindness has an impact on light. The works of M.C. Escher, particularly “Drawing Hands,” are for me a visual example of magic realism. It also reminds me of “Borges y yo,” by Borges, and “To Julia de Burgos,” by Julia de Burgos. Felisberto Hernández has a similar statement about his work in the introduction to *Piano Stories*. Each of these is some version of the artist creating or separating from him/herself creating.

The tradition in the Caribbean basin, and including Mexico to Colombia was invented by Alejo Carpentier, and called Magic realism. Characters slide in and out of time and of selves, as in Garro’s “It’s the Fault of the Tlaxcaltecas,” *The Kingdom of this World* by Carpentier, the films told by Molina in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Hector Babenco, 1985). Another tradition, literature of the fantastic, grew somewhat differently in South America. Characters maintain their personalities, but it is quickly apparent that the setting itself is fantastic or imaginary. Events grow into extensions of their imaginations, fears, dreams or thoughts. Bizarre and often macabre stories result. Writers of this genre include Horacio Quiroga, Jorge Luis Borges, and Julio Cortázar. The great American master, Edgar Allan Poe, was much admired by these literary greats. Cortázar wrote and delivered a eulogy at Poe’s funeral. The distinction between these two literary genres becomes blurred. See Emil Rodríguez Monegal, Felisberto Hernández and Tzvetlan Todorov for further reference.

Our students are already attracted to the literature of the fantastic, especially in movie form. The devotion to the grisly ghost stories of Stephen King and Alfred Hitchcock is evidence of the North American passion for the fantastic. Some science fiction might be considered an offshoot of the fantastic.

One accessible writer is Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*. The movie is wonderful, though appropriately rated R. Sections of the book, however, are lyrical descriptions of life growing up on a ranch in Mexico, with a little magic mixed into reality.

García Márquez’ “Light is Like Water” illustrates magic realism by extending the simple simile of the title to its

tragic conclusion when for literal minded children light does become wholly, not just symbolically, like water. It fills up the apartment so that the children can boat in it while their unknowing parents are away. It is an easy story to read, only five pages, and students can understand this concept about the elusive edges of reality. It can be taught first as a metaphor, with students brainstorming sayings which are similes or metaphors of light and water: ie; light pouring in a window, a pool of light, bathed in light, a wash of color, and rainbows. After this activity the class should read the story aloud. (The teacher should be forewarned that there is reference to adult sexuality in the story. "Papa's condoms" are mentioned, as well as adult film and TV.)

The story begins with the sentence, "At Christmas the boys asked again for a rowboat." Garc'a Márquez begins with the a realistic situation: children repeatedly asking for something they think they want badly. However we are immediately warned to suspend our disbelief, as the parents should have, when we learn that "the boys were more determined than their parents believed." (p. 157)

Totó, nine, and Joel, seven, are living abroad with their parents. Like in many other families, their success in school is rewarded in the way they request, and also like many other families, the reward comes through the father's indulgence over the practical objections of the mother, who says, "To begin with, the only navigable water here is what comes out of the shower. (p. 157)" To begin with she is right, but she doesn't know that the narrator has answered Totó's question about why light turns on at the touch of the switch by saying, casually and poetically, that "(l)ight is like water; . . . you turn on the tap and out it comes." (p.158). The narrator even warns us, ". . . I did not even have the courage to think about it twice." Nor do we, the readers, think twice about what happens when determination and imagination are greater than belief.

The boat is stored in the maid's room, since a maid is another thing the family does not have. Hence we are warned of the possibility of the boys alone without adult supervision. Step by step, one Wednesday evening at a time, we learn that the parents routinely go out to the movies, adult movies like *Last Tango in Paris* , hence the need for the condoms, leaving the boys alone, and that the boys routinely fill the house with a modest three feet of water at that time, and that the boys always get the reward they ask for when they have excelled in school. But we the readers are surprised because we do not believe what we have been told: that Madrid is landlocked, that Toto and Joel are skilled boaters, more determined than can be believed, that the boys longed to go farther, and that light is like water.

Follow-up discussion will include a plot summary, then a step by step analysis of when the metaphor becomes reality. As in any reading of Latin American literature, students should identify cultural descriptors: words or actions which are culturally specific, and compare them to their own culture. Parallels in the literature of North America are plentiful. All the works of Edgar Allen Poe are possibilities. *Jumanji!* , a delightful picture book by Chris van Allsberg, was made into a movie showplace for Robin Williams and special effects. I recommend the book.

In "Miss Forbes' Summer of Happiness" an idyllic summer is transformed for two boys by a governess who institutes a militaristic control on their life. When the desire for freedom from tyranny leads them to plot her death, the boundaries between imagination and reality become blurred, and to the surprise of the boys it isn't just their own imagination which has run away with them. After reading the story, discussion might include: who imagined or fantasized what? What did the boys want? What did Miss Forbes want? What did the boys have to do? What did Miss Forbes have to do? What did the boys plan? What did the boys fear? What really happened to Miss Forbes?

*Aura* , by Carlos Fuentes, reminds me of *The Picture of Dorian Grey* by Oscar Wilde. In the pursuit of eternal youth there is always peril. Dorian Grey had made a deal with the devil for his own continual youth. In *Aura*,

the aged main character has recreated herself, her youth and perhaps her husband through magical use of drugs and religion. But the exertion of keeping her young self present is exhausting. The story is told in the second person, as though Aura's late husband were telling it to you, his new replacement. The sexual relationship between Aura and the narrator may deny its usefulness to middle school students.

Borges wrote about the fantastic and published collections by other authors. The collection, *The Book of Fantasy*, which he edited with Silvina Ocampo and Adolfo Bioy Cesares contains the favorite fantastic stories of the three. Works by John Aubrey, Ray Bradbury, Thomas Carlyle, Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allen Poe are included. It is a stunning volume. It gives a more extensive meaning to the term. "House Taken Over" by Julio Cortázar is included in the volume. This story, like much of fantastic literature, will be readily enjoyed by our students. "The House Taken Over" is also included in *Blow Up and Other Stories* another excellent source of fantastic literature. "Bestiary" is my favorite; there is a tiger living loose in the house and the residents must anticipate his location to plan their lives. It happens that the head of the house hold is beastly himself . . .

In his discussion of Cortázar's short fiction Ilan Stavans compares Cortazar's early works to Bunuel's 1930 *Le Chien Andalou* and to the European surrealist movement. He refers to underlying themes of incest, surrealism and psychoanalytic dynamics. "Bestiary" is a story of involuntary intrusions and disquieting invasions, says Stavans. It is interesting that he mentions these motivations of Isabel, but merely says that the Kid is cruel; I see him as sadistic and abusive to Rema and Nino. "Bestiary" is a story which may be read with these motivations in mind, but it is also a powerful work at a less intense and intricate level which our students can appreciate. It is told, Stavans explains from the limited perspective of a child's view, "from the floor up."

Isabel is sent to stay with her Aunt Rema Funes for the summer. The reasons are adult; we are told the story through Isabel's mind. She understands that she is difficult to deal with in the summer for a variety of reasons. We know her mother and sister Ines have mixed feelings about her visit to the Funes, that the house is depressing, and Isabel's only companion will be "that boy" (79). We are also warned that the tiger is not a problem because the Funes' are careful in that respect. But we are forewarned: we know Cortázar writes in the tradition of the fantastic, we must be willing to wonder if the story is really true, and we must be prepared for a macabre twist.

"That boy," Nino, turns out to be a comfortable companion to Isabel. They play happily together with what they have. An ant colony becomes their fascination. And we hear, casually, about being careful not to go where the tiger is. Isabel loves and admires Rema. She watches her actions, and is soothed by her touch. Rema's husband Luis and his brother, the Kid, are also there. Luis is remote, quiet, intellectual. The Kid is sadistic, hurting Nino or threatening Rema in a subtle ways which are noticed by Isabel.

The routine of the tiger is established midway through the story. The foreman keeps track of the whereabouts of the tiger and informs whomever he meetx. Isabel soon learns to adjust and who to ask. After a time she becomes one of the trusted sources of knowledge of where the tiger is. She becomes subliminally aware of the tiger, and of the Kid. As the story progresses Isabel begins to draw parallels between the insect life she watches and that of the humans in the house. She mentions hope of escape in relation to the ants. A preying mantis leads her to visions of murder, although we understand that it hurts Isabel to kill an insect. One day after she has heard Rema crying, Isabel is the one to tell the family where the tiger is. A close analysis of the passage allows us to see that Cortázar has not said directly that Isabel lies, but creates an opportunity for her to let the family believe that she is relying on information from the foreman. When the Kid enters the library, Isabel is so deeply entranced with the snails she is watching, snails that can escape from their houses, that she does not react to his first scream. She does not move until Rema comes to her, and holds her in a way

that Isabel interprets as gratitude and acquiescence.

Questions for discussion include, from whose perspective is the story told? Who is listening? Who is not listening? Does Rema know that Isabel has murdered the Kid? Did Isabel set up the Kid to be killed by the tiger? Is the Kid sexually assaulting his sister in law? Does Luis know how far his brother dares to go? What does Nino know? How does Isabel feel toward her aunt, and how does Rema feel toward her niece? Who is complicitous in the death of the Kid? Who is oblivious or in denial? Who is the real danger in the story? Does every character agree?

“House Taken Over” is a story a brother and sister whose house is being taken over. In a Kafkaesque way we are never told how or by who this is happening. The story was written during the second dictatorship of Juan Peron, and reflects the steady growth of the regime in the lives of its citizens. It also reflects the house Cortázar grew up in and his close relationship with his sister, according to Stavans. The siblings in the story are adult and live together because they never bothered to get married. Stavans is a good source to further understand this, the first story Cortázar published, and one of his most powerful.

In discussion with students I will follow up the notion of a steady subtle creeping domination. I would reiterate some of the questions discussed in “Bestiary,” particularly those alluding to the sense of powerlessness the characters seem to have, their inability to make the evil stop. Who tells this story of “The House Taken Over,” and who is listening? I would ask my students if this is a ghost story, and what makes it so or not? What is the function of ghost stories in their lives? What social values of our time do they remind us of? Which of Edgar Allen Poe’s stories does this story make us think of? Were the characters party to the loss of their house?

Horacio Quiroga was an earlier writer and master of this genre. Unfortunately few of his stories are available in English. *The Decapitated Chicken* contains several stories with children as protagonist, or narrator, in a world of fantasy. There is an excellent and thorough analysis of this story in Peter Beardsell (see bibliography). The collection entitled *Cuentos de la selva (para ni-os )* was published in 1918. Unfortunately these are not yet in English. A unit on Quiroga (85.04.02) written by Trish Niece. The valuable information and suggestions in her unit need not be repeated here.

### **Coming of Age in Latino Literature**

As we embrace the concept of cultural diversity we include more reflections of that diversity through the eyes of our various minorities. Latino literature in recent years has become more available in the United States, and part of school curricula. This is the story of a minority culture, or several with similar aspects, in response to the dominant culture, trying to find justice or fairness or equality in a society founded at the intersection of racism and open integration.

Short stories by Hispanic authors can introduce universal aspects of life to students of Spanish in middle school. They can read in English stories about people they understand, and with whom they may identify. They will discover cultural differences and make links of cultural similarities. And best of all they will understand that all this foreign language is as American as tortilla chips and salsa, right here in our own lives. I plan to read aloud, or have students read, stories in class each week. The lessons are designed to focus on differences and the ways those differences show us to be alike. My purpose in this section is to provide an opportunity for my students to compare themselves to characters of their own age from literature written about and by Hispanics. I intend to include a variety of short stories and excerpts from novels.

As my goal is to make what is foreign seem familiar, my objectives will be reached by having students

compare their own lives to the lives they are reading about. I had hoped originally to find “coming of age” stories from other countries. I came to realize through my reading that “coming of age” as we understand it in the USA is an experience peculiar to us. In other countries the shift from childhood to adulthood is different, perhaps more sudden, sometimes earlier and sometimes later. The economic needs of society and the traditions which have resulted differ greatly between the Latin and the North American. In stories by Latin Americans, children are often relegated to minor roles ( “Balthazars’ Marvelous Afternoon”), or must assume adult burdens at what we Northerners consider a tender age (“Es que somos muy pobres”), below the age of consent ( *Innocent Erendira*), minors (“The Desert”). The stories of adolescents of Hispanic heritage who are living in the USA (Latino literature) more often reflect the longer passage from child to adult, complicated by the duality of their culture. Some popular writers are Chicano authors Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, última* and Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* and *Woman Hollering Creek* ; the Puerto Rican authors Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican* , and Judith Ortiz Cofer, *An Island Like You* ; Cuban Cristina Garc’a, *Dreaming in Cuban* ; and Dominicans Julia Alvarez, *How the Garc’ a Girls Lost their Accents* and Junot D’az, *Drown* . Hispanic children and adolescents growing up in the USA have the same problems as other minorities, as we discover all of us are. Prejudice, isolation and generational non-acceptance, particularly around issues of assimilation, are familiar.

This may be the easiest part of the unit to prepare and to teach. There are dozens of usable books, written within the acceptable parameters of *estadounidensiano* . Whatever that is. I have mentioned Cisneros, Garc’a, Anaya, Alvarez, Ortiz Cofer, D’az, Rodr’guez. There are other Caribbean writers such as Edwidge Danticott and Jamaica Kincaid whose works speak of cultural boundaries whether in Spanish or French or English. A valuable resource to mention at this point is Hazel Rochman’s 1993 bibliography of children’s books for a multicultural world, *Against Borders* . It has an enormity of useful material, and I desperately hope she publishes an addenda every five years. She includes fiction, non-fiction and video listings. The book has sections in themes—family, love, journeys—and also by ethnic group, among which Latino is included.

Chicano author Richard Rodr’guez has written an essay, published in *U.S. News and World Report* , April 7, 1997, about American adolescence in Los Angeles. He concludes that American authors have not known how to write the end of the story of adolescence since Mark Twain signed off, “The end. Yours truly, Huck Finn.”

### **Family, Holidays and Children on their own**

Students will read stories with clear and complex family trees, and make comparisons with their own families. ( *Bless Me, última* , *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* ). Some comparisons may be visual: drawings, collages, family portraits. I may ask students to investigate their own family trees to find out what heritages and linguistic traditions might be represented. We may compare customs, like birthday parties or school experiences, (“Once”). Did their parents have cultural boundaries to marriage? See the seminar (89.03) on the family in Latin American literature. We will also look at the family/cultural trees of some of the people we are discussing in the course. We have mentioned Arguedas’ dual cultural experience. We might also talk about people such as Frida Kahlo and Elena Poniatowska, both Mexicans with recent European roots: Kahol’s father, and Poniatowska herself.

I am aiming to create a sense of American-ness, that we all, from Tierra del Fuego to the North slope of Alaska, are immigrants. We are descendants of people who came here from somewhere, with languages forgotten or remembered, with traditions intact or reinvented. The accidents of history have put us where we are and our neighbors where they are. The new world is new to us all, and we may live next door to people who have come from any part of the world. Multiculturalism means that people of different origins now live together. This is a new experience to humanity, given five or ten thousand years of urban civilization on every

continent.

In discussion I would ask students what we mean by cultural diversity or multiculturalism. Why do schools value it? What cultures are represented in your family? church? school? What is prejudice? What is taboo in our culture? in the culture of the middle school child? in other cultures? Do Americans marry their siblings? Why not? Why did ancient Egyptians or ancient Americans feel differently? What about killing other people? murder? capital punishment? human sacrifice? What role did cultural misunderstanding have in the fall of Tenochtitlan? What assumptions does a dominant culture make about the values and goals of minority cultures?

## **Holidays**

We know that holidays are relics from agrarian society, when life was measured by the seasons and the work each required. From the most ancient memories of humanity we find celebrations to mark the continuing circle of time. The Aztec calendar, which is as accurate as the calendar we now use, ended every 52 years. At the end of a week of waiting, if the sun came up again the gods had allowed another 52 years. The last one ended in 1519, the year of the Spanish invasion. Several institute units have been written on Aztec life. One on the Aztec calendar (85.06.02) will be helpful in teaching this advanced mathematical understanding. In all cultures we find a celebration of the beginning of spring, the vernal equinox, the height of the sun, summer solstice, the harvest and autumnal equinox, and the end of the growing dark, winter solstice.

The celebration of holidays crosses culture, yet we discover discomfort and confusion about learning the differences among these celebrations. A unit is prepared in teaching multicultural holidays (89.01.12). Though the word holiday means Holy Day, in modern times this does not necessarily imply a religious sense. The Day of the Dead is sometimes misunderstood as devil worship, when in reality it is more like our memorial day. We now teach holiday clusters, such as Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and El día de los reyes. Other cultures celebrate this last as Twelfth night (Shakespeare), Epiphany (Ecclesiastical calendar), and Little Christmas, as it is called by many 20th century European Catholic immigrants to the USA. Autumn festivals include Homecoming, Thanksgiving, Succoth, Halloween and El día de los muertos . And of course in summer we celebrate Memorial Day, Midsummer Night, May Day, the 4th of July and San Fermín when the bulls run in Pamplona. Many books about multicultural holidays are available.

## **Survival without adult support**

Children coping with disaster in the absence of adequate parental aid is the stuff of great literature and movies. *Huck Finn* is alternately censored and praised as the greatest American novel. *Home Alone* , John Hughes, 1990, grossed millions. "Es que somos muy pobres," a story by Juan Rulfo, is a simple monologue of a girl considering her future after the family's cow, meant to be her dowry, has drowned. "The Desert," Quiroga, is similar to *Walkabout* , an Australian movie about two children whose father kills himself, leaving them in the outback of Australia to walk their way back to civilization, and discover self reliance through the Aboriginal coming of age experience. Bunuel's famous film, *Los olvidados*, exposes the lives of the homeless children of Mexico. S.E.Hinton's books are taught in middle school. Several have been made into movies, *That Was Then, This Is Now* , Christopher Cain, 1986 and *The Outsiders* . *Stand by Me* is a 1987 Stephen King movie about four friends who go alone on an odyssey to find a dead boy's body. In "Light is Like Water," Garc'a Márquez gives us a story of parents who were very present, but underestimated the power of their sons' imagination.

## **Travel**

Part of my lesson plan will be rather more intensive, extensive than some teachers will find convenient. I am



planning for the first time to take a group of eighth grade students to Mexico in February, 1998. I want the trip to be an exploration of Maya ruins, which they studied in sixth grade, and an opportunity to use the language they will have worked with for nearly three years. I am still investigating which tour company will provide us with the most for the least. I hope to be able to arrange for us to stay away from American resorts, and truly experience something of Mexican culture. I will plan a lesson on Mexican money, exchange rates, coins and the prices to expect as part of this unit. I will stress those aspects of life which are parallel but different over those aspects which are identical. For example, cultural comfort should extend beyond going to McDonalds in San Juan or staying at the Marriot in Cancún. A shopping trip in the open air market would use Mexican money rather than dollars and cents.

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Neruda writes about his life, not dates and facts, but impressions and memories.

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Included are stories by Elena Poniatowska, Clarise Lispector and Silvina Ocampo.

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This volume represents a statement of the identity of Puerto Rico to the rest of the world. What do we mean by Puerto Rican culture, who is Puerto Rican, what is Puerto Rico are all answered in the writings of forty authors, from Julia de Burgos to Geraldo Rivera. The writings are essays, fiction, poetry, and memories about the politics and identity and prejudice of what it means to these individuals to be Puerto Rican. Every teacher in New Haven should have this book. Because it is Puerto Rican and includes mainland English writers and island Spanish writers, it could be considered Latino or Latin American writing.

Santos, Rosario, Ed., *And We Sold the Rain: Contemporary Fiction from Central America* . Seven Stories Press, 1988.

The authors of these stories are less known than those in some of the other collections. Themes of the stories reflect life in war torn Central America.

Tapscott, Stephen, Ed., *Twentieth Century Latin American Poetry* . Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

This is an excellent bilingual collection of Latin American poetry. It includes over four hundred poems by eighty five poets.

### **Latino and Caribbean Literature:**

Alvarez, Julia, *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* . Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1991.

———. *In the Time of Butterflies* . Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1994.

This is available in Spanish, *En el tiempo de las mariposas* . Santo Domingo, 1995. It is my favorite of Alvarez' books, a fictional history of four sisters who resist the Trujillo regime in Santo Domingo.

Anaya, Rudolfo, *Bless Me, Ultima* . Berkekey, CA: Tonatiuh-Quinto Sol International Publishers, 1972.

This is a novel you could read for no reason at all. A boy comes of age between the shepherd culture of his father and the village culture of his mother, under the mentorship of Ultima, the *curandera* .

———, *Lord of the Dawn: The Legend of Quetzalcoatl* . Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.

Anaya's poetic and powerful writing lends itself to this story of the Aztec search for the promised land.

Anzaldua, Gloria, *Borderlands, La Frontera* . San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

Anzaldua writes often in *Spanglish* , using the language itself to express her sense of neither belonging nor not belonging to the place on earth where she was planted.

Becerra de Jenkins, Lyll, *The Honorable Prison* . New York: E.P.Dutton, 1988.

This is a children's book about a girl whose family is under house arrest in Latin America. I find it useful in helping students identify with a child's understanding of adult political resistance.

Cisneros, Sandra, *The House on Mango Street* . New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

Cisneros work is deceptively simple. It can be read one story at a time as prose poetry or as a novel with a devastating reality as the sum of the very short passages.

Danticat, Edwidge, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* . New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

———, *Krik? Krak!* New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Danticott, a professor of French Literature, is Haitian, lives in the States, and writes in English of a very Latin American childhood in Haiti.

Diaz, Junot, *Drown* . New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Powerful and painfully honest; when you read Junot you know why he is a best seller.

Duran, Roberto, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Gustavo Poerez Firmat, Eds., *Triple Crown: Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Cuban American Poetry* . Tempe, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1987.

Garcia, Cristina, *Dreaming in Cuban* . New York: Ballantine Books, 1992

This is also available in Spanish: *Sonar en Cubano* . New York: Ballentine Books, 1994.

It seems a Spanish translation would lose some of a story about Cuban (Spanish) being the language of her unconscious.

Gonzalez, Ray, Ed., *After Aztlan: Latino Poets of the Nineties* . Boston: David R. Godine, 1992.

Gonzales, Rodolfo, *Yo soy Joaquin* . Denver: 1967.

Milligan, Bryce, Mary Guerrero Milligan, and Angela de Hoyas, Eds.,

*Daughters of the Sun* . New York:: Riverhead Books, 1995.

The fifth sun is the Aztec world, yet this collection includes works by authors of Caribbean extraction as well as Mexican. Many

authors are familiar, for example Gloria Anzaldua, Rosario Ferre and Julia Alvarez. The introduction and notes include some historical background and explanations of the terms chicano, latino, and hispana.

Ortiz Cofer, Judith, *An Island Like You* . New York, Orchard Books, 1995.

Much of Ortiz Cofer's work is valuable in the classroom. *An Island Like You* is easy access for middle students to Latino literature.

Rebolledo, Tey Diana and Eliana S. Rivero, Eds., *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* . Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993.

If you only buy one collection of chicana literature, buy this one. It includes thirty five pages of introduction and history of chicana writing, and photographs of many writers, historical when available. The writings begin with foremothers, the earliest dated 1877, dictated by Dona Eulalia Perez. The divisions include self and identity, self and others, myths and archetypes, writers. The final division is celebrations, with entries by Lorna Dee Cervantes, Pat Mora, Alma Villanueva, among others.

Santiago, Esmeralda, *When I Was Puerto Rican* . Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1993.

### **Texts: Short Story Collections**

*Antologia Comunicativa* , Volumines 3,4,&5. Bogota: Editorial Norma, SA, 1988.

*Dime Dos* : Lexington, MS: D.C.Heath and Co., 1994.

*Galeria Hispanica* . New York: McGraw Hill, 1971.

*Joyas de Lectura* . Skokie, IL: National Textbook Company, 1979.

Kupferschmid, Gene S., Ed., *Al Tanto: Catorce cuentos contemporaneos* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

*Latino Caribbean Literature* . Paramus, NJ: Globe Fearon Educational Publishers.

*Mexican American Literature* . Paramus, NJ: Globe Fearon Educational Publishers.

Muckley, Robert L. and Eduardo E. Vargas, Eds., *Cuentos Puertorriquenos* . Chicago: National Textbook Co., 1974.

*Realidad y fantasia* . New York: Amsco School Publications, Inc., 1984.

*Selecciones Literarias* . Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997.

### **Reference:**

Beardsell, Peter R., *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* . London: Grant and Cutler, 1986.

Despite the title, the text is in English, and is a critical guide to Quiroga. His analysis of "The Decapitated Chicken" will prove worth the effort to find the book.

Carpentier, Alejo. *The Kingdom of this World* . New York, Knopf, 1957.

The Spanish edition contains a prologue on magic realism. Unfortunately it is not in the English edition. Few of Carpentier's works are

available in English, and all are out of print. He is the great master of magic realism. We need new editions.

Diaz del Castillo, Bernal, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* . New York: Da Capo Press, 1996.

Diaz de Castillo was one of Cortes troops. He writes an eyewitness account of the conquest. He states that he knew La Malinche, that he knew her mother. He is potentially the most accurate source on the facts behind the conflicting legends on La Malinche, but with the caution that he wrote his memoirs fifty years after the conquest.

Gonzalez Echevarria, Roberto. *The Pilgrim at Home* . Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

Gonzales Echevarria may be Carpentier' greatest critic and admirer. He has also led several seminars in the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.

Hernandez, Felisberto, *Piano Stories* . New York: Arsilio Publishers, 1993.

In the introductions and prefaces are three statements about Hernandez' style of fantastic writing.

Leon Portilla, Miguel. *Broken Spears: the Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* . Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

These translations from Nahuatl to Spanish to English are the writings of Aztec witnesses to the conquest. I recommend using *Broken Spears* with Bernal Diaz de Castillo's writings as witness from the Spaniard 's side.

Monegal, Emir Rodriguez, *Borges: a Reader* . New York: Dutton, 1981.

Especially pertinent are the essays on "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" and "Magic and the Art of Narrative."

Neimark, Anne M., *Che!* New York: J.B.Lippencott, 1989.

An informative children's biography of Che Guevara.107 pages; good bibliography.

Robinson, Cecil. *Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature* . Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977.

Robinson offers a factual account of the origins of La Malinche, largely taken from Diaz de Castillo. His interpretation of her influence on the conquest is compassionate and respectful.

Rochman, Hazel, *Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World* . Chicago: American Library Association, 1993.

As a guide to Latino literature for children, this is an invaluable book. She annotates her selections, and includes suggested appropriate grade levels. I hope she updates her curriculum frequently, as minority literature is a fast growing market. For example, she lists one of Judith Ortiz Cofer's books, her non-fiction about growing up Puerto Rican. Seven of her books are listed in the Yale catalogue. Perhaps the best is the selection of short stories, titled *An Island Like You* .

Santi, Enrico Mario, *Pablo Neruda: the Politics of Prophecy* . Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

I found critical works on Neruda and others to be helpful.

Shaw, Donald L., *Alejo Carpentier* . Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.

I found this second reference on Carpentier useful. It is an overview of all of his published fiction. Shaw created a two page chronology of Carpentier's life and writings which saves time in research. Each of Carpentier's works is discussed in very un-Carpentierian chronology. For those who don't read Spanish, it is a good source to understand what Carpentier said about the

“marvelous real” and connections with European surrealism.

Stavens, Han, *Julio Cortazar: A Study of the Short Fiction* . New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

Interpretations of Cortazar’s individual stories, including “Bestiary” and “House Taken Over,” can be found by using the index.

Stoll, Anita K., Ed. *A Different Reality: Studies on the Works of Elena Garro* . Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 1990.

Garro is a writer rediscovered. This anthology is interesting in its own right, particularly in the chapter of Garro’s understanding of Malinche in contrast to that of her former husband Octavio Paz. She, too, needs translation.

Todorov, Tzvetlan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* . Cleveland: Case Western Reserve, 1973.

Published in French as *Introduction a la litterature fantastique* , this is a very academic, very intellectual reference to the understanding of what fantastic is in literature, without reference to any of the writers included in this study. Todorov defines fantastic literature as to including the participation of the reader in the question of the nature of the uncanny events of the story: real or imaginary? The reader’s suspension of judgement is essential to fantastic literature.

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