



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

Introduction

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“Latin” America is not only that America south of the U.S. border. It is the America which speaks the Latin languages of Spanish and Portuguese, in Mexico and the Caribbean, in Central America, on the continent and the islands off of South America. Latin America includes those areas of the United States where, today, Spanish is spoken or where persons of Spanish heritage reside, whether or not they are Spanish-speaking. In this seminar we have studied novels, poems, and stories of this century’s Spanish America. We have extended our view, too, to some of the recent work of persons who live in the United States, and who write in English, but whose culture is strongly marked by a Mexican or Spanish-Caribbean heritage.

We have explored questions of race, culture, identity, and gender. We have, in our reading, seen Latin American writers express and debate the origins of peoples and languages, different kinds of freedom and enslavement, the lives of men and women from their differing perspectives, the worlds of faith, love, and religious ritual, and dominance of certain powers over others.

Our readings included Gabriel Garc’a Márquez’s *The Colonel Has No One to Write to Him*, *Collected Stories* and *Strange Pilgrims*; Octavio Paz’s *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*; stories by Ana Lydia Vega, Elena Garro, Clarice Lispector, and Elena Poniatowska; *Fictions* by Jorge Luis Borges; Pablo Neruda’s “The Heights of Macchu Picchu”; and poems by Delmira Austini, Julia de Burgos, Alfonsina Storni, Nicolás Guillén, and Gabriela Mistral. In our final classes we opened the books, in English, of Julia Alvarez, Junot D’az, and Sandra Cisneros. The literary experience of America, which originated well over a century before the pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Rock, has concluded, in this seminar, with these writings of Americans in the United States of Spanish heritage.

The curriculum units in this volume travel the long path of Hispanic culture in and out of the United States. Trudy Anderson focuses on the work of the Latina writers Sandra Cisneros, Esmeralda Santiago and Judith Ortiz Cofer. Yoselin Roman emphasizes the importance of African culture and gender differences in her study of Latin American culture. Kathryn Gray and Elsa Mar’a Calderón offer complementary studies of the African presence in Caribbean literature: Kathryn highlights the relationship between Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén, and Elsa offers an engagement of the poetry of the Cuban Nicolás Guillén with the poetry of the Puerto Rican Luis Palés Matos. Michelle Sepúlveda provides an introduction to the dramatic literature of the Spanish Caribbean. Jeannette Rogers outlines a full and extensive discussion of the short fiction of twentieth century Latin America, including her own engagement with Spanish culture and the writings of numerous Latino authors. John Grammatico, Mary Stewart Bargar, and Joyce Patton all focus on literature and activities for children who wish to know more about the Latin American world. John introduces students to several

aspects of Mexican culture, Mary offers artistic projects and an introduction each week to a different country, and Joyce explores a variety of reading materials about and from Latin America. Yolanda Trapp provides a warm introduction to the literature of Latin America's Nobel prize winners and the fiction of Isabel Allende.

We hope these curriculum units are of value to other teachers who wish to share the wealth of Latin American culture with their students. Lesson plans and activities, thoughtful and numerous, provide a place to begin in our efforts to bring a fuller understanding of culture into the classroom.

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