

Contemporary Women Writers in Latin America
SPAN 24524 / LACS 24524 / GNSE 23160

Class Hours: T Th 12:30-1:50, Cobb 430

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Thoughts (2019)
Gleo

Course Description

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, feminist critics in multiple world literatures fought for a reevaluation of canons dominated by male writers, seeking representation for those overlooked women who have nevertheless been integral to the development of regional literary cultures. Arguing that women's experiences have historically been devalued and their identities and subjectivities often misrepresented by patriarchal texts, woman scholars and authors have sought to instead bring feminine voices to the forefront to speak on their own issues. While these

concerns related to representation remain relevant in the twenty-first century, our conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, and the role of literature in culture and politics have changed significantly. Moreover, Latin America has seen an explosion of internationally lauded literature dominated by women writers over the last decade: as a recent article put it, “The new Latin American Boom is here, and it is being led by women.”

In this course, we will engage with Latin American women’s writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (1960 to the present), moving from texts concerned with feminine identity, subjectivity, and representation to those challenging oppression and marginalization and advocating for liberation. We will contend with changing trends and historically and culturally specific ideas of womanhood and feminine sexuality in Latin America, analyze the roles of race, class, and ability in women’s writing, and engage with legacies of authoritarianism, political violence, and femicide throughout the region. Texts will traverse the region and time period, ranging from the short stories of Isabel Allende (Chile, 1942-) to the concept albums of Rita Indiana (Dominican Republic, 1977-) and the 2017 novel *Temporada de huracanes* by Fernanda Melchor (Mexico, 1982-). Student assignments, which will include blog posts, podcasts, images, and/or videos, will revolve around the creation of a public-facing website dedicated to contemporary Latin American women writers. This course will be taught in Spanish.

Objectives

As part of this course, students will:

1. explain, compare, and synthesize major trends in contemporary women’s writing in Latin America,
2. identify and analyze historically and culturally specific conceptualizations of womanhood, femininity, and gender and sexuality more broadly in Latin America and contend with changes in these concepts over time,
3. analyze relevant course themes in novels, short stories, literary essays, poetry, music, and videos, and
4. support their interpretations using close reading and evidence from the texts in oral discussion, written assignments, and/or multimedia projects.

Materials

The required course texts below are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op or the UChicago Bookstore. If you purchase the texts elsewhere, please make an effort to buy the same editions, so that we will all be on the same page—literally—when discussing the texts in class. All other materials will be made available as links or PDFs on our course Canvas site.

Available at the UChicago Bookstore: Valeria Luiselli, *Los niños perdidos*. Editorial Sexto Piso, 2017. 978-8416677481

Available at the Seminary Co-op: Fernanda Melchor, *Temporada de huracanes*. Literatura Random House, 2017. 978-6073152730

Requirements

Participation is an essential part of this course, as it allows us to learn from one another and create new knowledge together through in-depth, productive discussions. This includes coming to class prepared to engage with the day's texts on a substantive level; listening attentively to your classmates and treating them with respect; and actively contributing and providing evidence for your ideas. Active participation also allows us to practice our language skills; remember, speaking a second language isn't about being perfect, but about taking every opportunity to improve!

There may also be **brief written assignments given in class or as homework**. These assignments will help evaluate your comprehension of the course material, encourage you to engage critically with the texts and key course questions, and provide you with the opportunity to regularly practice writing in Spanish.

The major project for this course throughout the quarter is the collaborative creation of a publicly facing **class website**. At the beginning of the quarter, each student will select an author and a literary text written by that author to write **two separate blog posts** on.

The **first post** (350-450 words), which should be posted by **9AM on the day of the class in which we will be discussing that author**, will provide a brief biography of the author (citing and linking to Encyclopedia entries, news sources, reputable websites, and/or scholarly articles or books—not Wikipedia). The student will also **briefly present (approximately 5-10 minutes)** their biography and a summary of (one of) the text(s) and its key themes to the class that day.

The **second post** (750 words), which will be posted **one week later**, should introduce and summarize the text and present and analyze 1-2 relevant themes of gender and sexuality, incorporating parts of our class discussion and relevant theoretical approaches from any articles we have read.

Both posts will be reviewed by the instructor, and students will have an opportunity to edit their publications with revisions.

At the beginning of the quarter, students will also select one scholarly article related to gender and sexuality for which they will be the **discussion leader(s)**. On the day that we will be discussing that article, students will come prepared to summarize key ideas, highlight key quotes to unpack, and ask guiding questions to help orient our discussion. Because of the number of students in our course, most discussion leaders will collaborate in pairs.

The **final project** for this course will consist of a final publication on the class website. At the midterm point, students will select an additional text of their choice from one of the authors we have covered in class or other late twentieth-/early twenty-first-century Latin American women writers not covered in the course. A list of options to choose from will be provided, but students are also welcome to explore their interests off-list and have their choice approved. Students will introduce, analyze, and interpret relevant themes of gender and sexuality in their text, using close reading and evidence from the work to support their ideas, and present this information in the form of **an argumentative essay, YouTube video, series of TikTok videos, podcast episode,**

or infographic or other image-based project. During the seventh week of the course, students will meet with me to discuss their plans for their final project.

Evaluation

Participation (including attendance, in-class discussion, and homework): 20%

Blog posts on class website: 30%

Post 1: 10%

Post 2: 20%

Presentation: 10%

Scholarly Article Discussion Lead: 10%

Final project: 30%

Course Policies

Attendance. Because class discussion is a major part of this course, attendance is a priority and will contribute to your participation grade. I do understand that students must occasionally miss class; please notify me in advance if you expect to do so. Students may occasionally be provided with alternative assignments to make up for missed classes. In the case of illness or disability, your health and wellness is a priority: please do not attend class sick. In the event of frequent or prolonged absences, I may ask for a doctor's note or other formal excuses.

Late Work. Assignments for this course are meant to promote student learning and stimulate discussion in the classroom. As such, it is important both for your own learning and for engaging with your peers to come to class prepared and submit assignments on time. Further, as an instructor, I also have to plan grading and my responsibilities to my students around my other responsibilities. Chronically submitting work late will affect your grade. Please get in touch with me at least 24 hours in advance to discuss if you are concerned about meeting a deadline on a major assignment.

Academic Integrity. In this course, students will practice engaging with texts as scholars. Scholars produce original work, but that work does not appear from thin air; it is the product of research, collaboration, and entering into a conversation with a scholarly community. This is why we cite: the practice of citation allows scholars to acknowledge what they owe to others, to show respect for others' work, and to build upon that work with a new contribution that results from that engagement with their colleagues. For this reason, it is essential that students act with integrity by citing their sources and never taking credit for work done by others. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the assignment and a referral to the Office of the Provost. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the University of Chicago Student Manual and (<https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/>) and contact me with any questions.

Disability Accommodations. I strive to create an accessible environment for all students through my course design and flexible classroom policies. I encourage students with disabilities who need additional accommodations to reach out to me to discuss how I can accommodate you

and to be in touch with the UChicago Student Disability Services Office (<https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/>) to receive support and resources.

Technology. Many of the texts for this course will be made available online via PDFs. However, it can often be easier to use hard copies rather than laptops to take notes on texts, absorb information, and locate and refer back to key passages in class. Talking around laptops can also impede class discussion. I do understand that laptops and other technologies aid students in a variety of ways. As such, although I encourage students to print out readings and minimize laptop usage as much as possible in class, I do permit the usage of laptops and tablets throughout this course. Students, in return, should use technology responsibly and politely, ensuring that they remain on task and are attentive and respectful to their classmates.

Diversity and Inclusion. The personal experiences that every student brings to our class are valuable because they make up who you are and provide unique perspectives for our intellectual community. I am committed to creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment in our classroom for students of all races, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, genders, classes, abilities, and documentation statuses by treating students with respect and being mindful of power dynamics in the classroom. I ask that all students come to class prepared to listen when their worldviews are challenged with respect, empathy, and open-mindedness towards marginalized backgrounds and experiences. I encourage students to come to me at any time with issues or suggestions on how to improve the inclusiveness of our classroom.

Content Warning. Some of the texts we will be discussing in this course include disturbing, graphic, and even traumatic content. This includes but is not limited to death, violence (in general and against women in particular), abuse, and rape and sexual assault. I am sensitive to the needs of students who may have experienced trauma and for whom these are difficult subjects and will strive to create a classroom environment that is emotionally supportive while we engage with and process these difficult and often draining topics. I ask that each student bring sensitivity and thoughtfulness to our discussions in order to contribute to the creation of a supportive environment. I will also do my best to alert students in advance of graphic content in course texts. I encourage students who are concerned about the impact of certain subjects on their mental or emotional health to discuss the course texts with me at any time. Your health and wellbeing come first.

Course Calendar

Unit 1: Identity, Subjectivity, and Representation

Week 1: Identity and Representation

Key Questions:

1. What makes a woman writer? How can we (or is it even possible to) try to define women writers as a collective?
2. Can women writers make a cohesive claim to shared identity that stands up under scrutiny?
3. How is it relevant that women have historically been excluded from the literary canon?

Tues. 3/19

- José Vázquez Amaral, "Letter from Mexico and Central America," *The New York Times*, September 18, 1960
- Marina E. Franco, "Women are Leading the New Latin American Literature Boom," *Axios*, July 29, 2021

Thus. 3/21

- Jean Franco, Introduction to *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (1989)
- "Prólogo: Mujeres de hoy: ¿tiene sexo la escritura?" in *Las trampas de la emancipación: literatura femenina y mundo hispánico* (2012)
- "Literatura femenina y canon literario hispano-americano" in *Las trampas de la emancipación* (2012)

Week 2: La escritura femenina: Feminine Subjectivities and Experiences**Key Questions:**

1. Is (or how is) women's writing different than men's writing? Put another way: Is there an "escritura femenina?"
2. How do women represent their own subjectivities in a way that is different from the way they have been represented by male writers?

Tues. 3/26

- Isabel Allende, Selection from *Cuentos de Eva Luna* (1989): "Dos palabras", "El oro de Tomás Vargas" y "María, la boba"
- Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975)

Thu. 3/28

- Rosario Ferré, Selection from *Papeles de Pandora* (1976): "La muñeca menor", "Eva María" y "La bella durmiente"

Week 3: Resistant Sexualities**Key Questions:**

1. How do patriarchal conceptualizations of women's sexuality inform the work of women writers?
2. What is the role of the erotic for lesbian writers?

Tues. 4/2

- Cristina Peri Rossi, Selection from *Evoché* (1971): "Dedicatoria I", "Prólogo", "La suplicante", "Composición"
- Carmen Maria Machado, Selection from *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017): "The Husband Stitch," "Real Women Have Bodies"
- Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980)

Thu. 4/4

- Jesusa Rodriguez, Performance: "Primero Sueño" de Sor Juana en FOMMA (2009)

- Cheryl Clark, “Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance” (1981)

Week 4: Gender, Race, and Class

Key Questions:

1. How do intersecting identities such as race and class affect Latin American women’s search for representation in the canon?
2. How does race and class complicate attempts to claim a cohesive identity for women writers as a group?

Tues. 4/9

- Excilia Saldaña, Selection of poetry: “Monólogo de la esposa” (1989), “Mi nombre (Antielegía familiar)” (1991)
- Lélia Gonzalez, “Racism and Sexism in Brazilian Culture” (1983)

Thu. 4/11

- Mayra Santos-Febres, Selection from *Pez de vidrio* (1994): “Pez de vidrio”, “Marina y su olor”, “Hebra rota”, “Acto de fe”
- Rosario Morales, “We’re All in the Same Boat” (1991)

Week 5: The Body and (Dis)Ability

Key Questions:

1. What does it mean for women to write “from the body?”
2. How do women writers represent the body in a way that differs from male writers?
3. How do questions of ability, disease, illness, and reproduction enter into women’s writing on the body?

Tues. 4/16

- Sylvia Molloy, *Desarticulaciones* (2010)
- Mariana Enríquez, “Nada de carne sobre nosotras” (2016)
- Prologue and Introduction to *El género al bies: cuerpo, género y escritura en cinco narradoras latinoamericanas* (2004)

Thu. 4/18

- Mariana Torres, Selection from *El cuerpo secreto* (2015): “Estrella caída”, “Época de muda”, “El corsé y la niña” y “Tierra madre”
- Alicia Borinsky, “Tentadoras, indiferentes, apáticas: mujeres y cuerpos” in *Narrativa femenina en América Latina* (2003)

Unit 2: Oppression, Marginalization, and Liberation

Week 6: Gender Performance, Gender Fluidity, and Trans Liberation

Key Questions:

1. How do trans and nonbinary individuals challenge the gender essentialism of earlier feminist movements?
2. How is gender performance and fluidity expressed in women’s art and writing?
3. How can art and writing contribute politically to trans liberation?

Tues. 4/23

- Selection from Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*
- Camila Sosa Villada, Selection from *Soy una tonta por quererte* (2022): “Gracias, Difunta Correa”, “Casa de la compasión” **CW: Child Sexual Abuse, Rape, Violence against Transgender People**

Thu. 4/25

- Rita Indiana, *Mandinga Times* (2020)—album and music videos

Week 7: Maternity and Migrancy

Key Questions:

1. Today, more children than ever in Latin America are migrating (around 8.7 million reported by UNICEF in 2023). How have women writers characterized border crossing and migration as related to maternity and reproductive justice?
2. How has the cultural category of motherhood been politically mobilized by women writers?

Tues. 4/30

- Valeria Luiselli, *Los niños perdidos* (2016), pp. 9-51 (including prologue)

Thu. 5/2

- Valeria Luiselli, *Los niños perdidos* (2016), pp. 52 to end
- Maria D. Lombard, “Introduction: Displaced Mothers and the Borders They Must Cross,” in *Reclaiming Migrant Motherhood* (2022)

Week 8: Ecofeminism

Key Questions:

1. What does a feminist approach to environmentalism and climate change look like?
2. How and why have women writers engaged with questions of climate justice from a feminist perspective?

Tues. 5/7

- Samantha Schweblin and Claudia Llosa, *Distancia de rescate* (2021) [Film: on Netflix]
- Gloria da Cunha-Giabbi, “Ecofeminismo latinoamericano” (1996)

Weeks 8-9: Gender-based Violence and Femicide

Key Questions:

1. What are the historical roots of femicide epidemic in Latin America? How has the region’s history of political violence, dictatorship, and poverty informed contemporary issues of violence against women?
2. How have women writers and artists articulated the struggle against gender-based violence as part of a systemic cultural issue?
3. What are the challenges for women writers who seek to ethically portray violence against women without numbing their audiences against the epidemic of femicide?

Thu. 5/9

- Luisa Valenzuela, “Cambio de armas” (1982) **CW: Sexual violence**
- *Final Project Prep Day*

Tues. 5/14

- Fernanda Melchor, *Temporada de huracanes* (2017), pp. 10-151 **CW: Gender and Sexual Violence, Pregnancy Loss, Transphobia, Violence against Transgender People**
- Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, “Introduction: A cartography of femicide in the Americas,” in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (2010) **CW: Gender and Sexual Violence**

Thu. 5/16

- Fernanda Melchor, *Temporada de huracanes* (2017), pp. 152 to end **CW: Gender and sexual violence, Pregnancy Loss, Transphobia, Violence against Transgender People**
- Las Tesis, “Un violador en tu camino” (2019) **CW: Sexual Violence**

**Final Project
Additional Writers to Choose From**

Elizabeth Acevedo (United States/Dominican Republic, 1988-)

Poetry selection

Katya Adaui (Perú, 1970-)

Short story selection from *Geografía de la oscuridad*, *Aquí hay icebergs* or *Algo se nos ha escapado*

Gioconda Belli (Nicaragua, 1948-)

Selection of poetry

Giannina Braschi (Puerto Rico, 1953-)

Selection of poetry from *El imperio de los sueños*

Aída Cartagena Portalatín (Dominican Republic, 1918-1994)

Selection of poetry

Rosario Castellanos (Mexico, 1925-1974)

Short story selection from *Ciudad Real*

Essay selection from *Mujer que sabe Latín*

Liliana Colanzi (Bolivia, 1981-)

Short story selection from *Vacaciones permanentes*, *Nuestro mundo muerto* or *Ustedes brillan en lo oscuro*

Alejandra Costamagna (Chile, 1970-)

Short story selection from *Malas noches* or relato from *Había una vez un pájaro*

Sônia Coutinho (Brazil, 1939-2013)

“Os venenos de Lucrecia” or short story selection from *Nascimento de uma mulher* or *Ovelha negra e amiga loura* (in Spanish translation)

Amparo Dávila (Mexico, 1928-2020)

“El huésped” or other short story selection

Guadalupe Dueñas (Mexico, 1910-2002)

Short story selection

Diamela Eltit (Chile, 1949-)

Short story selection from *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* or essays “Crónica del sufragio femenino en Chile” or “Colonizadas”

Laura Esquivel (Mexico, 1950-)

Essay selection from *Íntimas succulencias*

Nona Fernández (Chile, 1971-)

Short story selection

Elena Garro (Mexico, 1916-1998)

Short story selection

Margo Glantz (Mexico, 1930-)

Short story or essay selection

Angélica Gorodischer (Argentina, 1928-2022)

Short story selection from *Kalpa imperial*

Georgina Herrera (Cuba, 1936-)

Selection of poetry

Clarice Lispector (Brazil, 1920-1977)

Short story selection (in Portuguese or in Spanish translation)

Tununa Mercado (Argentina, 1939-)

Short story or essay selection

Lina Meruane (Chile, 1970-)

Short story selection from *Las infantas* or essay, “Contra los hijos”

Nancy Morejón (Cuba, 1944)

“Mujer negra”

Elisa Mujica (Colombia, 1918-2003)

Short story selection

Guadalupe Nettel (Mexico, 1973-)

Short story selection

Silvina Ocampo (Argentina, 1903-1993)

Short story or poetry selection

Mónica Ojeda (Ecuador, 1988-)

Short story or poetry selection

Alejandra Pizarnik (Argentina, 1936-1972)

Poetry selection

Cristina Rivera Garza (Mexico, 1964-)

Short story selection or selection from *El invencible verano de Liliana*

Anacristina Rossi (Costa Rica, 1952-)

Short story selection from *Situaciones conyugales*

Samantha Schweblin (Argentina, 1978-)

Short story selection from *El núcleo del disturbio*, *Pájaros en la boca*, or *Siete casas vacías*

Marcela Serrano (Chile, 1951-)

Essay selection from *Un mundo raro* or short story selection from *Dulce enemiga mía*

Fernanda Trías (Uruguay, 1976-)

Short story selection

Ida Vitale (Uruguay, 1923-)
Poetry selection