

West Valley College  
Department of English  
Fall 2005

**English 013-39272 Survey of Contemporary Latina/o Literature, Film and Culture**

Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays in LA 35 from 9:20 to 10:45

Instructor: Dr. Dulce M. Gray

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2:00 to 3:15, Thursdays 11:00 to 12:15 and by appointment

This is a 3-credit survey course that will introduce you to contemporary literature, film and culture produced by Latina/os, that is, writers and artists who are hyphenated Americans, the other side of the hyphen being a connection to one or more countries in Latin America. There are major objectives: to expose you to a thriving branch of American literature and culture, to give you a general understanding of the history of Latina/o lit and culture and its main themes and styles, to immerse you in literary language, devices and genres, and to create a dynamic dialogic environment that will prompt you to enjoy our time together and to become invested in a life-long process of using texts as tools for causing individual and collective growth. The recommended prerequisite for this course is English 1A.

Texts do not spring from or exist in a vacuum; that is why I teach from a Cultural Studies perspective. In this course that means that we'll consider selected written texts alongside films, music, art, food, other cultural artifacts and your own experiences; we will create a sensual learning community. We will consider the greater context of these texts, but we'll dissect particular representative genres and Latina/o groups, among them: poems by a Dominican American, drama (three plays) by and about Puerto Ricans, a novel by and about Cuban Americans, a memoir by a Mexican American, short stories by Peruvian, Argentinean, Guatemalan and Colombian Americans, three contemporary films that address recurrent themes in Latina/o culture, contemporary paintings by Latina/os, old and new music (e.g., salsa, merengue, rap, cumbia, rock etc.), food (e.g., mangú, arroz con leche, etc.), and your knowledge of Latina/os.

Here are my expectations; understanding them will help you to succeed in this class:

- I will come to each and every class promptly and prepared with a thorough and professional knowledge of the topic.
- I will help to create a dialogic, safe and fun student-centered environment where you can take charge of your learning and where generative discussions and activities can happen respectfully and insightfully.
- I will read your essays and journal entries critically and conscientiously.
- I will maintain a reasonable but challenging pace, and I'll be consistently open to your needs.
- You will dedicate at least 6 hours per week solely to the work required in this class.
- You will come promptly and prepared to each and every class (that means that you'll always be in class, on time, and that you'll do all of the assignments); if there's ever a problem, please talk to me in advance.
- You will keep up with the readings and assignments and participate fully in all discussions and activities.
- You will keep a journal where
  - \*you can jot your reactions to the texts;
  - \*where you will take notes during my brief lectures, or during our discussions and activities;
  - \*where you will complete assignments that I give you;
  - \*where you will practice for your essay exams, and practice following MLA style format.
- You can certainly keep that journal in a loose-leaf binder, and combine your in-class writing with whatever you do on the computer, but whatever you decide, note that this is a public journal. That means that I will be reading it, and that you will be exchanging it with others in the class who at times will also write in your journal. Have your journal with you every time we meet. I will collect them every Thursday.
- You will wordprocess all of the written assignments following MLA style format (heading, 12 pt. font, one inch margin all around, Works Cited, etc.—see the MLA manual).
- You will take the scheduled essay exams. Note that I do not accept work that is submitted late.

### Required texts

Alvarez, Julia. *The Woman I Kept to Myself: Poems*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2004.

These poems are about Dominican Americans' straddling of (at least) two cultures and ways of being. Alvarez is the famed author of many essays, short stories, and novels (among them *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*, which was made into a film starring Salma Hayek) that often deal with gender and race issues in the Latino community.

*Before Night Falls*. Julian Schnabel, director. Released by Fine Line, 2000.

This is a feature film about the life of Reinaldo Arenas, a gay Cuban writer who immigrated to New York in search of artistic freedom and who died of AIDS, one of the major realities that are threatening the survival of Latina/os.

Castillo Guilbault, Rose. *Farmworker's Daughter: Growing Up Mexican in America*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2005.

This is a memoir by a Chicana journalist who grew up in Salinas and still lives in northern California.

Del Barco, Mandalit. "Pemex Xmas." In *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories*. Esmeralda Santiago and Joie Davidow, eds. NY: Vintage Books, 1999. 17-19.

This is a short story by del Barco, a Peruvian American, who is also a staff reporter for National Public Radio.

Gallardo, Edward. *Simpson Street and Other Plays*. Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 1990.

This is a collection of three plays by a Puerto Rican playwright whose works (comment on the socio-economic and political concerns of Puerto Ricans and) are milestones in the development of Latina/o drama.

Garcia, Cristina. *Monkey Hunting: A Novel*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 2003.

This is a novel about several generations of the Chinese Diaspora in Cuba; Garcia, a Cuban American, is the author of novels *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*; her works comment on race and gender issues.

Goldman, Francisco. "It's Magic!" In *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories*. Esmeralda Santiago and Joie Davidow, eds. NY: Vintage Books, 1999. 105-110.

This is a short story by the Guatemalan American journalist and author of the novels *The Long Night of White Chickens* and *The Ordinary Seaman*; his works comment on the political condition of Guatemala and other Central American countries and on the plight of immigrants from those places who come to the United States.

Herrera, Estela. "Nurturing the Wild Beast of Christmas." In *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories*. Esmeralda Santiago and Joie Davidow, eds. NY: Vintage Books, 1999. 71-74.

This is a short story by an Argentinean American educator and journalist in Spanish-language media.

Manrique, Jaime. "Merry Crisis and a Hyper New Year!" In *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories*. Esmeralda Santiago and Joie Davidow, eds. NY: Vintage Books, 1999. 43-46.

This is a short story by a gay Colombian American whose works (e.g., novels entitled *Colombian Gold*, *Latin Moon in Manhattan* and *Twilight at the Equator*, poetry entitled *My Night with Federico García Lorca* and autobiography called *Eminent Maricones: Arenas, Lorca, Puig and Me*) has valiantly inscribed the Latina/o communities' issues with homosexuality.

*Maria Full of Grace*. Joshua Marston, director. Released by Fine Line, 2004.

This is a subtitled feature film about a 17 year old Colombiana who realizes that she's trapped by gender-socio-economic-political constraints in her tiny village and that the only way out is to join the throngs who make a living by being "mules" (by swallowing packets of heroin and smuggling them into the United States).

*Piñero*. Leon Ichaso, director. Released by Miramax, 2001.

This is a feature film about Nuyorican poet/playwright/actor, Miguel Piñero, the author of *Short Eyes*, a play about his experiences in prison; his writing is seen as the precursor to rap music.

Where to get the required texts:

--All of the books are in the Viking bookstore and on reserve in the WVC library; you can also take them out of your local public library or buy them elsewhere.

--All of the films will be on reserve in the WVC library only during the week they are due; you can also get them from your local public library or rent them from video stores.

--Photocopies of the four short stories are in a folder on reserve in the WVC library.

Grading:

To pass Eng 013 you must earn a C or better. Throughout the semester your work will be assigned points; those points accumulate to a maximum of 1000. At the end of the semester I will add your points and then convert to a letter grade as follows:

900-1000= A	800-899= B	700-799= C
600-699= D	599 or less= F	

Your work is worth these points:

100	Participation
100	Midterm essay exam
200	Final essay exam
600	Total for assignments as described in each of the weeks

10 points deducted each time you are late.

**20 points deducted each time you are absent.**

**Plagiarism** is a serious offense. Section 5.8.19.1 of the *College Catalog* (page 176) describes the consequences for submitting plagiarized work. Please make sure that maintain honesty and integrity, and that you give credit when you use words (and distinct ideas) that belong to someone else.

**Emergency Assembly Area:** in case of an evacuation, go to parking lot #7 (across the street from the library).

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a **disability** (visible or not) should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. You should also contact DESP (408.741.2010 or 408.741.2658 TTY) to coordinate reasonable accommodations for your verified disability.

## Tentative schedule

Wk	To accomplish during our two weekly meetings	Work due on Tues of the next week
#1 Aug 30 & Sept 1	Introductions, situating, expectations, watch <i>María Full of Grace</i>	-finish watching <i>María Full of Grace</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: analyze the film and your knowledge of Latina/os, then identify, list and discuss all the themes/issues that pertain to/affect Latina/os in the past and today -points worth: 40
#2 Sept 6 & 8	Colombian Film/Immigrant Concerns -Lecture/activity: why study Latina/o lit and culture; what is it; what is the history -Terms to know: affective fallacy, literary criticism (and schools, e.g., Reader Response, Feminist) aesthetics, alterity, American Dream, analogy, analysis, annotation, canon	-read Alvarez's <i>The Woman that I Kept to Myself</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: choose your three favorite terms (as listed in wk 3) and compose 3 analyses of your three favorite Alvarez poems -points worth: 65
#3 Sept 13 & 15	Dominican American Poetry -Lecture/activity: define genres, poetry, Dominican American lit & culture, merengue, food -Terms to know: structure, stanza/verse, voice, persona, sonnet, figurative/literal language, paradox, rhythm, simile, metaphor, diction, syntax, alliteration, allusion, free verse	-screen <i>Piñero</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: describe/discuss three reviews that you read on line (just google "Piñero") about the film and who Miguel Piñero was -start reading <i>Simpson Street</i> -points worth: 60
#4 Sept 20 & 22	Puerto Rican Film/Latina/os' Concerns -Lecture/activity: who are Puerto Ricans and what is their place/contribution to Latina/o lit and drama? What is drama? How do you do critical screenings of films? -Terms to know: cinematography, shots, sequences, transitions, editing, montage, mise en scène	-read the first play, <i>Simpson Street</i> , in Gallardo's anthology -1 page freewrite in your journal: summarize the play -continue to read the other two plays -points worth: 20
#5 Sept 27 & 29	Puerto Rican Drama -Lecture/activity: Nuyorican theater, the "beginning" of Latina/o literature -Terms to know: theme, irony, tragedy, comedy, catharsis, conflict, characterization	-read the second play, <i>Waltz on a Merry-Go-Round</i> , in Gallardo's anthology -2 page freewrite in your journal: compose a character analysis of the main character -points worth: 45
#6 Oct 4 & 6	Puerto Rican Drama -Lecture/activity: discussion, staged readings of excerpts, art, food	-read the third play, <i>Women Without Men</i> , in Gallardo's anthology -2 page freewrite in your journal: comment on what you find "foreign"/unfamiliar -points worth: 20
#7 Oct 11 & 13	Puerto Rican Drama -Lecture/activity: staged readings of excerpts, discussions, salsa, Latina/o rap	-screen <i>Before Night Falls</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: describe and comment on three reviews of the film that you read online (just google " <i>Before Night Falls</i> ") -points worth: 60 -study for the midterm essay exam by reading your journal and discussing it with at least 3 people in our class

#8 Oct 18 & 20	Cuban American Film/Latina/os' Concerns -Lecture/activity: screening films and other visual texts critically, teasing out (of the film and your knowledge) what you know about Cuban Americans <b>-Midterm essay exam, food</b>	-read up to page 87 in García's <i>Monkey Hunting</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: discuss/explain what surprises or confuses you in the novel -points worth: 30
#9 Oct 25 & 27	Cuban American Novel -Lecture/activity: history of Cubans in the U.S., craft of writing a novel -Terms to know: foreshadowing, point of view, first/third person narrators, ambiguity, symbolism, epiphany, exoticism	-read up to page 163 in García's <i>Monkey Hunting</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: analyze the point(s) of view and narrator(s) -points worth: 60
#10 Nov 1 & 3	Cuban American Novel -Lecture/activity: discussion, art, Celia Cruz, Albita	-read to the end of García's <i>Monkey Hunting</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: discuss what you have learned about Chinese in Cuba and Cubans in the U.S. -points worth: 50
#11 Nov 8 & 10	Cuban American Novel -Lecture/activity: other Cuban American novelists and authors and how they fit into both the "Latina/o" and American lit categories	-read up to page 82 in Castillo Guilbault's <i>Farmworker's Daughter</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: discuss what you learned about growing up Chicana in California -points worth: 40
#12 Nov 15 & 17	Mexican American Memoir -Lecture/activity: defining "memoir" and clarifying its role and importance in the development of Latina/o lit -Terms to know: memoir, autobiography, monoglot, narrative, bildungsroman, culture, deduction, didacticism	-read to the end of Castillo Guilbault's <i>Farmworker's Daughter</i> -3 page freewrite in your journal: identify and discuss the issues Mexican Americans, particularly the women, face in the U.S. -points worth: 50
#13 Nov 22	Mexican American Memoir -Lecture/activity: discussion, other Mexican American authors and works, history, contextualizing	-read the four short stories -3 page freewrite in your journal: summarize each story then compare and contrast the differences and similarities of how the four different Latino ethnicities celebrate Christmas -points worth: 60
#14 Nov 29 & Dec 1	Mixed Latino Ethnicities Short Stories -Lecture/activity: define "short story" and discuss its role in the development of Latina/o lit -Terms to know: short story, plot, motivation, setting	
#15 Dec 6 & 8	Latina/o painting and other arts -Lecture/activity: reflecting/taking inventory of what we've learned	-study for the final essay exam by reading your entire journal and discussing it with at least 3 people in our class and 3 outside of our class
#16 Dec 13	Final essay exam and celebration	