

Online Course

“Contemporary Latin American Literature: The Narratives of the Unusual”

By Ana Gatica

Course Description

This course aims at introducing the students to significant texts and authors of the contemporary Latin American literature of the unusual or what is called Latin American weird. The narrative of the unusual (*la narrativa de lo inusual*) is a term introduced by the Carmen Alemany Bay to describe one of the main literary trends in Latin America these days. In this seminar, the narrative of the unusual is used as an encompassing term to describe different genres that include the fantastic, weird or horror and their variations. In most of the cases these pieces of writing involve some complicit participation of the reader to decide what is possible or acceptable as reality and what is not. A significant characteristic of this literature has to do with a deep engagement with the social reality which is reflected in the chosen themes and topics of the stories: poverty and exclusion, gender violence, decolonisation and power abuses. While concentrating on literary themes and narrative techniques, this course aims to provide students with a better understanding of contemporary Latin American societies.

What has been termed the narrative of the unusual by Carmen Alemany Bay in Latin America and Spain has been put forward by many talented writers, many of whom are women, who use reality as the backdrop of their fantastic, gothic, horror and uncanny literature to advance very strong stances of social critique. This Latin American fiction of the 21st century brings paranoid and hesitant narrative voices that place themselves into different worlds to build up stories where time, territories and identities twist over themselves and multiply the instances of uncertainty in the text. In other words, we find prose where the rupture of the old principles and the established canon seem to coexist with other more canonical writing traditions, whose basic premises seem to be under threat by them. One of the identifiable and most salient principles in the work of these writers is, in the words of Samanta Schweblin, to “stretch realism as much as possible” in order to produce a shock in the reader when the uncanny, the fantastic or the horrific appears in the text. Many times, in the literary worlds built by these authors the fantastic is understood as that which we do not know and is frightening and it is in this particular sense that reality can be fantastic, it can lose that element of safe familiarity and become startling, uncontrollable and terrifying.

Objectives

1. Introduce the students to the main authors and texts of the narrative of the unusual in Latin America.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of the social dynamics, product of colonialism, race, ethnicity, class, and migration concerning the experience of Latin Americans.
3. Identify literary themes, motifs and tropes about different social issues in the region: colonial past, neo-colonialism, gender violence and patriarchy, ecological damage, state-promoted repression and corruption.
4. Develop critical and objective thinking.

Course Content

- Introduction and literary influences
- Contemporary Literature of the Unusual: Theory
- Contemporary Literature of the Unusual: Themes and authors

Detailed Plan

Session	Topic	Date & Time
INTRODUCTION AND LITERARY INFLUENCES		
1	Jorge Luis Borges: The writer and his Eastern influences. The role of the Thousand and One Nights in his literary production. Selected Texts: <i>The Story of the Two Dreamers</i> , excerpts of <i>The Aleph</i> .	Saturday 19 th October 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
2	Julio Cortazar: Exploring psychoanalysis and the uncanny. Selected Texts: <i>Axolotl</i> and <i>House Taken over</i>	Saturday 26 th October 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
3	Amparo Davila: The feminine and the weird Selected Text: <i>The Houseguest</i>	Saturday 2 nd November 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
4	Silvina Ocampo: Pioneering feminism and disturbed motherhoods Selected Texts: <i>The House Made of Sugar</i> .	Saturday 9 th November 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE OF THE UNUSUAL: THEORY		
5	Narratives of the Unusual: Carmen Alemany Bay and the Latin American writers of the unusual (literary genres at the crossroads of speculative	Saturday 16 th November 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)

	fiction, the new weird, the fantastic, horror and the eerie). Theory and concepts.	
6	Contemporary themes: Anomaly and Monstrosity. The feminine as the other. David Roas and the female monster.	Saturday 23 rd November 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE OF THE UNUSUAL: THEMES		
7	Social Horror: Latin American history and social landscape as sources of inspiration for weird literature. Selected text: <i>The Dirty Kid</i> from <i>Things we lost in the fire</i> by Mariana Enriquez	Saturday 30 th November 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
8	Gender violence and patriarchy in Andean gothic Selected text: Chapter III from <i>Jawbone</i> by Monica Ojeda	Saturday 7 th December 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
9	Racial relations Selected text: <i>Story with bird</i> from <i>Our dead world</i> by Liliana Colanzi	Saturday 14 th December 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)
10	The family-aggression and fear/monstrous relationships. Childhood and cruelty Selected text: Excerpts from <i>The body where I was born</i> by Guadalupe Nettel	Saturday 21 st December 2024 (12 to 1:30 pm PST)