

Comparative Literature 153 (3 cr, GH; GI)
“International Cultures through Literature and Film”
with
C I 296A and PSU Delco’s Service-Learning Trip to Guatemala

Instructor Contact Information

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- *Any major changes to this Syllabus will be made in writing.*

Course Description and Goals

CM LIT 153 is designed to help you grow in your knowledge and understanding of the Mayan and Ladino cultures in Guatemala through a study of their ancient and modern literature and relevant films. This eclectic exploration will help you to work respectfully and effectively with the Maya people in Santiago Atitlan and to reflect on that experience in light of their tumultuous history.

- GOALS:
- 1) Students will become familiar with a wide range of literary genres used in the Guatemalan oral and written traditions, specifically myth, folktales, fables, poetry, fiction, and testimonials;
 - 2) Students will be exposed to the writing (in translation) of a variety of 20th century Guatemalan writers, including Nobel Literature Prize winner Miguel Angel Asturias, Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, Arias Arturo, Otto Rene Castillo, Gasper Pedro Gonzalez, and Victor Montejo and to the controversies that surround some of them;
 - 3) Students will learn to use historical and cultural criticism to interpret the literature of Guatemala and, conversely, to use the literature to better understand both the Mayan and Ladino cultures, their conflicts, and the external influences that helped shape these conflicts, including those from the United States;
 - 4) Students will be able to perform their service among the Mayan people with a knowledge of their cultural and political history which can increase their understanding of and respect for them;
 - 5) Students will be able to use their travel and service learning experience in Guatemala to reflect on Guatemalan literature and on the people’s interaction with the United States, including recent migration here as seen through the film “El Norte”.

Resources for Reading and Viewing

- ***The two books that you should purchase*** (available on-line from amazon.com, new or used at reduced prices with free shipping for a minimum \$25 order, or on half.com with shipping charges) from the list below are:
 - 1) Menchu, Rigoberta. *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. New York: Verso, 1983.
 - 2) Arias, Arturo. *The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

A lovely keepsake of the Lake Atitlan area (where we will stay five days) and the Mayan people there is:

Sexton, James D., translator and editor. *Mayan Folktales: Folklore from Lake Atitlan, Guatemala*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

The other books will be used for reading selected assigned pages and are on **Reserve** at the Penn State Delaware County library (Vairo building)or can be obtained from the Penn State library system (<http://cat.libraries.psu.edu/>) or other libraries.

The films also will be on reserve in the library on specific dates, or can be ordered by you for your use through the University's MediaNet (<http://www.medianet.libraries.psu.edu/>)

If you need **assistance** with ordering books or films for the course, I will be happy to provide it.

Myths, Fables, and Folktales

Montejo, Victor. *The Bird Who Cleans the World and other Mayan Fables*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1991.

Penalosa, Fernando. *Mayan Folktales*. <http://www.folkart.com/folktale/folktale.htm>

Popol Vuh: The Creation Myth of the Maya – (film not currently available; try a printed version, such as Patricia Amlin's book of the same title from the University of California, 1988.)

Sexton, James D., translator and editor. *Mayan Folktales: Folklore from Lake Atitlan, Guatemala*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Sexton, James D., translator and editor. *Heart of Heaven, Heart of Earth and Other Mayan Folktales*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999.

Poetry

Castillo, Otto Rene. "Apolitical Intellectuals", "Satisfaction", and "Before the Scales, Tomorrow" (available on ANGEL) and other selected poems by and about him (pp. 287 – 291 in *Voices from the Silence: Guatemalan Literature of Resistance*. Marc Zimmerman and Raul Rojas, editors. Ohio, University, 1998.) -- on Reserve in the Delaware County campus library and available from other campuses.

Fiction

Arias, Arturo. *After the Bombs*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1990.

Asturias, Miguel Angel. *Men of Maize* (critical edition; Gerald Martin, Coordinator). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993.

Drama

Tedlock, Dennis, translator and interpreter. *Rabinal Achi: A Mayan Drama of War and Sacrifice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Testimonials

Gonzalez, Gasper Pedro. *A Mayan Life*. Rancho Palos Verdes, CA: Yax te Press, 1995. (Excerpt at <http://www.folkart.com/folktale/folktale.htm>)

Menchu, Rigoberta. *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. New York: Verso, 1983.

Rigoberta Menchu: Broken Silence – documentary film

Non-fiction

Arias, Arturo. *The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Feature Films

"*El Norte*" (1983), directed by Gregory Nava. Screenplay by Gregory Nava and Anna Thomas.

"*Motorcycle Diaries*" (2004) – Che Guevara's exploring South America and its indigenous peoples.

Assignments

Assignment I: Myan Myths, Fables, and Folklore

*Due by Feb. 12

First: Read the Introductions of at least two of the Books listed under Myths, Fables, and Folklore above, as well as at least twelve stories, including part of or information about the *Popul Vuh*. Additionally Read the Introduction to (pp.1-19) and selected scenes (your choice) of Tedlock's *Rabinal Achi: A Mayan Drama of War and Sacrifice* (2003).

Then: Identify from your notes the three cultural values you found most frequently emphasized in the Popol Vuh and in the Mayan fables and folktales. In a Thesis/Support paper (approximately 500-600 words) present these three major cultural values of the Maya in your Thesis and illustrate them with examples and quotes from the myth and specific fables, and folktales to show how the ancient and modern stories give insight into the Mayan culture. Use MLA format to cite and document your sources. (A **Proposal Sheet** for the Assignment to get you started on organizing your essay is also on ANGEL and is **DUE** by Feb. 8.)

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Assignment II: Voices from the Silence

*Due: Feb. 26 – March 1

First: 1) Read the following selected excerpts from 20th century Guatemalan writers:

- Poetry by Otto Rene Castillo: “Apolitical Intellectuals”, “My Desire for You”, “Satisfaction”, “Before the Scales, Tomorrow” (On ANGEL) and other selected poems by and about him on pp. 287 – 291 in *Voices from the Silence: Guatemalan Literature of Resistance*. (1998)
- Chapter 3 in Arturo Arias'. *After the Bombs* (1990). (You may want to read more!)
- Pages xi – xv of the Introduction and pages 36 - 49 of Miguel Angel Asturias' *Men of Maize* (1949). Also read the accompanying Notes #1, 2, 4 - 7, 14, 17, 21, 24, 26 – 28, and 30 – 52 on pages 326-332.
- Two chapters of Pedro Gasper's *A Mayan Life*: the one which begins on p. 91 and the one which begins on p. 213. But the reading is fast and easy; I also recommend the chapter that begins on p. 33 – or the whole book if you have time!

2) Take notes about the events, consequences, and emotions detailed in these fictional/testimonial accounts of Guatemala's years of political unrest and rebellion as told by Ladino and Mayan writers. Look especially for references to the United States. See what you can find on the Web about the authors.

Then: Take part in an on-line ANGEL discussion from Tues. Feb. 21 – Fri. Feb. 24 About the readings. (I'll start it with a question, and then you and the other students in the class will be expected to add your thoughts to the discussion, as well as post at least one discussion question of your own.) You'll be expected to enter, read, and add to the discussion at least *four times* during Feb. 21-24.

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Assignment III: The Rigaberto Menchu Testimony and Controversy

***Due:** Week of March 27- 31 (draft) and Week of April 3 – 6 (final copy)

First: 1) **Read** *I, Rigaberto Menchu* (especially the Introduction and Chapters 1, IV, V, VII, X, XIII, XIV, XV, XIX, XXI, XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXX, and XXXIII.

2) **Watch** *Rigaberto Menchu: Broken Silence* (a film on Reserve at the Penn State Delaware County library **Feb. 18-25**).

3) **Read** *The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy* (especially “Rigoberta Menchu’s History within the Guatemalan Context” in Section I and all the entries in Section II. (We’ll divide up selected articles in Section III for reading and discussion.)

Then: *While on the trip in Guatemala:*

- 1) **Keep a log** for each of the five days we are in Santiago Atitlan (a Mayan town) that records your observations about how and where the towns people interact with each other, noting similarities and differences in this interaction for men and women.
- 2) **Take the walking tour of Santiago** led by Dolores Tachkil, a local Mayan woman who speaks English, to get an “insider’s” view of family and community life among the Maya and to ask Dolores her view of the issues raised in *I, Rigaberto Menchu*.
- 3) **Interview** one other knowledgeable person in Santiago for his/her perspective on the relationship between individual and community which is raised in *The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy*
- 4) **Take part in a course discussion one evening** on the readings and film listed above, which will focus on: 1) the issues raised in them, 2) the insights your observations of and interviews about Mayan life have provided, and 3) the expectations for Assignment III essay.

Finally: **Write an essay** which presents your position on the controversial issue the above resources address: whether the possibility of contested facts (raised by American anthropologist David Stoll) in the book written by Rigoberta Menchu seriously undermines its credibility.

Make use of the above sources, anything else you have read for this course, any reputable sources you find on the Internet, and especially your experience in Guatemala, to:

- 1) *determine* your own **position** on the issue
- 2) *present* that position in your essay as your **thesis statement**
- 3) *support* your thesis with at least three intelligent **reasons**
- 4) *support and illustrate* each of your reasons with **examples and quotes** from your reading, viewing, and experience in Guatemala
- 5) *document* your use of information and quotes from those sources with a **Works Cited list** and **in-text citations**, using either MLA or APA format.

Some questions connected to the controversy which you might address in your essay:

- Doesn't a Testimonial – the genre used by Rigoberta Menchu – by its very definition mean “a sworn truth”?
- Which can communicate truth more effectively, fiction or historical fact?
- To what degree do most autobiographies present “the whole truth and nothing but the truth”?
- Did the unusual process by which Rigoberta Menchu's book was written and published enhance or undermine the truth of the final product?
- Do cultural misunderstanding and/or disrespect play any role in this controversy?
- Does Rigoberta Menchu's position in the current government of Guatemala compromise her unique voice in the literature of her country?

Reminders:

- 1) Your essay should be approximately 750 – 1000 words.
- 2) Type it double space and give it a title.
- 3) Write it in the 3rd person.
- 4) Incorporate your own unique perspective, insight, experience, and voice in the essay.

Proposal (see below) is due the week we return from Guatemala. You can see me individually for about 20 minutes to go over your Proposal, or we can get together as a group for about 45 minutes and listen to each other's Proposals while we are there. If you have any questions about this assignment or need assistance at any point, please contact me.

Proposal for Assignment III

1. What position are you taking in this essay on the Rigoberta Menchu controversy: that the possibility of contested facts in Rigoberta Menchu's book does or does not seriously undermine its credibility?

2. List at least three reasons that support your position;

A.

B.

C.

3. List some facts, quotes, examples, observations, or other valid evidence to support each of your reasons:

For A. 1.

2.

For B. 1.

2.

For C. 1.

2.

For D. 1.

2.

4. Are you using the MLA or the APA system to document your use of sources?

Assignment IV: Reflecting on the Literature in Light of Your Travel and Service Learning in Guatemala – and Vice Versa

***Due:** April 17 – 30, depending on medium and context chosen

First: Watch “*El Norte*” – a feature film (1983) directed by Gregory Nava and co-written by Gregory Nava and Anna Thomas. Optional: Also watch the recently-released video/DVD “*Motorcycle Diaries*” about Che Guevara’s early experiences exploring South America and interacting with its indigenous peoples. (*Both are on reserve at the campus library.*)

Then: *While you are in Guatemala*, select your subject for Assignment IV and have it approved by the instructor.

Finally: Choosing your own medium (video, power point, poster board display, essay or article) and your own context (article for a campus or local magazine or newspaper, EURECA at Penn State Delaware County (April 19) or another undergraduate exposition, communicate some important insight you have gained about Guatemala -- on the particular subject you have chosen -- from the fiction, articles, and poetry you have read, from the films you have viewed, from the formal and informal discussions you have had with classmates and others, and from your experiences and observations during your service-learning projects and travel in Guatemala.

Send the instructor a **Proposal** about your planned subject, medium, and context by **April 9.**

Final Grade Calculation

Assignment I – 100 points	Assignment III – 120 points	Proposals – 30 points
Assignment II – 50 points	Assignment IV – 100 points	Total: 400 pts

Course Policies

- 1) *Academic honesty* is expected. Plagiarism of any kind will result in an “F” for that assignment and therefore will seriously affect your final grade for the course.
- 2) *Course Expectations* are simply that respect be shown for every member of our class, during on-line discussions, in meetings, and on the trip. Those not doing so may be asked to leave the course.
- 3) *Students with disabilities* who need accommodations for this course should first see Ms. Sharon Manco in the Learning Center, 203 Main at the Delaware County campus or the comparable coordinator at other campuses.
- 3) *Academic support* is available from me during office hours or by email, from the Writing Center 312 Main, or from the Learning Center in Room 203 Main at the Delaware County campus, or at comparable facilities at other campuses.